



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



# Strategic Framework for Climate Action

## Climate change is a risk multiplier, driving displacement and protection needs around the world.

# Introduction

This document sets out the parameters for UNHCR's response to the growing, global climate emergency. It provides a common framework and approach to step up our ambition under three core pillars for action – law and policy, operations, and “greening” UNHCR. The Framework will be implemented primarily through the development of plans of action driven at regional and country levels in collaboration with affected communities, host governments, UN Country Teams and a wide range of partners. These include NGOs, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, the private sector and academia.

The document is aligned with the High Commissioner's Strategic Directions 2017-2021<sup>1</sup> and complements relevant UNHCR policy, strategy and guidance. It is guided by the Common Core Principles for a UN System-wide Approach to Climate Action,<sup>2</sup> and supports the Secretary General's Climate Action Strategy 2020-2021 and the UN Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience.<sup>3</sup> It supports international commitments related to climate change, disasters and environmental degradation under the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the context of disasters and climate change.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, it contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>5</sup>, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 at global, regional, national and local levels.

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1 UNHCR's [Strategic Directions 2017-2021](#)

2 The [Common Core Principles for a UN System-Wide Approach to Climate Change Action](#).

3 [United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience \(2017\)](#).

4 [Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change \(2015\). Developed through the State-led Nansen Initiative and endorsed by 109 States.](#)

5 Including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on Climate Action, while other SDGs are also relevant.

		Approach			
		Collaborative	Evidence-based	Innovative	Inclusive
Three Pillars for Action	 <p><b>1. Law &amp; Policy</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 1:</b> Guide the interpretation and application of relevant legal and policy frameworks, develop guidance and catalyze international discussions</p>			
	 <p><b>2. Operations</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 2.1:</b> Preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment and mitigate environmental degradation in displacement settings</p> <p><b>Objective 2.2:</b> Enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks</p> <p><b>Objective 2.3:</b> Strengthen preparedness, anticipatory action and response to support protection and solutions for people displaced and their hosts in disaster situations</p>			
	 <p><b>3. UNHCR's Environmental Footprint</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 3:</b> Improve UNHCR's environmental sustainability by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimizing negative impacts on the environment</p>			



CHAD. Djabal camp. Darfur, Sudan.  
© UNHCR/Hélène Caux



**CHAD.** *The rainy season of 2020 has caused flooding in several localities in Chad including Ndjamena, the capital.*  
© UNHCR/Aristophane Ngargoune

## Rationale

Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and its impacts are disproportionately experienced by people in vulnerable situations. Displaced and stateless persons, including women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people<sup>6</sup> and indigenous peoples, are among those in greatest need of protection.<sup>7</sup> As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, “*The time for small steps has passed. What is needed now is transformational change*”. In this spirit, UNHCR is stepping up its commitment and ambition to meet the humanitarian and protection challenges already being amplified by the climate emergency, and to mitigate and prepare for those to come.

Global plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the main driver of rapidly rising average temperatures, are wholly inadequate if warming is to be limited to the internationally agreed target ceiling of 1.5C - or at least 2C - by the end of the century. We have already exceeded 1.1C and are on a path to 3C if mitigation efforts are not rapidly and sustainably increased. Climate change can clearly be seen in the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as abnormally heavy rainfall, prolonged drought, heatwaves and cyclones. Such hazards are already inducing some 23 million displacements of people from their homes each year, as an average based on data from the past decade. Most are internally displaced within their home countries, while some may also be impelled to cross borders in search of safety and protection.

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and other gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQI+)

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR and International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change joint Factsheet (2020) [Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge and Climate Adaptation](#)

Gradual environmental degradation linked to the changing climate, such as desertification, is also creating conditions that may lead to displacement from barren and uninhabitable land. Sea-level rise is increasing coastal flooding, erosion, soil salinization and the threat of permanent inundation in low-lying areas. Communities are facing wide-ranging impacts on their health and livelihoods through the loss of food, water, land and other natural resources essential for survival and wellbeing. Resilience to climate-related disasters, environmental degradation and displacement is often lowest in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Seven of the ten countries most vulnerable to, and least prepared for climate change impacts host a peacekeeping operation or a special political mission.<sup>8</sup> Sudden- and slow-onset disasters may exacerbate conflict dynamics and increase the impact of other drivers of conflict and fragility.<sup>9</sup> The eight worst food crises in 2019, all in countries where UNHCR operates, were linked to both climate change impacts and conflict.<sup>10</sup> Additional crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, will add to this complexity. Climate-related risks may also hinder safe, dignified and durable solutions to displacement, including return. Without ambitious climate action and disaster risk reduction, climate-related disasters could double the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance to over 200 million each year by 2050.<sup>11</sup>

