

# United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



ENMUNC VI

# Table of Contents

**Sensitivity Statement.....2**

**Technology Policy..... 2**

**Letter from the Chair.....3**

**History and Structure of UNHCR.....4**

**Topic 1: Environmental Disaster Relief..... 5**

    Topic Introduction..... 5

    Problem Identification..... 5

    Current Situation..... 12

    Questions to Consider..... 13

**Topic 2: Increasing Vaccine Access..... 14**

    Topic Introduction..... 14

    Problem Identification..... 15

    Current Situation..... 22

    Questions to Consider..... 23

**Closing Statement..... 24**

**Country List.....25**

**Bibliography.....27**

## **Sensitivity Statement**

Dear Delegates,

You are expected to retain decorum throughout the committee and treat these issues with the seriousness they call for. Any appeal to or use of discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated. Undiplomatic behavior towards fellow delegates, including bullying, personal insults, and harassment, will also not be tolerated.

ENMUNC seeks to maintain a fair and balanced environment that allows delegates to shine and showcase their talents. As such, using pre-writing or similarly deceptive tactics, such as using AI in writing working papers in our committee, will not be tolerated by the dais or ENMUNC as an organization. Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable at ENMUNC.

If issues arise with the conduct of a delegation or individual, feel free to reach out to Nayan Mallubhotla at [nayan.mallubhotla@emory.edu](mailto:nayan.mallubhotla@emory.edu) or to our Under-Secretary-General, Hugo Rosen, at [hugo.rosen@emory.edu](mailto:hugo.rosen@emory.edu).

## **Technology Policy**

Generative AI is strictly prohibited from being used to generate documents such as resolutions. These documents must be your work. Technology of any form is only allowed during unmoderated forms of debate or as otherwise specified. As this is a double del committee, outroom delegates only may use technology during a moderated caucus during a room split.

## Letter from the Chair

Dearest delegates,

It's my absolute pleasure to welcome you to this year's ENMUNC double del GA committee! My name is Nayan Mallubhotla and I am the chair for ENMUNC VI's UNHCR committee. I am a senior at Emory University studying psychology on the pre-med track here. I am originally from West Bloomfield, Michigan and I have loved competing on Emory's Model UN since I joined my freshmen year in college. Outside of Model UN, I enjoy reading, running, and juggling!

In a time marked by mass displacement and humanitarian crises, the work of the UNHCR is incredibly vital to address the neglected needs of vulnerable individuals. As delegates, you will be tasked with addressing issues of access, equity, and survival; specifically how you will ensure that no one is left without protection and how all nations should respond when international systems are stretched to their limits. This committee's agenda will be focused on providing international access to vaccines and environmental disaster relief. You will need to collaborate with other delegates to formulate targeted solutions that will support displaced populations and formulate systems to sustain them long term. In today's political environment, it is more important than ever to understand the intricacies that come with international conflict, and how chronic overuse of power comes at the price of the lives of millions of individuals.

Much Love,  
Nayan

## History and Structure of UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN refugee Agency, was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1950.<sup>1</sup> This office was established to aid the millions of displaced individuals following the Second World War. The UNHCR leads all international action to protect forcibly displaced refugees and stateless people by providing medical care, shelter, and food. The core responsibility of the High Commissioner is to ensure international protection that guarantees the international protection of rights and safety for refugees under international law, specifically to, “prevent refoulement, ensure access to fair asylum processes, and advocate for refugee rights”.<sup>2</sup> While the UNHCR originally started as a temporary institution, the widespread humanitarian aid provided by the UNHCR served as a necessary force, and has now become a permanent structure that has spread its reach in 137 nations. The UNHCR comprises specialized divisions that oversee internal protection, operations, human resources, finance and information services, operational support, public information, and oversight and evaluation. In addition to these internal structures, field operations implement solutions presented by the committee on the ground.<sup>3</sup> This organization has been integral in the assistance of over 121 million people as of June 2025 and continues to provide succor to vulnerable populations across the globe

<sup>1</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.belfercenter.org/explainer/role-un-high-commissioner-refugees>

<sup>3</sup>[https://policy.un.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/2021/Sep/st\\_sgb\\_1998\\_9\\_organization\\_unhcr\\_0.docx](https://policy.un.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/2021/Sep/st_sgb_1998_9_organization_unhcr_0.docx)

# **Topic One: Environmental Disaster Relief**

## Introduction to Topic One

Climate-induced forms of displacement are defined by the UNHCR by the involuntary movement of people as a reaction to sudden or developing impacts of climate change or the occurrence of a disaster, within their country or origin or across borders.<sup>4</sup> The impact of global warming are undeniable today, affecting daily life, and reshaping global priorities. The accelerating pace of global warming is most concerning, as recent decades have seen temperature increases more than triple the historical average.<sup>5</sup> This rapid increase in temperatures has proliferated the chance and intensity of extreme weather events such as wildfires, tropical cyclones, tornadoes, heavy precipitation, and drought, which causes the displacement of millions each year.<sup>6</sup>

As reported by the UNHCR, an average of 21.5 million individuals are displaced each year by climate-induced events, giving rise to a new category of refugees referred to as “climate refugees”.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to refugees displaced due to war or conflict, climate refugees are not legally recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention, depriving them of formal legal status and guaranteed human rights.<sup>8</sup> As the primary UN agency responsible for protecting displaced populations, UNHCR is integral for coordinating emergency shelter, protection, and assistance following environmental disasters despite limitations in its formal legal mandate. This topic explores the exclusion of these displaced individuals in climate-induced events from risk reduction plans and long term solutions.

