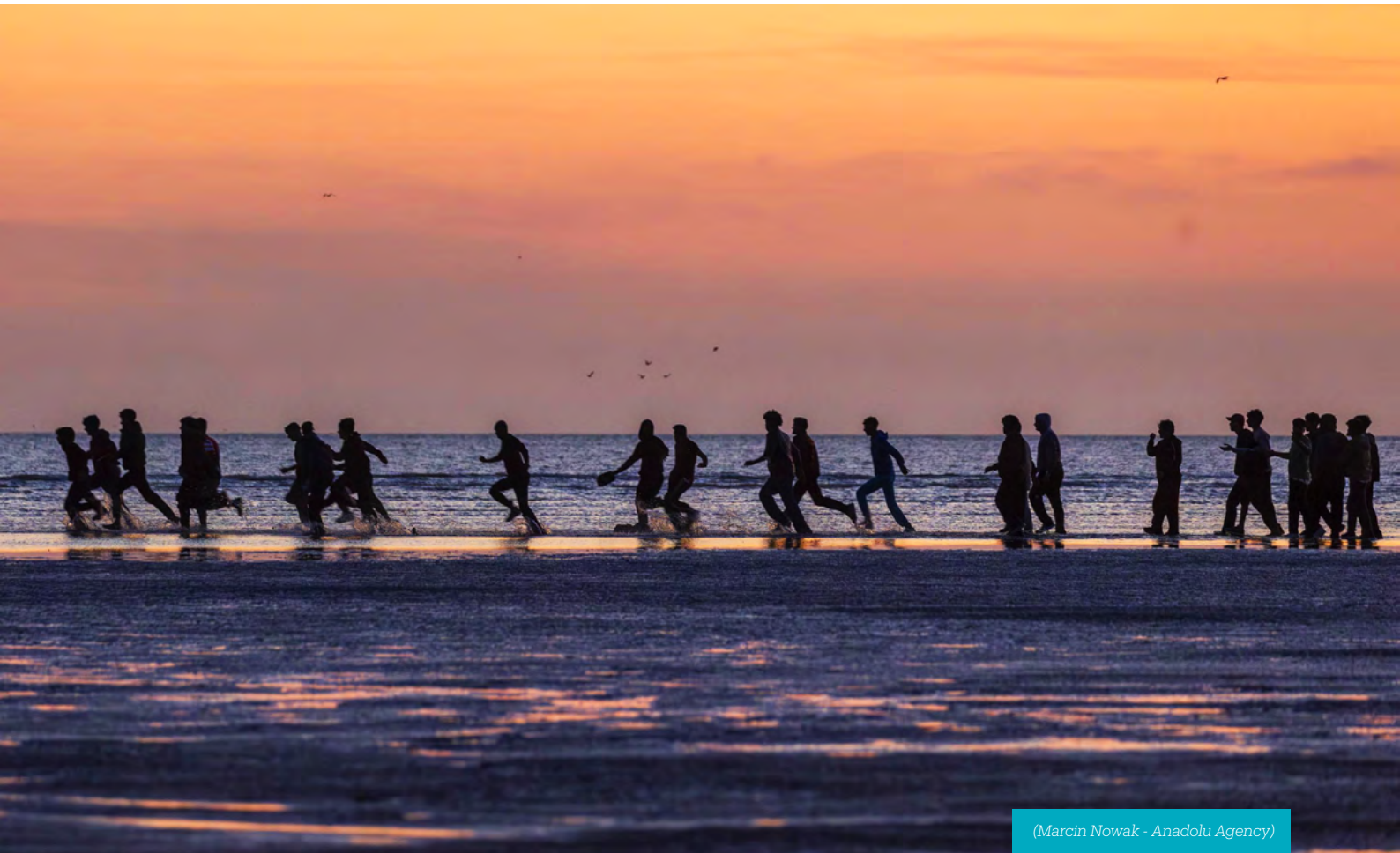


Beyond the Myths:

Protecting Climate Migrants in a Warming World

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(Marcin Nowak - Anadolu Agency)

As climate shocks intensify, displacement is rising, yet global discourse is driven more by political fear than facts. Though most climate-displaced people stay within their countries, public narratives—particularly in wealthier regions—often portray them as cross-border threats, skewing migration and asylum policies at the expense of those needing protection. This policy outlook challenges dominant myths around climate-induced migration and proposes realistic, data-informed legal frameworks that respond to displacement with responsibility and foresight.

