

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Monitoring Human Migration Linked to Climate Change

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Introduction

The human species has long been known for its ability to adapt to changes in its environment and changes in the factors that make up their community, possessing the unique ability to create civil societies almost anywhere on Earth. Yet, in the 21st century, increasingly, rapid modernization and the subsequent changes in climate has made it harder and harder for people to adapt, and forces them to instead flee their homes. As scarce resources such as safe drinking water become even more limited, hot and dry or cold and wet conditions making farming and raising livestock impossibly difficult, preventable natural disasters destroying more and more communities, people are forced to compete for resources, oftentimes amongst unwelcoming communities. The international community is faced with a pressing and long term issue, as a growing number of people are forced to share a plummeting number of resources.

However, possibly the most urgent and devastating issue within the scope of climate induced movement lies in its lack of recognition throughout states and communities. Currently, the group of people loosely known as “climate refugees” and “climate migrants” lack even a formal definition in any legal document, have very little protection under international law, and their predicaments are rarely discussed during refugee and migrant talks. So far, there’s absolutely no agreement amongst the international community as to who should qualify as a climate refugee, and no plan to manage the growing crisis. In addition to addressing the issues of a changing world physically, delegates must also challenge themselves to address a changing world politically. The wave of nationalism and xenophobia becoming more widespread, particularly in the US and Western Europe, has made it hard already for recognized refugees to seek asylum, and making room for an entirely new class of refugees will be a huge challenge for politicians who aren’t even able to agree on the existence of climate change.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, simply ignoring the problem does not solve any problem. It is paramount for delegates to reach a solution to this already urgent issue which, as time progresses, would only prove itself to become more and more urgent as well as to seek an end to bickering about the veracity of facts in place of finding meaningful solutions.

Definition of Key Terms

Climate Refugees

Climate refugees are a subset of the overarching umbrella of environmental migrants with their key distinction being that they are forced to flee their homeland in order to survive rather than make a voluntary decision to do so. Delegates must keep in mind that only those who move in order to escape changes that could potentially directly compromise their livelihoods or safety and security would qualify for a refugee status. Note, that when debating, it would be helpful for delegates to prioritize the interests or impacts of the climate refugees, since they will always be the most direct receiver of any benefits or harms and they constitute the group of people facing the most imminent threat. It is also interesting to note that while this is the typical way people would define climate refugees, there is no legally binding definition of it, since the international community has never officially come together to agree on a set definition.

Cross Border vs. In Country Migration

There are two distinct ways in which people facing problems cause by climate change could choose to migrate, typically but not always based on financial circumstance and the permanence of the migration. The first is cross border migration, in which people move out of their country in order to escape climate change. This case would directly involve international law as well as the foreign policy agendas of countries. The second method of migration is in country migration, in which the migrant still moves away from their original home, but doesn't cross into somewhere under a different legal jurisdiction. The international community holds less of a stake in this, seeing as it concerns internal policies. But it is still important for the United Nations to create ways of monitoring the process of this migration nonetheless.

Slow Onset Climate Problems vs. Immediate Climate Problems

There are two types of climate problems in the status quo. First is the more immediate climate problems, those with a smaller and less universal impact, but the ones that are already in effect in the status quo, such as increased natural disasters and food scarcity. Second, there are the slow onset climate problems, whose effects we are already beginning to see in bits and pieces, but whose full impacts have not been shown yet. These ones are more long term, and do not substantially threaten many people in the short term, but once their full effects are in place, it will inevitably bring destruction that is much worse.

Food Security

The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Currently, the draining of resources and degradation of the quality of land, coupled with a growing population, is making food more and more scarce.

Natural Disasters

Rising sea levels expose more and more areas to the erosion of wind and waves, increased surface temperatures is often linked to the more frequent possibility of droughts and the increased intensity of storms, heat in the atmosphere as well as warmer ocean temperatures create worse tropical wind storms with increased wind speeds, water vapor evaporated into the atmosphere increases the intensity of storms. Climate change is increasing the occurrences and severity of natural disasters, generating more and more movement around the world when people attempt to escape increasingly unsafe regions.

Lack of Natural Resources

At the current rate we are burning resources at, Earth is projected to completely “burn out” by 2050 and already, we are gradually beginning to see an early sign of what that may look like. Our high consumption levels have expanded desert area and degraded the quality of farmland, affected biodiversity in all pockets of the Earth, made safe drinking water a rarer and rarer resource. Oftentimes, people are forced to migrate in pursuit of these resources, when their old homes are no longer able to offer them these basic necessities, especially when they are left with no other alternatives.

