

UN Negotiations on Climate and Migration

Overview

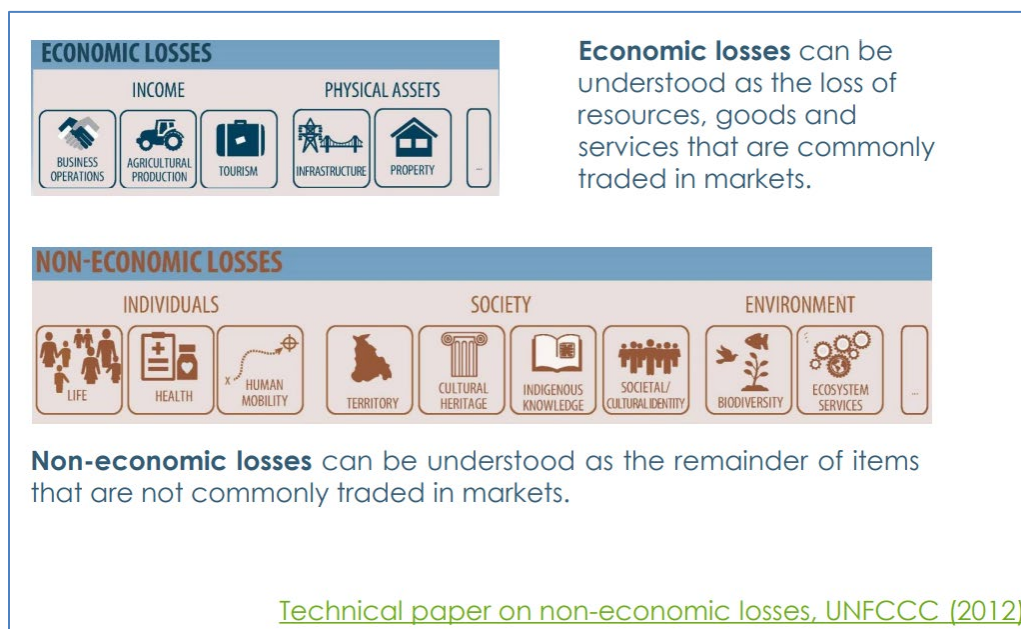
International policy on climate change is governed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Signatories to the UNFCCC agree to:

- provide annual reports on their greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs)
- take action to reduce GHG emissions
- cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change
- hold annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to advance their activities

At COP 13 held in Bali in 2007 signatories to the UNFCCC began discussing how to respond to losses and damages caused by climate change. Losses were subsequently defined by the UNFCCC as comprising two types:

Economic losses = the loss of resources, goods and services that are commonly traded in markets. Examples include losses sustained by businesses and agricultural production, damage to infrastructure

Non-economic losses = any other types of losses and can include losses associated with people being displaced or having to move



At COP27 held in Egypt in 2022, signatories agreed to the creation of a fund to assist low-income countries that may experience climate-related loss and damage. At COP29 in Baku in 2024, signatories agreed on the institutional arrangements for the new Loss and Damage Fund and plan

to start disbursing money in 2025. As of 2024, countries and institutions had pledged over US\$700 million to this fund. All contributions to the L&D Fund are made on a voluntary basis. There is no requirement to contribute, but there is a hope/expectation that wealthy countries that have historically had high GHG emissions will make significant financial contributions.

At present, an estimated US\$143 billion in losses occurs each year that are attributable to climate change in the form of damage caused by extreme weather events (Newman & Noy 2023). It is estimated that at +3°C global warming (which is a strong possibility by the year 2100 given current global emission trends) average economic losses attributable to climate change will increase to approximately 10% of countries' GDP, with higher rates of losses in low-income countries (Waidelich et al 2024).

Simulation exercise

In weeks 9-10 in this course, we will find out if the L&D fund will be sufficient to help low-income countries avoid involuntary displacements associated with climate change, by holding mock UN negotiations.

