

**Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Submission to the International Development Committee  
Inquiry on Climate Change, Development and COP26**

**1. Introduction:**

- 1.1. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent humanitarian organisation helping people forced to flee conflicts and disasters. NRC endeavours to highlight how the climate crisis is increasingly causing displacement, as well as exacerbating the conditions and prospects for people already displaced, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states.<sup>1</sup> NRC works closely with the state-led Platform on Disaster Displacement,<sup>2</sup> plays a coordinating role within the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility,<sup>3</sup> and is a founding member of the Climate, Migration and Displacement Platform.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.2. This submission focuses on the following area of the inquiry: *“The extent to which the Government’s work to date on climate change and development has taken ... the needs of low- and-middle income countries and vulnerable groups into account”*, particularly displaced people, and *“the potential of COP26 to address these remaining challenges effectively and the steps the Government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.”*
- 1.3. NRC continues to see how large-scale displacements in the context of the climate crisis have devastating effects on people and communities. On average, 25 million people are forced to flee disasters each year, and almost all are weather-related. As global temperatures rise, more extreme weather events will occur more often. This will lead to an increase in the number of people displaced by disasters. According to a report by NRC’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre,<sup>5</sup> the number of people displaced every year due to floods is likely to double by the end of the century, reaching 50 million people annually, even if we manage to implement the Paris agreement and limit global temperature rise to 2 degrees.
- 1.4. In its *Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19 on UK aid for combating climate change (HC 1432)* the International Development Committee (IDC) welcomed *“the fact that climate migration and displacement is increasingly being recognised as an area that requires attention”* and pressed the UK government to use its leadership role on climate issues to advance action to prevent and assist those impacted by climate migration and displacement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on NRCs work on Climate and Disaster Displacement, head to:

<https://www.nrc.no/what-we-do/speaking-up-for-rights/climate-change/> and also

<https://www.nrc.no/countries/nrc-representation-offices/nrc-geneva/>

<sup>2</sup> Platform on Disaster Displacement, available at: <https://disasterdisplacement.org/> [accessed 10 May 2021]

<sup>3</sup> This informal group is composed of the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC, IDMC), Refugees International, the Hugo Observatory and the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED).

<sup>4</sup> Climate, Migration & Displacement Platform, available at: <https://www.cmdplatform.org/about> [accessed 10 May 2021]

<sup>5</sup> ‘First of its kind study reveals the risk of future climate-related displacement could increase five-fold by 2099’, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/media-centres/first-of-its-kind-study-reveals-the-risk-of-future-climate-related-displacement-could> [accessed 14 May 2021]

<sup>6</sup> House of Commons, UK aid for combating climate change: Government Response to the Committee’s Eleventh Report Twelfth Special Report of Session 2017–19, July 2019, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/2589/2589.pdf> [accessed 10 May 2021]

1.5. It is NRC's view that progress to date has been limited. NRC urges the UK government to use COP26 as an opportunity to take urgent collective steps to ensure the full implementation of the Paris Agreement. Since the Paris Agreement entered into force in 2016, the parties to the agreement have been unable to agree sufficient financing arrangements for its implementation, particularly with regards to supporting developing countries. Unless this is addressed, the catastrophic effects of the climate crisis on displaced people and the communities who host them will continue to worsen.

## 2. Climate-related Displacement:

2.1. Almost every second, a person is displaced by disasters. In 2019, disasters triggered nearly three quarters of the new displacements recorded worldwide, accounting for 24.9 million displacements.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the majority of refugees and internally displaced people originate from and live in climate hotspots, exposed to severe floods, heatwaves and droughts. Climate displacement threatens a wide range of human rights, including the right to life, health, adequate housing, adequate food, water and sanitation, and development.

2.2. As global temperatures continue to rise, the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters will increase, leading to more and more people being displaced. Many of the countries that will be hardest affected by the climate crisis are low-income countries with a limited ability to build resilience and respond to disasters. These countries are also least responsible for contributing to the current climate emergency. Industrialised countries therefore have a responsibility to not only significantly reduce their emissions, but to support resilience building, adaptation and humanitarian response to disasters in those countries that are hardest hit.

2.3. Without urgent global and national climate action, sub-Saharan Africa, south Asia and Latin America could see more than 140 million people displaced within their countries' borders by 2050, according to a World Bank study.<sup>8</sup> The main triggers for population movements include decreasing crop productivity, water shortages and flooding.

2.4. The five countries at highest risk of disaster displacement, in terms of numbers, are India, China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and the Philippines. Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable due to low elevation and high population density. By 2050, with a projected 50cm rise in sea-levels, Bangladesh will lose about on tenths of its land,<sup>9</sup> affecting 18 million people.

