Research Report

General Assembly 1

Addressing Security Challenges Posed by Climate-Induced Migration

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Introduction

We have all heard about global warming. It is a process by which gases polluted from our everyday activities are emitted into the atmosphere, in turn trapping some of the heat inside the Earth, creating a greenhouse effect. It operates just like an agricultural greenhouse, where transparent materials are used to allow sunlight in, heating the plants inside, without the heat being able to escape. Nevertheless, these gases, such as carbon-dioxide, water vapour, nitrogen-oxide, methane and more, conduct the effect on a global scale, and while the sun's light is able to enter, the heat it produces on Earth is unable to leave.

It is imperative to understand that this happens naturally. Natural processes, ranging from the eruption of volcanoes to even the breathing of living organisms, produce greenhouse gasses. In fact, our planet would not be able to nurture life if not for greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, ensuring the climate remains habitable. However, since human society began industrialising, deploying systems of factories and trains for mass mobilisation and production respectively, global warming has severed drastically. A fact commonly referred to is that the average temperature on Earth has risen by 1°C (degree Celsius) since 1880. And while this may not sound dramatic, its tolls are already being felt around the globe.

One key implication of climate change is that myriads of homes across every continent on Earth are being deserted, with people searching for a new, safer place to live. Be it due to extreme colds, droughts, floods or other natural disasters, climate-induced migration has become a prominent issue for today's world, for both the migrants as well as the nations tasked with hosting them. The following report will cover the various security challenges posed by climate-induced migration, as well as its origins, the situation today, and steps the UN General Assembly can take as it seeks to resolve it.

Definition of Key Terms

Climate & weather

Weather is the conditions of a specific place at a specific time, regarding temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind, etc., and it fluctuates day-by-day. Contrarily, climate is the long term expected weather conditions for that region. Weather changes are presumed to occur, but climate changes can be consequential.

Climate-induced migration

Individuals leaving their homes and moving into new areas, due to factors stemming from climate related issues. These can include floods, drought, land degradation and more.

Climate refugees

People seeking help from nations outside their own country, as a result of overwhelming climate-induced issues back home.

Greenhouse effect

Where light from the sun enters the Earth, heating the surface, and then gets trapped inside, raising the average temperatures on our planet.

Greenhouse gases

Gases which cause the greenhouse effect by absorbing heat. The most common ones in our atmosphere are carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane and water vapor.

Internal displacement

A term for migration taking place within a state.

Natural disasters

A naturally occurring (though could take place as a result of climate change) process which is harmful to its immediate environment, for instance a volcano eruption, earthquake or hurricane. Natural disasters can initiate or amplify patterns of climate-induced migration.

Positive feedback loop

When an effect has consequences which magnify the effect itself. For instance, the warming environment melts glaciers. In turn, the surface area of sunlight-reflecting ice decreases, further heating the environment, melting more glaciers.

Push factors

Factors that motivate emigration, effectively pushing people out of their current homes.

UNGA

United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

General Overview

Roots

Climate induced-migration, and its associated security challenges stem first and foremost from **climate change**, and the worsening **natural disasters** it has been inflicting upon various regions in our world. While climate change can take place for many reasons, in recent times it is primarily caused by the **greenhouse effect**. As stated in the introduction, this is an effect where heat that enters the Earth is unable to leave due to specific gases in our atmosphere that absorb it. With human activities rapidly increasing the emissions of **greenhouse gases**, this effect has been

intensifying. Carbon dioxide is the greenhouse gas most commonly emitted. Nevertheless, the most prominent greenhouse gas in our atmosphere is actually water vapour.

The changing climate has initiated a **positive-feedback loop**, introducing devastating effects on our environment, and this loop indicates that the process is becoming increasingly more difficult to mitigate. The poles, which reflect much of the sun's light, are melting, and so the Earth is absorbing more heat than before. Furthermore, forest trees, which would otherwise convert some of the carbon dioxide into oxygen (a non-greenhouse gas), are being chopped down, with ever growing practice of deforestation. And the positive-feedback loops, alongside the greenhouse effect, highlight why now, more than ever, the **UNGA** must take action.

Current situation

While climate change can be felt everywhere, it is in areas of political instability and economic underdevelopment where the environmental crisis often escalates into a refugee crisis, posing serious security challenges for nations destined to host the refugees. As a result, more and more **climate refugees** are beginning to evacuate their homes, seeing no future there anymore.