Each student will be assigned to a group representing a particular country in week 2 of the course. Students will then conduct research and prepare a briefing note that summarizes the key climate hazards their country faces, their country's key adaptation needs, the potential displacement risks they face, and estimate a \$ cost of what is needed to avoid displacement and/or compensate people if displacement cannot be avoided. This briefing note should be submitted no later than week 7 and should be made available to all participants to consult prior to negotiations beginning in Week 9.

Two key issues will be discussed during the negotiations, with the instructor (or TA) acting as moderator of the negotiations:

1. How much money in total should be contributed to the L&D fund each year to ensure it meets the needs of vulnerable countries; what countries should make these contributions, and how much should their individual contributions be?
2. Which countries should be the first to receive money from the L&D fund? How much should each receive?

If no agreement can be reached on either or both issues, the students must come up with some alternative proposals.

References

Newman, R., Noy, I. The global costs of extreme weather that are attributable to climate change. Nat Commun 14, 6103 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-41888-1>

Waidelich, P., Batibeniz, F., Rising, J. et al. Climate damage projections beyond annual temperature. Nat. Clim. Chang. 14, 592–599 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-024-01990-8>

Suggestions for instructors on how to carry out the simulation

It is important that students be assigned to a country as early in the semester as possible so as to begin preparing their briefing notes.

Students need to be reminded that in the negotiations they will be representing the interests of the country they are selected to represent. This may result in them having to represent a position they do not personally agree with or a position that is not consistent with scientific research on the dangers of climate change and the urgency needed to tackle it.

A list of 20 countries is provided below; these have been selected to provide a balanced cross section of countries in terms of geography, income levels, vulnerability to climate hazards, oil producing countries, etc. In our past experience, students will be able to find enough online resources in English to enable them to do a good job in the simulation. If the instructor chooses not to use all the countries listed, the minimum number of countries selected should be no less than 12 (and select a mix of countries of different types of countries in terms of likely positions). If there are more than 12 students in the course, students can be organized into pairs or teams. If there are more than 5 students per team, increase the number of countries represented. If adding countries not on the list, take into consideration such factors as whether a country's official websites are likely to have sufficient English language content for students to access (for this reason we have excluded countries like Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Japan, Korea) and what that country's negotiating position is likely to be and if this would create an imbalance of countries of a particular position.

In conducting preparatory research for their briefing notes, students may find that some countries have already thought about these questions and will have published official policy statements about the Loss & Damage fund, but most will not have. That's ok. Students are expected to piece together from available evidence what they believe to be the position their country would take in these negotiations.

In general, high-income countries with historically high emissions will negotiate in a way that keeps their financial contributions to the L&D fund as low as possible and voluntary. They may argue that they, too, have populations that may be at risk of displacement and so they will need to invest in their own adaptation.

Low-income countries will argue they need much larger amounts each year than is currently available in the L&D fund, and will want high-income countries to make regular, mandatory contributions to the fund that reflect each country's historical emissions.

Small island states will insist that, given the displacement risks they face due to rising sea levels and storms, they should receive priority in receiving money from the L&D fund, and this may put them in competition with other low-income countries. Sub-Saharan African countries may argue that they should receive priority because of the large number of people exposed to drought hazards, and the fact they have young, rapidly growing populations. Pakistan and Bangladesh will argue they should be prioritized given the size of flood-related displacements in recent years.

Oil exporting nations (Canada, Saudi Arabia) want to avoid being forced to make high \$ contributions, arguing that countries that consume the most fossil fuels should make the highest contributions, not the countries that produce the most fossil fuels.

Expanding economies like China, India and Brazil currently have rapidly-growing GHG emissions but will argue that financial contributions to the L&D fund should be made on the basis of historical emissions, in which case North American and European countries should make the biggest contributions.

The US has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement as of 2025 but remains part of the UNFCCC as of early 2025. The US is therefore included in these negotiations, but the students representing the US should take the position they expect the Trump administration would take until such time as there is a change in administration.

Some countries may argue that, while climate-related displacement is important, there are many other types of economic losses and damages that ought to receive higher priority.

