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The Impact of climate change on displacement and human security

Parliamentary dialogue with the Special Advisor for Climate Action to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Webinar, 21 September 2022, 14:00 - 15:30 CEST

Background Information

The impacts of climate change are numerous and can trigger displacement, worsen living conditions and/or hamper the return of already displaced people. Limited natural resources, such as drinking water, are becoming even more limited in many parts of the world that host refugees. Crops and livestock struggle to survive under environmental and climate related stress, thus threatening livelihoods. Climate change is a vulnerability multiplier, exacerbating existing tensions and adding to the potential for conflicts.¹ Countries most vulnerable to climate change and least ready to adapt, are the source of 90% of refugees and 70% of internally displaced people (IDPs) which put an enormous pressure on already fragile states.

In these contexts, resilience to climate disasters and environmental degradation is often lower,² sometimes leading to violence and threats to the enjoyment of the right to life; physical integrity; adequate standards of living; self-determination and development. Across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America, climate-related displacement could undermine regional stability. Water stress and reduced access to natural resources contribute to tensions in Central Asia. Rising sea levels and extreme weather events pose a risk to social cohesion in the Pacific. In the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, climate change has already escalated conflict risks.³

Despite their unique vulnerability, refugees, IDPs and host communities have historically been severely underserved by climate adaptation support and excluded from disaster risk reduction strategies and measures. The [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) references the need to reduce disaster risk, including through preparedness measures that take into account global, regional and national early warning and early action mechanisms, evidence-based forecasting of future movements, and the inclusion of refugees in disaster risk reduction strategies. It further recognizes that “climate, environmental degradation and disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements”. The adoption of the GCR led to the submission of several pledges related to climate change in the Global Refugee Forum in 2019.⁴

In line with [UNHCR's Legal considerations](#), where climate change or disaster displacement interact with conflict or violence, existing international protection frameworks may be applicable, based on a legally sound interpretation of the 1951 Convention refugee definition criteria, as well as regional instruments (such as the Convention and Cartagena Declaration of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)). Broader global human rights developments, as well as complementary and temporary forms of protection may also be relevant in some circumstances.

¹ UNHCR, [Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters \(2020\)](#).

² UNHCR, [In Harm's Way: International protection in the context of nexus dynamics between conflict or violence and disaster or climate change \(2018\)](#).

³ UN News, [Climate emergency 'a danger to peace', UN Security Council hears](#) (July 2020).

⁴ Twenty-two Member States (among which there were 6 Members of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)) and the European Union pledged on energy and environment, climate change and disaster displacement,.

In 2019, UNHCR appointed a Special Advisor to provide strategic guidance, oversight and expertise to its climate change agenda and engagement. UNHCR's Climate Action is aligned with the High Commissioner's Strategic Directions and complements relevant UNHCR policy, strategy and guidance. It supports international commitments related to climate change, disasters and environmental degradation, as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 at global, regional and local levels.

Last year, UNHCR published its first ever [Strategic Framework for Climate Action](#). The framework prioritizes preventive measures and solutions that take climate and environmental risks into account. Preparedness and emergency responses require new technologies and collaboration between climate change, human security, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian and development sectors to turn long-term climate foresight into actionable near-term analysis.

Linked to these sectors parliaments are central to implement climate change and displacement responses, as well as to ensure access to protection and assistance during emergency crises, but also resilience in the long term. They ensure that treaties and commitments are translated into national legislation and that adequate budget allocations are made to support local adaptation activities and implementation of climate change and disaster laws and policies. The data collection initiative by the LSE Grantham Research Institute and Sabin Center at Columbia Law School, in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), indicates that more than 2,120 climate laws and policies are currently in force worldwide.⁵

Recognizing the critical role that parliaments play in fighting climate change given their legislative, budgetary, oversight and representation functions, the IPU has made supporting parliaments and parliamentarians in their efforts to address the climate crisis a priority. The new IPU 2022-2026 Strategy includes climate action as one of its key policy goals. The IPU mobilizes parliaments politically around climate change through IPU resolutions, such as [Addressing climate change](#) (2019) and [Parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflicts resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences](#) (2021), and provides tailored capacity-building support to parliaments at the national and regional level to support implementation of the Paris Agreement and on other climate-related topics.

Displacement linked to climate change is increasingly seen as a major issue among the IPU Member Parliaments. The [Nusa Dua Declaration](#), *Getting to zero: Mobilizing parliaments to act on climate change*, endorsed at the 144th IPU Assembly by over 100 national parliaments in March 2022, explicitly recognizes the growing threat of climate-related displacement, particularly in resource-scarce conflict situations. It calls for the upholding of rights of persons displaced by climate change, and for parliamentarians to reflect climate-related displacement issues in national laws and to guarantee accountability when rights are violated. In December 2021, the IPU and the Adaptation at Altitude Programme co-organized a global webinar on climate change and forced migration in mountain areas to explore opportunities for enhancing parliaments' role in aligning and harmonizing national policies on climate change, disasters, and human mobility.

⁵ Available at: <https://climate-laws.org>.

Objective

This webinar co-organized by the UNHCR and the IPU, with the support of the International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (PHAP), aims to increase parliamentarians' understanding of the linkages between climate change, displacement and human security. The event will feature a presentation by UNHCR Special Advisor, followed by a dialogue with parliamentarians to create an open space for information and good practice-sharing. The dialogue will enable discussions between parliamentarians on challenges and solutions for disaster preparedness and prevention, access to services, and on building resilience for displaced and host populations affected by the climate emergency. It will also provide a platform to identify opportunities to learn about tools to influence and monitor national actions tackling climate change.

Format

The webinar will take place on 21 September 2022. UNHCR will share its Strategic Framework for Climate Action with participants and explain its role in mobilizing multi-stakeholder partnerships to better address the protection needs of and to help build resilience for the most vulnerable. Good practices from different contexts and ideas on how to follow up in national contexts will be shared by MPs.

Guiding Questions

1- *What good practices can you share in this area from your national perspective? What are some of the challenges faced?*

2- *How can you support the implementation of the UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action?*

Agenda

Time (CEST)	Agenda Item
14:00-14:10	Welcome and Introduction – UNHCR and IPU <i>Opening session</i> Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General (TBC) Ms. Gillian Triggs, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR (TBC) Moderator – Ms. Şafak Pavey, Senior Adviser, UNHCR
14:10-14:25	Briefing on climate change, displacement and human security Mr. Andrew Harper, Special Adviser on Climate Action, UNHCR The briefing will provide an overview of UNHCR's Strategic Framework for Climate Action, making linkages between displacement, climate change and human security within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
14:25-14:45	Parliamentary good practices: national laws and policies Members of parliament will provide scene setting remarks and share good practices identified in their respective parliaments.
14:45-15:25	Moderated discussion - Perspective and Q&A Q&A.
15:25-15:30	Concluding Remarks by Special Advisor Mr. Andrew Harper