## Problem Identification

### **The 1951 Refugee Convention**

The United Nations Refugee Convention, ratified in July of 1951, is a treaty that defines a refugee and

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration\\_and\\_statistics](https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration_and_statistics)

<sup>5</sup><https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature>.

<sup>6</sup><https://wmo.int/topics/extreme-weather#:~:text=Overview,drought%2C%20tornadoes%20and%20tropical%20cyclones.&text>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.zurich.com/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.climate-refugees.org/why>

outlines their rights. Following World War II, many war refugees remained unprotected, prompting the introduction of an international legal framework specifically for refugees.<sup>9</sup> According to the treaty, a refugee is, “someone unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear or prosecution based on reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”<sup>10</sup> The treaty was later amended by the 1967 Protocol, an independent legal instrument that expanded the original Convention’s framework to establish protection to refugees worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

As outlined by international law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no individual should be forced to return to a country where they would face inhumane treatment, torture, or other irreparable harm.<sup>12</sup> This principle is enforced under international human rights, refugee, humanitarian, and customary law and provides a strong pillar for refugee protection. Under this framework, refugees are granted many rights such as the right to work, freedom of religion, and access to housing and healthcare. Importantly, non-refoulement applies to all persons regardless of migration status, nationality, or citizenship, and includes vulnerable populations such as children and disabled people. By upholding this principle, UNHCR ensures that displaced populations receive protection against being returned to situations of danger.

However, this framework offers minimal practical value for climate refugees. They do not conform to the UN’s definition of “refugee”, rendering the process by which refugee status is granted extremely difficult. Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the process by which national governments and the UNHCR determine whether an individual qualifies as a refugee.<sup>13</sup> The criteria for refugee status are primarily based on the 1951 Refugee Convention reasoning, but exceptions are allowed. To quote UN Secretary-General António Guterres, “there is a protection gap in the international system that needs

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/2023-09-factsheet/2023-09-Factsheet\\_Refugee\\_Convention\\_Jun2023.pdf](https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/2023-09-factsheet/2023-09-Factsheet_Refugee_Convention_Jun2023.pdf)

<sup>10</sup><https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/the-1951-refugee-convention/>.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4ec262df9.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/refugee-status-determination>.

to be addressed.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The 2018 Global Compact for Migration (GCM)**

The Global Compact for Migration is an agreement developed by the United Nations in 2018, aiming to improve cooperation on international migration.<sup>15</sup> It is one of the first international agreements to openly recognize climate-induced events as a valid ground for migration.<sup>16</sup> Although a milestone, the GCM is not legally binding. This means that there is no obligation to act or legal consequence upon violation, leaving climate refugees weakly protected without guaranteed rights.<sup>17</sup> Since its creation, it has yet to yield substantive change for climate refugees. Additionally, multiple countries, such as Australia and Italy, have pulled out of the agreement with concerns of interference with their domestic immigration agendas.<sup>18</sup> By 2050, there is estimated to be over 200 million climate-displaced individuals. This statistic grows more concerning when there is no legally binding legislation to protect them.<sup>19</sup>

### **Disparities in Climate Displacement Frameworks**

Disparity stands as the primary barrier to effective responses to climate-induced displacement, taking many forms that ultimately undermine the success of risk reduction frameworks.

A critical gap in proper climate migration frameworks is the lack of integration between climate policy and migration policy. These two spheres of policy are developed through independent agencies and actors who do not communicate. On one hand, climate policy focuses on “mitigation,” which is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and on “adaptation,” allowing for populations to adjust to the impacts of climate change.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, migration policy refers to the set of rules and strategies

<sup>14</sup><https://www.climate-refugees.org/why>.

<sup>15</sup><https://migrationnetwork.un.org/minisite/gcm-tools/gcm/gcmobjectives.html>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees#:~:text=Despite%20the%20prevalence%20of%20this,o%20return%20to%20unsafe%20conditions>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees>.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees>.

<sup>19</sup><https://www.cigionline.org/articles/climate-migrants-face-gap-international-law/>

<sup>20</sup><https://cris.unu.edu/making-climate-policy-work-environmental-policy>

governments use worldwide to manage the movement of people across borders or within a country.<sup>21</sup> When these two interconnected domains act as isolated sectors, individuals displaced by climate-induced events are left unprotected by both systems. This legal void leaves millions of climate refugees vulnerable to human rights violations.<sup>22</sup> Countries with poor socio-economic conditions and high exposure to extreme climate events become a primary target of this phenomenon, trapped between inadequate climate adaptation policies and nonexistent migration protections.<sup>23</sup> Cooperation and integration between climate and migration policy are essential for a unified approach.

