

US Women's Caucus at UN: Climate - Women and Migration

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Summary

People have always been on the move, and historically there are instances of populations moving because the climate where they lived no longer supported them. However, the unprecedented global effects of climate change are threatening our entire planet. Erratic rainfall, rising sea levels, increased intensity in the effects of drought, fire are examples of events caused by global warming that impact the livelihoods of many of the poorest, and a substantial portion of them are women. Examples include fishing communities affected by warming and rising seas, farmers affected by floods, droughts, or insect invasions, not to mention the problems caused by large migrations to the cities. Moreover, climate change amplifies problems already existing in the world, such as wars that occur in the fight over land when its productivity decreases or disappears.

The United Nations developed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which has the mandate to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions and encourage member nations to develop action plans to enable sustainable development. It is the parent of the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Agreement of 2015. The latter included women in its provisions.

Women who are forced to leave their homes by climate change face the same difficulties experienced by women who are forced to leave because of conflict. At the same time, those who are currently living in refugee camps are subject to the same forces of nature. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is working to adapt their environment to handle them.

Fast Facts

The latest World Bank report on climate change and migration, Groundswell II, reports that in the worst-case scenario, 216 million people will be internally displaced by 2050.

The first Groundswell Report, which was published in 2018, had a lower estimate, 140 million. Africa will be especially hard hit, with 60% of the population working in agriculture, and a large portion of them are women. The Best-Case scenario cuts that number by 80%.

Sea level has risen 8 – 9 inches since 1880. It is predicted to rise another 12 inches in the next century even with low greenhouse gas emissions and 8½ feet in the case of continuing high emissions.

Recommendations

- A) The world must engage in early and concerted action to cut global greenhouse gas emissions and to ensure inclusive and resilient development to reduce the scale of internal climate migration. Plans for development must include climate change in their development.
- B) Countries can anticipate and prepare for the drivers of migration by supporting communities to adapt in place by diversifying livelihoods or facilitating migration, where needed. They need to develop national adaptation plans to set goals and lay out strategy to attain them.
- C) Cities need to take steps to cope with the upward trend of arrivals from rural areas and improve opportunities for education, training, and jobs.
- D) Planning is needed for preventive measures like Integrated water resource management and climate smart agriculture programs, that could ease the impact of changes resulting from the rise in ocean levels.
- E) We need to be able to help people make good decisions about whether to stay where they are or move to locations where they are less vulnerable.
- F) Reaffirm the Global Compact on Refugees and provide comprehensive immigration policies by countries faced with an inflow of migrants seeking refuge from the impact of climate change, hunger or unstable economies.
- G) Increase the participation of internally displaced women in leadership and management structures of organizations involved in these issues.
- H) Use clean and efficient energy resources. Increase research into causes and effects of climate change, including compiling more scientific data. Invest now to improve data on the scale and scope of local climate migration.
- I) The number of predicted climate-affected migrants in the future can be lowered by slower population growth, less economic inequality, slower urbanization, a higher GDP, and more education.

Suggested Reading

The World Bank Groundswell 2 Report of 2021

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/09/13/millions-on-the-move-in-their-own-countries-the-human-face-of-climate-change>.

UNHCR -- Gender, Displacement and Climate Change:

<https://www.unhcr.org/5f21565b4>.