

**Committee: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

**Issue: Climate immigrants a new global challenge**

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**Position: President**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAIR**

Distinguished Delegates,

Hereby I would like to formally welcome you to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the ATSMUN 2020. I am so glad that you have chosen this committee and I hope the conference will be an overall success full of fruitful debate and lots of fun.

I have been active in the MUN community for quite some time, and have made many good friends through MUN. To anyone doing MUN for the very first time at ATSMUN, welcome to the community, I am certain you will love it! To all those returning to MUN, welcome back! Regardless I hope you all broaden your horizons at ATSMUN and hopefully make some new friends.

My aim in this committee is not only to effectively guide the debate, but also to create an atmosphere where you can ask for help if you need any. To that end I have left my email address below. If there is anything you would like to ask or tell me before the conference you are more than welcome to contact me via email in the coming weeks.

Also, I highly encourage you all to thoroughly research the topics and your countries policies in order to write a well rounded and informative **Position Paper.** Working on your Position Paper will not only help you to better understand the committees' questions but also to better represent your delegation during the committee session. **Please, do not forget to list all your sources and bibliography at the end of your Paper.** You can send your position papers for feedback to the email address attached below.

**Finally, keep in mind that the Study Guide is a general overview of the topic and should not under any circumstances replace your individual research.**

I cannot wait to meet you all! See you in November!

Kind Regards,

Natalie

*email: natalie222000@gmail.com*

## INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

*After all that has been said about the levity and inconstancy of human nature, it appears evidently from experience that a man is of all sorts of luggage the most difficult to be transported.*

☞ ADAM SMITH, *The Wealth of Nations*

Millions of men, women and children around the world are affected by climate change and the subsequent environmental stress every year. Extreme natural phenomena such as cyclones, floods and wildfires destroy homes and property, and are responsible for the displacement of people. Furthermore, sea-level rise, changes in rainfall patterns and droughts, processes that are much slower but equally dangerous and threatening put even more pressure on livelihoods, and access to food and water, that can ultimately lead to decisions of migration in order to find more tenable living conditions. Extreme natural phenomena and massive changes in ecosystems are occurring more rapidly and intensely than any other known period of time on Earth. It is expected that anthropogenic climate change will progressively impact migration and other forms of displacement in order to avoid environmental risks.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### **The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)<sup>1</sup>**

The ECOSOC is the coordinator of 14 UN specialized agencies, ten functional commissions and five regional commissions. In addition, it issues policy recommendations to Member States and to the United Nations system and receives reports from nine UN funds and programmes. According to the UN Charter, the Economic and Social Council is responsible for:

- promoting higher standards of living,
- full employment, and economic and social progress
- identifying solutions to international economic, social
- and health problems
- facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation

### **Types of migration<sup>2</sup>**

- International and internal migration (destination)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/meetings/2005/hl2005/ECOSOCinfo%20rev%20et.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/introduction-human-migration/>

- Seasonal migration, medium-term, and permanent migration (duration)
- Climate migrants, economic migrants, political, social etc. (causes)
- Forced vs. voluntary migration (choice)
- Productive vs. unproductive migration (development outcome)

### **Environmental migrants<sup>3</sup>**

Environmental Migrants are individuals or groups of people who, primarily due to sudden or progressive changes in the environment that negatively affect their lives or living conditions, are obligated, or choose to, to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently, in order to migrate internally or internationally.

### **Environmentally displaced person<sup>4</sup>**

An environmentally displaced person refers to an individual who is displaced within their country of habitual residence or who has crossed an international border and for whom a major agent of their displacement is environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction .

### **Disaster Displacement<sup>5</sup>**

The term disaster displacement is applicable to situations, where people are forced or obliged to leave their habitual residence, in particular as a consequence of or in order to avoid natural hazards and their disastrous effect. Such displacement can occur nationally and/or internationally, spontaneously or as a result of an evacuation ordered or enforced by authorities.