Another important barrier to effective climate change displacement frameworks is the disparity between internal and cross border displacement. Internal climate migration refers to people moving within their state who are not seeking protection from another party or at the international level.<sup>24</sup> The majority of climate migration is internal, making it a domestic issue. This places the full burden of protection and relocation on national governments, many of which lack the financial resources and infrastructure to do so. As a result, internally displaced persons (IDPs) often face poor living conditions, such as limited access to healthcare and overcrowded housing.<sup>25</sup> Those who cross borders use asylum systems designed for those facing persecution, as defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The majority of policies only address one type of displacement, leaving international climate migrants in a state of legal uncertainty in both cases. This disparity creates a double-edged sword situation, as IDPs face challenges within their nations, and international climate refugees face a gap in international law. A last significant source of disparity is the difference between developing and developed countries' access to funding for climate displacement frameworks. Greenhouse gas emissions today are strongly linked to a nation's degree of wealth, meaning richer countries pollute significantly more. As reported by the World Bank, only one-tenth of the world's greenhouse gases are emitted by the 74

lowest-income countries, but these remain the ones most affected by extreme climate

<sup>21</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees#:~:text=Despite%20the%20prevalence%20of%20this,o%20return%20to%20unsafe%20conditions>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees>.

<sup>23</sup><https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/climate-induced-displacement-establishing-legal-protections-for-climate-refugees>.

<sup>24</sup><https://www.cigionline.org/articles/climate-migrants-face-gap-international-law/>

<sup>25</sup><https://cris.unu.edu/making-climate-policy-work-environmental-policy>

events.<sup>26</sup> These countries are also ones with weak governance and growing poverty, meaning they are not equipped with adequate early warning systems.<sup>27</sup> This leaves developing nations with a double burden; they are the most affected by extreme weather events, yet the least equipped to respond to them.

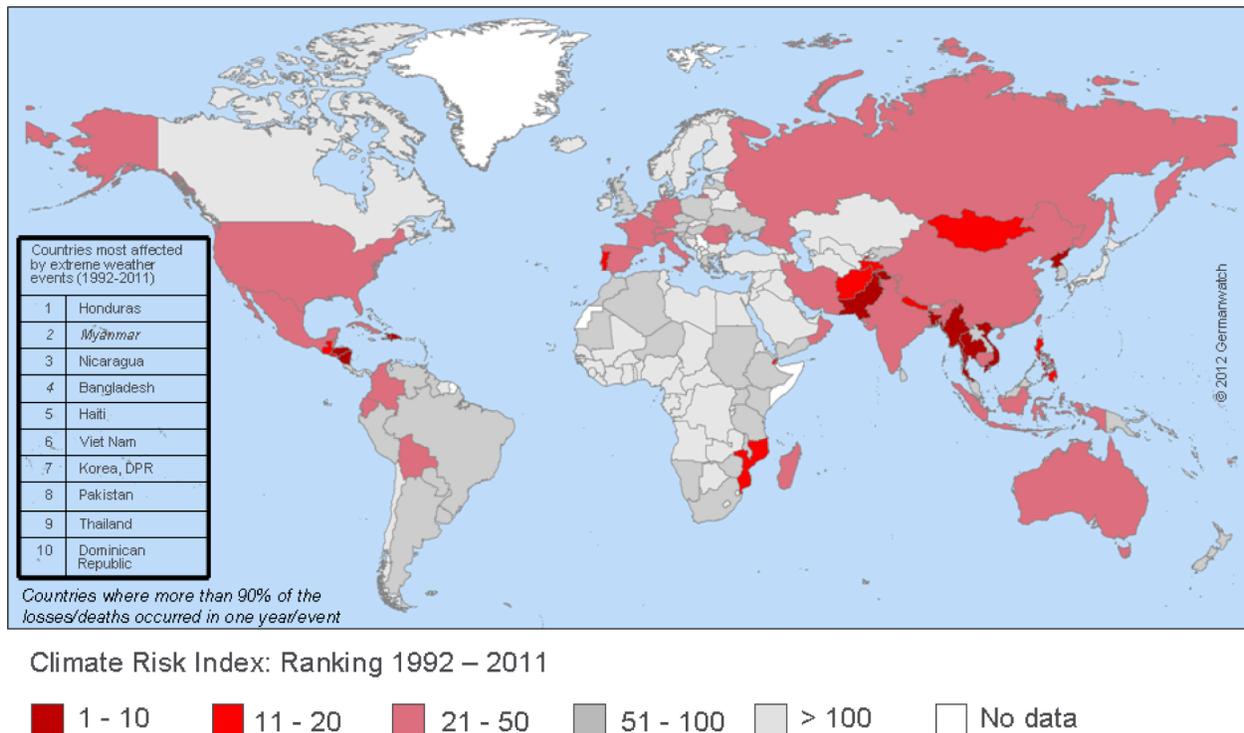


Figure 2: World Map of the Global Climate Risk Index 1992-2011

Source: Germanwatch and Munich Re NatCatSERVICE

*Countries most affected by extreme weather events from 1992 - 2011*

### Pre-Existing Factors: Geographical Location and Governance

There are many pre-existing factors that can exacerbate the impact of extreme weather events within nations, and thus create harsher conditions to develop effective frameworks beyond pieces of legislation. These factors are mainly their geographic locations and their current governments and political landscapes.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup><https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/01/climate-crisis-poor-davos2023/>.

<sup>27</sup><https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102912>.

Picture: <https://un-spider.org/news-and-events/news/extreme-weather-events-developing-countries-hit-hardest-2011>

<sup>28</sup>[https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/which-countries-are-most-vulnerable-to-climate-migration/#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20\(SIDS,hotspots%20for%20climate%20migration%20vulnerability](https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/which-countries-are-most-vulnerable-to-climate-migration/#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20(SIDS,hotspots%20for%20climate%20migration%20vulnerability).