1- The Displacement / Disinformation Divide

Displacement caused by climate change is no longer a distant scenario—it is a present-day crisis with wide-reaching implications. From slow-onset disasters, such as droughts and sea-level rise, to sudden shocks like floods and wildfires, millions are being uprooted each year. However, alongside this physical reality lies a less visible but equally pressing concern: the political narratives that shape how climate-displaced populations are perceived and treated.

Despite the fact that most people affected by climate-related disasters remain within their national borders, prevailing discourse in many parts of the Global North frames them as border-crossing “threats” or “waves.” These narratives are often amplified by political movements seeking to justify more restrictive migration policies. Alarmist language around “climate caravans” or “environmental invasions” has moved from fringe rhetoric into mainstream policymaking, shaping how laws are written, and resources are allocated.

This distortion has real-world consequences. Legal frameworks still lag behind the pace and complexity of climate-linked displacement. Existing refugee protections do not extend to those fleeing environmental harm, and emerging regional solutions remain fragmented and underfunded. At the same time, frontline communities and advocacy networks are developing innovative models—from anticipatory relocation funding to climate-specific humanitarian pathways.

This paper argues that combating myths around climate migration is more than a discursive challenge—it is a policy necessity. By examining how misinformation fuels exclusion and offering actionable, rights-based solutions, this outlook seeks to contribute to a more just and future-ready response to climate-induced displacement.

2- Weaponizing Climate Migration through Misinformation

The politicisation of climate displacement has become a defining feature of global migration discourse. Across much of the Global North, far-right parties and segments of mainstream media reframe climate-induced migration not as a humanitarian or development concern but as a looming security threat. This strategic distortion lays the rhetorical groundwork for restrictive asylum laws and hardened border controls.

In Europe, parties such as Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) have introduced terms like “climate caravan” into the public debate, implying that environmental crises will trigger uncontrollable population flows toward

Europe. This narrative gained political traction in the lead-up to regional and EU elections, reinforcing calls for fortified borders and fast-tracked expulsions. Germany’s 2023 asylum reform, for example, explicitly excluded climate-related claims from protection eligibility, citing the threat of “speculative migration.”

In the United States, high-profile media outlets increasingly characterise climate migrants as a future “border crisis,” blending environmental displacement with broader fears around irregular migration. This conflation erases key distinctions between internal displacement, planned relocation, and asylum-seeking, fostering a sense of siege rather than responsibility.

These narratives have consequences that extend far beyond the headlines. As documented by the UN Refugee Agency, the climate crisis is already a contributing factor to forced displacement globally, especially where it intersects with conflict, poverty, or weak governance.

Data from global assessments show that more than 80% of climate-related displacement is internal, not cross-border—a fact consistently overlooked in securitised migration discourse. For instance, climate disasters in South Asia and West Africa have displaced millions, the vast majority of whom remain within their national borders. This reality is underscored in the Carbon Brief interactive analysis and supported by findings in the IOM’s 2023 briefing paper on climate migration.

Yet, as the O23 figures of the International Organisation for Migration show, framing climate populations as international threats continues to increase—despite assertions to the contrary.

Both Earth.org and the Centre for Global Development warn that these misleading narratives do more than misinform—they actively shape harmful policies. Sensationalist framings of mass “climate exodus” often justify inaction or deterrence rather than constructive, rights-based governance.

Ultimately, narratives that weaponise climate displacement not only distort public understanding—they shape law. Securitised migration frameworks, influenced by fear-based discourse, routinely override humanitarian obligations. In an era of escalating environmental volatility, the language we use will increasingly determine who receives protection—and who is excluded.

