

PAMUN XVIII RESEARCH REPORT— QUESTION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Introduction of Topic

Usually, the term migrant or refugee brings to mind people fleeing conflict or general danger. From Figure 1. One might assume this because the problem is put under the umbrella term “refugee” in “The Refugee Crisis”. Although it is true that the world has plenty of conflict, one must not forget that we are all at the mercy of nature’s strength. Before all wars and fighting, people have been at battle with the forces of nature since civilization was born. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tidal waves, and even the disasters due to human activities like climate change are some of the natural disasters that have displaced many over the course of human history. What governments and organizations are now realizing is that these victims are in poor living standards, exercising limited human rights.

The refugee crisis is at historic proportions

Persons of concern, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and others

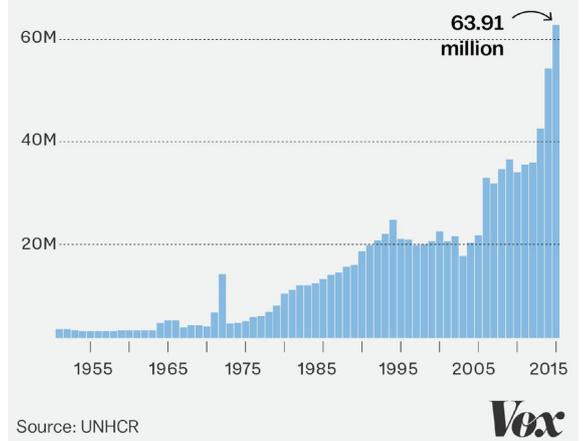
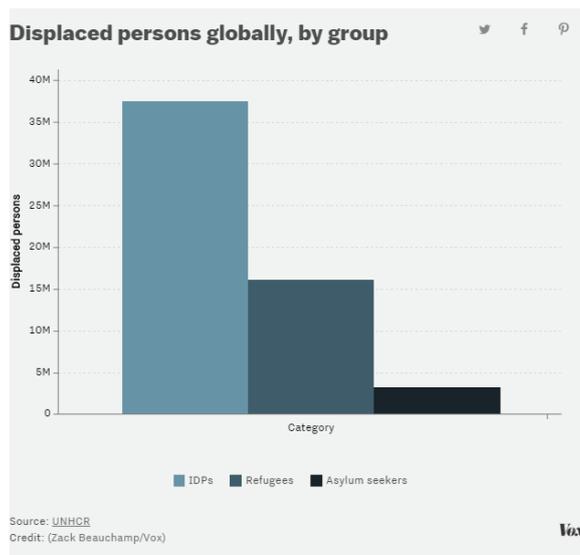


Figure 1. Total displaced persons from 1955 to 2015, Vox



In Figure 2, It is clear that the majority of these so called “refugees” are not refugees but rather internally displaced persons. Environmental migrants don’t even fall under the category of “refugees” because the out dated 1951 Refugee convention’s definition of refugees did not include environmental migrants because the issue wasn’t even realized yet. One demographic under this group includes what we are discussing in this research report: environmentally displaced persons. Now the world is realizing that these environmentally displaced persons require equal government attention and assistance as refugees fleeing conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Environmentally Displaced Peoples

Peoples undergoing forced migration due to environmental causes are a type of involuntary migrant. Most common definition is quoted by Essam El Hinawi (UNEP): "...those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life"

Background Information

There are a multitude of reasons how a person or people may be displaced due to environmental reasons. Most popular examples include desertification and rising sea levels due to climate change. Somewhat recently, the earthquakes in Indonesia or the tsunamis in Fukushima more than half a million internally displaced people. It would be simple if people could merely resettle in unaffected areas but continuing and unfaltering rates of displacement are contributing to the surge in refugees for this century, not to mention the obvious economics and personal loss that devastated living habitats bring. The personal grief resulted from environmental migrant inducing events is more strongly received by indigenous peoples.