## 3. COP26 and steps governments need to take:

3.1. Large-scale global action can prevent mass displacement and other catastrophic impacts of global heating. Critically, a step-change is needed in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and related measures to limit global warming to between 1.5 and 2 degrees centigrade. Governments attending the COP26 Climate Conference, due to take place in Glasgow in November 2021, must make seismic shifts in current policies and practices to reach this goal. While the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement is still likely to result in, for

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<sup>7</sup> IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, May 2019, available at: <https://www.internaldisplacement.org/global-report/grid2019/> [accessed 10 May 2021]

<sup>8</sup> Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2018/03/19/groundswell---preparing-for-internal-climate-migration> [accessed 10 May 2021]

<sup>9</sup> Climate Displacement in Bangladesh, available at: <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/climate-displacement-in-bangladesh> [accessed 10 May 2021]

example, a doubling of flood-related displacement by the end of the century, if we fail to act, this number could increase fivefold.<sup>10</sup>

- 3.2. Urgent action is also needed to significantly scale up investment in specific climate mitigation and adaptation to reduce the risk of disasters. Individual weather events such as floods, storms and earthquakes do not have to turn into large-scale disasters. Their impacts can be limited through significant strengthening of disaster risk reduction measures, early warning systems and early life-saving action, like pre-emptive evacuations and access to reliable weather forecasts, and by building resilience in affected countries.
- 3.3. As the host of COP26 and signatory of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), NRC encourages the UK to promote ambitious collective measures to address climate displacement and other human mobility – and to lead by example:
  - 3.3.1. **Mitigation:** UK and other Parties need to address the underlying causes that force people to move in response to life-threatening weather conditions and environmental degradation, and to take effective measures to limit ongoing and future harms by pursuing ambitious climate change mitigation. Keeping global warming below 1.5°C is a prerequisite to significantly reduce displacement risk.
  - 3.3.2. **Adaptation and preparedness:** NRC encourages the UK and other Parties to facilitate action and support for integrating human mobility challenges and opportunities into national and regional planning processes, including the process to formulate and implement National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). NRC also calls for the inclusion of displaced people into preparedness strategies (climate change forecasting and early warning systems). Plans and strategies should draw upon available tools, guidance, and good practices. The UK's commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction highlight the need to move away from crisis response to collective approaches on risk reduction, prevention, mitigation, adaptation, and preparedness.
  - 3.3.3. **Loss and Damage:** NRC asks that the UK scales up its support to the Warsaw International Mechanism to accelerate action on displacement and other human mobility. One outcome of the COP21 Climate Conference in Paris in 2015 was the establishment of a Task Force on Displacement.<sup>11</sup> The Taskforce is tasked with developing recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change. The UK Government should support the continuation and acceleration of work of the Task Force on Displacement to ensure full implementation of their recommendations and current workplan. The UK Government could further encourage the Taskforce to undertake broader consultation beyond the direct membership.
  - 3.3.4. **Finance:** The UK needs to work with other governments and international financial institutions to ensure financial support is provided to fully implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Displacement. NRC also encourages the UK Government and other Parties to examine other ways UNFCCC funding mechanisms can support reducing the risk of climate displacement. NRC further encourages COP26 participant governments to make

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<sup>10</sup> 'First of its kind study reveals the risk of future climate-related displacement could increase five-fold by 2099', available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/media-centres/first-of-its-kind-study-reveals-the-risk-of-future-climate-related-displacement-could> [accessed 14 May 2021]

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Climate Change, Task Force on Displacement, available at: <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/constituted-bodies/WIMExCom/TFD> [accessed 14 May 2021]

available additional dedicated funding allocations to support vulnerable countries to avert, minimise and address displacement. Funding should benefit the most affected and most vulnerable communities. The UK should also examine how it can best encourage more flexible, predictable, long-term funding to humanitarian operations, including where appropriate, via climate financing, the private sector and from international financial institutions. Addressing gaps in global humanitarian funding is ever more urgent in the context of cuts to the UK's own Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget and rising needs in the most fragile countries.

- 3.3.5. **Capacity building:** As recommended by the Task Force on Displacement, the UK and other Parties should facilitate capacity-building support to countries experiencing disaster-related internal displacement, map risks of displacement, and identify and implement integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address displacement. Significant new investment is needed to strengthen preparedness and response capacity to ensure early, rapid, and effective response to disaster displacement. This can be done through regional, sub-regional and bilateral cooperation, and through simulation exercises and drills.
- 3.4. In addition to the above measures, NRC encourages the UK Government and other Parties to ensure policy coherence in COP26 decisions with other relevant policy processes, including the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda on cross-border disaster-displacement.

#### 4. Conclusion:

- 4.1. The UK Government has rightly highlighted that climate displacement requires urgent attention. NRC welcomes the UK Government's response to the International Development Committee's *Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19, on UK aid for combating climate change (HC 1432)* in which it recognised that; *"climate change and environmental degradation will amplify drivers of irregular migration."* NRC looks forward to the UK Government meeting its commitment to *"lead positive action to increase effective action on adaptation and resilience."*<sup>12</sup>
- 4.2. The UK Government now has the opportunity to use its role as the host of COP26 to press for much more assertive and ambitious collective action to shift current policies and practices which do not go far enough to address underlying causes of climate displacement. This requires engagement across all UNFCCC workstreams so that issues related to climate displacement are not siloed or limited to the "Loss and Damage" workstream alone.
- 4.3. The UK Government must also lead by example by stepping back from proposed cuts to ODA which will impact heavily on disaster-risk reduction, prevention, mitigation, adaptation, and preparedness, and encourage all States to include and address climate displacement risks in National Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Adaptation Plans.

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<sup>12</sup> House of Commons, UK aid for combating climate change: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report Twelfth Special Report of Session 2017–19, July 2019, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/2589/2589.pdf> [accessed 10 May 2021]