Preparing for and addressing these challenges require an urgent collaborative effort, informed and enabled by the latest science and technology. While prioritizing collaboration with displaced and stateless people, host governments and communities, UNHCR will work with UN Member States; international organizations within and outside the UN system; other humanitarian and development actors; international and regional financial institutions; regional organizations; local authorities; civil society, including faith-based organizations; academics and other experts; the private sector; and the media. Without collective ambition to mitigate and adapt to climate change, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is being put in jeopardy.

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8 UN News July 2020, [Climate emergency 'a danger to peace', UN Security Council hears](#)

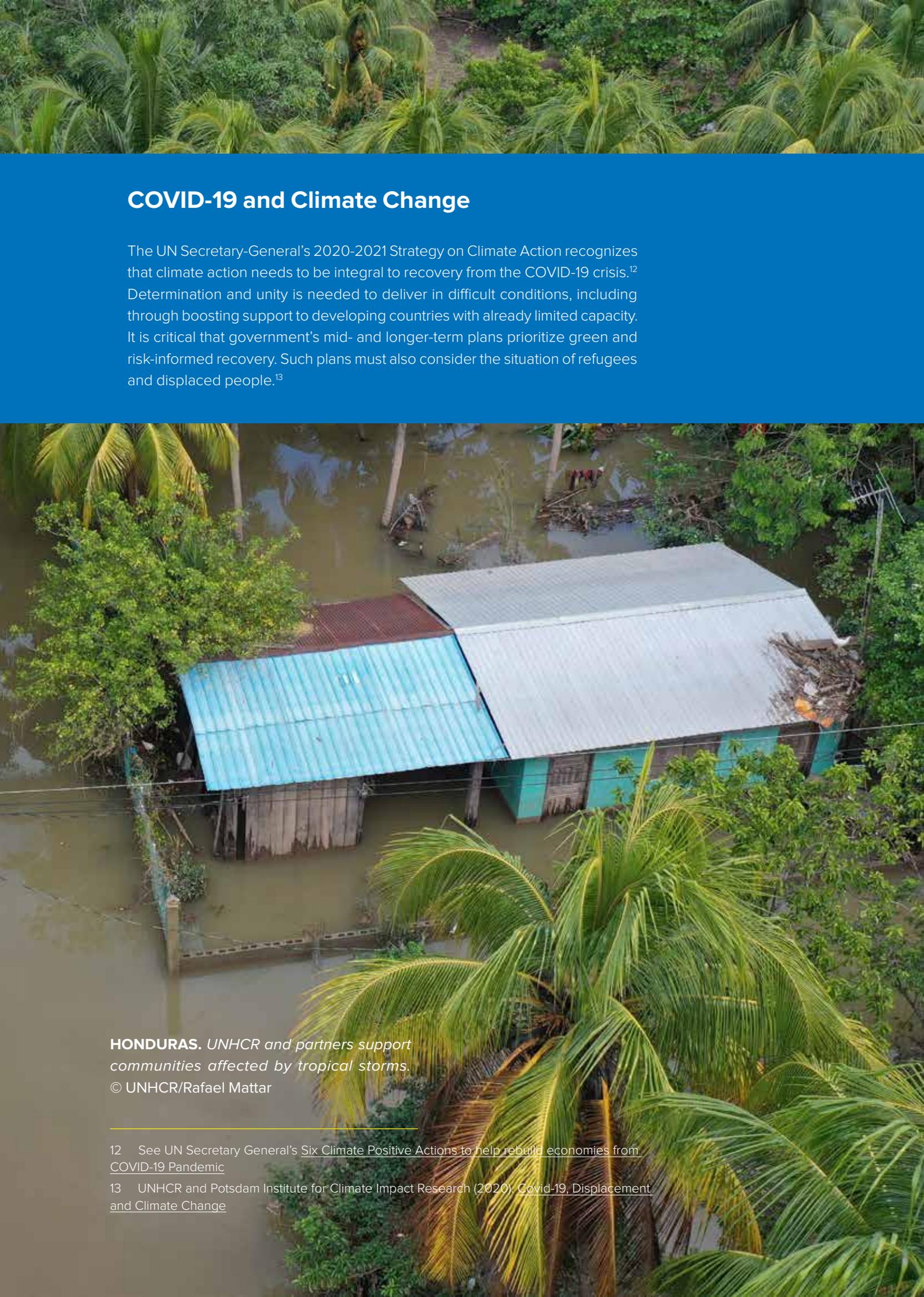
9 UNHCR, [In Harm's Way: International Protection in the Context of Nexus Dynamics Between Conflict or Violence and Disaster or Climate Change, 2018](#)