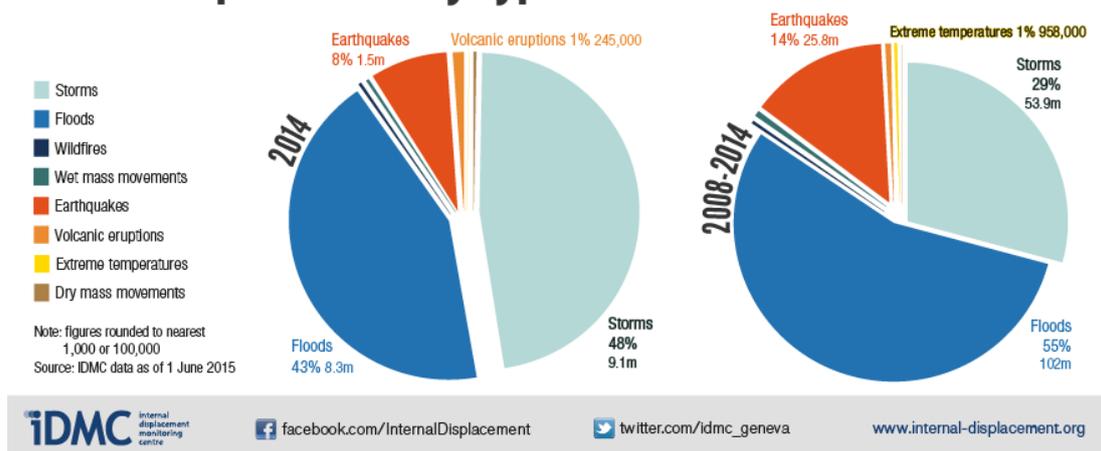
The Environmental migrants

These environmentally displaced migrants are numerous. From 2008 to 2015, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 22.5 million persons were displaced due to climate or weather-related reasons. Some disasters that occurred during this period include the following: heavy monsoon rains caused flooding in Pakistan in 2010, killing nearly two thousand people, displacing millions of Pakistanis and refugee families from Afghanistan who had previously sought refuge there and causing an estimated \$43 million dollars' worth of property damage. A drought in 2011 in East Africa caused a severe food crisis that killed tens of thousands of people and many Somalis to evacuate into Kenya and Ethiopia, where refugee numbers were already crowded and suffering unsanitary environments and malnutrition. Both types threatened a population's human rights forcing them to migrant internally or cross-border.

Natural Disasters

As exhibited in Pakistan in 2010, natural disasters can cause a large amount of property damage to homes. There are many different types of natural disasters that can cause people to be environmentally displaced, some include: earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, avalanches, landslides, tsunamis, floods, cyclonic storms. In a 2014 Reuters report, natural disasters caused 20 million people to be forcefully displaced from their homes which points to a long term trend of rising figures, in fact it is 60% more likely that an individual would be environmentally displaced today than they would be in the 1960s. Now the tricky thing about natural disasters is that for the most part, they are natural reaction of earth's function, making it difficult to prevent (usually). The best defense people have against natural disasters is prediction and immediate relief. However, these institutions are lacking in developing countries, which is where most of the world's environmental migrants originate. Environmental migrants due to natural disasters are usually only temporarily displaced, until they can safely return to their habitat with rebuilt or rebuilding infrastructure.

Global displacement by type of hazard



Slow-onset

Unlike the sudden events like flash floods and volcanic eruptions, slow onset environmental events are impacts that slowly take place, allowing for measures to be taken before hand. Instead of developing crisis-response tactics that sudden events require, slow-onset can be mended through efficient policy over a long period. Examples include droughts, like the one that occurred in East Africa of 2011, rising sea levels, salinization, and desertification. Most of these types of environmental events are also more linked to effects of climate change. Similar to natural disasters, slow-onset events hurt developing countries the strongest. Because of controversies over climate change as well as its relatively new emergence, policies regarding slow-onset climate change are very much undeveloped compared to existing natural disaster policies, calling for legislative reforms.