A country's location is a deciding factor for its degree of vulnerability to extreme climate events. Rates of climate variation are not consistent worldwide, with some countries experiencing significantly higher rates of climate change than others. As reported by the IDMC, the continents most affected by climate-related disasters, in order, are Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Oceania.<sup>29</sup> Asia remains the most disaster-hit region in the world due to high population density in vulnerable areas and economic dependence on climate-sensitive sectors.<sup>30</sup> These countries, namely Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines, are most affected by the issue. Africa ranks second due to drought and desertification, threatening their economies and access to water. These nations include places like Chad, the DRC, Eritrea, and Tanzania.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Small Island Developing States worldwide, such as the Maldives and Tuvalu, face the existential challenge of rising sea levels.<sup>32</sup> Overall, the constant and immense burden of climate-related disasters striking decreases the effectiveness of prevention and risk reduction measures that were simply never created to sustain such a high volume of instances.

A nation's governmental strength and political stability play a critical role in shaping its capacity to respond to such challenges. Here, a government is considered strong if it effectively addresses climate change and protects its climate refugees. This includes not only investing in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, but also ensuring that displaced populations are protected and supported.

A proactive government is exemplified by Bangladesh. Although resource-constrained, the government has implemented a multi-pronged approach to reduce the impacts of climate change, as well as having launched the world's largest housing project for almost five thousand climate refugee families.<sup>33</sup> The opposite can be seen from Sudan, a currently war-torn state that has not adequately responded to either issue. The ongoing war has only exacerbated the effects of climate change by increasing its population's exposure to extreme environmental hazards and causing significant damage to the

<sup>29</sup><https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental-migration>.

<sup>30</sup><https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/news/climate-change-asia-and-pacific-whats-stake>.

<sup>31</sup><https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/africa-faces-disproportionate-burden-from-climate-change-and-adaptation-costs>.

<sup>32</sup>[https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/which-countries-are-most-vulnerable-to-climate-migration/#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20\(SIDS,hotspots%20for%20climate%20migration%20vulnerability](https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/which-countries-are-most-vulnerable-to-climate-migration/#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20(SIDS,hotspots%20for%20climate%20migration%20vulnerability).

<sup>33</sup><https://icccad.net/publications/climate-induced-displacement-loss-and-damage-in-bangladesh/#:~:text=Supporting%20Climate%20Migrants%20and%20Local,disaster%20preparedness%2C%20and%20income%20generation>.

country's existing infrastructure. Refugees of both war and climate are internally displaced, leading to violent competition over limited resources, like fertile land and water.<sup>34</sup> In Sudan's circumstances, government inaction and an unstable political landscape only worsen their current climate refugee situation. How these elements interact is an important consideration when developing any climate displacement risk reduction framework.

### **Disproportionate Impact on Vulnerable Communities**

The current climate crisis disproportionately affects marginalized communities, namely women and Indigenous Peoples. These groups face specific obstacles or have particular needs that are entirely neglected in disaster planning and relocation processes.

In many regions, women bear more of the burden to secure food and water for their families. In cases of relocation and displacement due to climate-related events, these women must work harder and travel farther. This is not only physically exhausting but also hinders their access to education and work. This disparity in information and decision-making skills makes women and girls less likely to survive in natural hazard displacement settings.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, a 2025 UN Spotlight brief found that climate pressure and violence against women and girls are closely interrelated, even finding a 28% increase in femicides during heatwaves.<sup>36</sup>

Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable in climate displacement settings due to economic marginalization, human rights violations, and discrimination. Often settled in proximity to climate-sensitive lands, these communities usually lack formal land ownership.<sup>37</sup> Climate change displaces these communities at seven times the rate of the global population, disconnecting them from

<sup>34</sup> <https://mecouncil.org/publication/sudans-puzzle-confronting-climate-change-in-a-war-torn-state/>.

<sup>35</sup>2025. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20are%20less%20likely%20to%20survive%20natural%20hazards&text=When%20disasters%20strike%2C%20women%20are,access%20to%20resources%20and%20training.>

<sup>36</sup>2025. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20are%20less%20likely%20to%20survive%20natural%20hazards&text=When%20disasters%20strike%2C%20women%20are,access%20to%20resources%20and%20training.>

<sup>37</sup><https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G04328.pdf>.

their ancestral lands.<sup>38</sup> When displacement occurs, they are typically excluded from consultation.<sup>39</sup> Because of existing economic marginalization and historic discrimination, their needs are ignored and unaccounted for in regional and national risk reduction frameworks.

To quote Matcha Phorn-in, a feminist working to empower Indigenous women in Thailand, “if you are invisible in everyday life, your needs will not be thought of, let alone addressed, in a crisis situation.”<sup>40</sup>

### Current Situation

Currently, the main challenges in addressing climate-induced displacement lie in reducing systemic disparities, protecting the rights of all displaced populations, especially more vulnerable populations, and legitimizing climate change as a valid reason for displacement. Climate change is still perceived as an illegitimate source for displacement. Addressing this challenge not only requires social and legal reform, but also a broader shift affirming the legitimacy and rights of all displaced people.