10 OCHA (2020). [Global Humanitarian Overview 2020](#).

11 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), ["The Cost of Doing Nothing: The Humanitarian Price of Climate Change and How It Can Be Avoided"](#) (Geneva, 2019).

**SOMALIA.** *Families affected by drought*  
© UNHCR/Mustafa Saeed



An aerial photograph showing a tropical landscape with numerous palm trees. In the center, there is a flooded area with murky brown water. A large building with a corrugated metal roof is partially submerged. The roof is divided into sections of blue, white, and brown. The surrounding area is lush with green vegetation.

## COVID-19 and Climate Change

The UN Secretary-General's 2020-2021 Strategy on Climate Action recognizes that climate action needs to be integral to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>12</sup> Determination and unity is needed to deliver in difficult conditions, including through boosting support to developing countries with already limited capacity. It is critical that government's mid- and longer-term plans prioritize green and risk-informed recovery. Such plans must also consider the situation of refugees and displaced people.<sup>13</sup>

**HONDURAS.** *UNHCR and partners support communities affected by tropical storms.*  
© UNHCR/Rafael Mattar

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<sup>12</sup> See UN Secretary General's [Six Climate Positive Actions to help rebuild economies from COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR and Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (2020). [Covid-19, Displacement and Climate Change](#)

# Our Role

As a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for displaced and stateless persons and host communities, UNHCR has an important contribution to make to global climate action. This contribution is based on our protection mandate and expertise, our operational field presence and proximity to displaced populations, our designated role in the Humanitarian Cluster Approach, our experience working in complex contexts and our extensive network of partners.

UNHCR is a thought leader able to mobilize networks of international and local partners and guide protection-centred solutions. We provide data, analysis and legal and technical support and guidance to Member States to inform climate action and disaster risk reduction across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding objectives that prioritize some of the most vulnerable countries, communities and people. As a member of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, and as a standing invitee to the Steering Group of the State-led Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), UNHCR engages with governments and works closely with IOM and other organizations, as well as with civil society and academic partners. UNHCR also engages with the UN Security Council's Climate and Security Mechanism on climate-related security risks and with human rights mechanisms.

Across all pillars of action, the organization adopts a rights- and evidence-based approach towards issues of displacement and statelessness. In collaboration with a growing range of humanitarian and development allies, we act as a catalyst for protection and sustainable solutions in the context of climate change. We advocate for displaced and stateless people to represent themselves in policy forums and to participate in the decisions affecting their resilience to climate and environmental risk.



**BANGLADESH.** Kutupalong refugee camp expanded and made safer by UNHCR and partners

© UNHCR/Roger Arnold

# Three Pillars for Action

## 1. Law and Policy

### Objective 1:

**Guide the interpretation and application of relevant legal and policy frameworks, develop guidance and catalyse international discussions**

Most people who are displaced by disasters and the adverse effects of climate change become displaced within their own countries. Over time, UNHCR has played an important role in supporting international, regional, national and sub-national development of laws and policies relevant to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Such efforts have been referenced by the Special Representative with regard to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in 1998.

For those who are driven to cross an international border, the global legal framework for international refugee protection may be applicable and may serve to effectively extend international protection. In particular, where the effects of climate change and disaster interact with violence, conflict or persecution leading to displacement, individuals may be refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. In addition, the OAU Convention and Cartagena Declaration include broader refugee criteria that recognize, as refugees, those persons who, owing to “events seriously disturbing public order” are compelled to leave their country. This may occur as a result of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters where the impact is sufficiently severe and where the State is unable or unwilling to protect against it. In regions where the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration do not apply, those facing a real risk of serious harm because of the adverse effects of climate change or disasters, and who cannot benefit from State protection, may still be protected from enforced return and benefit from international protection where the gravity of the risks would trigger the non-refoulement obligation under international customary law and international human rights instruments.<sup>14</sup>

**As highlighted in the Human Rights Committee case of *Teitiota v New Zealand (No. 2728/2016)*,** robust and international efforts to address the adverse effects of climate change are critical to mitigate the risks of serious harm that could trigger the need for international protection. Such adverse effects may act as a root cause of displacement as well as affect the likelihood of finding durable solutions for those already displaced.

