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	International Field Protection of Environmentally Displaced Persons	
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Abstract Empirical research demonstrates that anthropogenic climate change is accelerating beyond most scientific projections, compelling widespread forced migration and threatening core human rights. In 2019 alone, disasters displaced at least 1.5 million persons across 95 countries, representing 90% of all new displacements, with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Haiti, and numerous sub-Saharan states experiencing protracted displacement crises. This article critically examines the efficacy of extant international protection mechanisms for environmentally displaced persons, interrogating both generalist frameworks—the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organization for Migration—and specialized regimes including the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the Warsaw International Mechanism's Task Force on Displacement, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Through doctrinal analysis of legal mandates, field operations, and policy coordination architectures, the study evaluates whether these mechanisms adequately address normative gaps or whether novel institutional arrangements, such as the proposed "Green Helmets" and dedicated international assistance funds, are juridically necessary. The analysis reveals that while existing mechanisms exhibit significant evolution toward climate-responsive protection, their fragmented mandates and overlapping competencies risk systemic incoherence, necessitating either fortified coordination protocols or sui generis legal frameworks to ensure effective protection for environmentally displaced populations.		
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11. Introduction

Contemporary climatological evidence demonstrates that the Earth's climate system is undergoing rapid transformation at a pace that exceeds the projections of many earlier scientific models. As a result, communities across diverse geographical regions are already experiencing severe and compounding impacts of climate change, including prolonged droughts, extreme flooding, sea-level rise, and ecosystem degradation. These environmental stressors increasingly undermine livelihoods and human security, compelling individuals and households to abandon their habitual places of residence in search of survival and stability (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2020; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2020).

Climate change impacts are multifaceted. The availability of potable water is declining in numerous regions, while agricultural and pastoral systems face existential threats in climate “hotspots” characterized by extreme temperatures, aridity, or excessive precipitation. These dynamics exacerbate food insecurity and erode adaptive capacity, particularly among vulnerable populations. Although some communities attempt to cope through resilience-building and adaptation strategies, many are ultimately forced into displacement as a survival mechanism rather than a voluntary choice (UNHCR, 2020).

Emerging displacement patterns, coupled with intensified competition over increasingly scarce natural resources, heighten the risk of intercommunal conflict and reinforce pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. In 2019 alone, disasters triggered at least 1.5 million new cases of internal displacement across 95 countries, representing approximately 90% of all newly recorded displacements that year (IDMC, 2020). However, these figures likely underestimate the true scale and duration of displacement due to methodological constraints and data gaps. Afghanistan recorded the highest levels of protracted disaster-induced displacement, with over 2.1 million individuals affected by droughts and floods, while India, Ethiopia, and South Sudan experienced concurrent large-scale movements. Haiti continued to host approximately 33,000 internally displaced persons more than a decade after the catastrophic 2010 earthquake (IDMC, 2020).

More recent events further underscore the severity of climate-induced displacement. The 2022 floods in Pakistan submerged nearly one-third of the country's territory, displacing an estimated 8 million people and prompting large-scale humanitarian interventions coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024). The majority of climate-displaced populations originate from states characterized by high exposure to environmental hazards and limited adaptive capacity. These populations often reside in remote areas, overcrowded camps, or informal settlements, where access to essential services is minimal and exposure to cascading climate risks is acute (UNHCR, 2020).

Climate impacts also exacerbate tensions over vital resources such as water, arable land, and fuel, threatening peaceful coexistence between displaced persons and host communities. In regions experiencing acute environmental stress, deteriorating conditions impede safe return, sustainable peacebuilding, and durable solutions, increasing the risk of repeated displacement. Addressing climate change as a structural driver of displacement is therefore essential for breaking cycles of vulnerability and achieving long-term protection outcomes (UNHCR, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following research question: **To what extent do existing international mechanisms provide effective protection for environmentally displaced persons, and is there a legal and institutional imperative to develop specialized protection frameworks?** To answer this question, the analysis proceeds in two parts. The first examines general international protection mechanisms, while the second evaluates emerging specialized architectures addressing climate-related displacement.

2. General International Mechanisms for the Protection of Displaced Persons

Generalist international organizations—most notably the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)—have progressively incorporated climate-related displacement into their operational and policy frameworks. This integration occurs through coordinated engagement with the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), the implementation of the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, and alignment with global instruments such as the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNFCCC, 2015; UNDRR, 2015).