Many organizations are at the forefront of this problem. Although the main policy remains the GCM, the UNFCCC “Human Mobility” Focus has fought to include climate displacement throughout climate negotiations since the 2019 COP to reduce the disparity between migration and climate policies, though this has not fully been ratified.<sup>41</sup> The UNHCR Strategic Plan 2024-2030 developed guidelines to integrate refugee protection with climate policy, through tangible action like early warning systems.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched a 10-year institutional strategy laying out their long-term approach to alleviating the struggles of climate refugees.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup><https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/indigenous-challenges-displacement-climate-change/>.

<sup>39</sup><https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html>.

<sup>40</sup><https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/role-human-mobility-global-climate-policy-belem-and-beyond>.

<sup>41</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/climate-change-and-displacement>.

<sup>42</sup><https://www.iom.int/climate-action>.

While these initiatives represent necessary steps, their effectiveness remains mixed. The lack of formal ratification in the UNFCCC's agreement, the missing refugee status in the UNHCR's strategy, and the IOM's unsustainable funding mark significant obstacles for proper functioning.<sup>43 43</sup>

### Questions to Consider

1. How can the 1951 Refugee Convention be expanded to include those displaced by climate-related events and disasters?
2. How can national governments and regional bodies, like the African Union, coordinate responses to climate disasters and cooperate with one another?
3. How can the disparity between solutions from developed nations and developing nations be ethically addressed?
4. How can governments allow inclusive relocation for vulnerable communities?
5. What role do education and awareness campaigns play in eliminating xenophobic attitudes and climate denial?
6. What mechanisms can the UNHCR implement as “last resort” solutions?
7. How can the disparity between solutions from developed nations and developing nations be addressed?
8. How can the human rights of vulnerable displaced individuals be protected from violations during and after displacement?

<sup>43</sup><https://www.refworld.org/policy/strategy/unhcr/2024/en/147980>.

<sup>44</sup><https://www.onlinelibrary.iihl.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2021-IOM-Institutional-Strategy-on-Migration-Environment-and-Climate-Change-2021%E2%80%932030.pdf>.

## **Topic Two: Increasing Vaccine Access for Refugees and Displaced Persons**

### Introduction to Topic Two

Refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless individuals often face limited access to healthcare due to displacement, lack of documentation, and instability in host countries. Refugees are defined as, “people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country”<sup>45</sup> whereas an internally displaced person has been forced to flee their home but remains within the borders of their country. Historically, vaccine campaigns for diseases like polio measles, and most recently COVID-19, have prioritized citizens of recognized states, leaving displaced populations underserved.

The UNHCR works alongside the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and other humanitarian agencies to provide equitable access to vaccines, particularly during outbreaks or pandemics. Past infectious disease outbreaks have consistently had a disproportionate impact on refugees and displaced populations due to overcrowded living conditions, limited sanitation, and disrupted healthcare systems. Measles and polio outbreaks have repeatedly emerged in refugee camps where routine immunization coverage is low, reversing years of global eradication efforts.<sup>46</sup> Cholera has similarly spread rapidly among displaced communities lacking access to clean water and adequate hygiene infrastructure. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified existing inequalities, as refugees were often excluded from early vaccine distribution plans, leaving them more vulnerable to prolonged public health crises.<sup>47</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted gaps in global vaccine distribution, with refugees often receiving vaccines late, in insufficient quantities, or facing barriers such as documentation requirements, political restrictions, and logistical challenges in camps or informal settlements.

<sup>45</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees>

<sup>46</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12259657/#:~:text=Evidence%20reveals%20that%20countries%20affected,priority%20and%20a%20human%20right>

<sup>47</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35196045/>

Accessibility for vaccines for displaced populations refers to the ability for refugees to obtain vaccinations regardless of legal status, location, or duration of displacement. The forefront of this is access to routine immunizations to measles, polio, and status, which are essential for preventing diseases and maintaining baseline public healthcare. Vaccine access also encompasses emergency outbreak response vaccines, which are deployed rapidly during disease outbreaks to contain transmission in high-risk, overcrowded environments. Finally are pandemic-related vaccines, such as those developed for COVID-19, which require equitable global distribution mechanisms to ensure displaced populations are not excluded from national vaccination strategies during global health emergencies.

## Problem Identification

### **Legal and Policy Barriers**

According to the World Health Organization, a significant barrier to expanding access for vaccine access is a lack of legal entitlement to healthcare and vaccination. The 1951 Convention treaty guarantees that refugees will receive the same treatment as state constituents, however it lacks specificity for equitable vaccine access, especially in the event of emergencies.<sup>48</sup> For example, a 2021 WHO analysis found that 11.8 million IDPs are omitted from National Deployment Vaccination Plans (NDVP).<sup>49</sup> In many nations, vaccination access is determined by residential status or legal documentation status rather than clinical need. These policies exclude marginalized groups from preventative and curative healthcare services.<sup>50</sup> Many such undocumented individuals are at increased risk of infection due to their work in environments with minimal protective equipment and higher risk of exposure. Other nations require the use of internet access for online registrations, excluding lower income populations without such access.