2.1 – Pakistan: A Case Study in Narrative Distortion and Policy Oversight

Pakistan offers one of the clearest illustrations of how climate disasters are reshaping patterns of human mobility—while international narratives continue to misrepresent them. In 2022, unprecedented monsoon floods submerged nearly one-third of the country, displacing over 8 million people and affecting an additional 33 million. Yet nearly all

those displaced remained within Pakistan's borders, seeking refuge in nearby villages, temporary camps, or with relatives. As Al Jazeera's reporting vividly shows, most families moved short distances, clinging to their communities even after their homes and livelihoods were swept away.

Despite this, political narratives in the Global North quickly shifted toward fears of a mass migration "wave" headed for Europe. This framing not only lacked evidence but also ignored the socioeconomic profile of those displaced—primarily low-income, rural populations with no access to cross-border migration channels. The spectacle of the "climate refugee" served more to justify pre-emptive border security policies than to reflect the reality on the ground.

This disconnect also reflects a deeper legal gap. Under international refugee law, individuals displaced by environmental disasters typically do not qualify for protection unless they can demonstrate that they have faced targeted persecution. As the UN Refugee Agency has warned, climate-displaced persons are often left without recourse, trapped in legal limbo. In Pakistan's case, this means that millions of people affected by climate shocks are invisible to international protection systems—even as they face overlapping crises of shelter, health, food, and income loss.

Domestically, Pakistan has taken important steps to address climate vulnerability, though displacement remains a structural blind spot. The country's National Adaptation Plan (2023), submitted to the UNFCCC, outlines a multi-sectoral strategy to build resilience across six priority areas: agriculture and water, natural capital, urban infrastructure, human development, disaster risk management, and social inclusion. It emphasises inclusive and gender-sensitive adaptation, grounded in federal-provincial coordination and supported by a national monitoring and evaluation framework. Notably, the plan integrates climate finance mechanisms, including domestic budgeting and international funds such as the Green Climate Fund.

Yet, for all its strengths, the NAP does not directly address internal displacement. It outlines how to reduce future risks but not how to protect those already uprooted. There are no dedicated legal pathways for long-term resettlement, no formal status for climate IDPs, and no framework to restore livelihoods lost to disaster. These gaps leave millions to navigate recovery in a policy vacuum—resilient out of necessity, but not by design.

Pakistan's experience challenges the myth of a looming mass exodus from the Global South to the Global North. It reveals a more pressing reality: climate displacement is overwhelmingly internal, unfolding in silence, and dangerously underserved by both international law and national policy. Protecting these communities requires more than surveillance and speculation—it demands recognition, inclusion, and rights-based reform where displacement is actually happening.

2.2 – Yemen: Climate, Conflict, and Regional Spillover

Yemen presents a powerful case of how environmental stress, armed conflict, and economic collapse converge to produce climate-linked displacement—without resulting in mass migration to the Global North. Prolonged droughts, flash floods, and declining agricultural productivity have intensified a humanitarian crisis already shaped by years of war. Today, over 4.5 million Yemenis are internally displaced, primarily moving short distances within their home governorates or into urban peripheries. Most of those leaving the country are seeking safety in neighbouring countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Djibouti, rather than heading to Europe.

This regional pattern challenges common myths about climate migration. Yemenis flee to nearby countries out of geographic proximity, cultural ties, and lack of access to legal routes elsewhere—not as part of any "mass movement" toward the West. At the same time, internal displacement remains overwhelmingly under-supported, with most families relying on informal housing, kinship networks, or underfunded local aid systems.

Yemen's agricultural backbone—especially smallholder farming—has been severely impacted by shifting rainfall patterns, groundwater depletion, and recurring flooding. These climate shocks have not caused displacement in isolation; rather, they exacerbate the effects of protracted conflict and economic collapse, driving rural communities into urban areas that are already strained by insecurity, infrastructure breakdown, and food insecurity.

