

Climate Change, Migration and Displacement: UNHCR and IOM Moving Beyond Their Mandates

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Abstract

There is a growing awareness that climate change is affecting human livelihoods, and may lead to displacement and migration. However, no person has ever been granted refugee status due to climate change. Even if the adverse impacts of climate change and natural disasters are harmful, they do not satisfy the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention requirement of persecution. This paper asks: how are international humanitarian institutions providing assistance to those affected by climate change? It examines recent mandate and operational changes in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It finds that these two organizations lobbied their Executive Board's to expand their mandates: IOM successfully and UNHCR not. Both also worked with sympathetic states to establish new initiatives to tackle internal and international displacement related to climate change. Overall, it suggests there are many multilateral avenues for states to assist those affected by climate change.