Types of displacement

Internal displacement

Internally displaced people (IDPs) are persons who undergo forced migration but stay within the borders of their country. In the context of the topic discussed, forced migration due to environmental changes usually results in IDPs as opposed to cross-border movement. There exists no binding agreement on a state's responsibilities regarding IDPs however the UNHCR have set out the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GPIDs). These principles provide a framework for policy as well as effective methodology in using instruments to gather data about an IDP population. Although states aren't obligated to the GPIDs, those that do implement them measure a degree of success. For example, the governments Mozambique and Madagascar's strongly used the GPIDs following the floods in their countries, which proved successful on many fronts. However the GPIDs hold gaps in policy: The current GPIDs fall short in having no discussion of climate change disasters as well as voluntary displacement. This is expanded in a later section "Main Issues"

External displacement

For general cross border migration, the governing international policy is the framework of the Refugee Convention. However, environmental migrants are not classified as people "fleeing persecution", and therefore the definition of a refugee set forth by the convention does not apply to externally displaced environmental migrants. Although less abundant than IDPs, environmentally and externally displaced migrants exist and require an otherwise lacking definition and structure.

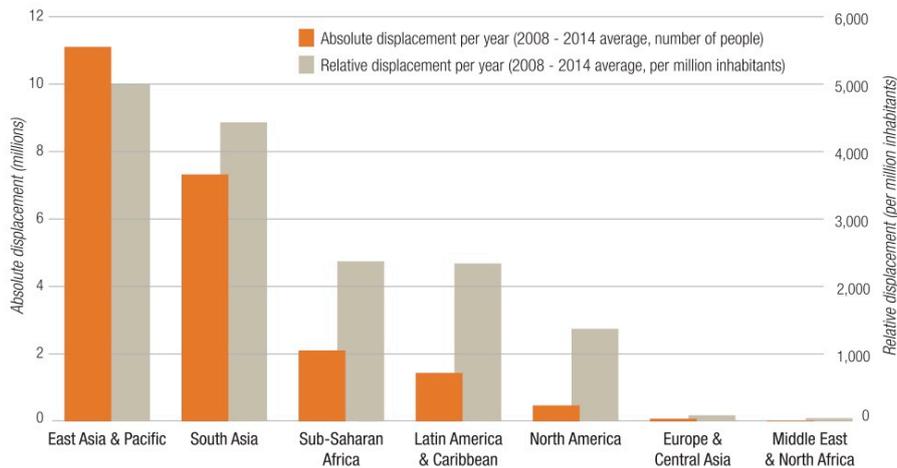
The "sinking island"

Research indicated that a sea level rise of just one meter, which is a plausible reality for 2100, could flood Tuvalu, the Maldives, Kiribati, and the properties of about 90,000 other people. In such an extreme example of the force of climate change, it poses an unanswered question in the eyes of international policy: What is the legal status of citizens, should their state cease to exist? Of course, this only a question that, assuming climate change trends continue, has nearly a century to solve.

Major Countries, Organizations, and Regions Involved

The following regions that exhibit a particular set of challenges in regards to slow onset events and natural disasters. The countries within these specific regions share these similar problems.

Weather-related disaster displacement by region, 2008 - 2014 average



Source: IDMC estimates as of 1 June 2015

South Asia

Consisting of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, South Asia exhibits deserts, alpine areas, tropical forests, and low lying coastal areas. The inhabitants of these countries represent 64 percent of the global population that experiences floods annually, with Pakistani and Bangladesh being the two countries most exposed to natural disasters. The region also has slow-onset events challenges like desertification, drought, and riverbank erosion. The biggest concern with climate change is rising sea levels, especially for regions like Bangladesh who have 17 million people in areas that are at risk with just a 1.5 meter rise in sea level. Another climate change concern the region has is the melting of their Himalayan glaciers which is not only a feat of nature but a crucial water reserve for peoples living near the mountains. Due to reasons like these, data indicates that most environmentally displaced migrants are, as per usual, internally displaced. This is a trend that is expected to continue as climate change worsens. There are some exceptions like cross-border displacement occurring between neighboring countries like the sudden Cyclone Aila in 2009, where thousands of Bangladeshis permanently relocated to India. In addition, environmentally displaced persons who move for long or permanent periods of time tend to move to cities, worsening urbanization. These highly populated urban centers can lead to slums and poor health practices and treatment.