<sup>48</sup><https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-access-covid-19-vaccine-inequity>

<sup>49</sup><https://peoplesdispatch.org/2021/10/08/humans-without-rights-refugees-and-access-to-covid-19-vaccines/>

<sup>50</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36011606/#:~:text=People%20with%20irregular%20resident%20status,side%20access%20barriers;%20undocumented%20migrants>

## **Inequities in Global Vaccine Distribution**

Large disparities between high-income and low-income states present themselves in the inequalities in global vaccine distribution. In high-income, developed nations, vaccine distribution is significantly faster than in developing nations.<sup>51</sup> This disparity leads to the proliferation of new, resistant variants in under-vaccinated nations when vaccines are not distributed in a timely manner. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 emerged as a direct consequence of viral spread untreated through an unprotected population.<sup>52</sup> Within only a few weeks, this variant became the dominant strain across South Africa, Europe, and the United States and resulted in the emergence of multiple subvariants that continued to spread to neighboring countries. Similarly, within these nations, inequality persists. In developing nations with large socioeconomic gaps, high-income populations are prioritized. During the peak of COVID-19 infection in India in September 2020, new infections only subsided and began to decrease when initial vaccine shipments targeted higher risk groups such as the elderly, homeless populations, and those with the highest risk of exposure.

Vaccine nationalism is defined as, “the ideology of ‘my country first’ in global vaccine distribution... during the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>53</sup> Founded by Thomas Bollyky and Chad Bown, the ideology argues that competition exists amongst vaccine-producing countries to secure early access to vaccines and prioritise vaccination of their own populations, resulting in limited access for low and middle-income countries. Despite international mechanisms such as COVAX, forcibly displaced populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons, were frequently deprioritized and left “at the back of the queue,” particularly in overcrowded settings with limited healthcare access.<sup>54</sup> In an already politically unstable atmosphere, refugees are left particularly vulnerable to negligence for basic healthcare rights. This unequal distribution not only deepened existing humanitarian vulnerabilities but also undermined global public health efforts, as infectious diseases do not respect national borders.

<sup>51</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11660815/#:~:text=Vaccine%20distribution%20has%20generally%20been,throughout%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic>.

<sup>52</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9385581/#:~:text=Addressing%20the%20profound%20vaccine%20inequity,the%20case%20of%20the%20flu>.

<sup>53</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264410X2500194X>

<sup>54</sup><https://wrmcouncil.org/news/opinion/vaccine-nationalism-must-not-relegate-the-forcibly-displaced-to-the-back-of-the-queue/>



*Cold chain system in Azerbaijan*

## **Funding and Infrastructure Challenges**

Most vaccines rely on cold chain storage, a refrigerated production, storage, and distribution facility that relies on equipment to maintain low temperatures.<sup>55</sup> This system requires electricity, transportation networks, and medical infrastructure, which is difficult to maintain in remote areas or regions affected by conflict. These limitations increase the risk of vaccine spoilage and reduce the feasibility of large-scale and long-term immunization campaigns. In 1977, Ghana's first vaccine cold chain was established, demonstrating the possibility of such technology in low income nations.<sup>56</sup> John Lloyd, a WHO consultant, helped design Ghana's first vaccine cold chain in the 1970s, creating equipment and protocols that could withstand high temperatures and long transport distances in low-income settings. His work also led to innovations like vaccine vial monitors, multi-energy and solar-powered refrigerators, and improved transport carriers, which are now used globally. These advancements, alongside initiatives to train healthcare workers and strengthen immunization

Picture:<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/17-01-2023-azerbaijan-boosts-its-vaccine-cold-chain-system>

<sup>55</sup><https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/what-cold-chain>

<sup>56</sup><https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/the-unsung-vaccination-hero-whose-ingenuity-and-collaboration-has-saved-millions-of-lives>

networks, have made large-scale vaccination campaigns in remote and conflict-affected regions feasible, protecting millions of children from preventable diseases.

Inconsistent data collection remains a major obstacle to ensuring vaccine access for refugees. Many refugees flee without medical documentation, and health records are often lost or fragmented across borders. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), refugees are frequently excluded from national health information systems, resulting in incomplete immunization records and difficulty tracking vaccine coverage.<sup>57</sup> In large refugee settings such as Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, multiple humanitarian organizations operate parallel databases, leading to gaps and duplication in reporting.<sup>58</sup> This lack of reliable data makes it challenging to identify unvaccinated refugee populations and increases the risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks within camps and host communities.

Sustainable financing for routine immunization programs for refugees remains limited, particularly in protracted displacement settings. While global initiatives such as Gavi support national immunization systems, funding eligibility is based on national income levels rather than the size of refugee populations.<sup>59</sup> Countries hosting large refugee communities, such as Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Uganda, struggle to finance routine vaccinations for refugees alongside their own citizens. The WHO has emphasized that without predictable, multi-year funding, host states are unable to fully integrate refugees into national immunization programs.<sup>60</sup> Within fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS), two financing mechanisms have been implemented to improve vaccination outcomes.<sup>61</sup> The first is Direct Disbursement Mechanisms, which channel resources directly to implementing partners, community-based organizations, and local NGOs to reduce delays within local government. The second is Results-Based Financing, which links the funding to the achievement of vaccination goals

<sup>57</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12738965/>

<sup>58</sup><https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2022-new-who-global-evidence-review-on-health-and-migration-underscores-how-the-implementation-of-inclusive-immunization-plans-is-critical-for-member-states-to-achieve-universal-health-coverage>

<sup>59</sup><https://www.gavi.org/programmes-impact/programmatic-policies/eligibility-policy>

<sup>60</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK583127/>

<sup>61</sup><https://www.hitap.net/en/article/overcoming-barriers-vaccination-financing-fragile-states/>

established prior to the funding. These goals may include coverage rate or number of marginalized populations reached to provide an incentive for funding parties. While these funding mechanisms compliment each other well, they are both expensive to implement and are difficult to establish in areas with poor infrastructure.