Despite the multi-layered nature of Yemen's displacement crisis, those uprooted receive little formal recognition under international law. Yemenis fleeing climate- and conflict-related hardship are typically treated as irregular migrants by neighbouring host countries without access to refugee protection, legal residency, or durable solutions. There are few structured relocation pathways, and even returnees—many of whom come back involuntarily—face the same deteriorating conditions that first forced them to leave.

Yemen's case challenges two dominant assumptions in global climate mobility discourse: first, that environmental displacement inevitably results in transcontinental flows toward the Global North, and second, that "climate refugees" neatly fit into existing protection frameworks. In practice, most Yemenis are internally displaced, regionally mobile, and legally unrecognised. Their decisions reflect both strong attachments to place and a lack of safe, viable alternatives.

Responding effectively to climate-linked displacement means looking beyond imagined futures and addressing the real, complex patterns already unfolding in crisis zones like Yemen. It requires investing in regional migration governance, legal recognition of climate drivers, and locally

anchored resilience solutions for both displaced and host communities across the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.

2.3 – Tuvalu: Digital Nation and the Limits of Climate Visas

The case of Tuvalu—a low-lying Pacific Island nation threatened by rising sea levels—has become emblematic of the existential dimensions of climate change. As the ocean creeps closer to overtaking its territory, Tuvalu has taken extraordinary steps to preserve its national identity, most notably by launching the world's first attempt at becoming a “digital nation.” In 2022, its foreign minister delivered a climate address to underscore the urgency of the issue. The gesture captured headlines—but it also revealed the limits of symbolic politics in addressing the legal and material challenges of climate displacement.

Tuvalu's population—just over 11,000 people—is highly vulnerable to sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and storm surges. Entire atolls face long-term uninhabitability. But despite the existential threat, most Tuvaluans have not migrated, and there is no formal international mechanism in place to classify them as climate refugees. This legal gap has prompted Tuvalu to pursue diplomatic efforts and digital preservation, including the development of a metaverse-based replica of its territory and cultural heritage.

At the same time, Tuvalu has pursued bilateral arrangements, including a limited “climate mobility” pathway with Australia and New Zealand. These mechanisms are far from universal. As noted in Earth.org's analysis of climate migration, such “climate visa” models offer a glimpse of what future solutions might entail—but they fall short of providing scalable or rights-based frameworks.

Tuvalu's digital nationhood project represents an effort to preserve sovereignty in exile, raising new legal and philosophical questions: Can a state continue to exist without territory? Who will represent displaced citizens in decades to come? While the initiative has raised international awareness, it also risks reinforcing a discourse in which adaptation becomes a matter of symbolism rather than structural protection.

Tuvalu illustrates how climate displacement does not always involve mass movement. Instead, it often involves delayed decisions, deep cultural ties, and limited legal alternatives. Many residents choose to stay as long as possible, citing ancestral connection to the land, spiritual belonging, or mistrust of life abroad. As explored in Carbon Brief's reporting on rooted communities, such populations often display profound resilience—not because they are protected, but because they are deeply anchored in place, socially and spiritually, despite increasing environmental risk and economic precarity.

In contrast to alarmist forecasts, Tuvalu's story reveals how climate displacement can unfold quietly, gradually, and

without legal clarity. As Earth.org argues, addressing this multidimensional challenge will require international legal innovation, regional coordination, and scalable support systems far beyond symbolic recognition or experimental digital sovereignty.

3- Legal Gaps

3.1- Why Climate Displacement Falls Outside International Protection

Despite the growing number of people displaced by environmental disasters and climate stress, there is no formal international legal recognition for “climate refugees.” The 1951 Refugee Convention, still the cornerstone of global refugee law, defines a refugee as someone fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Crucially, it does not include environmental factors. As a result, individuals displaced by rising sea levels, droughts, or hurricanes fall into a legal vacuum, lacking access to refugee protections, resettlement pathways, or asylum rights.

