**Call for input for the HRC56 thematic report on climate change and internal displacement.**

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Juan Manuel Orozco Moreno ([Conexiones Climáticas](https://conexionesclimaticas.org/)) and Claudia Fry (Department of Geography, University of Exeter) welcome and appreciate this opportunity to inform the report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons to the 56th session of the Human Rights Council. We focus on the experiences of planning for relocation in El Bosque, Tabasco, Mexico, a town that is significantly affected by the impacts of climate change. We aim to provide insights into three themes:

* Human rights impacts of planned relocations
* Legal, policy and institutional frameworks
* Engagement of communities and regional and international actors

**Background: The case of El Bosque, Mexico**

In this report, we outline the experiences of the El Bosque community, located on the Gulf of Mexico. El Bosque is impacted by coastal erosion due to tidal flooding, rapid sea-level rise and intense storms, which has destroyed much of the town’s infrastructure. Community members have been displaced and are awaiting relocation. Only a few years ago, the town of El Bosque had hundreds of inhabitants however few remain today. The community is not relocated yet, but construction of new houses has started, and the community is expected to be fully relocated in June/July 2024. In this report, we focus on the period between displacement and relocation, providing insight into the early stages of planned relocation. The process of accessing government support for relocation has been long and challenging. The community has experienced numerous impacts on human rights in the time leading up to relocation. These impacts showcase the detrimental consequences of the lack of adequate policy and institutional frameworks on planned relocation in the context of climate change. The examples provided here calls for the urgency of planned relocation frameworks that carefully integrate human rights considerations.

* 1. **Human rights impacts of planned relocations**
  2. *Whether relocated persons feel they restored or improved their livelihoods, living standard, access to land and property, safety and security and ability to practice their culture 6 months, 1 year, 5 years following relocation; Whether host communities (if applicable) were able to maintain their pre-existing livelihood and living standards or attain that of relocated persons, whichever is higher.*

The community depends on the relationship between the river and the sea to sustain their fishing livelihoods. Fishing livelihoods are much more than just an economic activity, it is also an important part of culture, identity, and sense of belonging. The new land provided from the government for relocation is far away from the river and the sea. Hence, the pre-existing livelihoods are highly threatened by the relocation and it is currently uncertain whether the community will be able to maintain these post relocation. There is currently no plan for how to support the maintenance of fishing livelihoods or address the impacts of the loss of livelihoods.

*1.2 Impacts on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of relocated persons and those who stay behind in place of origin.*

The negative impacts on human rights in the early stages of relocation are many, exacerbated by the delays in the relocation process and thus prolonged displacement. Below we specify some of these.

**Right to Food**: Irregular electricity supply in El Bosque impedes food preservation e.g. the ability to freeze food, further exacerbating food insecurity.

**Right to Water**: Rising sea levels have led to salinization of wells in El Bosque, jeopardizing access to water.

**Right to Education:** Educational infrastructure has been ravaged by extreme weather events, where for example schools have been destroyed, limiting access to education.

**Right to Housing:** During storm surges, community members have had to evacuate without the provision of any temporary shelter. This has forced many to organise shelter on their own, typically renting housing elsewhere, with cumulative negative impacts. For example, the money used for rent leaves little money left for other necessities, such as food. Families have gone into debt to afford rent, leaving them with a great financial burden.

**Right to Health:** Interruptions in electricity supply impede access to essential medication, such as insulin for diabetics, exacerbating already existing health vulnerabilities. Further, the significant delays of the relocation process and the lived experiences of loss and damage has caused profound psychological distress amongst community members.

**Right to meaningful and informed participation:** Community members have not been sufficiently included in the decision-making process on relocation. They have not had a say in key decisions related to for example new land and housing designs.

**Other communal impacts:** Being stuck in a period between displacement and relocation, many families have been forced to build houses with any materials available (e.g. from rubbish) in a football field, leading to reconfigurations of the neighbourhood. This includes living next to new neighbours, resulting in new intra-community conflicts and tensions. In addition, already existing conflicts were intensified due to the stress that community members were experiencing. There is not enough support to manage these conflicts, causing significant disruptions to social cohesion.

**Legal, policy and institutional frameworks**

* *Please describe any measures, including policies, legislation, practices, strategies, or institutional arrangements that your government or the government(s) in your area of geographical interest have used or have available at the regional, national or sub-national level to conduct planned relocations and/or policy frameworks to prevent arbitrary displacement. Please also identify institutional and governance gaps.*

There are some clear institutional and governance gaps that has contributed to slowing down the process of relocation, leaving the residents of El Bosque in prolonged periods of displacement. These gaps demonstrate the need for efficient and coordinated approached to planned relocation across levels and spheres of governance.

Firstly, collaborations between levels of governance are fragmented, specifically the institutions in charge of addressing issues of disasters, impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, leading to inefficient responses. In the case of El Bosque, the responsibility of managing relocation are primarily at the local municipal level with limited support from the national government. The local level of government is also the level with fewest resources. The absence of national level support has detrimental consequences, for example in terms of the lack of provision of temporary shelter and safe evacuation whilst awaiting relocation.

Secondly, the relocation process is slowed down by bureaucratic processes in the cooperation between the municipal and national level in terms of acquiring land, specifically in transferring state owned land to land that could be used for community relocation.

