

## Climate Change and Forced Migration

Thursday 25 June 2020

12:00 - 16:45 BST | 13:00 - 17:45 CEST

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### Background:

Between January and June 2019, more than 7 million new internal displacements were triggered by the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, such as coastal erosion in South Asia and the Pacific islands, drought in the Horn and Western Africa, flooding in South-East and East Africa, South-West Asia and the Caribbean. Between 2008 and 2018 there have been approximately 265 million new internal displacements triggered by natural hazards, and in recent years the number of displacements due to disaster is up to three times higher than displacements due to conflict. Existing refugee and internally displaced people are also affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters as they often reside in climate ‘hotspots’, where they are exposed to slow and sudden-onset hazards, which can result in secondary displacement, among other impacts.

In addition to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation threaten limited natural resources, such as drinking water, crops and livestock shortages. The commodification of natural resources, the impacts of unpredictable rainfall patterns and drought on agricultural productivity are fundamentally changing communities’ ability to cope and may lead to community tensions or conflict. Other mega trends related to climate change, such as urbanization, threat to livelihoods, and deterioration of governance and rule of law, are likely to increase displacement in complex ways. Climate change is also contributing to environmental phenomena such as drought, desertification and rising sea levels that render entire areas of land uninhabitable. These changes not only contribute to displacement, but also hinder the potential for return.

As Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees recently said “forced displacement across borders can stem from the interaction between climate change and disasters with conflict and violence, or it can arise from natural or man-made disasters alone. Either situation can trigger international protection needs.” UNHCR recognizes that the consequences of climate change are extremely serious. Those fleeing situations where climate change and disasters interact with conflict and violence may have valid claims for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Regional frameworks, like the Kampala Convention of the African Union, can offer additional means of protection in situations where climate

change and disasters do not interact with conflict. Though we know that only a very small minority of displaced people cross borders due to climate change, forced migration has become a divisive issue in Europe where the Mediterranean is now the deadliest border in the world. Meanwhile, the increasing recognition of displacement in the context of climate change is reflected in the January 2020 U.N. Human Rights Committee decision stating that people facing an immediate threat to their lives due to climate change should not be returned to their country of origin.

For instance, the worsening droughts in Somalia together with Al-Shabab-related violence are driving thousands of people to flee within the country or trek to Ethiopia. Shalle Hassan Abdirahman, a Somali refugee who fled to Ethiopia, survived a spell as a captive of Al-Shabab before he managed to escape. Once free, however, he decided he had no choice but to leave. Al-Shabab had also been forcing him and other farmers to pay a “tax” on their earnings even though drought was already curtailing their livelihoods and leaving them with less to eat. Years ago, the nearby river had overflowed when the rains arrived, nourishing the land and enabling crops to grow. “Now the river has no water and the sky has no rain,” Shalle Hassan said. The river and the weather are in the hands of Allah, he added, but the threats and extortion from Al-Shabab made life intolerable. “No human being will remain there — there is drought in the land and no rain. And the people left behind are afraid that with Al-Shabab they will get killed.”

Looking at current trends and future outlook, the growing scale and complexity of displacement will have consequences for communities and societies all over the world, but what could European foundations do about it? For UNHCR and Ariadne, joining forces is key to raise awareness and seek increasingly innovative and holistic solutions to address the rising challenge of protecting refugees, internally displaced persons, and other persons of concern in the era of climate change.

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a pandemic. The coronavirus situation is dynamic and evolving with, as of 7 April 2020, over a million cases reported worldwide in 200 countries. This outbreak is a global challenge as it is the climate change that does not discriminate and can affect anyone—including refugees and displaced people—and which can only be addressed through international solidarity and cooperation.

### **Focus of the event:**

The key issues to be discussed are:

1. How does climate change, often combined with conflict, drive people from their homes?
2. How can foundations support relevant and innovative programmes to deal with the aftermaths of these events? What about anticipatory action, prevention, adaptation and mitigation? How can they help build resilience in the long-term so people can stay and/or return?
3. Linking these debates with the broader European and international policy agendas, the event will also look at how foundations can also support civil society advocacy on this topic to improve both policies and practices.

## Programme:

### 13.00 - 13.45 Opening session moderated by [Ruben Fierens](#), Associate PSP Officer, UNHCR

- Welcome address by [Gonzalo Vargas Llosa](#), Regional EU Affairs Representative
- Keynote speech by refugee advocate Sayed Abbas Kazimi
- Participant introductions

### 13.45 - 14.00 Comfort break

### 14.00 – 15.30 Session 1 - Purpose: Setting the scene. Climate Change and forced migration: what European foundations need to know

Moderated by [Saskia Baar](#), PSP Officer, UNHCR. Expert speakers:

- [Andrew Harper](#), Special Advisor on Climate Action, UNHCR
- [Carlotta Weber](#), Strategy Manager, [Green European Foundation](#), and [Caroline Zickgraf](#), Deputy Head of Liege University's Hugo Observatory on Environment, Migration and Politics
- [Alex Randall](#), Programme Manager, Climate Migration Coalition

### 15.30 – 16.00 Coffee Break/Screen Break

### 16.00 – 17.30 Session 2 - Purpose: showcase actions by foundations and find potential collaborations or ideas to follow up. What can foundations do about forced migration linked to climate change?

Moderated by [Julie Broome](#), Ariadne's Director. Foundation speakers:

- [Gregory Maniatis](#), International Migration Initiative (IMI), Open Society Foundations (OSF) and [Kamal Amakrane](#), Adjunct Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University
- Heather McGray, [Climate Justice Resilience Fund \(CJRF\)](#) and [Salote Sogo Unitarian Universalist Service Committee \(UUSC\)](#)
- [Linda McAvan](#), Executive Director for European relations, European Climate Foundation (ECF)

### 17.30 – 17.45 Conclusions by Andrew Harper and Julie Broome