### **Planned relocation<sup>6</sup>**

According to the definition proposed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the term planned relocation refers to individuals who have been rehabilitated in another place.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Definition of climate refugee**

The main issue presented when trying to secure protection for the individuals affected by displacement as a result of climate change, lies in the definition of the term 'climate refugee'. Climate refugees are a group that has no international legal recognition, despite the fact that the

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<sup>3</sup> [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep\\_glossary\\_en.pdf?language=en](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_glossary_en.pdf?language=en)

<sup>4</sup> [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep\\_glossary\\_en.pdf?language=en](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_glossary_en.pdf?language=en)

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<https://www.nanseninitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/DRAFT-Nansen-Initiative-Protection-Agenda-for-Consultation-08042015.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep\\_glossary\\_en.pdf?language=en](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_glossary_en.pdf?language=en)

term 'environmental refugees' has been used since the 1970s. In other words, climate refugees cannot be guaranteed international legal protection due to the fact that they are not covered by law, thus there is no legal provision for an individual right.

The term 'environmental refugee' is too broad and cannot fully encompass the realities of 'climate refugees'. According to academic researchers Docherty et al. (2009)<sup>7</sup>, a definition of the term 'climate refugee' should incorporate the following: 'forced migration, temporary or permanent relocation, movement across the borders, disruption consistent with climate change, sudden or gradual environmental disruption, and a more than likely standard for human contribution to the disruption'. This definition is comprehensive, inclusive, and outlines the circumstances of climate refugees.

Another parameter that should be considered is the inherent temporal element that influences climate-induced migration and forms the following question: if the event is one of a fairly short duration, for example a hurricane, to what extent should people who flee from the resulting devastation be obliged to return once the danger has passed? In order to answer this question we have to identify three kinds of hindrances to the forced return of people in such circumstances:

- legal impediments to return after the end of an environmental crisis under human rights law: whether after their forced return the individuals would be exposed to considerable risk of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- factual impediments: there is no means of sending people back to the country;
- humanitarian impediments: where there are compassionate and humanitarian grounds for not sending people back.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lies a more chronic form of displacement, where the changes in the environment force people to abandon their place of habitual residence due to the gradually degrading resources and thereby increasingly difficult living conditions.

Subsequently, any definition of the term 'climate refugees' must reflect the experience of individuals at both ends of this theoretical spectrum, along with all of the scenarios that may occur in between. What is of utmost importance when adopting a definition is to address not only the displacement but also the causes of displacement.

### **Understanding the interrelationship between environmental change and migration**

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<sup>7</sup> See, Bonnie Docherty & Tyler Giannini, Symposium: Confronting a Rising Tide: A Proposal for a Climate Refugee Treaty, 33 Harvard EVITL L. Rev. 349, 372, 385 (2009).

The impacts of climate change are numerous. Natural resources, such as drinking water, are becoming scarce, crops and cattle are facing the danger of total obliteration as they struggle to survive in environments where the climate becomes either too hot and dry or too cold and wet. Despite the constant efforts to adapt to the constantly changing environments and temperatures, many people are forced to abandon their habitual residence in order to escape the climate disasters and their effects, ergo, new immigration and displacement patterns are created and the scarcity of resources leads to conflicts between communities.

In 2018, Afghanistan was forced to confront a severe drought, Samoa faced the Tropical Cyclone Gita, and the Philippines were severely challenged by numerous floods<sup>8</sup>. This natural phenomena, resulted in acute humanitarian needs. As reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there were 18.8 million new displacements linked to natural disasters recorded in 2017. The majority of the displacements were related to natural hazards and climate disasters had a mostly internal impact with those affected remaining within their national borders. However, displacement across borders also occurs, and may be interrelated with situations of conflict or violence.