The phenomenon of climate refugees, as well as climate-induced **internal displacement**, has been severe in areas hit by natural disasters, for instance flooding, due to increased precipitation and rising sea levels. 40% of humans are vulnerable, living in proximity of <100km away from the coast. However, droughts are an even more common factor for climate refugees to evacuate, having forced out 5 times as many people as floods have, with 3% of land on Earth experiencing drought directly. This brings forth immigration in areas like Central America. Similarly, extreme heat has been a **push factor** too. It is estimated that up to 33% of humans will be living in areas of extreme heat conditions (average temperature >29°C) in 50 years. This is becoming a cause for climate refugees in regions like the Middle East or the Indian subcontinent.

Additionally, war and conflict as a whole are a factor which speeds up these processes. The Syrian civil war is an instance in which climate change, observed via droughts, was a reason for groups in the North (more severely impacted by drought) to begin a rebellion. Consequently, when the war took off, it rapidly deteriorated living conditions, which were already low due to the aforementioned droughts, starting a wave of climate-induced migration.

Security challenges

Be it as it may, climate-induced migration poses extensive security challenges, which is the key issue now standing before the UNGA. In the case of internal displacement, urban regions, to which climate migrants tend to move, will become overpopulated, while the countryside slowly empties out. Crime rates, as well as cases of inequality between city residents and newcomer migrants, could begin proliferating. And for those continuing the search for a new home in new countries, security challenges such as overcrowded refugee camps may arise. Border control is a polarising subject as well, and nations need to decide how many refugees can enter before security challenges become too overwhelming to sustain the political landscape.

Timeline of Key Events

December 1950 UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees) is founded.

1985 First use on the international stage of the term “environmental refugees” to describe displaced persons due to climate related factors.

August 1992 Rio Conventions including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development lead to UNGA resolutions guiding future sustainable development.

2011 Climate refugees adopted as a term by the UNHCR, though not yet officially defined.

September 2015 **UN Sustainable Development summit** takes place. A list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals is published, inter alia addressing climate-induced migration.

September 2024 **Summit of the Future** as part of the UNGA discusses various forwards-looking issues including that of climate refugees.

2025 **Ongoing conflicts** in Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria and more, widening the scale of climate-induced migration, especially in Africa and the Middle-East.

Stakeholders

Chad

Chad has been regarded as the most vulnerable nation to the impacts of climate change, due to lack of food and excessive flooding, in a country already plagued with political and economic instabilities.

European Commission

This organisation leads actions of the European Union, and can help in disseminating solutions to the relevant regions. Its operations under CLICIM are vital to resolve the climate crisis in regions like Africa. As this issue is more commonly apparent in less economically developed nations, support from the European Commission could constitute a means to realise many of the solutions the UNGA might propose.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

As a UN agency set-up primarily to support populations of refugees worldwide, the IOM holds responsibility in enforcing any solutions presented by the UNGA. It has facilities to reach out to the migrants themselves, and the work of the IOM, in terms of both research and climate action, has been supporting climate-refugees since its establishment in 2007.

Sudan

Currently, the UN officially declared the Darfur region of Sudan to be experiencing famine, the first of its kind in the world since 2017. An escalating civil war in the region broke out in April 2023, with millions of people forced to migrate due to the climate-induced challenges which ensued.

Syria

The number of climate refugees in Syria has increased rapidly in recent years. With a gruelling civil war, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been living in refugee camps, insufficiently prepared to deal with the harsh weather conditions they are faced with, which have pushed them to migrate as climate refugees. In addition to numerous droughts, Syria was also hit by an earthquake in February 2023.

UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the primary office engaging with matters related to all issues pertaining to refugees, and climate-induced migration is now prioritised on the UNHCR agenda. Its work so far can be utilised as an example for how to treat this issue, and its past actions can be taken into account when considering which future steps, the UNGA should or

should not take.

Possible Solutions

Policies to improve conditions

Governments of member states can begin implementing policies directly targeting the security challenges posed by climate-induced migration. The international community can work to support the nations struggling with climate issues, ultimately seeking to reduce the rates of migration by pre-emptively improving the conditions.

Establishing a legal framework

Current UN conventions are not specific enough in defining who a climate refugee is, or how nations should treat them. In order to moderate the security challenges this migration causes, a legal framework and clear internationally recognised action plan can be established and sustained.

Fostering humanitarian rights and needs

Governments can focus on improving humanitarian aid, social services, and legal protections for displaced people, prioritising the rights of migrants, and helping them adapt to the new environments they will enter. Many of the security challenges lie with regards to this, and humanitarian rights could be a means to ensure such risks are mitigated.

Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases

At the end of the day, the issue of climate refugees is only so profound due to the extent to which the climate crisis has deteriorated in past decades. By working towards reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases in the first place, we can try to stabilise the climate crisis, thereby ensuring climate-induced natural disasters are no longer affecting civilians.

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