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the relevance of international protection instruments for the protection of people displaced across borders in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, see UNHCR’s [Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters](#), UNHCR, 2020

## Actions may include:

- Playing a leading role in guiding legal interpretation and comprehensive application of the relevant legal frameworks in the context of climate change and disaster-induced displacement
- Supporting States to develop and implement legal and institutional policy frameworks to prevent and respond to displacement and to facilitate solutions to internal displacement due to disaster
- Catalysing international discussions and developing legal and normative guidance to promote and support access to international protection for persons in need, including refugees
- Advocating and advising on the integration of protection-centred measures addressing displacement and statelessness risks and the inclusion of displaced people in disaster risk reduction/management policies, strategies and climate adaptation plans<sup>15</sup>
- Monitoring legal and policy developments
- Conducting research and evidence-based advocacy, such as on protection-centred climate action in complex emergencies, cross-border displacement due to disaster and risks of statelessness in the context of disasters and climate change
- Guiding the international community and States to assess and mitigate the risks of statelessness as a result of climate change impacts
- Advising governments on planned relocation away from unsafe or uninhabitable areas as an anticipatory and adaptive measure of last resort

## 2. Operations

Climate change is exacerbating the causes and consequences of displacement and amplifying protection concerns for displaced people and returnees. Under all projected climate scenarios, the achievement of UNHCR's objectives will require that we reduce and manage risks by adapting our internal processes and operations.<sup>16</sup> In line with the 2030 Agenda and the principle of "leaving no-one behind," we work together with partners to secure the inclusion of disaster-displaced people in national services and to build effective approaches to resilience and solutions that include the most vulnerable among them, such as women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, informal settlers, landless people and indigenous communities. Strengthening resilience and preparedness measures is critical to protection-centred action, as promoted across multiple policy frameworks including the GCR and the UN Secretary General's priorities for prevention<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, UNHCR's contribution will continue to be called upon in response to disaster-induced displacement, for which we must be better prepared. Caring for the environment in displacement settings brings mutual benefits for people and nature and avoids adding to strategic and operational risks.<sup>18</sup>

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15 UNDRR (2019). [Words into Action Guidelines - Disaster displacement: How to reduce risk, address impacts and strengthen resilience](#).

16 UNHCR's Strategic Risk Register (2020) recognizes the "failure to adapt our strategic positioning, internal processes and operating posture in response to climate change" as a strategic risk to the achievement of our objectives (point 17).

17 [United Nations Secretary General Priorities: Prevention](#)

18 Policy for Enterprise Risk Management in UNHCR (UNHCR/HCP/2020/2)

**Objective 2.1:****Preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment and mitigate environmental degradation in displacement settings**

Environmental management is a priority for UNHCR in all phases of our work. We seek to contribute to environmental conservation and sustainable natural resource management in our field operations by working to improve waste management, reduce soil erosion, improve water resource management and promote energy efficient technologies. These measures enhance the self-reliance and economic inclusion of displaced persons. Sustainable site planning avoids or mitigates land degradation and exposure to landslides, floods and other climate shocks. This further reduces the risk of onward displacement and the need for relocation to alternative sites. Improved environmental and energy programming, especially the provision of clean cooking alternatives, also has a positive impact on the health and livelihoods of all people living in displacement settings.

Through our Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy 2019-2024, UNHCR is undertaking ambitious action to avoid or reduce negative environmental impacts. Access to sustainable, clean energy is closely linked to protection and to meeting basic needs. It also creates more sustainable and inclusive communities, builds resilience to climate change and helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Over 90 percent of refugees living in settlements have no access to electricity or clean sources of energy. Sustainable energy solutions benefit both displaced and host communities and align with broader programmes to support host countries' national and local energy plans in line with SDG 7 on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

**Refugees in Minawao, the 'green' refugee camp in Cameroon**

## The Clean Energy Challenge:

The Clean Energy Challenge seeks to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all refugee settlements and nearby host communities by 2030. Under the Global Plan of Action, UNHCR is steering this multi-stakeholder approach to achieving clean energy solutions for refugees and host communities. The Action Group of the Challenge has over 50 members, including Member States, international organizations, private sector companies and NGOs. The initiative is designed to be self-sustaining with contributions from its members.