Scientific organizations, including those who are represented at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have come to the consensus that greenhouse gas emissions induced by humans and their catastrophic impact are of unique and unprecedented proportions. Nevertheless, the links between environmental change and migration are not linear. Namely, environmental, economic, political, cultural and demographic factors collectively, influence individuals to abandon or remain at a certain location. However the final decision and manifestation of the will to immigrate, are shaped not only by the aforementioned factors but also by the physical or psychological ability to move. Populations that do not possess this ability are often characterised as “trapped”.

It is important to note that throughout the years, human mobility related to climate change has been perceived by academia, the media and policy circles via three different prisms:

- A. Irregular climate-induced migration as a border security issue, especially for the areas of destination or temporary residence.
- B. The need for adequate protection of environmental immigrants.
- C. Environmental Migration as a response to climate impacts and risks.

### **Gaps in international legal framework**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

The universal human rights treaties do not clearly state a specific right to a healthy and safe environment. However, all the UN human rights treaty bodies are aware and recognise the correlation between a healthy environment and the realisation of human rights across the globe.

The 1972 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Declaration) states that: there is a “ a fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and wellbeing” and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that states parties shall take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition 'through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution'.

Human rights law may be applied to climate change, however, there are challenges when utilising a human rights framework to address climate-change issues. Although human-rights treaties have been successful in many instances, these instruments do not adequately protect 'climate refugees' and in addition there is still no explicit right to a healthy environment under international law.

The 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide a framework for protecting victims of natural disasters who do not cross an international border. They offer a valuable set of legal standards for protection and have the advantage of leaving governments a wide margin of discretion regarding their implementation.

There are nonetheless a number of gaps and grey areas in this framework. The 1998 guiding principles are not legally binding and are far from being correctly implemented, even if governments have incorporated them in domestic law and policy as well as in international agreements. These principles were used for drafting the Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa. This convention, which was adopted by the African Union in October 2009 and entered into force on 6 December 2012, is the first legally binding regional instrument in the world to impose an obligation on states to protect and assist persons displaced by natural or man-made disasters and development projects. Complementary forms of protection allow states to provide protection to persons facing the prospect of being returned on human rights grounds, in cases not addressed by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol.

Potentially useful frameworks exist at national, regional and international level; however, it remains to be seen whether a new specific legal framework is both necessary and feasible, or whether persons moving in the context of environmental change can be adequately assisted and protected under existing frameworks.

In 2008, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) studied the effects of climate change on human rights and found three obstacles that we need to overcome before climate change could be treated as a human rights violation:

- proving that one country's emissions cause a specific effect on another country;
- showing that human rights issues are caused solely by global warming;
- and, considering the fact that the human rights framework is usually utilised in response to violations, whereas climate change regulation is concerned with potential future harm.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Member states of the EU and Nordic countries**

The countries that are members of the European Union along with Nordic countries have always set the bar very high in terms of reducing their greenhouse emissions and tackling climate change. Some like the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden managed to lower their greenhouse emissions using alternative or/and sustainable energy resources such as solar, geothermal, or wind power to cover to some extent their energy demand. Climate and human rights are thus issues that European countries take very seriously and their common position is very progressive on the subject. However, the tolerance and the will of these states to find effective solutions, implement measures and change their policy has been running thin concerning the refugee crisis. Especially, during the last couple of years European countries have adopted more conservative approaches when discussing the issues of immigration and the high influx of refugees and asylum-seekers.

### **United States of America**

Under current U.S. immigration law, those displaced by sudden-onset disasters and environmental degradation do not qualify for refugee status or asylum unless they are able to demonstrate that they have also been persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. However, the States are now facing their biggest environmental threats yet in the form of wildfires, hurricanes, floods, extreme weather and temperature changes etc. which create an even bigger problem: internal displacement. The current US government has made bold statements refusing the existence and validity of the scientific facts that demonstrate the massive threat that is climate change accompanied by the decision to exit the Paris agreement. In addition the US policies concerning immigration are those of "zero tolerance" and denial to accept the permanent relocation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