This tripartite coordination was formalized through two Memoranda of Understanding signed on 9 December 2020 between UNHCR, IOM, and the Platform on Disaster Displacement. These agreements reaffirmed institutional

commitments in the context of converging crises, including accelerating climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, protracted conflicts, and record levels of forced displacement worldwide (UNHCR, 2020).

2.1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Established on 14 December 1950 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 428(V), UNHCR is the principal international body mandated to provide international protection to refugees and to seek durable solutions to displacement (United Nations General Assembly, 1950). Its operational activities encompass legal protection, registration, documentation, family reunification, shelter provision, and the coordination of humanitarian assistance, alongside norm-setting and international advocacy.

Although UNHCR's original mandate focused on refugees crossing international borders, its responsibilities have expanded over time to include internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless individuals through Executive Committee conclusions, inter-agency arrangements, and regional instruments (UNHCR, 2020).

2.1.1. Legal Framework for the Protection of Displaced Persons

As internally displaced persons now outnumber refugees globally, the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* in 1998. These principles affirm that displaced and evacuated persons are entitled to equal protection without discrimination and articulate safeguards against arbitrary displacement, violations of dignity, and family separation (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1998).

UNHCR operationalized these principles through its *Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement*, which clarifies institutional responsibilities and protection standards. More recently, the organization adopted its *Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024–2030*, which mainstreams climate responsiveness across humanitarian and protection programming (UNHCR, 2024).

2.1.2. Field Operations for Environmentally Displaced Persons

UNHCR has emerged as a leading advocate for recognizing climate change as a protection concern. Its engagement spans four key domains: (a) legal and normative development; (b) policy coherence across humanitarian, development, and climate sectors; (c) empirical research to address data gaps; and (d) operational responses to internal and cross-border disaster displacement (UNHCR, 2020).

Within the Global Protection Cluster, UNHCR leads protection coordination for IDPs who are unable to return safely, providing registration, shelter, water and sanitation, nutrition, and protection services. UNHCR also serves as a standing invitee to the Steering Group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, facilitating implementation of the Nansen Initiative's cross-border displacement agenda.

Data collection and monitoring are supported through the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which systematically tracks displacement related to conflict, violence, disasters, and development projects. IDMC data are publicly available via the Global Internal Displacement Database (GIDD), ensuring transparency regarding methodology, scope, and limitations (IDMC, 2020).

2.2. International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration serves as the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration governance. IOM promotes humane and orderly migration, supports international cooperation, and delivers humanitarian assistance to migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IOM, 2020).

As environmental migration has gained prominence, IOM has intensified its research, advocacy, and capacity-building efforts to integrate climate-related mobility into national and international policy frameworks. Climate migration has been identified as a priority area within the UN Migration Network, particularly in the context of global climate negotiations (IOM, 2020).

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) constitutes a critical tool for monitoring population movements and needs. By 2020, the DTM recorded 40.5 million new internal displacements across 149 countries, with disasters

accounting for 76% of these movements. The total number of internally displaced persons worldwide reached approximately 55 million, underscoring the scale of climate-related mobility challenges (IOM, 2020).

3. Specialized International Mechanisms for the Protection of Environmentally Displaced Persons

In response to normative and operational gaps within existing protection regimes, several specialized frameworks have emerged. These include the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the Task Force on Displacement under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Together, these mechanisms aim to enhance prevention, preparedness, and protection in the context of climate-related displacement (UNFCCC, 2013, 2018; UNDRR, 2015).

. Specialized International Mechanisms for the Protection of Environmentally Displaced Persons

3.1. Platform on Disaster Displacement and the Nansen Initiative

The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), currently co-chaired by Fiji and France, constitutes a central institutional mechanism dedicated to addressing disaster- and climate-related displacement. The Platform operationalizes the **Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda**, which was endorsed by 109 states in 2015 as a non-binding yet authoritative framework guiding state responses to disaster displacement (Platform on Disaster Displacement [PDD], n.d.).

The Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda provides states with practical tools to **prevent, prepare for, and respond to displacement** triggered by disasters and climate change. These tools include mechanisms for cross-border cooperation, standards for temporary admission and stay, and the reinforcement of the principle of **non-refoulement** in disaster contexts. Importantly, the Agenda emphasizes state sovereignty while promoting responsibility-sharing and regional coordination.

Following the adoption of the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** and the **Global Compact on Refugees** in 2018, states reaffirmed their commitment to implementing measures derived from the Nansen Initiative to protect persons displaced in the context of climate change and disasters (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2018). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) serve as standing invitees to the PDD Steering Group, ensuring institutional coherence between humanitarian protection, migration governance, and disaster risk reduction (UNHCR, 2020).

