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The role of parliaments in tackling the humanitarian impacts of climate-related displacement

Thursday, 26 October 2023, 11:30–13:00,
Tenda 2, ground floor

Concept note

Background

The climate crisis is a humanitarian crisis and displacement is one of its most severe consequences. Refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and stateless people are at the frontlines of the climate emergency. [An average of more than 20 million people](#) have seen themselves forced to leave their home and move to other areas in their countries each year due to climate-related events. At times, people have no option other than to cross international borders to flee from the severe effects of climate change, which may put them in a situation where international protection is needed.

Although the refugee definition under the 1951 Refugee Convention does not include persons who are internally displaced or have crossed an international border due to climate-related events, other instruments and initiatives aiming to ensure protection for those people have been adopted. The [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) recognizes that “climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements”. The latest 2023 [report](#) of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change calls upon States to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change and provides legal options to tackle this issue. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also adopted [legal considerations](#) to help guide the interpretation of and steer international debates on claims for refugee status as a result of climate change.

Climate change also reinforces underlying vulnerabilities, thus posing challenges to both the displaced and their host communities. [Around 76% of the world's refugees are hosted by low- and middle-income countries](#), which are likely to be the most affected by the adverse impacts of climate change. These displaced persons usually reside at the edge of cities in low-quality housing or in camps located in remote areas, which are particularly prone to extreme weather events, such as heavy rains and floods, droughts, extreme cold or cyclones. As a consequence, life in camps in precarious conditions and with lack of access to many services deteriorates heavily. Also, the displaced are oftentimes deprived from their fundamental rights, such as the right to work and the right to move, which are key to becoming more resilient to climate shocks. The placement of refugee settlements in “climate change hotspots” only further exacerbates these vulnerabilities as it compromises the security of these people and places them at risk of a secondary displacement. Climate change has, therefore, hindered host communities from the ability to ensure adequate standards of protection for displaced populations as well as their own socio-economically vulnerable communities.

It is imperative to assist and provide protection to those displaced due to climate change, but also to help both the host communities and the displaced populations to address their vulnerabilities and increase their resilience to future climate events. Although the already established refugee and human rights law instruments play an essential role in this process, other international, regional, and national legal and policy approaches must be adopted. For instance, at the domestic level, States can ensure a more holistic, effective and coordinated response benefitting both host communities and displaced populations. This can be done by putting the right legislation, policies and practices in place with the aim to reduce risks and address not only protection issues, but also the practical challenges faced by host communities.

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In this context, parliamentary action is key to a solutions-oriented agenda on climate-related displacement. Parliaments play an important role not only in legal preparedness on the issue by having climate-related displacement integrated into national laws, policies and strategies, but they can also scale up action to avert, minimize and address the effects of climate change on host communities, especially those effects that jeopardize the fundamental rights of refugees, IDPs and stateless people. As part of its climate change policy focus under its [2022-2026 Strategy](#), the IPU is committed to helping parliamentarians make progress on tackling the humanitarian impacts of climate change, in particular those leading to displacement and affecting displaced populations and their host communities.

This open session will address the humanitarian challenges brought by climate-related displacement, including those relating to the protection of refugees, IDPs and stateless people, and their impacts on host communities. The discussion will focus on an exchange of good practices, especially on innovative and inspiring ways that can be replicated, in whole or in part, on how parliaments can play a role in mitigating those challenges. The debate will bring together members of parliaments from around the world to share their experiences related to legislation, policy and national development and action plans.

Key questions:

1. What are the humanitarian challenges faced by persons displaced due to climate change? What are the legal, policy and protection gaps that need to be addressed?
2. How does climate change affect the livelihood of refugees, IDPs and stateless people? How does it increase the socio-economic vulnerabilities of host communities?
3. How can we build on States' experiences to collaboratively improve the legal preparedness of host communities to tackle climate-related displacement and its humanitarian impacts? How to connect parliamentary action to international initiatives tackling this issue?
4. How can we address and mitigate, in a durable manner, the effects of climate change on host communities, especially those inflicting on fundamental rights of refugees, IDPs and stateless people? Which innovative initiatives have been implemented in this area?
5. What are the measures that parliaments can adopt to better understand climate-related displacement? What outreach activities can parliaments carry out to engage with refugees, IDPs and stateless people and safeguard their rights in this context?

Presentations will be followed by a panel discussion and Q&A session on how good practices on tackling climate-related displacement can be expanded to catalyse positive change in national laws and policies, as we look ahead to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Panellists and participants are invited to discuss potential measures to integrate climate-related displacement into national laws, policies and strategies while addressing the humanitarian needs of displaced populations and host communities.