Rising Sea Levels

Although currently, rising sea levels do not pose a huge, quantifiable threat to many people, it is highly likely that soon, this will become a major force driving people to migrate to new places. Right now, rising sea levels greatly increase the chances for more frequent and more intense natural disasters in certain areas of the world. But in the future, the story that is repeatedly told in order to warn the general public about climate change may very well come true. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs currently lists 52 territories as being in danger of disappearing, with small island states like Kiribati, the Maldives, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and the Fiji Islands as being in imminent danger.

Planned Relocations

There are many different ways people define planned relocations. Some people would say that planned relocation is simply the process through which people whose livelihoods have been rebuilt in another place. Others would say that planned relocation describes circumstances in which an entire group of people move permanently or long-term, but still retain the original characteristics of their community, including but not limited to things like social structures, legal and political systems and culture.

Background Information

Climate Change

Today, the average global temperature is at around 15 degrees Celsius, a temperature which, looking at geological evidence of the highs and lows of temperatures on Earth over time, is not actually too extreme. However, what is truly alarming about the current climate change is the rapid pace at which it is occurring, which points to the fact that the current change is outside of the natural fluctuations and is instead caused by unnecessarily heavy human industrial activity.

The global temperature is currently rising at around 1.5 degrees Celsius every year, which is a relatively safe amount. However, simulations conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that global surface temperature change is likely to soon exceed 2 degrees Celsius per year, a statistic that scientists regard as being a dangerous gateway to an irreversible level of permanent damage to the Earth. But preventing this from happening is not as easy as we think. Even if we are able to miraculously cut the bulk of our greenhouse gas emissions, it would take centuries for our hydrosphere to respond to the changes and for the greenhouse gas already choking up our atmosphere to be removed.

What Causes Climate Change?

Essentially, climate is a balancing act. What causes rapid changes in climate is when the balance between energy leaving the Earth and energy entering the Earth is heavily skewed to one side or the other. Currently, not all of the incoming energy coming from the sun escapes the Earth's atmosphere, instead, some of it gets absorbed by the Earth, causing it to warm up. The reason behind this phenomenon is greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The greenhouse gases, like water vapor, carbon dioxide and methane, traps heat inside the Earth and makes it much harder for anything to escape the atmosphere. To conceptualize it, greenhouse gases act like a blanket covering the Earth. Furthermore, there are many causes of the current greenhouse effect, each one linked to one another. The most direct one, human industrial activity, puts more and more gases into the air, directly contributing to the blanket of greenhouse gases. As the marine systems change, algae, vegetation and coral, which are typically supposed to absorb heat and carbon dioxide, begin to decrease.

Fake News and the Denial of Climate Change

Starting from the beginning of when climate change became a pressing issue and ballooning with the 2016 elections, a vocal minority has always questioned the existence of climate change. At the center of this denial tendency is the concept of confirmation bias — a natural inclination to observe the world and interpret information through methods that are able to confirm our own pre-existent beliefs to avoid reaching a confusing stage of cognitive dissonance.

For example, a prominent business leader who has heavy investments in fossil fuels may not want to acknowledge climate change, because if he does so, he would be forced to address the uncomfortable question of whether or not he himself has been directly contributing to climate change. This has a huge effect on whether we are able to eventually find solvency for climate change. A survey conducted in the United States has shown that around 23% of Americans say that they don't believe in climate change at all, while 53% say that climate change is not human caused. This puts any government, regardless of the presidential administration, in a hard position to go forward with real action countering climate change when the majority of their country still doesn't believe the words of the scientists.

Migration

Since 2008, 24 million people per year have been displaced by weather disasters, and as climate impacts unravel over time, estimates project that by 2050, 143 million people are set to become climate migrants. Problems like food security, lack of natural resources, natural disasters and rising sea levels are forcing more and more people to have to move around. Even more concerning is how the problem transcends that of climate migration, but extends to even more concerning and enduring issues like poverty and xenophobia.

The three major hotspots for climate problems are Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America, where, coincidentally, 55% of the developing world's populations reside. Their governments aren't able to create barriers stopping natural disasters from occurring, and as the impacts of climate change become more and more obvious, developing countries are the ones taking the heaviest and most immediate tolls.

A poll conducted in 2016 found that in eight major European states, over 70% of people agreed that Europeans have become "more negative about immigrants or other groups that are different from them." This is, in fact, fairly reflective of a trend that has become more and more prevalent in the Western world. The rise of radical right wing groups in politics like the People's Party in Austria, Fidesz in Hungary, the Five Star Movement in Italy, the Alternative for Germany party and the Tea Party, which Trump is a part of, has propagated harsh and strict policies against immigration and refugees. In 2018, one of the first acts of the new Italian government was to block a ship with 600 asylum-seekers to dock, instead forcing it to divert to Spain. Trump continuously attempts to "build a wall" to keep immigrants from Central and South America from coming into the country. Migration now is no longer a simple task of buying a train ticket and packing your bags — it requires being able to fit into the political climate. As the number of resources decreases, the number of people is increasing, and oftentimes, climate migrants find themselves in areas where resources are just as scarce, where the impacts of climate change is taking a toll just as bad, making themselves unwelcome foreigners with nowhere to go.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States of America

