**Climate Justice and Environmentally Displaced Persons**

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This chapter looks at the relationship between climate justice and environmentally displaced persons – people who are forced to move because of environmental hazards. We begin by defining the population of concern, considering that not all those who move for environmental reasons are displaced. Nor are environmental hazards the sole cause of their displacement. Nor are all environmental hazards related to human-induced climate change. These are complicated issues to untangle and generalizations are dangerous. The academic field of climate migration is relatively new and characterized by different disciplinary approaches (Ferris 2020). There is a lack of consensus on how many people will be displaced because of environmental hazards and the dynamics of their displacement and there is no agreement within the academic or policy-making community on terminology. While the term ‘people displaced at least in part by environmental hazards, some of which are exacerbated by human-induced climate change’ is probably the most accurate, for the sake of readability, the term ‘environmentally displaced’ is used here as a shorthand term. The question of terminology is not a trivial one. The way in which the climate displaced are defined affects their relationship to climate justice. Is displacement a protection strategy for people and a positive form of adaptation to climate change? Or should displacement be seen as a form of loss for which reparations from those who caused climate change (the major carbon emitters) are warranted? And how does the fact that groups marginalized because of race, ethnicity, gender, ability and age are often at the most risk of both displacement and the negative effects of climate change play into conceptions of climate justice? While this chapter does not offer definitive answers to these questions, it does highlight the benefits of using a climate justice lens in addressing environmental displacement.

*Environmentally displaced: who are we talking about?*

As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recognized since its very first report in 1990 (IPCC 1990), one of the main impacts of climate change is expected to be on the movement of people. This mobility will take different forms. Some people will be forced to leave their homes in the aftermath of a sudden-onset event, such as a flood, a cyclone, a storm, or a landslide. These are the disaster displaced. Some will experience a slow-onset degradation of their environment – years of worsening drought, the gradual rise of the sea and the erosion of coasts and riverbanks, longer heat waves -- and will decide that they need to move in order to survive. These are also disaster displaced. At the end of 2022, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that the global number of people displaced by disasters was 32.6 million – a figure higher than the number displaced by conflict and violence (28.3 million) (IDMC 2023). Some people will see the handwriting on the wall and decide to move before conditions become truly desperate and most will use normal migration channels, principally moving to urban areas. While they are generally considered as voluntary migrants, it is hard to see their conditions as truly voluntary as many, perhaps most, would not have decided to move if there had not been environmental pressure. These are three examples of the types of displacement caused by environmental hazards, including the effects of climate change.

Almost all such displacement will be internal – within the borders of countries and it is national authorities that are responsible for ensuring that their needs are met and that they are safe from future displacement although international aid agencies often provide humanitarian assistance to those displaced by disasters. Although there is disproportionate attention devoted to the specter of large-scale movements of environmentally displaced persons across international borders – usually portrayed as people from the global south turning up on the borders of countries in the global north – the real challenge is likely to be faced by cities in both the north and south as climate displaced people seek security in urban areas.[[1]](#footnote-1) While most of the environmentally displaced will move for climate-related reasons (98 percent in 2022, IDMC 2023, 9), earthquakes and volcanoes also force people to leave their communities. In 2022, 2 percent of Tonga’s population was displaced as a result of a volcanic eruption, 700,000 Indonesians were displaced by earthquakes and in February 2023 over a million people were displaced by earthquakes in Türkiye (IOM 2023).

This chapter will only consider those displaced by disasters and not those who migrate – those who choose to move in anticipation of the effects of climate change. Although it can be argued that migration in anticipation of climate change is not voluntary, the issues are more starkly drawn (and there is more data) in the case of those who are displaced – whether by rapid or slow-onset environmental phenomena. Nor does this chapter address the situations of those who are unable or unwilling to move – originally called ‘trapped’ populations by the Foresight report (2011) and more recently referred to as the voluntarily or involuntarily immobile (Farbotko 2018; Zickgraf 2018).