As explained in earth.org's overview of climate migration, this gap leaves millions of people without formal protection, even when worsening climate shocks clearly drive displacement. Efforts to reinterpret or expand the 1951 Convention to include environmental triggers have largely stalled, often due to states' reluctance to broaden their legal obligations or open new protection routes.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) acknowledges the connection between climate change and mobility, but it is non-binding and offers no enforceable commitments. Similarly, international human rights law guarantees basic entitlements—such as the right to food, housing, and health—but it does not grant displaced people the legal right to remain, relocate, or access asylum solely based on environmental harm.

A few regional legal instruments go further. The **Kampala Convention** in Africa and the **Cartagena Declaration** in Latin America recognise that people may be displaced by natural disasters or environmental degradation. However, these frameworks are limited in geographic scope, unevenly enforced, and do not create universal obligations under international law.

To fill this gap, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) introduced the broader concept of a “**climate migrant**”, which refers to people whose movements are at least partially triggered by environmental factors. However, as the IOM highlights in its 2023 policy brief, these movements are often multi-causal. Climate impacts frequently intersect with economic collapse, food insecurity, and conflict—making it difficult to legally isolate climate change as the sole driver. Yet, this complexity should not justify paralysis. The absence of a single, clear cause

should not prevent protection when lives and livelihoods are at risk.

According to UNCHR, this lack of legal clarity leaves climate-displaced people exposed to arbitrary treatment and deprives them of predictable rights or resettlement options. It also undermines coordination and funding as donors and governments struggle to categorise or prioritise those affected.

As Earth.org emphasises, without systemic legal innovation, climate displacement will continue to be treated as a humanitarian issue, not a rights-based crisis. This approach may generate temporary aid but fails to provide long-term protection, relocation planning, or accountability for countries most responsible for emissions and environmental harm.

In short, the world is confronting a rapidly accelerating driver of human mobility, yet the legal framework remains stuck in the mid-20th century. Bridging this gap is not just a technical challenge—it is a test of global political will.

3.2 – Legal Innovations: Adapting Law to the Climate Mobility Era

While international refugee law has failed to keep pace with the climate crisis, regional frameworks and national legal innovations are beginning to address some of the protection gaps—although these efforts remain inconsistent and fragmented.

One of the most comprehensive regional examples is the African Union's Kampala Convention (2009), which recognises environmental degradation and climate disasters as valid causes of internal displacement. It is the first binding regional instrument in the world to provide legal protections for people displaced within their own countries by both natural and human-made causes. However, despite its progressive language, its implementation has often been hampered by limited resources, lack of institutional capacity, and political constraints within member states.

In Latin America, the Cartagena Declaration (1984) expands the traditional refugee definition to include those fleeing “massive violations of human rights” and circumstances that “seriously disturb public order.” Although it does not specifically mention climate change, several countries have interpreted its scope to include disaster-related displacement—especially when such events result in instability or state failure. This flexible approach has enabled some disaster-affected migrants to access protection, though its application remains highly discretionary and varies by state.

In a more targeted effort, Argentina's 2022 climate humanitarian visa represents a rare national policy designed explicitly to address environmental displacement. The visa enables individuals from climate-affected countries to seek residency due to clear environmental risks, such as rising sea levels or recurring floods. As noted by Earth.org,

this initiative provides a legal prototype for climate mobility, though its reach is still limited to a small number of applicants and lacks regional harmonisation.

Elsewhere in the Global South, agreements like the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement facilitate freedom of movement across member states, offering an indirect legal pathway for those displaced by climate events. While not specifically designed for environmental migration, the agreement's broad eligibility criteria and regional cooperation model suggest how future legal instruments might accommodate climate mobility through existing labour and residency channels.

Beyond legal instruments, countries like New Zealand and Australia have pursued bilateral relocation schemes with vulnerable Pacific Island nations such as Tuvalu and Kiribati. These programs offer limited climate-linked visas or work pathways but are often discretionary, capped in number, and politically sensitive, making them ill-suited for planning widespread or long-term displacement.