### Outcome Areas:

- Priority energy needs of refugee households in emergencies (cooking, lighting and heating) are met swiftly.
- Refugees and host communities have sufficient access to safe, sustainable energy to cook three daily meals.
- Refugees have access to 200 Wh/household/day, allowing for basic lighting and connectivity.
- Energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy are used to meet the electricity needs of communities: centralized water supplies, street lighting, educational and health facilities and humanitarian support facilities such as offices and staff accommodation.

### The greening of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Before and after.



## Actions may include:

- Prioritizing environmental sustainability across site planning and settlement, shelter and housing, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods, food security, nutrition, public health, education, and cash-based interventions
- Ensuring that operational responses are increasingly climate-neutral, including for the selection and distribution of core relief items (CRI), development of sites and construction
- Increasing sustainable access to and use of renewable energy, energy efficient technologies and energy conservation options<sup>19</sup>
- Enhancing capacity and knowledge of UNHCR staff on environmental policies, guidance and best practice across sectors
- Collaborating with governments and partners to promote afforestation, reforestation and sustainable agriculture
- Advocating at regional and central government levels to develop infrastructure to provide reliable and sustainable energy to refugees and host communities

### Objective 2.2:

#### **Enhance the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate-related and other environmental risks**

Refugees and IDPs are often highly exposed and vulnerable to climate-related shocks and environmental degradation.<sup>20</sup> In hosting areas and in areas of return, climate and environmental risks may add to humanitarian and protection needs and operational complexities, including through onward, repeated and protracted displacement, as well as through restricting freedom of movement and access to humanitarian assistance. Climate shocks and environmental degradation may also aggravate existing tensions or conflict, further exacerbating vulnerabilities and displacement. The resilience of refugees, IDPs and host communities to climate impacts will largely depend on access to financial, technical and institutional resources that address both their immediate needs and long-term solutions.<sup>21</sup> UNHCR aims to strengthen protection for displaced people and their hosts through investing in anticipatory action to reduce and manage these risks and support progress towards solutions. Collaboration and partnership with affected populations are essential, especially where we can learn from and support culturally appropriate and effective traditional and indigenous adaptation practices. Climate and environmental risks should be taken into account in all preparedness activities, including context analysis, planning, training and capacity building, partnership development and coordination, and resource pre-positioning.<sup>22</sup> When a natural hazard event occurs where UNHCR is already the cluster lead agency for protection, camp coordination and camp management and/or shelter, these leadership and coordination responsibilities are maintained in line with Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) arrangements.

The GCR references the need to reduce disaster risk, including through preparedness measures that take into account global, regional and national early warning and early action mechanisms, evidence-based forecasting of future movements, and the inclusion of refugees in disaster risk

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19 In line with UNHCR's Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy 2019-2024

20 Refugees may include people whose displacement and need for international protection are related to disasters or the adverse effects of climate change in their countries of origin, as discussed under section 1 of this framework.

21 Hallegatte, S.; Rentschler, J.; Rozenberg, J. 2020. *Adaptation Principles: A Guide for Designing Strategies for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience*. World Bank, Washington, DC

22 [UNHCR Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies \(PPRE\)](#)

reduction strategies<sup>23</sup>. UNHCR may play a catalytic role in promoting and supporting innovation and access to the best technologies, preventive measures and solutions that take climate and environmental risks into account. Partnership is key to this endeavour, working with UN Country Teams and particularly with IOM, international financial institutions and development partners to address the climate-related drivers of displacement and to enable progress towards durable solutions. We support and advocate for the inclusion of displaced people and the integration of their concerns in sustainable development, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policy, plans and programmes.

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23 UNHCR (2019) [Climate change and disaster displacement in the Global Compact for Refugees](#).

## Reducing monsoon hazard risk in refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

The Site Maintenance and Engineering Project (SMEP) is a joint UNHCR, IOM and WFP initiative to improve infrastructure in refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar and protect against the continual risk of landslides and flooding during the monsoon season. Landslides, flooding, and waterlogging from very heavy monsoon rains affect roads, shelters, and camp services, causing significant damage and creating increased protection risks.

In addition to improving infrastructure, UNHCR and partners prepared safe relocation areas for refugees who are exposed to flooding and landslides. Refugee communities are also trained and empowered as first responders to shift towards a community-centred approach to emergency planning. Volunteer Community Outreach members go house to house, spreading information and awareness about how families can better protect themselves and their shelters.