### **Children and Other Vulnerable Groups**

Children are among the most affected groups amongst refugees that face disruptions in vaccination services, frequently missing routine childhood immunization schedules. Forced displacement interrupts access to national health systems, while mobility between camps, urban settings, or across borders makes consistent follow-up increasingly difficult. As a result, refugee children face higher risks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, polio, and diphtheria.<sup>62</sup> According to UNICEF, displaced children are significantly less likely to be fully immunized than non-displaced children, contributing to recurrent outbreaks in humanitarian settings and undermining global eradication efforts.

Pregnant refugee women also face substantial barriers to accessing maternal vaccines, including those for tetanus, influenza, and COVID-19.<sup>63</sup> Limited prenatal care, lack of legal documentation, and exclusion from national health programs restrict timely vaccination during pregnancy. In humanitarian contexts, maternal immunization services are often deprioritized in favor of emergency care, despite the critical role vaccines play in preventing neonatal mortality and maternal complications. Additionally, vaccine misinformation aggravates vaccine hesitancy. The World Health Organization has identified refugee and internally displaced women as disproportionately exposed to preventable maternal and neonatal health risks due to gaps in immunization coverage.

<sup>62</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6955676/>

<sup>63</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12279790/>

Elderly and immunocompromised refugees represent another high-risk group with limited access to vaccines. Older refugees often suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or respiratory illness, increasing vulnerability to severe outcomes from infectious diseases. A study of Ukrainian refugees showed a significantly higher disease burden than younger populations.<sup>64</sup> These elderly refugee populations were at higher risk of multimorbidity, averaging a mean of 2.5 diseases per individual. However, vaccination strategies in humanitarian settings frequently prioritize children, leaving older populations underprotected. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many refugee populations experienced delayed access to vaccines targeting high-risk groups, exacerbating morbidity and mortality among elderly refugees and those with weakened immune systems.<sup>65</sup>

### **Role of UNHCR and International Actors**

UNHCR plays a central role in coordinating public health responses for refugees, including vaccination efforts, as part of its broader mandate to provide protection and life-saving assistance to displaced populations. While UNHCR does not typically deliver vaccines directly, it works closely with host governments to integrate immunization into refugee assistance frameworks and ensure alignment with national health systems.<sup>66</sup> Through partnerships with international actors such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Gavi, and non-governmental organizations, UNHCR supports each individual aspect of procuring and distributing vaccines for refugee populations.<sup>67</sup> These collaborations are essential for extending immunization services to camps, settlements, and urban refugee populations, particularly in low-resource and emergency settings.

During disease outbreaks and humanitarian emergencies, international actors activate emergency response mechanisms to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases among refugees and host communities. These mechanisms include rapid vaccination campaigns, outbreak surveillance, and

<sup>64</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666756822001878#:~:text=As%20of%20May%2019%2C%202022,tuberculosis%20and%207827%20for%20cancer>.

<sup>65</sup>[https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/documents/covid-19\\_analytical\\_snapshot\\_67\\_migrants\\_access\\_to\\_vaccines.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_67_migrants_access_to_vaccines.pdf)

<sup>66</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/news-releases/unhcr-highlights-great-progress-refugee-vaccine-inclusion-inequities-hamper>

<sup>67</sup><https://www.unrefugees.org/news/world-health-day-why-vaccine-equity-must-include-refugees/>

emergency funding mobilization through global health initiatives. At the same time, UNHCR and its partners advocate for the inclusion of refugees in national vaccination plans, emphasizing that equitable access to immunization is both a public health necessity and a legal obligation under international refugee and human rights law.<sup>68</sup> Countries that have included refugees in national COVID-19 vaccination strategies, often with technical and financial support from international organizations, demonstrate that coordinated global action can reduce disparities in vaccine access and strengthen health system resilience for displaced populations.

### Current Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant vulnerabilities within global vaccine distribution systems for displaced populations. While mechanisms such as COVAX were designed to promote equitable access, refugees were frequently deprioritized in national vaccination plans, particularly where legal documentation requirements created barriers to inclusion.<sup>69</sup> These shortcomings underscored the consequences of fragmented coordination between humanitarian actors, national governments, and global health institutions. At the same time, some states expanded inclusive health policies to integrate refugees into national vaccination strategies. Countries such as Jordan and Colombia demonstrated that incorporating displaced populations into public health systems can be both feasible and effective when supported by sustained international funding and technical assistance.<sup>70</sup>

Despite this progress, low-income and conflict-affected states continue to face significant gaps, as healthcare systems in these regions are already overstretched. These states often experience limited cold-chain capacity, an integral structure required for vaccine storage, leading to persistent vaccine wastage.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, developing nations face insecurity in resources and

<sup>68</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10413720/>

<sup>69</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9812946/>

<sup>70</sup><https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23315024231160770>

<sup>71</sup><https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12177255/#:~:text=Vaccination%20in%20Africa%20faces%20significant%20delivery%20in%20resource%20limited%20settings.>

established infrastructure to ensure independence from short-term humanitarian funding.<sup>72</sup>

Together, these factors restrict consistent and equitable vaccine access for displaced populations. Underlying these disparities is an imbalance between responsibility-sharing and burden-sharing, in which low- and middle-income host countries shoulder the majority of displaced populations while wealthier nations retain greater financial resources and vaccine-producing capacities.<sup>73</sup>

Without sustainable financing mechanisms and stronger international cooperation, vaccine access for displaced populations remains highly vulnerable to future global health crises.

