

# The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees's Key Messages and Calls To Action

## 26TH UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP26)

### 1. The climate crisis is already amplifying vulnerability, driving displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee—this is the human face of loss and damage on a global scale

The displacement of people by climate change-fuelled crises is already a global reality – a reality that reflects and amplifies the deep inequalities and injustices in our world today. Countries and communities that have contributed the least to global warming are bearing the brunt.

Climate change impacts are ramping up multiple challenges to people's safety, security, and dignity such as poverty, sustainable access to food, water and livelihoods, and pressures on peaceful co-existence. Women, children, older people, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples are often disproportionately affected. Under crisis conditions, people are being forced to flee their homes – not as a choice, but as a matter of survival, and they have the right to be protected.

Disasters brought on by hazardous weather events and made more likely by slow-onset climate impacts displace millions of people every year – including many in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Most remain within their countries of residence, while those who do cross borders in search of safety and assistance tend to move to neighbouring countries. At the same time, 80 per cent of those displaced by conflict and persecution – refugees and internally displaced people – originate from countries on the frontlines of the climate emergency.<sup>1</sup>

With many displaced people located in climate vulnerable hotspots and left without the resources and capacity to adapt to an increasingly inhospitable environment, the challenge of preventing and resolving cycles of crisis and displacement will worsen. To protect displaced people, displacement must be better prepared for and its impacts both minimized and addressed.

### We urge parties to the UNFCCC to:

- Highlight displacement and human mobility in COP26 deliberations and decisions on loss and damage, including through supporting implementation of the Warsaw international Mechanism recommendations, endorsed by the COP, on integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse effects of climate change.
- Apply existing refugee and human rights instruments where there may be need for international protection when cross border displacement occurs in the context of climate impacts and disasters.
- Increase action and support for measures to avert, minimize and address displacement in the most climate vulnerable countries and communities, based on their specific needs. This includes increased access to sustainable and predictable finance as well as technical assistance through the operationalization of the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage.
- Keep 1.5 degrees within reach to avert the worst-case loss and damage scenarios by urgently increasing and implementing commitments to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

1. Almost 90% of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution come from a country ranked most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change by the [ND-Gain Index](#) (bottom 30%). Over 70% of those internally displaced by conflict and violence are displaced in such a country. *Data sources: University of Notre Dame, UNHCR Data Finder & IDMC.*

## 2. Much displacement and suffering can be avoided or minimised with greater and urgent support to adaptation, particularly in the most climate vulnerable and fragile countries and communities—including people already displaced

Without a major increase in support for adaptation where they currently live, people in climate vulnerable regions face the increased risk of having to abandon their homes or flee in the face of crisis conditions or disaster.

Many climate vulnerable countries, including Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, are already reaching the point at which climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction will prove insufficient without stronger commitments to address climate change.

Furthermore, highly climate vulnerable countries host 40% of refugees and are home to 70% of people internally displaced by conflict or violence.<sup>2</sup> Most disaster-related displacement occurs in developing countries. While these populations are often highly exposed and vulnerable to climate-related shocks, they

have fewer resources and support to adapt to an increasingly hostile environment. Their resilience, and that of their host countries and communities will depend on access to financial, technical, and institutional resources that address their immediate needs for protection as well as longer-term climate risk informed solutions to their displacement.

At the same time, it should be recalled that when human mobility protects people and their human rights, it also saves lives and can minimize suffering and enable resilience. This may be through well-prepared and timely emergency evacuations, assisting communities to plan for relocation to safer settlement areas as a measure of last resort, or facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration. The freedom and capacity to move is also part of adaptive capacity.

2. Ibid

### We urge parties to the UNFCCC to:

- Meet the commitment to provide US \$100 billion annually to support mitigation and adaptation measures in developing countries between 2021-2024, ensuring at least 50 per cent of climate finance goes to adaptation.
- Ensure that climate action not only reaches climate vulnerable countries, but also reaches displaced people and their host communities, particularly people living in unstable and hard to reach areas.
- Scale up adaptation financing and support to climate action in countries and host community areas where displaced people take refuge, or hope to safely return to following their displacement, by strengthening preparedness and building resilience to climate impacts.

With one of the largest field presences of any humanitarian agency, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is working in some of the most fragile contexts where conflict and climate vulnerabilities meet – where millions of people are displaced and in urgent need of assistance and protection. We recognise that to protect people, we must protect the environment where they take refuge. UNHCR is stepping up its contribution to climate action through providing legal and policy guidance, through its operational preparedness, response and support to communities' resilience, and through greening its own environmental footprint.



Visit [UNHCR.org](https://www.unhcr.org) to learn more about climate action at UNHCR



UNHCR delivers core relief items to IDPs in Kayah State.