

FORUM: The Third Committee of the General Assembly (SOCHUM)

QUESTION OF: “Finding a comprehensive definition for the term climate refugee”

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POSITION:

Introduction

Climate change is a major issue in our time. Natural greenhouse gases are important for the survival of human beings, however, due to industrialization, deforestation and large scale agriculture the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have risen. There is alarming evidence that there will be irreversible damage to important ecosystems and the climate system. Climate change has already had an impact on the environment. glaciers and the ice at the north pole is melting. This leads to sea levels rising which leads to people losing their homes due to natural disaster. People are forced to migrate due to environmental issues.

Slow changes in the environment, such as ocean levels rising, desertification and coastal erosion, can have a deep impact on human lives and their chance of survival.

There are predictions that say that in the twenty-first century there will be even more people displaced due to results of climate change. The World Bank predicts that there will be 143 Million people migrating in the borders of their own countries. In the past years the political awareness of the issue has risen and the acceptance that this is a global issue increased.

Key terms

A refugee is a person who crossed an international border due to fear of being prosecuted for reasons of race, religion, political opinion and nationality.

“Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad” (IOM, 2011:33).

(<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>)

Major Organisations and Nations involved

International Organisation for Migration (IOM): IOM is working to bring environmental migration to the heart of nations to see it as an issue.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): The UNHCR gives legal advice, guidance and the development of norms to support the protection of the rights of people displaced in the context of displacement due to disaster and climate change.

International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): IPCC was created to provide policymakers with scientific information on climate change. IPCC does not do its own research. It reviews other research.

Ethiopia is facing high population growth of up to 85% and increasing migration due to crop failure.

Mexico may see increasing migration from climate vulnerable areas into urban spaces.

Bangladesh could have more climate migrants than any other internal migrants by 2050. (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/03/climate-migrants-report-world-bank-spd/>)

Inuits in the area of Nunavut, Canada are facing problems of surviving due to ice loss. The coastlines of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean and in sub-Saharan-Africa are at higher risk of enduring the health effects of climate change.

(more examples in background information)

Background information

In 2018 17.8 million people were displaced due to disasters in 148 countries and drought led to 764,000 displaced people in Somalia, Afghanistan and several other countries. Climate migrants have been invisible for years.

IOM is trying to bring climate change as an effect on human mobility into the discussion. The IOM does not want to create a climate specific legal status parallel to the already existing refugee status. The available evidence on how climate is affecting human mobility is growing but putting the focus on establishing a climate refugee status can lead to a narrow and biased debate.

Climate migration is mainly internal. They are under the responsibility of their own state and they are not seeking protection in a third country or on an international level.

For very slow processes migration is not necessarily forced. Countries should think about migration management. Isolating environmental or climate reasons is difficult and could lead to long and unrealistic legal debates. Creating a climate refugee status can lead to the

exclusion of categories of people in need of protection. Migrants who have to leave due to many factors could not prove the link to climate change. Reopening the refugee question could weaken the 1951 Refugee Convention. This would be especially tragic in our time because of the ongoing conflicts.

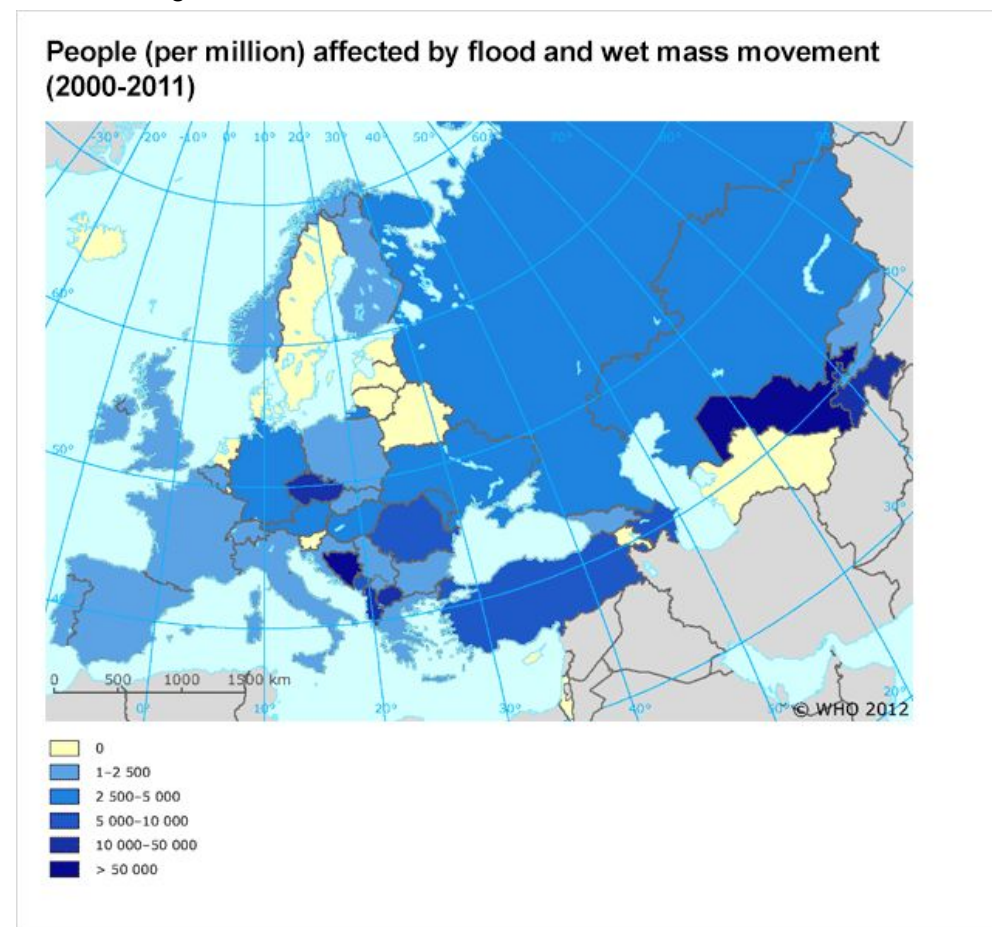
In 1990 the IPCC noted that the greatest effect of climate change could be on human migration.