As the second largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions globally, falling second only to China, the US is yet to develop a sustainable solution for combatting climate change and probably wouldn't be expected to do so under the Trump administration, which firmly and loudly expresses its disbelief of climate change. President Trump continues to cut back on policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, allowing more room for big corporations to continue their activities without having to worry about the environment. In fact, researchers report that US gas emission rates rose by 3.4% in 2018, the largest rise in years. On the ranking of different countries' contributions to the reduction of climate change, the US ranked in the worst category possible, "critically insufficient". In recent years, the United States has become more and more isolationist, yet by and large, its policies and what it chooses to do still affects people around the world. 2020, the year when the US is set to officially draw out of the Paris climate agreement is rapidly approaching and many predict that the agreement would collapse without the backing and agreement of a major industrial market like the US.

However, the United State's stake in this issue is not just in climate. Its geographic location also puts it as a popular destination for many climate migrants. Many members of the migrant caravans coming from countries like Guatemala, the Honduras and El Salvador are there because of the changing climate. In those countries, climate change has created a myriad of problems, including crop failure, poverty and usually some version of food insecurity. The most hard-hit countries are those whose markets are heavily agriculture-based. For the people of those countries, a month without rain means a month without income. Solving such problems may turn out to be much more complicated than simply building a wall.

China

China is known for the speed at which it was able to develop from an unknown, poverty-ridden country in Asia to a major economic superpower. However, most of its development was largely thanks to the development of its industrial and energy sectors, which today has become a problem for China instead of a benefit. Currently, China emits more carbon from burning fossil fuels than Europe and the United States combined, being responsible for more than a quarter of the world's carbon emissions.

But, despite all this, China's efforts to curb its energy use is still existent. Chinese emissions fell for the first time in decades in 2015 and 2016, and slowly but surely, China is developing wind and solar energy sectors. Already, it has become the world's largest solar technology producer. China is on track to either meet or overachieve all the standards set for it by the IPCC, and some would even say that it is positioning itself as the global climate leader as the US shifts away from the role. Yet, at the end of the day, a huge challenge for China is learning to juggle continuing its economic growth at the same time as

keeping its environmental promises, which is absolutely crucial if the world hopes to have any chance at becoming more sustainable.

Rapidly Developing Countries

It is hard to predict exactly where most migrants would come from. However, one major source that climate scientists and political scientists alike point to are rapidly developing countries, especially those that are heavily affected by climate change, including places like Mexico, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and India. In order to ensure a more sustainable future as more and more people attempt to move from poorer rural areas to big cities, governments have to learn to diversify their economy and encourage people to take on more environmentally sustainable jobs.

An interesting case study to consider for the rapidly developing countries would be Bangladesh. Without being fully prepared for changes in climate, storm surges caused by sea-level rise on the coast drove many people to the capital city of Dhaka in search of a safer and more stable place to live. This has led to growth in the city's labor force, allowing it to become an epicenter for growth. Somewhat counterintuitively, the climate changing helped advance the Bangladeshi economy. However, Dhaka probably wouldn't be able to sustain too many migrants at once, a fact epitomized by how the slums are rapidly growing in both size and population.

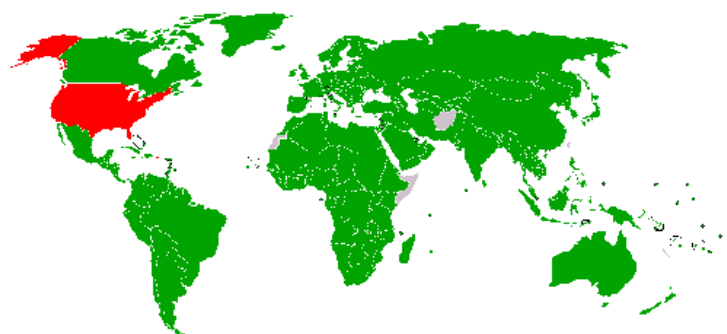
Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1970	First Earth Day happens as people become more and more aware of climate change.
1972	Droughts in Africa, Ukraine and India causes a global food crisis, forcing millions to migrate internally and raising fears about climate change.
1977	Scientists correctly predict that climate warming would probably become the biggest environmental issue in the next century.
1979	Global energy crisis raises awareness about environmental issues.
1988	Media coverage of global warming becomes more prevalent following record heat and droughts, causing farmers around the world to migrate in search of better farmland or risk losing their sources of income. IPCC is established.
1999	A massive "brown cloud" of aerosol detected from South Asia.