## Actions may include:

- Integrating climate, environmental and natural hazard risks in UNHCR operational and strategic risk reviews and registers to support anticipatory approaches and preparedness<sup>24</sup>
- Integrating climate-related risks in multi-hazard risk and impact analysis and assessments, including Environmental Impact Assessments and/or Rapid Environmental Assessments conducted at the onset of emergencies and on a regular basis
- Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in site planning for camps and settlements and in supporting solutions for refugees and returnees
- Strengthening community-based early warning and early action, including access to timely weather forecasts, evacuation drills and capacity building
- Introducing forecast-based financing for preparedness and anticipatory response
- Promoting assessment and access to information about the viability and sustainability of return and planned relocation considering climate and disaster risk over different timescales<sup>25</sup>
- Undertaking area-based risk reduction and adaptation measures to strengthen the sustainability of solutions in return or relocation areas
- Advocating for the adaptation of urban and land-use plans and climate resilient public infrastructure and services by governments and the private sector to avoid locking displaced people and vulnerable host communities into high-risk areas
- Supporting regional mobility schemes that can help refugees find jobs, build skills and work towards longer-term solutions in collaboration with IOM and other UN agencies
- Supporting capacity development for staff and partners on the integration of climate risks in programming, and approaches and methods for community-based preparedness and climate-smart programming in displacement settings

### Objective 2.3:

#### **Strengthen preparedness, anticipatory action and response to support protection and solutions for displaced people and their hosts in disaster situations**

Disasters brought on by climate- and weather-related hazards displace millions of people from their homes each year. Those without the means and resources to anticipate and adequately prepare, and whose governments may be unable or unwilling to adequately protect them, tend to have the greatest needs for protection. Most remain within their countries of residence, but some cross international borders, and many may be caught in prolonged or repeated cycles of displacement. Innovative tools and partnerships, including with international financial institutions and development agencies, will strengthen our ability to anticipate, reduce and manage climate change, natural hazard and environmental impacts. Where displacement does take place across international borders as a result of the sufficiently severe adverse effects of climate change and disasters, and where the State is unable or unwilling to protect against it, UNHCR's mandate and operational protection expertise would be relevant for operational engagement (see Objective 1).

UNHCR's IDP policy also highlights the relevance of our protection expertise to preparedness and response measures related to "forced displacement or planned relocations arising from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation." When major disasters bring a massive surge of new actors, including some who may be insensitive to protection concerns, UNHCR's predictable, protection-centred engagement becomes all the more important. Preparedness, informed by climate-related disasters and environmental risk knowledge, is critical to coordinated, predictable, timely and protection-centred responses. It is also essential to early recovery and progress towards durable solutions that take evolving and future disaster risk into account. UNHCR leads relevant cluster preparedness initiatives, applying the emergency response preparedness (ERP) approach set out by the IASC.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Policy for Enterprise Risk Management in UNHCR (UNHCR/HCP/2020/2)

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, IOM and Georgetown University (2017) [Toolbox: Planning Relocations to Protect People from Disasters and Environmental Change](#) and UNHCR, Georgetown University and the Brookings Institution (2015) [Guidance for Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocations](#).

# UNHCR's engagement in inter-agency responses to internal disaster-induced displacement

UNHCR aims to ensure a prompt and robust response to internal displacement on a 'no regrets' basis<sup>26</sup> and for a limited period of time.<sup>27</sup> When large-scale disasters require a system-wide response, UNHCR must be ready to participate in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Scale-Up protocols.<sup>28</sup> Under the overall leadership of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator or Resident Coordinator at country level UNHCR leads the protection cluster response, with the Government or an international NGO as co-chair whenever possible, whenever three criteria are met:

1. sufficient in-country UNHCR presence
2. a government request, and
3. inter-agency agreement with other protection-mandated agencies (UNICEF and OHCHR)

Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement (IDP Policy)<sup>29</sup>

## Actions may include:

- Enhancing innovative and strategic use of data and evidence-based forecasting of potential displacement patterns related to climate and environmental risks and impacts to inform anticipatory action in collaboration with scientific institutions, governments, regional organisations and UN agencies
- Analysing the policy and institutional context for disaster risk management and climate change adaptation to inform collaboration with appropriate local actors, mechanisms and networks
- Contingency planning, including pre-positioning resources and supply chain processes, for possible displacement, both internally and across border.
- Developing exit strategies to hand over to government authorities and local development partners
- Enabling exchange of good practice and developing guidance on protecting IDPs in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change
- Initiating partnerships with municipalities hosting displaced populations to invest in resilient urban infrastructure and services and support the integration of IDPs
- Using strategic communications and advocacy with governments and national and local development actors to promote early progress towards risk-informed and sustainable solutions
- Clarifying our role and responding more predictably to cross-border disaster and climate-related displacement, taking into account not only our protection expertise, but critically the broader refugee definition in the OAU Convention and Cartagena Declaration.