Sources for information about each nation's experience with GHG emissions, migration, displacement, climate change, and other pertinent subjects can be found on official government websites, and in publications by think-tanks and multilateral organizations, media reports, and academic journal articles.

A suggested list of headings for students to use in preparing their briefing notes is attached below. Again, it is important that all countries have access to each other's briefing notes in order to make negotiations go smoothly. Briefing notes should be graded.

In weeks 9 and 10 students will meet in class as the representatives of their respective nations/organizations (it is a good idea to prepare country name tags in advance). The instructor (or a TA) will represent the UN and conduct the negotiations. The aim is for the students to collectively negotiate a set of written responses to each of the above two issues. Note that the UNFCCC process operates on the basis of consensus decision-making; all participating countries must agree to the final written statement, which must be completed by the end of Week 10.

After negotiations have been completed, the instructor should conduct a de-briefing exercise that allows students to discuss what they learned from the simulation and reflect on whether the written agreement they negotiated would actually meet the L&D needs of countries that experience climate-related displacements.

Specific instructions & template for the briefing note (instructor should adapt following text as necessary before distribution to students)

The briefing note should be of high-quality and mimic the type of document that government researchers draft for senior officials: succinct yet comprehensive, detailed, and accurate. The briefing should be no more than 4 single-spaced pages in length (not including references, and there should be plenty of references). To ensure that all position papers are similar in format, please use the following headings:

Official name of country:

Name of representative (i.e. name(s) of student/group members):

Our nation's general position on the questions of: How much money in total should be contributed to the L&D fund each year to ensure it meets the needs of vulnerable countries; what countries should make these contributions, and how much should their individual contributions be?

Our nation's general position on the question of: Which countries should be the first to receive money from the L&D fund? How much should each receive?

Our nation's recent experience with internal and international migration: (*e.g. are you a sending or receiving nation, or both? Can you provide statistics?*)

Our nation's experience with displacement due to climate-related disasters (data are available from <https://www.internal-displacement.org/>):

Our nation's greatest concerns about the future impacts of climate change:

Other pertinent information:

References: (*use Harvard style*)

Grading guidelines:

The following considerations will be taken into account when briefing notes are graded:

- The quantity and quality of research that is evident in the briefing note
- The extent to which the stated answers to the questions are consistent with each what each nation's positions is likely to be in real life (either as explicitly stated or as can be reasonably inferred from available sources)
- Overall readability (i.e. adherence to specified structure, proper use of grammar, spelling, proper formatting of references)(readability is important because other students will be relying upon your work!)

Grading for negotiations

For the negotiations to succeed, all students must participate. The aim of official representatives at international negotiations such as these is to work hard to advance their country's interests and aims, while at the same time ensuring that nothing that is against their country's interests is included in the final agreement. The most common way of doing so is to identify other participants who share similar interests and to act cooperatively to advance your shared positions. Sometimes trade-offs must be made in order to secure an agreement that meets your own nation's needs, but you must ensure that what you get is not grossly outweighed by what you give up. Another reality is that some nations have much greater influence than others, and if they do not agree, no progress will be made.

The instructor/TA will take detailed notes throughout the negotiations. These notes will help the instructor assess after the quantity and quality of participation of each nation's representatives. Quality reflects (1) how accurately the students represent their nation's "real world" positions and (2) well as the extent to which their interventions helped advance the process and contribute toward the framing of the final agreement.

Once negotiations have concluded, students will be given a list of all countries that were represented, and will be asked to confidentially suggest a letter grade for each (A+, A, A-, B+, B... etc) based on the quantity/quality of their interventions. The instructor will calculate the mean score for each country group as assessed by their peers and use this in conjunction with the instructor's own notes to award a final grade for each country's student representatives.

List of countries to be assigned

United States
Canada
United Kingdom
European Union
Saudi Arabia
China
India
Brazil
Bangladesh
Pakistan
Philippines
Fiji
Kiribati
Barbados
Maldives
Kenya
Nigeria
South Africa
Saudi Arabia
Australia