### **China**

As the Chinese economy grew roughly 42% in the past five years, Chinese carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions grew as well. From 2014–2016, according to several estimates, Chinese CO<sub>2</sub> emissions fell. Several factors contributed to the partial decoupling of Chinese economic growth and emissions growth. Structural shifts in the economy (from manufacturing to services) played an important role. Government policies—including policies to replace coal with cleaner energy sources—played an important role as well. The Chinese government took significant steps in order to address climate change and committed to peak CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030. In addition, several Chinese climate change policies have multiple objectives, something that can be considered a strength from the standpoint of climate migration. However, some Chinese policies such as the Domestic Coal Plant Construction and the Overseas Coal-Fired Power Plants, run counter to climate change goals.

### **Middle Eastern Countries**

Middle Eastern Countries have already been severely affected by the change in climate and the rising temperatures that augment every year, and the water scarcity. Additionally, these countries' economies heavily rely on oil and gas production. The instability of the region is also reinforced by the ongoing refugee crisis.

### **Latin American countries**

The majority of Latin American countries are fairly progressive concerning climate change issues. However, Brazil and Venezuela are the exception to this rule, mainly due to the fact that they are large oil producers. In addition Brazil continues to allow the deforestation of the Amazon for agricultural purposes. Natural disasters plague the area: Chile faces the risk of earthquakes and the melting of Argentina's glaciers might cause sea levels to rise, endangering also the Caribbean Islands. When solely focusing on refugees, Mexico is already an important migration route from South America to North America.

## **UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS - PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

- [The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees \(the 1951 Refugee Convention\)](#)
- [The international conference on population and development in 1994](#)



- [The Kyoto Protocol \(signed in 1997 and effective in 2005\)](#)
- [The Paris COP21 Agreement](#)
- [The United Nations \(UN\) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants \(19 September 2016\)](#)

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Providing a solution to the issue of environmental migration requires a dual approach. In the short term, the needs of the people forced to flee their homes must be accommodated. That underlines the importance of understanding the reasons behind migration patterns and establishing the criteria of what constitutes an environmental migrant. It would be particularly useful to look at the migrant crisis in Europe and understand what has succeeded and what has failed when it comes to handling a large influx of migrants. Particularly important, is the question of resettlement considering the fact that some of the nations receiving large influx of environmental migrants do not have the resources and would require the aid of wealthier nations in order to create the infrastructure and oversee the process. It is important to note that nations facing the biggest threat caused by climate change are the smallest environmental polluters. With that in mind a possible solution to be explored is helping those nations improve their existing infrastructure and safeguard themselves from threats like rising sea levels and desertification. A big part is to be played by NGOs within a frame that needs to be clearly defined. Even more important is a strategy to address the reasons causing environmental migration.

When it comes to global warming, reviewing the targets set within the Paris Climate Accord and the progress that has been made along with a deeper discussion about fossil fuel divestment and expanding the use of renewable energy sources could be a good basis for discussion. Further than that there is a vast array of ideas to be explored from funding for new technology development to working with environmental organizations on the ground in order to ensure that resources are utilized in an efficient way.

## **POINTS A RESOLUTION MUST ADDRESS**

- The definition of the term “climate refugee”
- The initiatives and the measures that should be proposed to combat climate change and the negative effects of the human activities on the environment

- What measures should be proposed in order to equip the countries that are expected to be the sources and destinations of environmental refugees with the proper infrastructure
- Should countries that due to their activities and policies endanger the environment and contribute to climate be responsible for granting asylum to environmental refugees?

## FURTHER READING

These are some helpful links that might aid you in your research:

- <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/environment-disasters-and-climate-change.html>
- <https://www.nanseninitiative.org>
- <https://ejfoundation.org>
- <http://www.unep.org>
- <http://www.fmreview.org/peopletrafficking/romer.html>
- <http://www.sej.org/publications/tipsheet/environmental-refugees-us-and-world-examples>

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<https://www.iom.int/middle-east-and-north-africa>