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26 Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement (September 2019), section 6.

27 The six-month duration of an emergency declaration, as set out in UNHCR's Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response and in the IASC system-wide Scale-up protocols, can be a reference in this regard.

28 [IASC system-wide SCALE-UP activation protocols](#) (2018).

29 [Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement](#) (2019)

## 3. UNHCR's Environmental Footprint

### Objective 3:

#### **Improve UNHCR's environmental sustainability by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimizing negative impacts on the environment**

In line with the UN Secretary-General's call to make UN operations environmentally sustainable or "green", UNHCR aims to reduce its own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and minimize any negative environmental impacts associated with its operations. Minimizing harm to the environment contributes to global climate action and protects the natural resource-based livelihoods, health and security of displaced populations and host communities. Sustainable management also contributes to the efficient use of natural and financial resources.

We have, for example, been implementing clean energy solutions for field offices and staff accommodation, replacing diesel generators and reducing transport emissions through fleet management systems. We have significantly improved monitoring of our sustainability through the Environmental Inventory, which gathers data on carbon emissions, waste production and water use. UNHCR is committed to maintaining carbon neutrality, which was achieved for the first time in 2018 through offsetting our emissions. In line with UNHCR's commitment to sustainable procurement, we aim to prioritize goods and services that minimize negative impact on the environment, that are sustainable across their entire life cycle, and whose providers operate in a sustainable manner. Social and environmental considerations form part of the evaluation and selection criteria for goods and services, including their manufacture, transport, packaging, use and disposal.

The rapid adaptation of our work practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including teleconferencing and reduced travel, shows that "green" policy and behavioural change is possible. Additional steps are planned to further improve the sustainable and climate-smart management of our facilities, waste, water and energy usage, travel, fleet and the procurement of goods and services.

#### **Actions may include:**

- Identifying opportunities to transition to alternative energy sources, with a preference for renewable energy, and offsetting unavoidable GHG emissions to achieve climate neutrality
- Building technical in-house capacity for climate-smart and sustainable facility management, including the Green Box initiative, and expanding the Environmental Inventory to all offices to monitor our carbon emissions, waste production and water use
- Providing joint UNHCR-WFP fleet-related services for the UN system and supporting interagency measurement, management and mitigation of carbon emissions through efficient and effective use of global fleet assets
- Mobilizing "greening" champions to promote awareness, best practice and behavioural change.
- Including sustainable procurement considerations in all procurement processes
- Deploying the Green Fund to enable longer-term investments in sustainability
- Establishing a UNHCR environmental policy to ensure sustainable and climate-smart strategies and guidance, including on travel, procurement, supply and logistics, facilities and fleet management, waste and water management, building management, event management<sup>30</sup> and communications

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30 UNHCR is promoting compliance with the Core Sustainable Event Checklist for all UNHCR sponsored events

# Main initiatives of UNHCR’s Greening the Blue Strategy (2020)<sup>31</sup>



**The Green Box** initiative supports the installation of electricity meters in UNHCR offices, connects meters to a global dashboard monitoring offices’ power consumption, and helps to identify alternative energy options.



**The Green Fund** supports the conversion of UNHCR’s field compounds and offices from diesel to renewable energy to achieve both carbon and financial savings. It will allow sub-offices to enter into long-term contracts with private sector power suppliers for the set-up, operation, and maintenance of solar plants. The Green Fund is a guarantee mechanism in which the same capital can be reused to support multiple sites over time.



**The Green Data** initiative establishes systems and policies for real-time, high quality data collection of GHG emissions, energy, waste and water across UNHCR, creating a data warehouse and dashboards for easy monitoring, reporting and decision-making.

31 In line with the [UN 2020-2030 Strategy for sustainability management](#)

# Our Approach

## Collaborative

Both within and outside the UN system, we collaborate with a broad and growing range of partners to mobilize the capacity, resources, knowledge and influence required to meet current and future protection challenges from the climate emergency and to achieve collective outcomes and impacts at scale.