The evidence has been clear for a long time that climate change disproportionately affects the poor (OECD 2004). It exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, reduces access to clean water, has serious health consequences and increases food insecurity. We also know that poor and marginalized groups tend to be disproportionately affected by disasters – often living on marginal land – and to receive less support after disasters than those with more financial and human capital (Hersher and Kellman 2021). As DW (n.d) summarized:

A root cause of vulnerability is poverty. The rich may have more to lose, but the poor are repeatedly the ones who suffer most, are more exposed to risk, and are living in unsafe places and in unsafe homes. The places they live in have poorer services and levels of support. When disaster strikes, proportionately the cost of recovery in social and economic terms is very high for the poor, and the end result is that poor families often find themselves in an even more vulnerable situation after a disaster. Many who live on the margins of poverty slip back into real poverty. In Viet Nam, families tell of losing their homes five times or more. Recovery from disaster diverts efforts and savings away from productive activities that can improve the situation of the poor.

The evidence is also clear that displacement increases poverty (World Bank 2017). A more recent study by the World Bank (Hamner 2022) concluded that displaced populations have higher rates of poverty than non-displaced populations, experience higher rates of multidimensional poverty and that women and men often have distinct experiences of displacement. IDMC (2023, 51) reports that 75 percent of countries with crises of food insecurity had IDPs; and that five countries experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity were home to 26 million IDPs. Disaster displacement also increases health risks (Schwerdtle 2018). Disasters cause destruction of property and infrastructure and almost always cause at least a temporary disruption of livelihoods affecting income and standards of living. Of particular concern are those who have been displaced by conflict and violence who then experience additional hardships as a result of environmental phenomena such as typhoons and earthquakes as was the case for Syrian refugees affected by the earthquake in Türkiye or Rohingya refugees and IDPs displaced by Cyclone Mocha in 2023 (Baucher 2023).

So, to summarize, climate change disproportionately affects the poor who also face more loss from disasters and usually receive less aid. Disasters displace people and disaster leads to poverty. There is also some evidence that disasters and climate mobility increase the risk of conflict (Burrowes and Kinney 2016; Null and Rusi 2016; Kelley et al 2015).

*So how does climate justice fit in?*

“A justice-based approach to climate displacement must recognize that climate change is a form of structural violence caused by the emissions of the planet’s most affluent inhabitants. Climate change is an injustice not a random misfortune (Gonzalez 2019, 388)

Claudia Gonzalez (2019, 371) summarizes current understandings of environmental justice, citing environmental scholars who allege “distributive injustice in the form of disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards (such as toxic waste and polluting facilities); procedural unfairness due to the exclusion of underrepresented groups from governmental decision-making, corrective injustice, in the form of inadequate enforcement to environmental laws in low-income and minority communities; and social injustice because environmental degradation is closely linked with broader social ills (such as poverty and racism.” Applying this to environmentally displaced persons, we see that exposure to environmental hazards increases the risk of displacement. Environmentally displaced persons are rarely engaged – or even consulted -- in governmental decision-making. Inadequate enforcement of environmental laws (including building codes) contributes to the risk of displacement and it is clear that racial and ethnic minorities as well as low-income people tend to experience higher risk of displacement than others.

Most of the work on disaster displacement has focused on reducing the risk of disasters (UNDRR, nd) or on humanitarian response which includes ensuring that those affected by disasters do not lose their basic human rights. Human rights and justice are not the same thing, however. Individual human rights can be protected in systems that are inherently unjust. Most definitions of climate justice – or environmental justice on which climate justice is built – focus on addressing the unequal impacts of climate change, particularly on poor and marginalized communities. The Environmental Protection Agency in the US defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies” (US, EPA, n.d). This definition includes both the notions of fairness and discrimination as well as the issue of participation of affected people.

Discussions of climate justice go further and introduce the notions of responsibility and reparations. Those who cause environmental harm should be responsible for redressing the impacts of this harm. The principle of ‘polluter pays’ is central to environmental justice and has a very long history. As OECD (1992) summarizes, “Under the 1972 and 1974 OECD Recommendations(1)(2), the Polluter-Pays Principle means that the polluter should bear the ‘costs of pollution prevention and control measures,’ the latter being measures decided by public authorities to ensure that the environment is in an acceptable state” (OECD 1992). We will return to the issue of the applicability of the polluter-pays principle in the context of climate justice for environmentally displaced persons later in this chapter.