3.2. Task Force on Displacement under the Warsaw International Mechanism

The adoption of the **Paris Agreement** on 12 December 2015 marked a watershed moment in the integration of human mobility into international climate governance. Decision 1/CP.21 formally established the **Task Force on Displacement (TFD)** under the **Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM)**, mandating it to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize, and address climate-related displacement (UNFCCC, 2015).

The Warsaw International Mechanism itself was created earlier through Decision 2/CP.19 in 2013, with a mandate to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts, including risks related to human mobility (UNFCCC, 2013). The Task Force on Displacement is composed of state representatives, technical experts, United Nations agencies, and civil society actors, reflecting a multi-stakeholder approach to climate displacement governance.

In 2018, the TFD adopted comprehensive recommendations structured around five core pillars:

- (a) strengthening national legal and policy frameworks;
- (b) improving data collection and risk assessment through participatory methodologies;
- (c) enhancing preparedness through early warning systems, evacuation planning, and anticipatory financing;
- (d) developing planned relocation strategies; and
- (e) facilitating safe, orderly, and regular migration pathways (UNFCCC, 2018).

For international organizations, the recommendations emphasize increased financial resources, technology transfer, institutional capacity-building, regional cooperation, and systematic sharing of best practices. The Task Force's mandate was extended for an additional two years at COP24, reflecting sustained political recognition of climate displacement as a structural challenge rather than a temporary humanitarian concern (UNFCCC, 2018).

3.3. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sendai Framework

The **United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)** is mandated to oversee the implementation, monitoring, and review of the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030**, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 March 2015 (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2015). The Sendai Framework succeeded the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015) and represents a comprehensive global blueprint for reducing disaster risk and vulnerability.

The Framework establishes seven global targets aimed at substantially reducing disaster-related mortality, the number of affected persons, economic losses, and damage to critical infrastructure. **Target (b)** specifically seeks to substantially reduce the number of people affected by disasters by 2030, explicitly acknowledging displacement as a key risk outcome (UNDRR, 2015).

To this end, the Sendai Framework promotes early warning systems, evacuation planning, anticipatory financing, and cross-border cooperation as essential tools for minimizing displacement risk. It further recognizes the necessity of durable post-disaster solutions and, where necessary, planned or anticipatory relocation of human settlements exposed to recurrent hazards (UNDRR, 2017).

Crucially, the Framework situates disaster risk reduction within the broader agenda of sustainable development and climate action, emphasizing coherence with the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC. This integrated approach underscores the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation across humanitarian, development, and climate governance domains.

4. Conclusion

The nexus between climate change and forced displacement is now empirically and normatively irrefutable. Extreme weather events, environmental degradation, and slow-onset climate processes generate cascading crises that threaten fundamental human rights, exacerbate poverty, undermine livelihoods, strain inter-state relations, and contribute to protracted displacement. The majority of climate-displaced persons originate from highly vulnerable states with limited adaptive capacity and are often forced to reside in precarious conditions characterized by severe exposure to ongoing climate risks (IDMC, 2020; UNHCR, 2024).

International protection mechanisms—both generalist and specialized—have undergone significant evolution, extending their focus beyond emergency protection to encompass early warning, disaster risk reduction, resilience-building, and sustainable development. Nevertheless, scholarly and policy debates persist regarding the adequacy of existing institutional architectures. Proposals advanced in earlier forums, such as the 2005 Limoges Forum, including concepts of “Green Helmets” or dedicated international assistance funds, reflect continuing concern over institutional fragmentation and normative gaps.

This study concludes that while existing mechanisms provide substantial and increasingly effective protection, their **overlapping yet fragmented mandates** necessitate either:

- (a) strengthened hierarchical coordination under a unified climate-mobility governance framework; or
- (b) the development of **sui generis legal instruments** specifically tailored to the unique protection needs of environmentally displaced persons.

The path forward requires not merely the multiplication of institutions, but **normative clarification, legal coherence, and enhanced operational synergy**, ensuring that no climate-displaced individual remains unprotected due to jurisdictional or institutional lacunae.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on doctrinal legal analysis, policy documents, and secondary empirical sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Accordingly,

ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required. The authors affirm that the research was conducted in accordance with internationally recognized standards of academic integrity and research ethics, including accuracy in citation, objectivity in analysis, and respect for intellectual property.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial or personal interests that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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