Pacific Island States

The Pacific islands are thousands of islands that constitute 22 states, some of which include Tuvalu, Kiribati, Fiji, Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands, and Samoa. All of these islands are vulnerable to climate changes. These states are special in the sense that should climate change continue, planned international relocations of their citizens may become inevitable: the “sinking island”. In some of these states, issues of salt water intrusion and coastal erosion have already arose from rising sea levels. For such reasons, among many others, the Pacific Island States have been some of the most outspoken propagators of climate change mitigation and human mobility refinement. On top of this, the islands often experience strong natural disasters like storms and cyclones. Some permanent migration already exists,

with many Marshall Islanders migrating to the United States of America and New Zealand's Pacific Access Category visa taking in environmentally displaced islanders.

The Sahel

The Sahel is a strip of land stretching across Africa that is a transitional area between the Sahara desert and the tropic Saharan desert. The countries that are part of the Sahel include Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Eritrea. Though experiencing less natural disasters and slow onset events than some other regions like South Asia, the region is indeed the most vulnerable to such events. Countries in the Sahel are low in human development and are mostly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category. Human mobility is very prevalent in the region with policies like the free movement protocol of the Economic Community of West African States allowing for easy cross-border movement. Seeing as most of the Sahel is rural and about 79% of its people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, some sheep and cattle farmers seasonally migrate in response to environmental conditions. However, this depends on the environmental conditions to be consistent and predictable. Droughts and desertification plague the Sahel and have led to consistent long-term migration. About 90 percent of the men in Senegal have migrated at least once during a drought. Then, the forced migrants sometimes experience different natural disasters in some places with flash floods and hurricanes. The severity of these two influencing factors significantly contributes to Africa having the world's highest IDP and environmental migration counts.

Central America

Central America consists of Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, and Nicaragua. The region is notable for its vulnerability to sudden events like hurricanes, tropical storms, and floods. Geographical features like the Dry Corridor is subject to many droughts while other environmental events like cyclones and storms are projected to become more frequent with stronger intensity if climate change trends continue. The countries have facilitated cross-border movement to an extent with several free movement accords, like the CA-4 accords that allow passage between Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. They have also made agreements like the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) following 1998's Hurricane Mitch, taking up effective practices for protection of cross-border disaster migrants.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
28 July 1951	Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees signed

11 February 1998	Guiding principles on Internal displacement
23 October 2009	African Union's Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa adopted (Kampala Convention)
2009	Cyclone Alia in Bangladesh
2010	Flooding in Pakistan
2011	Drought in East Africa
12 December 2015	United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) and subsequent (COP22 & COP23)

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Guiding principles on Internal displacement, 11 February 1998 (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2)
- Convention relating to the Status of refugees, 28 July 1998
- United Nations Climate Change Conference (Paris COP 21), 12 December 2015 (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9)
- United Nations Climate Change Conference (Marrakech COP 22), November 18th 2016 (COP 22/CMP 12/CMA 1)
- United Nations Climate Change Conference (Bonn COP 23), November 17th 2017 (COP23/CMP13/CMA2)
- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, 3 October 2016 (A/RES/71/1)

Main Issues

Regarding definitions

A question currently debated is whether we need to define “environmentally displaced persons” , and then eventually come up with a specific convention regarding their status, their rights, and the protection of their security and needs, or, alternatively, if we need to modify the definitions of refugees to include also environmentally displaced persons, and once this is done to allow the various international agreements and conventions regarding refugees to take hold and deal with these issues.