The Global Compact for Migration (2018) also recommends that states adopt planned relocation policies, integrate climate resilience into migration systems, and explore cooperative responses. However, as a non-binding agreement, it offers guidance without enforceability—relying on states' voluntary action rather than legal obligation.

What these regional and national models demonstrate is that legal innovation is not only possible but already emerging—often from the Global South. Yet they also expose a sobering truth: piecemeal solutions cannot address a global crisis. In the absence of a unified international framework, these promising practices remain isolated, experimental, and vulnerable to political reversal.

If climate-induced migration is to be managed ethically and effectively, these scattered precedents must evolve into interoperable and rights-based legal protections that can scale across borders and be sustained over decades.

3.3 – Narrative vs. Norms: How Climate Migration Is Framed

Legal gaps in the protection of climate-displaced communities are not just bureaucratic oversights—they are the product of dominant political narratives. Across the Global North, the way climate migration is described in media and policy circles directly influences whether affected populations are seen as deserving of rights—or as threats.

Two sharply contrasting discourses have emerged. On the one hand, development institutions like the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) frame climate migration as a shared global challenge. AFD warns that climate stressors—particularly in vulnerable regions—will increase both internal and cross-border mobility. But rather than leaning into alarm, AFD calls for anticipatory action, human rights-based frameworks, and international cooperation. In this context, mobility is not a failure to be policed

but rather a resilience strategy that must be supported through legal recognition, economic adaptation, and inclusive planning.

In contrast, far-right political actors—such as Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD)—have positioned climate migration as part of a broader cultural and political threat narrative. While not using the term “climate caravan” directly, AfD routinely casts both climate policy and migration as threats to national identity, economic stability, and sovereignty. They oppose international climate commitments and present rising displacement as a reason to tighten borders and resist asylum reforms, reinforcing fear-based narratives that link environmental governance with forced demographic change.

This divergence is not merely rhetorical—it has policy consequences. As detailed by Climate Refugees, securitised narratives lead to increased border militarisation, surveillance technologies, and the erosion of asylum pathways, even as climate displacement escalates. Countries shaped by these narratives are less likely to fund adaptation, develop legal categories for climate mobility, or engage in regional coordination.

A 2023 analysis by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre showed that anti-migrant rhetoric in political discourse correlated with reduced investment in climate relocation planning, even when such measures were urgently needed.

By contrast, human-centred narratives—such as those advocated by Earth.org and AFD—promote recognition, equity, and international solidarity. They highlight that those most affected by climate impacts are often the least responsible for emissions, underscoring the ethical imperative for global cooperation and legal protection.

Ultimately, language shapes law. If climate migrants are persistently framed as security threats rather than displaced rights-holders, meaningful legal innovation becomes politically unviable. Reframing the narrative—from invasion to responsibility, from crisis to coordination—is not just a communication goal; it is a strategic imperative and a precondition for justice.

4 – Root Causes and Moral Responsibility

4.1 – Economic Fragility and Climate Shocks

Although climate variability has been a constant throughout history, the stakes are now far higher due to the economic fragility of today's globalised societies. In regions such as South Asia, the Sahel, and Central America, the climate crisis is not an isolated environmental phenomenon—it is a catalyst for systemic economic challenges. Agriculture, which remains the primary livelihood for billions,

is extremely sensitive to rainfall variability, temperature extremes, and soil degradation. When crops burn, rivers dry up, or floods wipe out harvests, it is not only food security that suffers but also employment, continuity of education, and public health.

A recent analysis by earth.org shows that many communities experiencing climate-induced displacement are not reacting to a single event but rather to years of compounding environmental, social, and economic shocks. For instance, desertification gradually undermines the viability of traditional pastoralist systems, while salinisation renders previously arable land unusable. These slow-onset disasters push families into precarious forms of migration, often without legal recognition, savings, or institutional support—leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, poverty, and marginalisation in unfamiliar urban peripheries.