The questions raised by climate justice include not only how to ensure that the costs of climate change, including displacement, are fairly distributed but also that the harm is redressed.

In this section, we begin by looking at efforts to redress the harm of environmental displacement through existing mechanisms, including references to international law for those displaced across international borders, strengthening the protection of the human rights of those displaced by environmental hazards, and the loss and damage mechanism of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). There is a fairly robust literature on these issues.

We then turn to the more difficult issue of the relationship between those who cause the harm – particularly carbon emissions – and those who suffer as a result of the harm. In the case of climate justice, this also raises the thorny issue of what is owed, if anything, to people who are displaced by non-climate-related disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

*International Refugee Law*

Much of the literature on environmental displacement focuses on the relatively small subset of the environmentally displaced who move to other countries. Scholars, activists, practitioners and policy-makers have all sought to use the 1951 Refugee Convention to respond to those who are forced to seek safety in another country because of environmental hazards but most quickly realize that the definition of refugees in the convention, at least in its present formulation, cannot be expanded to include the vast majority of those who are displaced for environmental reasons. The Convention itself doesn’t mention the word climate or even environment and the five grounds for persecution – race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group or political opinion are generally not applicable for those fleeing disasters. Some have argued that the Convention definition should be expanded but refugee advocates and UNHCR have strongly opposed this on the grounds that re-opening the convention would lead to a weakening of the already beleaguered refugee system. If given the chance, many governments would like to see the definition narrowed – not expanded. In 2020 UNHCR issued legal guidance about cases where the Refugee Convention could be used in the context of disasters and climate change, such as when governments persecute environmental activists or there is discrimination towards certain ethnicities or minorities in the provision of assistance after a disaster (UNHCR 2020). But these are fairly limited cases. In June 2023, the newly-appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change, in his first report to the UN Human Rights Council, forcefully made the argument that people displaced across international borders face serious protection risks and called for the establishment of a new protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention to apply to those displaced across international border because of climate change (UN Human Rights Council 2023).

The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted in 2018, mentions climate change as part of the context in which refugee movements occur but doesn’t offer new understandings of how climate change relates to refugee status (United Nations 2018). The UN Human Rights Committee added a new dimension in the debate when it ruled in 2020 in the case of an asylum-seeker from Kiribati whose asylum claim in New Zealand had been rejected that returning people to areas where their lives were threatened by climate change could constitute refoulement under the 1951 convention (United Nations 2020). As will be discussed later, litigation in the field of human rights offers several promising avenues.

Some advocates have proposed new international conventions to address cross-border movements resulting from climate change, but there are difficulties in defining who is a ‘climate migrant’ and in any event there is no appetite for new binding international treaties on this – or almost any matter. States which are concerned about these issues have preferred to use non-binding, international frameworks – such as the Global Compact on Refugees and even the UNFCCC – to set voluntary standards and recommend good practices.

On the national level, many governments have adopted laws and policies to respond to those who cross borders because of the effects of disasters and climate change. Notably the Platform on Disaster Displacement has developed an Agenda for Protection (also a non-binding declaration) which has been affirmed by over 100 governments. It has also compiled a compendium of such national laws and policies by over 50 governments to respond to disaster displacement -- such as the development of humanitarian visas (Platform on Disaster Displacement 2015). Most recently the government of Argentina developed a new humanitarian visa for Mexicans and Central Americans displaced by disasters (Argentina 2022). It is also possible for governments to develop complementary protection measures as called for by a blue-ribbon Task Force convened by Refugees International (Refugees International 2021). Finally, there are also possibilities to use refugee law at the regional level, particularly in Africa and Latin America where there are regional agreements that expand the definition of refugees, to include (among other things) ‘events seriously disturbing the public order.’ In some cases, such as Mexico, governments have already included this broader definition into their national legislation which offers the possibility of extending protection – as refugees – to those whose lives are threatened by disasters or climate change.

