

Key Messages and commitments on Climate change and disaster displacement COP 25 – Madrid, Spain 2 to 13 December 2019



08 October, 2019, South Sudan. Heavy rains in Ethiopia flood refugee camps in Maban county - UNHCR

A continuous engagement with the Task Force on Displacement of UNFCCC

- Alongside partners, UNHCR is a core member of the [Task Force on Displacement](#) (TFD) mandated by the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM Excom) under the auspices of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in follow-up to the Paris Agreement (2016).
- UNHCR has been actively involved in the implementation of the workplan of the TFD under its initial mandate that led to the development of TFD **recommendations on integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change** that were endorsed by the Parties to the Paris Agreement at COP24 in Katowice in December 2018. As UNHCR continues to play an active role in the TFD under its renewed mandate for full implementation of the TFD's recommendations, and to raise awareness on the integration of protection and displacement in global climate policy discussions more broadly.
- UNHCR has been closely involved in the work of the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#), a state-led initiative steering the implementation of the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change of the Nansen Initiative endorsed by 109 States in 2015, to ensure that climate change and disaster displacement features high on the agenda and in a coherent way in policy discussions such as COP25, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and other policy fora.

Legal and normative guidance on application of refugee law

- UNHCR has played a leading role in highlighting the relevant legal frameworks and the protection gaps resulting from cross-border disaster displacement in the context of climate change, catalysing international discussions and legal and normative development in this area.
- Where the effects of climate change and disaster interact with conflict and violence, **affected people who are forcibly displaced across international borders may be refugees** under the 1951 Refugee Convention or regional refugee frameworks. In fact, the Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 2018, recognizes that “while not in themselves causes of refugee movements, **climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with drivers of refugee movements**” (para 8). In 2017, UNHCR published [Legal considerations on refugee protection for people fleeing conflict and famine affected countries](#), indicating that people displaced by humanitarian crises linked to a mix of the consequences of conflict, public disorder, the effects of climate change, and drought may qualify as refugees within the meaning of the 1951 Convention or the 1969 OAU Convention. Some people displaced across borders solely in the context of climate change or disasters may fall within the definition of a refugee under regional instruments if and when flight is a result of a serious disturbance to public order. UNHCR is now developing further **legal guidance** on the applicability of international and regional refugee law frameworks in the context of climate change and disaster.
- However most people displaced across an international border solely by the effects of disaster or climate change will not fall within the definition of a refugee under international law. **They may nevertheless still be in need of international protection**, on a temporary or longer term basis. UNHCR has produced [Guidelines on Temporary Protection and Stay Arrangements](#) to inform Government responses to such humanitarian crises and disasters.
- UNHCR’s expertise has also come to bear in guiding States in undertaking **planned relocations** internally, with [guidance](#) and a [toolbox](#) done in partnership with others, to ensure that protection considerations are at the forefront of any needed relocations in the face of climate induced hazards.

An operational engagement at the side of displaced populations

- UNHCR’s vast experience with providing protection and leading crisis responses in refugee situations, as well as providing interagency leadership on protection, shelter and site coordination and management in internal displacement crises, means that it has much to contribute in the climate change/disaster displacement context. UNHCR has provided **protection and assistance in numerous disaster situations** over the years, and its mandate and expertise in the area of forced displacement has been recognized as equally being directly relevant to displacement also in the climate change context. In cooperation with and support of States, UNHCR has played a key role in leading and delivering an operational protection response, especially in emergency situations, to address the needs of people displaced in such contexts – both across borders and in internal displacement situations.
- It should be recalled that operationally in disaster displacement contexts, **it is the protection needs in consequence of displacement which could trigger UNHCR’s international protection and displacement mandate and expertise, not the causes of the displacement**. Strong partnerships and collaborations with other agencies and expertise in the field of disaster risk

reduction, development, or climate change adaptation are important to ensure a holistic approach, with UNHCR's expertise remaining protection.

Reducing the environmental impact of large refugee crises

- UNHCR has a long-standing commitment to **reducing the environmental impact of refugee crises** themselves, for instance by launching climate change mitigation programmes which includes a shift to renewable energy options for refugees, reforestation activities, and enhancing refugees' access to clean modern fuels and technology for cooking to reduce dependence on charcoal and firewood. Broadly, UNHCR seeks to increase the sustainable use of renewable energy sources to minimize environmental impact, in a way that includes host communities and other stakeholders, while improving refugees' protection and well-being. These initiatives, along with others, will find their reflection in a new UNHCR Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy in Displacement Situations.
- UNHCR equally has an interest to **minimise the risks facing refugees and host communities** hosted in climate hotspots. Persons of concern to UNHCR are on the frontlines of climate change. One-third of refugees, many in protracted displacement contexts, are found in least developed countries which are often among the most vulnerable to climate change. Environmental factors like desertification, water shortages and increasing extreme weather events threaten efforts to promote self-reliance and peaceful coexistence and may even force refugees to move again from the places to which they have fled. Environmental factors may also prevent displaced people from returning to their places of origin. Despite their unique vulnerability, refugees and host communities do not benefit sufficiently from climate adaptation initiatives.
- UNHCR thus engages to support climate change adaptation for refugees and host communities, working with partners like WFP, UNEP and UNICEF to design and deliver **climate change adaptation programmes** in vulnerable countries. UNHCR is also partnering with donors and governments to advise on how refugees and other persons of concerns can be better included into the global climate change dialogue and into national and regional climate change mitigation and adaptation plans and climate finance.

A commitment to reduce UNHCR's own operational footprint

- UNHCR joins the UN-wide efforts to become **climate compatible**. There is a growing concerted effort to make UNHCR's operations climate compatible and improve UNHCR's environmental performance worldwide, including, for example, through efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by increasing energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in UNHCR operations, and better understanding and reducing our own greenhouse gas emissions.
- In 2019 UNHCR significantly improved its sustainability monitoring by gathering data on carbon emissions, waste production and water use for 100 offices. As a result, UNHCR was able to calculate and off-set its global carbon emissions, in compliance with the UN-wide **climate neutrality strategy**. UNHCR has also been introducing clean energy solutions for field offices and staff accommodation by replacing diesel generators as well as reducing emissions from transport through vehicle management systems.