

Climate change and disaster displacement in the Global Compact on Refugees

UNHCR considers that the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) adopted by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 2018 effectively acknowledges and addresses the reality of increasing displacement in the context of disasters, environmental degradation and climate change, and provides a basis for measures to tackle the many challenges arising in this area. This document summarises the key textual references in this regard.

Applicability of arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing to countries affected by displacement resulting from natural disasters and environmental degradation.

- Para 12 recognizes that **'external forced displacement may result from sudden-onset natural disasters and environmental degradation'**. It notes that States **'may seek support from the international community to address' complex challenges that arise from such situations**. This paragraph has been carefully crafted to ensure that the GCR applies not only to large refugee situations, but also to countries affected by environmental degradation and natural disasters. It allows such countries to draw on the arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing laid out in the GCR, e.g. national arrangements, Support Platforms and regional and sub-regional approaches. It reflects operational realities, in a spirit of consensus, also focusing on the practical cooperation between relevant actors, including UNHCR and IOM.

Prevention and root causes

- Para 8 recognizes that **'While not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements'**. The words **'increasingly interact'** make clear the growing nature of this challenge.
- The text also references the need to **reduce disaster risks** (para 9); for **preparedness** measures (paras 52-3) to take into account global, regional and national **early warning** and early action mechanisms, and measures to enhance **evidence-based forecasting of future movements and emergencies** (including in situations of forced internal displacement) (para 53); and to **include refugees in disaster risk reduction strategies** (in para 79).

Protection and assistance

- Para 63 calls for **'stakeholders with relevant mandates and expertise [to] provide guidance and support for measures to address other protection and humanitarian challenges**. This could include measures to assist those **forcibly displaced by natural disasters**, taking into account national law and regional instruments as applicable, as well as practices such as temporary protection and humanitarian stay arrangements'.
- Para 63 should be read in conjunction and in complement to para 61 that refers to **'international and regional obligations (A/RES/72/150, para 51), in a way which avoids protection gaps** and enables all those in need of international protection to find and enjoy it'. UNHCR considers that this language will precisely avoid any gap and ensure that all those people in need of international protection are covered, including in the context of climate change and disasters.

- This language is complemented by footnote 26, which is particularly important in this context, as it references ExCom Conclusion No. 103 on *The Provision of International Protection Including Through Complementary Forms of Protection*. This conclusion (1) encourages the use of complementary forms of protection for individuals in need of international protection who do not meet the refugee definition, and (2) affirms that this should be implemented in a manner that strengthens, rather than undermines, the existing international refugee protection regime.

Follow-up and review

- The GCR states that: ‘A periodic **Global Refugee Forum**, at ministerial level, will be convened for all United Nations Member States, together with relevant stakeholders, to announce concrete pledges and contributions towards the objectives of the global compact...and to consider opportunities, challenges and ways in which burden- and responsibility-sharing can be enhanced... ’ The first Global Refugee Forum will be convened on 17 and 18 December 2019. It will provide an opportunity to announce initial pledges of financial, material, technical, or other kinds of support to meet the objectives of the GCR, to take stock of progress and to showcase good practices that can inform the development of future pledges.
- Para 106 calls for the creation of a ‘**digital platform**’ to enable the **sharing of good practices**, including those related to climate change and disaster displacement, by States and all relevant stakeholders.
- The text also calls for the establishment of ‘A **global academic network** on refugee, other forced displacement, and statelessness issues... involving universities, academic alliances, and research institutions, together with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, to facilitate research, training and scholarship opportunities which result in specific deliverables in support of the objectives of the global compact’ (para 43) noting that, ‘efforts will be made to ensure regional diversity and expertise from a broad range of relevant subject areas’. The global academic network has the potential to address knowledge and data gaps relating to the provision of international protection in the context of cross-border disaster displacement, including in nexus situations where conflict or violence interact with the effects of climate change or disaster.