### Questions to Consider

1. What mechanisms can be implemented to overcome host country restrictions or political resistance?
2. How should funding priorities be set to include refugees and IDPs in global vaccination campaigns?
3. What logistical strategies could improve vaccine delivery in conflict zones or informal settlements?
4. How does misinformation proliferate vaccine hesitancy in displaced communities?
5. What role should international and human rights law play in guaranteeing access?
6. How can coordination between UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF be strengthened?
7. What long-term strategies can ensure displaced populations are included in future vaccination programs and health initiatives?

<sup>72</sup><https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/172943/providing-development-aid-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>

<sup>73</sup><https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/GRF%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Burden%20and%20Responsibility-Sharing.pdf>

## **Closing Statement**

While support for refugees, stateless peoples, and displaced peoples today has substantially improved since the formation of the UNHCR in 1950, its growth cannot afford to slow. Without a conscientious solution for climate change, the displacement of people, due to climate-related issues, does not appear to halt anytime soon. Infectious diseases will continue to unproportionately affect refugees excluded from vaccine distribution frameworks. Now is the time to unite countries and collaborate on practical, long-lasting solutions to adequately support all refugees, stateless peoples, and displaced peoples.

Throughout this committee, delegates have the opportunity to debate topics surrounding climate-driven displacement policies and expanding policies for vaccine access. During the debates and discussions, the dais encourages delegates to think critically, creatively, and, most importantly, sensitively. While stimulating debates are strongly encouraged, it is essential to debate with respect and appreciate the weight of these topics. By working alongside your fellow delegates, we are confident that this committee will craft many innovative solutions that address climate-related displacement and disability-inclusive policies for displaced peoples.

## Country List<sup>74</sup>

Afghanistan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Cyprus
Albania	Botswana	Czechia
Algeria	Brazil	Democratic Republic of the Congo
American Samoa	British Virgin Islands	Denmark
Andorra	Brunei Darussalam	Djibouti
Angola	Bulgaria	Dominica
Anguilla	Burkina Faso	Dominican Republic
Antigua and Barbuda	Burundi	Ecuador
Argentina	Cabo Verde	Egypt
Armenia	Cambodia	El Salvador
Aruba	Cameroon	Equatorial Guinea
Australia	Canada	Eritrea
Austria	Cayman Islands	Estonia
Azerbaijan	Central African Republic	Eswatini
Bahamas	Chad	Ethiopia
Bahrain	Chile	Federated States of Micronesia
Bangladesh	China	Fiji
Barbados	Colombia	Finland
Belarus	Comoros	France
Belgium	Cook Islands	French Guiana
Belize	Costa Rica	Gabon
Benin	Côte d'Ivoire	Gambia
Bermuda	Croatia	Georgia
Bhutan	Cuba	Germany
Bolivia	Curaçao	Ghana

<sup>74</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/us/where-we-work/countries>

Greece	Lao	Myanmar
Greenland	Latvia	Namibia
Grenada	Lebanon	Nauru
Guadeloupe	Lesotho	Nepal
Guatemala	Liberia	Netherlands
Guinea	Libya	Netherlands Antilles
Guinea-Bissau	Liechtenstein	New Caledonia
Guyana	Lithuania	New Zealand
Haiti	Luxembourg	Nicaragua
Honduras	Madagascar	Niger
Hungary	Malawi	Nigeria
Iceland	Malaysia	North Korea
India	Maldives	North Macedonia
Indonesia	Mali	Northern Mariana Islands
Iraq	Malta	Norway
Ireland	Marshall Islands	Oman
Iran	Martinique	Pakistan
Italy	Mauritania	Palau
Jamaica	Mauritius	Panama
Japan	Mexico	Papua New Guinea
Jordan	Monaco	Paraguay
Kazakhstan	Mongolia	Peru
Kenya	Montenegro	Philippines
Kiribati	Montserrat	Poland
Kuwait	Morocco	Portugal
Kyrgyzstan	Mozambique	Puerto Rico

Qatar	Spain	Vanuatu
Republic of Moldova	Sri Lanka	Venezuela
Republic of the Congo	Sudan	Viet Nam
Republic of Türkiye	Suriname	Western Sahara Territory
Romania	Sweden	Yemen
Russian Federation	Switzerland	Zambia
Rwanda	Syria	Zimbabwe
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Tajikistan	
Saint Lucia	Thailand	
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Timor-Leste	
Samoa	Togo	
San Marino	Tokelau	
Sao Tome and Principe	Tonga	
Saudi Arabia	Trinidad and Tobago	
Senegal	Tunisia	
Serbia	Turkmenistan	
Seychelles	Turks and Caicos Islands	
Sierra Leone	Tuvalu	
Singapore	Uganda	
Slovakia	Ukraine	
Slovenia	United Arab Emirates	
Solomon Islands	United Kingdom	
Somalia	Tanzania	
South Africa	United States of America	
South Korea	Uruguay	
South Sudan	Uzbekistan	

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