Moreover, urban centres that absorb this internal displacement—such as Dhaka, Lagos, or Karachi—are themselves under immense stress from climate and infrastructural challenges. Migrants arriving from climate-stressed rural areas frequently enter overcrowded informal settlements, where job markets are saturated, basic services are lacking, and social hostility is common. Migration in this context is not a choice but a last-resort survival mechanism, one that governments and international institutions have consistently failed to plan for.

4.2 – Historical Emissions and Global Responsibility

One of the least contested facts in climate science is also one of the most ignored in climate politics: those who have contributed the least to global warming are suffering the most from its consequences. The lion's share of historical greenhouse gas emissions has come from high-income countries, particularly in Europe and North America, whose prosperity was built on the large-scale burning of fossil fuels. Yet, when the consequences of that warming—such as drought-driven migration or flood-related displacement—materialise in the Global South, responsibility is often deflected or minimised.

Reports by the World Bank warn that up to 216 million people could be internally displaced by 2050 in just six regions unless urgent adaptation and mitigation efforts are made.

Beyond emissions, wealthier nations also bear responsibility for resource-driven economic dependencies, having historically shaped the extractive and export-dependent economies of many lower-income countries. These structural dynamics have left little room for climate resilience. Without historical reckoning—and redistribution mechanisms like climate finance, adaptation support, and migration channels—calls for “shared responsibility” will remain hollow.

4.3 – Why Most Communities Are Left Behind— And Who’s Changing the Game

Despite growing attention to climate-linked migration in academic and advocacy circles, policy responses remain disproportionately reactive and underfunded. Emergency relief dominates international action, while long-term adaptation, relocation planning, and legal reform are sidelined. Many communities vulnerable to climate shocks are simply left to “adapt in place” with minimal external support, even when relocation or economic restructuring is clearly needed.

According to earth.org, one of the key failings in the international system is its persistent reliance on post-disaster intervention rather than pre-emptive resilience-building. In 2023, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre found that most national climate plans mentioned displacement only briefly—if at all—despite projecting large-scale population movement.

However, not all countries have turned a blind eye to this issue. In 2024, Canada pledged \$15 million in direct support for Indigenous and local communities in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, where melting glaciers, erratic rainfall, and increasing landslides threaten cultural survival and ecological balance (ICIMOD). What makes this initiative stand out is not just the financial amount, but its structure: community-led adaptation with flexible, needs-based implementation. This contrasts sharply with top-down, bureaucratic aid models that often fail to reach frontline communities.

Such efforts are rare exceptions. Without international coordination and political will, most climate-displaced populations—especially in the Global South—will continue to navigate existential risks without recognition, legal rights, or pathways to safe relocation. The consequences are not only humanitarian but also geopolitical in nature. As migration pressures increase and states retreat from protection, the vacuum will be filled by inequality, instability, and resentment. The time for symbolic commitments is over. The infrastructure of support must be as global as the crisis itself.

5 – From Emergency Response to Proactive Protection

5.1 – Rethinking Climate Finance: From Emergency to Prevention

Current climate finance mechanisms overwhelmingly prioritise post-disaster relief—when communities have already lost homes, land, or livelihoods. This reactive model perpetuates a cycle of crisis. Instead, funding must pivot

toward prevention and locally-led adaptation, addressing the root vulnerabilities that turn climate stress into forced displacement.

One solution lies in reallocating existing resources. For instance, channelling even 30% of the COP Loss and Damage Fund toward anticipatory measures—like flood-resilient infrastructure or drought-tolerant agriculture—could reduce displacement at a fraction of the cost of emergency relief. Bangladesh’s floating school model—which costs approximately \$120 per person—demonstrates that low-cost, high-impact interventions are feasible, scalable, and community-driven. In contrast, emergency shelters in displacement camps cost over \$2,000 per person annually, yet they often fail to offer long-term solutions.

Global institutions must prioritise grant-based funding over debt, simplify application processes for frontline communities, and measure success not in capital spent but in displacement avoided.