2000	Drought in Kenya caused a crop failure for a third consecutive year, putting 22 million on the brink of starvation and forcing people to move in search of food.
2001	A month-long drought ravages Central America, causing Honduras to lose 80% of its basic grains, El Salvador to lose 80% of grains in its eastern provinces, Nicaragua to lose 50% and Guatemala to lose 80% of its beans in the eastern provinces.
2005	Kyoto Treaty countering global emissions comes into effect, signed by all major industrial countries aside from the US.
2005	Hurricane Katrina displaces more than a million people.
2015	Paris Climate Agreement is created.
2017	Hurricane Harvey displaces 30,000 people, mainly the poor.
2017	Trump announces on the White House lawn that the US will draw out of the Paris Climate Agreement.

UN Involvement

The United Nations involvement in reducing climate change is a long and complicated one, with multiple bodies and conferences dedicated to it. However, the bulk of it can be summed up with two documents, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Climate Agreement. Both of them were aimed at binding countries to an agreement to reduce their carbon emissions. The key variable that both agreements were contingent on is that all major industrial countries of the world would agree to it and follow its terms, because otherwise it would be impossible for it to create significant change. Today, the Kyoto Protocol is largely considered as a failure, mainly because it was never able to get the United States, the second biggest contributor to natural gas emissions, to ratify it and agree to its terms. The Paris Climate Agreement also seems to be advancing in the same direction, as Trump announces his plans to withdraw the US by 2020. The US's reluctance to reach a compromise on environmental terms with the global community is a pressing obstacle to solvency.



Countries in red have refused to sign onto the Kyoto Protocol, countries in Green have already ratified the protocol and countries in grey are undecided.

As for climate migrants specifically, the UN has done very little. What we call “climate refugees” do not actually have any legally binding meaning, since there has never been an attempt to reach an agreement on a definition. The 1951 refugee convention specifies that only those who have “a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” qualify as a refugee. Clearly, it lacks recognition of the refugee status of those who have to move because of the climate. This means that there is very little legal protection for climate migrants even as their numbers grow in size.

Currently however, the international community is trying to work towards a formalized agreement on it. In a conference held on December 10-11th, 2018, 164 countries agreed to adopt the UN Global Compact for Migration, and it's the first time that a major migration policy even addresses climate change as a possible cause. But the document does have its limitations in the sense that it's voluntary and non-binding, so many countries, especially across the European countries where right-wing politicians remain influential, have completely ignored the agreements reached in the compact. Still, this could be an important first step.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- 1951 Refugee Convention
- Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Possible Solutions

In seeking a solution to the issue at hand, it's important for delegates to note that the issue concerns monitoring instead of solving or reducing, since at this stage, monitoring involves much less variables when it comes to reaching solvency. Although delegates definitely do not need to limit themselves if they have more ideas about this, it would be helpful to prioritize monitoring.

That aside, delegates have many methods for solving this, any of which could potentially work, since there has been very little discussion done around this. However, in seeking a solution, there are a few important things for delegates to keep in mind.

First, delegates need to establish a set definition for climate refugees as well as climate migrants, in order to address the current lack of recognition. This is paramount, and it serves as a prerequisite to everything else that needs to be done for climate migrants, since without a definition the UN cannot offer legal protection to a group. In doing so, delegates need to be able to achieve a neutral definition that

doesn't contain intrinsic bias towards any immigration policies, and the definition should also be one reflective of the status quo. Keep in mind that global warming is an ever-changing issue, so a looser definition that is up for adjustment and interpretation could be a better option. However, it can't be loose to the point at which it is easily squirreled out of. At the end of the day, balance is key in setting the definition.

The next issue that needs to be addressed is how we could set a system to help us permanently track the status of climate migrants and gather more information about them. It might be a good idea for delegates to add this on to the responsibilities to pre-existing bodies in charge of things like movement of people, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which is already attempting to loosely monitor the aftermaths of major natural disasters. There are two main things that this system will have to be able to track. First, it would need to track advancements in climate change, specifically its effects on communities. Natural disasters, food insecurity, degradation of farmland are all important things to note in order for the international community to be able to map out specific global hotspots of climate migration as well as learn how to create barriers protecting against such things. Second, it would also have to be able to keep track of the number of people moving, as well as their specific demographics and the different types of migration going on.

Lastly, it is important for delegates to understand that in any process of monitoring, there will always be a final goal being worked towards. In this case, delegates can decide themselves what the monitoring should be used for, whether it could be used to help provide more data to reduce climate change, or only to solve the issues at hand with migration. One interesting way the monitoring could help is by shedding light on these refugees, increasing concern for their status in developing countries and changing the radical right-wing politics currently reigning strong, since it is extremely detrimental to the livelihoods of migrants. Once the final purpose is decided on, the methods of monitoring should be able to effectively work towards that final purpose.

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