The scientific arguments for climate change are confident, however, the impact on humans are unclear and unreliable. Other factors such as social, economic and environmental factors are making it difficult to establish a relation between climate change and migration.

By a prediction of the world bank there will be 143 million internal refugees in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America by 2050.

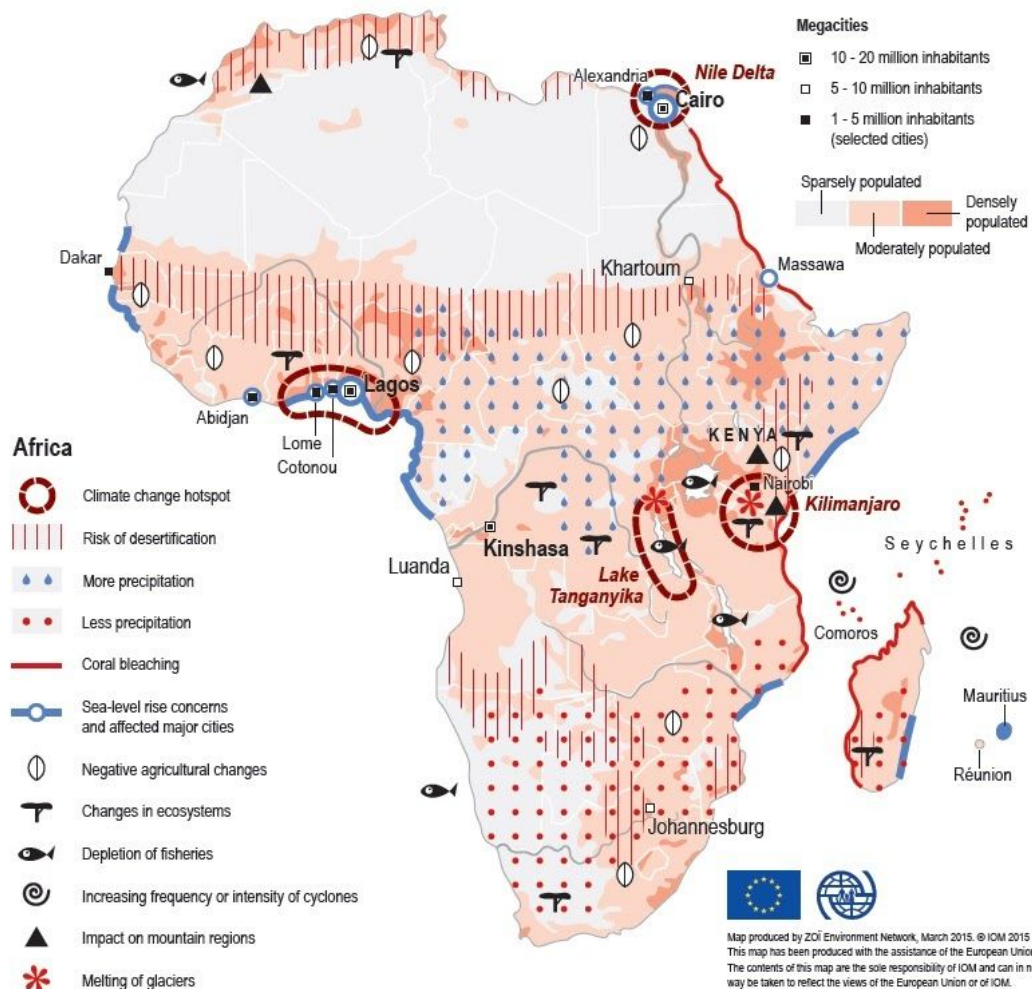
All persons migrating due to climate change related issues are protected by international human rights law.

Climate refugees do not exist in international law.



The population of the countries that contributed the least to global warming are the ones that are affected most by the effects of global warming.

An argument in favor of creating a legal status for climate refugees or environment refugees is that it stresses the urgency of the issue. People affected by climate change are seeking refuge. Any other terminology would downplay the seriousness of their situation. The term refugee is already known, therefore, people can sympathize with it.



Questions Delegates should consider:

- Is your country affected by climate change?
- Will your country be affected by climate migrants?
- What would be the consequences for your country if there would be a comprehensive definition for climate refugee?
- How high is your country's green gas emission?

Sources:

UNHCR

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

<https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

UN News

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1043551>

UN

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

IOM

<https://www.iom.int/migration-and-climate-change>

<https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/Climate-change/data-and-statistics>

Statistics

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/>

<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/maps>