These are important initiatives which address a significant gap in international standards on the movement of people internationally. But the fact remains that most of those displaced, now and in the future, will remain within the borders of their own countries. The *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (OHCHR 1998) and the *Kampala Convention* (African Union 2012) both apply to people displaced internally because of disasters and the effects of climate change. The UN Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Internal Displacement (2021) “opens up the space for promoting a more nuanced understanding of displacement in the context of climate change, but stops short from framing it as an issue of climate justice” (Aycock et al 2021). The World Bank estimates that without significant action to lower carbon emissions, some 216 million people will migrate internally by 2050 (Clement et al 2021). It is likely that mayors and other municipal authorities will be on the front lines of responding to these internal movements, but as yet, few seem to have considered issues of climate justice in their approaches to climate migration. However, growing awareness of climate gentrification – where lower income households and particularly communities of people with color are displaced by more affluent households seeking security from the effects of environmental hazard – point to the need for policy-makers to consider issues of equity in their response to climate migration (Forbes 2020). In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, policy choices made during reconstruction and recovery meant that over 100,000 black former residents of the city were unable to return and the income gap between black and white residents skyrocketed (Stein 2015). Issues of equity and climate justice need to be taken into account in devising policies for those internally displaced by environmental hazards.

Turning back to cross-border environmental displacement, using a climate justice lens and existing refugee law leads to exploration of the issue of fairness. As the argument goes, countries responsible for high levels of emissions – which create the conditions which compel people to leave their homes -- have a responsibility to admit those turning up on their border because of those high levels of admissions. This notion that countries such as the United States, European Union members, China and India have a responsibility or a legal obligation to admit those trying to escape the effects of climate change is hotly resisted by those countries. As the argument goes, countries which have pursued economic development through fossil fuel consumption have a moral responsibility to those who suffer from the effects of that fossil fuel consumption. As Nawrotzki (2014) argues, “justice claims call for the producer of the problems to take responsibility….Either MDCs [more developed countries] transfer some of their wealth to LDCs [less developed countries] in order to improve the livelihoods of poor rural populations, or MDCs allow the worst-off, who have lost the means to make a living, to enter the more resource secure MDC territory.” While the moral principle is clear and is in line with the polluter-pays concept, there are several difficulties with pursuing this line of action: the difficulties in determining the causal relationship between emissions and displacement, difficulties in determining who is, in fact a climate migrant and of course, the opposition of developed countries who both emit large amounts of carbon and are increasingly limiting the arrival of people in search of protection. It also raises the problem facing all those who argue that climate migrants deserve preferential treatment of how to respond to those who are displaced by non-climate-related environmental hazards. For example, the 2020 Hurricanes Eta and Iota displaced over 2 million people. We cannot (at least not yet) say that climate change caused those two hurricanes – though the evidence is clear that climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme events. We don’t know whether the hurricanes were the only or even the major driver of displacement give the prevalence of other social and economic factors. And it is hard to make the case that people displaced by hurricanes have greater needs than those displaced by an earthquake or volcanic eruption. However, the UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change argues that what sets those displaced by climate change apart from those displaced by other environmental hazards is precisely the fact that their displacement is caused by the actions of other countries and thus the international community has a particular responsibility for redressing the harms that are caused. While it is difficult to assign responsibility for cross-border displacement to specific states on the basis of their emissions, using a climate justice lens leads us to look at the question of responsibility for displacement and to consider the obligations of states to redress the harms of displacement. Similar questions are being raised in the context of conflict-induced displacement where efforts to seize the assets of governments responsible for displacement for reconstruction are being discussed (WRMC 2022).

*Human rights standards and climate justice*

While some have turned to refugee law as a basis for responding to environmentally displaced, many have argued that climate justice must be rooted in a human rights-based approach, making the case that the worst effects of climate change are being felt by those whose rights are least protected (Zoi 2021; Okai 2022; Schapper 2018).

All international human rights conventions include the right to life and the subsequent obligation of the state to protect life. Burson et al (2018, 407) argue, for example, that under international human rights law, “states are obliged to protect people whose lives are threatened by natural disasters and climate change.”