In support to governments and as part of coordinated UN efforts, we prioritize partnership with national and local actors, including NGOs, refugee and IDP organisations, women, older people, youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people and other groups representing diverse protection concerns and capacities. We prioritize strategic partnerships with development organizations,

### Partnerships for Impact:

In 2017 UNHCR partnered with the Government of Germany through the KfW Development Bank to establish the largest solar plant ever built in a refugee camp, to provide clean and much-needed energy to 80,000 Syrian refugees living in Jordan's Za'atari camp. The plant increases the availability of electricity to between 12 and 14 hours per day, compared with six to eight hours previously. The additional power enables residents to preserve food, carry out chores more effectively and helps children study in the evenings.

Annual carbon dioxide emissions from the camp have been reduced by 13,000 metric tons per year, equivalent to 30,000 barrels of oil. The plant also delivers annual savings of around US\$5.5 million, which are reinvested in humanitarian projects across Jordan. Furthermore, construction of the solar plant provided employment for local Jordanian workers as well as 75 Syrian refugees. With the plant connected to the Jordanian power grid, any unused electricity is fed back to the network to support the energy needs of the host community.



financial institutions (IFIs) including the World Bank Group, and broadened engagement with the private sector. The World Bank Group's focus on addressing fragility, conflict and violence and on prevention and early action, represents an opportunity to reinforce the humanitarian-development nexus, as an essential approach to comprehensively addressing climate change and disaster-related displacement.

We work in close collaboration with our sister-agency on human mobility, IOM, with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and with scientific and academic centres of excellence. Multi-stakeholder platforms and networks at all levels are essential to these efforts, including the Global Refugee Forum, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement and the UN Network on Migration.

## Inclusive

In line with the UNHCR policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD)<sup>32</sup> and our commitment to be accountable to affected people (AAP)<sup>33</sup>, we aim to ensure that all people of concern have equitable and non-discriminatory access to assistance and protection, and a say in policy and operational decisions that affect their lives. Recognizing that climate change exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, we seek to amplify local and marginalized voices and to ensure our decisions and actions are not only shaped by their concerns and perspectives but also enable them to transform their lives.

## Evidence-based

We ensure our decisions are informed by the best available evidence and work with centres of scientific and academic excellence to develop data and knowledge needed for policy and practice. UNHCR is well-positioned to bring local knowledge, field-based learning, protection expertise and climate and social science together to inform policy and manage risk. In line with UNHCR's Data Transformation Strategy 2020-2025<sup>34</sup> and the UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy 2020-2022,<sup>35</sup> we support efforts to improve data collection, quality and access. We use sound, relevant and disaggregated data, enabling us to respond to the diverse needs of displaced and stateless people in different contexts, and our understanding of the interaction of climate change with other drivers of vulnerability and displacement shapes our response and solutions.

## Innovative

The climate emergency demands new thinking and approaches that transform the way we work, challenging us to be far more forward-looking and ready to meet escalating risks. We are committed to enabling innovation that allows us to adapt our response in anticipation of future displacement and protection risks. For example, we are collaborating with partners to develop predictive analysis

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32 UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity ["AGD Policy"], 8 March 2018.

33 UNHCR [Accountability to Affected People](#)

34 [UNHCR Data Transformation Strategy 2020-2025](#): Supporting protection and solutions

35 [Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. 2020-2022](#)

and tools for risk-informed policy and programming, bringing together climate and social science, new technology and data sources (including big data and artificial intelligence) and protection expertise. Working with development banks, investors, donors and implementing partners, we are developing innovative financing mechanisms that go beyond our traditional, purely grant-based financing models to strengthen financial sustainability, enabling faster roll-out and sustained programming in support of climate action, such as the Refugee Environmental Protection (REP) Fund (see below) and the Green Fund mechanism (see pillar three).



LEBANON.  
Syrian children pose  
for a picture.  
© UNHCR/Hani Al Moulia

## In the Pipeline - The Refugee Environmental Protection (REP) Fund:

UNHCR is developing a revolving fund to leverage carbon finance to sustainably finance improved and scaled-up environmental projects such as reforestation, improved cook stoves and alternative cooking fuels. These initiatives are urgently needed to mitigate the environmental damage associated with refugee influxes, to create 'green jobs' for locals, and reduce risks to refugees created by land degradation and deforestation in displacement settings, including increased SGBV risk as women have to travel further to gather firewood, and increased conflict risk due to competition over depleted resources.