Some say that those displaced as a result of environmental or climate change are refugees and advocate for the expansion of the definition of a refugee in the 1951 Refugee Convention in order to include them; others call for the adoption of new instruments to provide them with protection similar to that provided for refugees. And then there are those who believe that any notion of the existence of ‘environmental refugees’ and their need for refugee like protection is at best exaggerated and at worst politically motivated and dangerous. According to them, such ideas serve only to confuse the traditional concept of a refugee and play into the hands of those – governments – who wish to classify all as economic migrants and thereby avoid their obligation to provide refugee protection.

Protection of human rights

Many of the causes of environmentally displaced migration damage the migrant’s internationally recognized human rights. Specifically, slow onset events like desertification restrict a people from accessing basic needs. All of the relevant violations of human rights regard around when a state fails to meet the needs of its population following an environmental-induced migration. An example includes events like salinization or desertification which can change the agriculture of an economy leading to hunger and malnutrition. It is estimated that 854 million people live hungry and on environmentally degraded lands. The drought in Pakistan’s Tharparkar district caused crop failure leading to the death of about 160 people. 100 of which being children. This problem does not get better with the worsening of climate change. Other needs that are challenged by environmental migration-inducing events are the right to water quality, health services, adequate housing, and the issue worsens when a State does not take, or fails to implement positive measures of protecting the right to basic needs, and therefore the right to life. With so many issues in human rights, the problem of environmentally displaced migrants tackles most of the sustainable development goals, which strongly points to the relevancy and importance of the topic. However, like any migrant problem, it proves not to be a simple task providing adequate care to migrants.

However, the question is still open which rights should such persons be granted? Once a list of such rights is drawn, such as for example: right to assistance, right to food and water aid, right to health care, right to safe shelter, right to education and training, right to work, right to return (if possible), then each and every one of those “rights” becomes a contentious issue, and how and to what extent such rights can or should be granted and implemented becomes a key issue.

Slow-onset and Natural disaster distinction

Considering the two different causes of environmentally displaced persons, slow-onset and crisis natural disasters, the problem comes from two sources that must be dealt with differently. Slow-onset require long-term mediation and preparation while crisis events need efficient disaster responses. However, this distinction is not always clear when one should occur and causes unnecessary extra measures. If slow-onset events are to be identified now and mended for the future, crisis response will no longer be needed for those events and focus can be kept on the real sudden natural disasters.

Cross-border mobility

Environmentally displaced migrants are not Refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention's definition of a refugee. Though environmentally displaced migrants may sometimes cross state borders, they are not fleeing persecution and therefore they cannot receive refugee status. This means that environmentally displaced migrants do not receive any of the protection or asylum processes that refugees do even though they experience similar threats to their security of life and human rights. The issue becomes more complex with the involvement of voluntary migrants: environmentally displaced migrants that leave their lands due to economic factors and or in anticipation of environmental degradation, a situation often occurring with slow-onset degradation. Furthermore, a lack of regulated cross-border mobility risks environmentally displaced migrants seeking illegal and unsafe means of crossing borders, another threat to human rights.

Responsibility

As with the case with most environmental problems, there is debate between countries over whose responsibility is it to manage environmental migrants. The problem is especially prevalent in issues of cross-border migration like when many Somali's evacuated to nearby Kenya and Ethiopia during the drought in East Africa. Then, there are debates over whether how developed a country is should be a factor in their responsibility for environmental migrants. Often, countries struggling with these environmental impacts have low economic development, which prompts many to put the responsibility on more economic developed countries to take responsibility.