OHCHR’s message on disaster risk reduction sums up the linkages and provides a useful context to this discussion:

‘All states have positive human rights obligations to protect human rights. Natural hazards are not disasters, in and of themselves. They become disasters depending on the elements of exposure, vulnerability and resilience, all factors that can be addressed by human (including state) action. A failure (by governments and others) to take reasonable preventive action to reduce exposure and vulnerability and to enhance resilience, as well as to provide effective mitigation, is therefore a human rights question’ (OHCHR, nd).

In particular, states have a responsibility to reduce the risks of disasters and to protect those at imminent risk of disasters through timely warnings and evacuations and when they fail to do so, they face domestic and international criticism and potential legal action (Kromm and Sturgis 2008; ActionAid 2006; EAT-Burma 2009). This can be extrapolated to argue that states that are emitting greenhouse gases also have a responsibility to reduce the risks of disasters caused by these emissions in order to uphold the right to life. We return to this line of reasoning in the next section.

In the case of sudden-onset disasters, there have been a few legal cases where governments have been held accountable for their failure to protect their populations from the effects of environmental hazards. In 2009, Italian authorities were found responsible for failing to give adequate assurances to the public before the L’Aquila earthquake, killing over 300 people although prison sentences for seismologists and others were overturned in 2014. In 2012, Krymsk, Russia experienced massive flooding which killed 172 people; in the investigations which occurred afterwards, the mayor of Krymsk and two other officials received prison sentences for criminal negligence for “failing to provide adequate advanced warning to local residents” and sentenced to up to three-and-a-half, six and four-and-a-half years of imprisonment, respectively (Giuliano 2013). In 2000, a mudslide in Tyrnauz, Russia killed eight people. Relatives of the victims tried to receive compensation in domestic courts, but were rejected since, according to the ruling, the victims died of ‘natural causes’ that ‘could not have been foreseen or prevented’ by the state. The relatives, including the wife of Mr. Budayeva who died in the mudslide, appealed their case to the European Court of Human Rights which found that the state was in violation of its duty to protect life since it did not act on the clear, preventive measures necessary to protect its population (Barry 2012).

This ruling is particularly significant since it affirms that the ‘right to life’ (Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights) establishes a positive obligation of the state to take reasonable and appropriate actions to protect the lives of those within its jurisdiction. While states maintain flexibility in how they prioritize and allocate resources towards disaster risk reduction, the Court ruled that the state is liable for deaths when it fails to act on proposed, preventive measures to mitigate risk of an identifiable natural disaster.

At the international level, in addition to the 2020 case mentioned above which was in response to an asylum case, the UN Human Rights Committee also in 2020 ruled in favor of Torres Straits Islanders – notably a case brought by children – and ruled that the Australian government could be held accountable for failing to protect indigenous children from the effects of climate change and was in breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Feria-Tinta 2020).

A focus on climate justice also draws our attention to issues of racial justice and displacement (Gonzalez 2021). Colombia is a case in point. Although Afro-Colombians make up around 10.6 percent of the country’s population, they account for 30 percent of Colombians displaced by conflict (WOLA 2019), many of whom have been victims of land-grabbing (Bratspies 2020). Afro-Colombians and indigenous Colombians tend to live on marginal land – land that is more vulnerable to the effects of environmental hazards. Some of the displacement is due to cultivation of palm oil – intended as a climate change mitigation strategy to replace fossil fuel. Afro-Colombian and indigenous Colombians are disproportionately affected by this cultivation (IDMC 2009) and indeed palm oil cultivation is a factor in displacing people from their communities in different parts of the world. There are many studies, dating back decades, which have found that people of color and indigenous groups are particularly impacted by displacement caused by disasters and climate change (Fothergill et al 1999; Kromm and Sturgis 2008).

The relationship between climate justice and racial justice is a close one. As William Barber states, “when we look at climate justice, it is actually defined as the remediation of the impacts of climate change on poor people and people of color—those who are impacted the first and worst—and compensation for harm suffered by such communities due to climate change” (cited by Weiborn 2022). As mentioned above, the impact of displacement on people of color can also take the form of climate gentrification – where marginalized communities are displaced by those seeking protection from the effects of climate change.