Thirdly, the lack of a legal concept of displacement in the context of climate change represents another key gap. Forced displacement is currently only recognised when linked to organised crime or violence, providing limited to no right to protection for those displaced by climate change. In Mexico, there are hence no specific policies for relocation of communities impacted by climate change. The policy framework used in the case of El Bosque is a general relocation and social housing framework, used for communities that are at risk (from other hazards, e.g. violence, volcanic eruptions, landslides) but not specifically linked to climate change. This policy is “*Proyecto Institucional de Relocalización de Personas para Atención a Proyectos Prioritarios o Estrategias Prioritarias del Gobierno Federal y/o Población Asentada en Situación de Riesgos”* part of *“Programa de vivienda social (SEDATU (Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial yUrbano) and CONAVI (Comisión Nacional de Vivienda)”.*

Lastly, there is a lack of legal and policy instruments to detect communities at risk to allow for timely relocation. Currently, many communities across Mexico are facing significant challenges in adapting to the impacts of climate change and may need relocation. There is a huge blind spot in terms of identifying which communities are at risk and when they should be considered for relocation.

* *Please outline whether the available legal and policy frameworks foresee options for persons who did not wish to relocate as well as assistance, remedies for anticipated economic, non-economic, indirect and long-term losses that relocated persons will incur, and remedies following relocation for unanticipated losses.*

There are no policy frameworks to address loss and damage associated with relocation nor to address the issue of voluntary immobility.

**Engagement of communities and regional and international actors**

* *Please indicate how the group(s) to be relocated were informed, consulted and enabled to participate in decisions on whether, when, where and how the planned relocation was to occur. Please also explain how people who wished to stay behind at the site of origin and people who had already moved away prior to planned relocation and may also wish to join at new site, were informed and consulted in the process. As well as information on any challenges or obstacles to the meaningful participation of affected communities in the planned relocation process.*

The community was approached by the national government in 2021 and were advised to be relocated due to living in a high-risk area. At the time, the community expressed a preference to stay and a lack of trust in the risk assessment presented by government agencies.

The community later had a workshop with a researcher from the local state-level univesrity (Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco) who confirmed the risks of climate change impacts on the area and reduced habitability. Recognising this, and the several unsuccessful attempts to address coastal erosion and adapt in situ, the community initiated the process of accessing support for relocation.

Following this, the participation and consultation process has been flawed and community members have too often been treated like recipients rather than active agents and decision-makers. For example, the community were excluded from decision-making related to what land they would relocate to, causing significant disruptions to their current livelihoods. The community was also not part of designing their new houses, resulting in houses that are misaligned with their needs.

Community participation is also challenged by divisions and conflicts within the community and a limited capacity of external actors in resolving these conflicts. Without one shared voice, it has been difficult for the community to push for specific needs. Certain community members, who were more acquainted with politics and bureaucracy have been able to gain more influence and push for specific agendas, silencing others. This highlights the challenges of relocation planning that considers and addresses multiple socially differentiated vulnerabilities and uneven power dynamics.

* *Please provide information on how regional and international actors and organizations were engaged in the planned relocation process.*

Non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace México, Nuestro Futuro and Conexiones Climáticas have been actively involved in supporting the El Bosque community and fighting for their right to a just relocation process since 2022.

Regional and international actors have not been involved in any direct way. There have been some consultations with the community from UN agencies to determine the links between climate change and migration, however without any involvement in supporting or enabling the El Bosque relocation. Other UN agencies have offered technical assistance to the government.

**Recommendations**

* *Please provide specific recommendations on how to address the critical challenges and impacts that emerge during planned relocations in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change to ensure they are people-centred, anchored in human rights-based approaches and preserve cultural identity. Please include actions to be taken at the local, national, regional, and international levels, as well as by different groups of stakeholders: governments, communities to be relocated, potential host communities, development agencies, financing institutions, and others.*

A national policy framework on planned relocation, displacement, adaptation and loss and damage in the context of climate change anchored in human-rights is urgently needed. This would allow for more rigorous, legitimate, and timely responses that are people-centred and just.

Careful planning for the maintenance of livelihoods, recognising that the loss of livelihoods will likely expose community members to new and other types of risks and the relocation will thus fail in improving the lives of community members.

Rigorous risk assessments prior to relocation that involves the community, seeks to build trust, and integrate local knowledge and perspectives. Risk assessments needs to not only consider biophysical hazard profiles but should also consider different perceptions of risk and potential impacts on human rights. Risk assessments are needed not only in the place of origin, but also of the relocation itself and in the new destination area.

Rigorous participation processes where adaptation options and any potential trade-offs are discussed. These processes should begin early and before there is an urgent need for relocation (linking back to the need for early risk assessments) to allow for careful planning and integration of various community perspectives.

Take measures to address intra-community tensions and conflicts e.g. through conflict resolution methods to mitigate the impacts relocation might have on social cohesion.

Long-term collaborative relationships between levels of governance, including communities at risk, local governments, non-governmental organisations, institutions in charge of addressing the impacts of climate change, and international and regional actors. In fostering this collaboration, there is a need for careful consideration and discussion on how responsibilities, rights and roles should be distributed between these various actors involved to allow for legitimate and ethically robust processes.