So, whose responsibility is it to attend to environmentally displaced people? Some would argue that it is the responsibility of the nearby countries where such people find refuge. On the other hand, very much on the model of what is currently happening in the European Union (EU), it is argued that it is impossible to expect the brunt of the responsibility to be exclusively in the hands of "first access countries", and therefore all should bear responsibility, one way or another

Gaps in policy

Existing international law does not protect environmentally displaced persons well, leaving the policy to government crisis response or local and unregulated policy. For internally displaced people, the GDIPs lack coverage on environmental migrants. Subsequently, advocates for these migrants dispute over whether to create a new convention regarding environmental migrants or amend the existing

In this year's PAMUN conference, delegates are expected to write specialized clauses, which should later amount to a coherent resolution with each of them addressing a specific aspect of the topic. When writing their clauses, delegates are to focus on a specific aspect or a "specialized topic" of the general issue that are outlined by 'major issues' and 'possible solutions' of this report. During your conference, chairs will deliver their delegates with more specific instructions. However, please keep in mind that these ideas do not in any way set restrictions for debate. Moreover, each solutions have both its benefits and disadvantages that delegates should thoroughly consider.

Filling in the Gaps

There are many ways this task can be accomplished, which is most effective is left to debate. It is important to note that these different means are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One may update the current UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This document already holds existing and frameworks already proven to be effective but are indeed frameworks and in less direct contact to policy makers. Another means is mirroring the African Union's Kampala Convention and placing regional principles on internal displacement. This option is effective in customizing the frameworks to the specific needs of a region (pacific island state's framework for internally displaced people is best different from a landlocked nation). However, the African Union's Kampala Convention is new and its methods are not yet proven reliable. The same goes for any new policy framework. Policy makers could also tackle the 1951 Refugee convention to include environmental migrants- a change that would require a debate and refinement on the rights and protections of a refugee. However, it should be duly noted that there are opponents to including the specific definition of an environmental refugee due to the many social, cultural, and environmental factors to forced migration. It would be important in this debate to find a clear definition for an environmentally displaced migrant considering the matter of voluntary environmentally displaced migrants, as well as reaffirming an effective asylum processes.

Limiting Slow-onset events and Natural Disasters

Of course, the best course of handling environmentally displaced persons is by preventing the creation of them in the first place: Slow-onset events are largely climate change dependent, meaning they pose problematic only if climate change poses problematic. At the trend that the world is following now, carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gas emissions will only continue to grow and threaten to worsen the effects of climate change. Noting the departure of the U.S. from the COP 21 climate accords, the world is in disaccord on how to fix the problem of climate change. Perhaps a step forward in the right direction is the inclusion of environmentally displaced migrants as a consequence of climate change in agreements like the Paris agreement. That, as well as implementing policies that directly serve to protect those that are geographically endangered by climate change. For example, implementing policies that provide water management for areas prone to desertification to protect those who use that land as a source of agriculture. Then the ultimate means of prevention is attacking the root cause: greenhouse gas emissions. However, the reduction of greenhouse gas emission is a whole and

large subject that requires its own research report, and therefore will not be discussed in the context of this issue.

Limiting Natural Disasters

The same goes for natural disasters seeing as it proves difficult to prevent naturally occurring earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. The feasible means of protecting environmentally displaced migrants from natural disasters is creating infrastructure that is natural disaster proof to minimize property damage from natural disasters so that migrants may return to their original habitat sooner.

World Agency for Environmentally Displaced Persons (WAEDP)

Some would argue that, unless a specific body is set up to attend to environmentally displaced persons, which will have its own specific budget and will be able to carry weight in negotiations, the issue will not be seriously taken into consideration, and will fall between the cracks. On the other hand, the multiplications of UN body is widely thought to be actually detrimental to the effective treatment of problems, with differing bodies actually competing to “justify their existence” by undercutting the actions of another.

In this context, many observers point to the fact that contexts and situations being so widely different, it would be impossible and ineffective to seek to formulate any Convention, or seek to establish a dedicated agency: the situation of Kiribati, of Bangladesh, being widely different and actually incomparable. Others argue that this fact being true doesn't prevent any other UN agency to function.

Additionally, some argue that, the plan to come up with a dedicated convention and setting up a dedicated agency is going to take political energies away from the real issue and divert them to organization, while dealing with the real issues of currently environmentally displaced persons will take a back seat and be swamped by petty quibbling over formulations.

For further inquiry

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Appendix or Appendices

I. <http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>

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