5.2 – Trigger-Based Protection Systems

Climate-related displacement is predictable in many contexts—especially where models forecast rising sea levels, desertification, or glacier melt. Yet, international protection mechanisms remain reactive and discretionary, often relying on political will or media attention to drive their effectiveness. This must change.

One innovative proposal is to adopt trigger-based protection. When a scientific threshold is met—such as a ≥ 2 -meter sea-level rise projection for a populated area—automatic protection mechanisms should activate, offering temporary or permanent residency to affected populations. This approach replaces slow, adversarial asylum processes with a rule-based protection model, aiming for a data-informed, rule-based system.

Precedents already exist. Argentina’s 2022 humanitarian visa for climate-displaced persons offers legal residence to individuals fleeing environmental disasters in their home countries. While still limited in scope, such policies prove that flexible, forward-looking legal innovation is possible, especially if modelled regionally through blocs like MERCOSUR or the African Union.

5.3 – Solidarity Over Security: Coordinated Global Action

Climate migration is not a security threat—it is a foreseeable outcome of environmental neglect and inequality. Treating it as a danger to be contained rather than a justice issue to be addressed undermines both human rights and geopolitical stability. A true solution demands a shift from isolationism to multilateralism.

One starting point is the creation of a Global Kampala Protocol—a multilateral agreement modelled after Africa’s Kampala Convention but expanded to address cli-

mate-specific displacement. Binding climate-vulnerable states and donor countries alike, this protocol would include shared commitments on planned relocation, adaptation funding, and legal protection for both internal and cross-border climate migrants.

Equally vital is the media's role. The spread of misinformation and fear-based narratives undermines public support for humane policies. Collaborations between the UNFCCC, NGOs such as Climate Refugees, and regional press councils should establish climate migration reporting guidelines, encouraging accuracy, context, and dignity in coverage.

Climate migration is not a future threat—it is a current reality. And inaction is not neutrality; it is complicity. The world must choose between reacting to displacement in chaos—or preparing for it with compassion, foresight, and solidarity.

Conclusion

Recognising Climate Migration as Survival, Not Crisis

Climate-induced migration is no longer a future scenario—it is an unfolding reality that is reshaping borders, straining urban systems, and redefining the meaning of displacement. From Pakistan's monsoon-devastated regions to Yemen's famine-stricken cities, environmental stressors are combined with fragile governance and economic vulnerability to uproot millions. Yet, as this paper has demonstrated, most of this movement remains internal and under-supported. What dominates the global narrative, instead, is fear, namely that climate change will trigger mass migrations to the Global North.

This rhetoric—fuelled by misinformation and amplified by far-right actors—obscures the truth. The majority of climate-displaced people remain within their countries or move to neighbouring regions. And yet, the legal and policy frameworks designed to protect them are outdated, fragmented, and unfit for a warming world. The term “climate refugee” still lacks recognition in international law, as it does not fit within the 1951 Refugee Convention's definition, which requires persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. As a result, millions displaced by floods, droughts, or rising seas fall into a legal void—without formal status, without clear rights, and access to protection mechanisms afforded to other forcibly displaced groups.

But this is not a story of inevitability. It is a story of political choice.

Through evidence-based reforms—such as trigger-based protection mechanisms, climate-responsive visas, and frontline adaptation funding—the global community can

transform its response to climate mobility. Countries like Canada have already modelled how localised, community-led support can be both ethical and effective. Similarly, a Global Kampala Protocol, grounded in shared responsibility and binding commitments, could fill the dangerous legal vacuum that currently leaves climate migrants invisible.

Climate migration is not a threat to be contained; it is a reality that demands attention. To treat it as a crisis of movement is to ignore the crisis of neglect that created it.

Preparing for climate migration is not just a humanitarian imperative—it is a test of whether the international system can adapt, equitably and proactively, to the challenges it helped create. The choice is not whether people will move; the question is how they will move. The choice is whether we build a world in which they can do so with dignity, safety, and legal protection.