

**UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges:  
Protection and Resilience during Pandemics  
COVID-19 and Climate Change - What can we learn?**

*Written Statement from the Climate, Migration & Displacement Platform (CMDP)*

We appreciate UNHCR's decision to designate one of the sessions of this year's High Commissioner's Dialogue to the theme of Climate Change. We would like to take this opportunity to share some additional observations and recommendations based on the exchanges that occurred during the session, also recalling some of the points made by NGOs at the Annual Consultations earlier this year in September on the same subject, focusing specifically on UNHCR's important potential future role in this area. The Climate, Migration & Displacement Platform (CMDP) is a convening space that brings together civil society, academics, and activists to address issues at the intersection of climate change and human mobility. Our purpose is to advance collective understanding of the complex range of issues and actors involved in order to develop and promote a more holistic, human-centered, participatory, rights- and justice-based approach to advocacy and policy spaces. CMDP has been engaging with UNHCR on climate change, including most recently in identifying panelists for and making contributions to the recommendations coming out of the NGO consultations focusing on climate action.<sup>1</sup> In our recommendations below, we would like to reiterate and further elaborate on some key points.

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the UNHCR has recognized the importance of including refugees as stakeholders in their futures. Similarly, people who are displaced or at risk of displacement in the context of climate change and disasters must be included in climate action. Incorporating the participation of affected communities within a rights-based approach ensures that solutions are context-specific and centered around their needs and aspirations for sustainable futures.

CMDP recommends the following actions for streamlining participatory and human rights-centered approaches within the UNHCR's strategic framework and operations:

1) Partner with government officials, legal practitioners, and civil society to advance case law relevant to the UNHCR's recent "Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters."<sup>2</sup>

- Advocate for national policies to implement perspectives and guidance in the legal considerations paper and partner in such efforts with governments prepared to implement such guidance.
- Engage with civil society organizations working on refugee issues on the ground so that refugee status determination and practice evolve in a progressive way.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. *UNHCR 2020 Annual Consultations with NGOs Recommendations*, 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/2020-unhcr-annual-consultations-with-ngos/Recommendations-UNHCR-NGO-Annual-Consultations2020.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. *Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters*, 2020. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html>.

2) Increase engagement with civil society to reduce displacement risks and harms and address the need for context-specific solutions.

- Partner with people at risk for displacement and civil society members who have been working on the ground on the intersections of mobility and climate change.
- Collaborate with communities and grassroots organizations in order to strengthen community-based preparedness and response to disasters and establish culturally appropriate and context-specific adaptation strategies.
- Promote action research with local communities to ensure their experiences and needs are effectively documented and used in advocacy and policy development at all levels.

3) Follow through with the intent for UNHCR to “become a proactive protection agency that mitigates the need for protection in the future.”<sup>3</sup> This would mean averting, minimizing and addressing risks of climate-related displacement, including but not limited to those already displaced and those in communities hosting IDPs and refugees, in all operational work.

- Encourage active and informed community participation in local climate action planning to improve local governments’ abilities to support climate change adaptation and reduce future climate-related risks.
- Draw on existing local and indigenous knowledge and empower greater local ability to access information and collect data that communities can use in decision-making.
- Recognize the ways in which gender, age, disability, and other characteristics affect disaster risk and vulnerability, and incorporate all sectors, not just community leaders.
- Adopt inclusive approaches and utilize specific measures to include the perspectives of women, youth, people with disabilities and others who may be in particularly marginal situations. Inclusivity is key because gender, race, class, and other identities underpin displacement risks and capacities to overcome them.
- Follow through with the intention to incorporate community input into future-based risk modeling, which will require communities to be equipped with adequate technical capacity and resources.

4) Fully incorporate considerations of current and future displacement risk—including due to impacts affecting livelihood opportunities—into all considerations of solutions and sustainable futures for those currently displaced.

- Encourage states to include and address displacement risks in their national DRR and climate adaptation plans

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR - 'Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it particularly impacts the displaced'. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2020/11/5fbf73384/climate-change-defining-crisis-time-particularly-impacts-displaced.html>)

5) Acknowledge that the ways to conceptualize refugees and displaced people must be expanded—and that potential solutions for them must be innovative and novel.

- Today’s modern world, and especially the impacts of climate change, show us that business as usual is not possible. This is true for an organization such as UNHCR, whose mandate must necessarily evolve and adapt.

- The ways in which climate change induces movement are complex and generally multicausal. In many cases, movement will be on a spectrum from forced to voluntary. Traditional definitions of “displacement” versus “migration” will thus not apply. A broader understanding of mobility is needed.

In this context, it is necessary to engage across a diversity of policy frameworks to promote joint-up approaches – these include the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (as referenced by UNHCR itself<sup>4</sup>), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (especially its Objectives 2, 5, and 7), the Paris Agreement and UNFCCC mechanisms, the Sendai Framework, and others, and we encourage UNHCR to play an equally active and constructive role in all of them, in collaboration with other stakeholders.

- Addressing migration, and not just displacement, for instance, will help expand safe, dignified livelihood opportunities for people on the move and for their families in places of origin. Leaving migration unaddressed could lead to new threats, including forced displacement, migration into situations of vulnerability at borders as well as in precarious situations in urban areas, and trapped populations in environmentally fragile and unsustainable hamlets and villages.

- Invest in filling research gaps related to the intersections of mobility and climate change in order to explore and define a durable solutions framework specific to the context of climate change. This process should include partnering with academics in the climate mobility space, activists, affected communities, and civil society.<sup>5</sup>

Once again, my thanks for engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders, including civil society, on these issues. We are looking forward to fruitful collaboration in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, ‘Climate change and disaster displacement in the Global Compact on Refugees’. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/environment/5c9e13297/climate-change-disaster-displacement-global-compact-refugees.html>

<sup>5</sup> PIK & UNHCR. *Climate Change and the Future of Safe Returns*, 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/5fb28b504.pdf>.