Disasters and displacement also affect men and women differently. The UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change reports that women are 14 times more likely to be killed in disasters than men (UN Human Rights Council 2023) and a 2015 report by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies found that women are more likely to experience sexual and gender-based violence following disasters (IFRC 2015). UNHCR highlights gender specific risks in climate displacement contexts: "Women displaced due to disasters often have to reside in congested evacuation centers and informal settlements, leaving them at heightened risk of gender-based and sexual violence. In some cases, women who stayed behind to avoid socially unacceptable living arrangements in displacement sites such as living in the same room as men, were killed during disasters" (UNHCR 2022). In addition to the exposure of women and girls to gender-based violence and other protection risks, the disruption of access to critical services, including sexual and reproductive health care and social protection during and after disasters, especially in the context of sudden-onset disasters, can increase their vulnerability.

*UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): Loss and Damage mechanism*

The global south bears a disproportionate burden of the effects of climate change. From the beginning, the UNFCCC has acknowledged that responsibility to address climate change should be proportionate to a country’s contribution to the problem and capacity to address it through the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities.

The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 as a protocol to the UNFCCC, included a Loss and Damage Mechanism, known as the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) which is perhaps the closest thing we have to a climate justice mechanism. However, the mechanism is still in progress, the issues are contentious and it is unclear how this is going to work out. In 2022, the UNFCCC’s Conference of Parties (COP 27) agreed to establish a loss and damage fund to support countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Zardari links climate justice to loss and damage and was a driver of the decision to establish a Loss and Damage Fund. Zardari argues that while the agreement does not establish the legal responsibility of those who have contributed the most to climate change and global warming, it does confirm the central principle of climate justice—that those who are suffering the most from the impacts of climate change, although they have contributed the least to global warming, deserve financial support from those who have added the most to the problem and have done the most damage to the environment (Zardari 2022).

In 2015, the UNFCCC established a Task Force on Displacement, charged with developing recommendations to avert, minimize and address displacement caused by the negative effects of climate change. The Task Force is composed of 14 members, including representatives of UN agencies, NGOs and legal and academic experts as well as four members of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM)’s executive committee.

Together with the UNFCCC’s Task Force on Displacement, the WIM has been charged with identifying policies and generating knowledge to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse effects of climate change. (UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, n.d.)

One consequence of displacement is a significant drop in income. Displaced populations are faced with a loss of assets, belongings, workplace, social networks, service providers and consumers. In their host areas, they compete with local workers for employment. Additionally, their arrival alters the economic situation of their host areas, with an increase in demand for goods and services, which may push up prices. This loss of income impacts the security of the displaced and often they have no choice but to resort to other less secure and sometimes dangerous income-generating activities. While there have been efforts to measure the economic impacts of displacement (IDMC 2018), it has been more difficult to measure the non-economic costs of displacement. For example, displaced populations often face stigmatization from the communities that host them and there are significant losses to cultural heritage which are difficult to measure (Albro 2023). The issue of non-economic losses incurred as a result of climate change are of course of concern to many of those impacted by climate change, but particularly so for those who are displaced. The Task Force on Displacement has established an expert group to work on the issue of non-economic loss, but given the difficulties in measuring these losses, and the even greater difficulty of devising appropriate remedies, this is likely to be a long process..

It is as yet too early to assess the role of WIM in addressing the costs of displacement. But certainly one way for states which have contributed to climate change to provide remedies for those experiencing the negative consequences of climate change, including displacement, would be to increase their financial support of the new loss and damage fund as well as to the various funding mechanisms available to support climate change adaptation measures. While developed countries in 2009 committed to providing $100 billion annually to support less developed countries curb emissions and adapt to climate change, this goal has not been reached and many developed countries have contributed less than half of their fair share (Bos et al 2021). However, even when it comes to climate change adaptation funds, there are differences in access, leading to the creation of more inequalities. As Francesca Rosignoli states, “access to funds is still largely affected by complex procedures, mechanisms and required conditions that are likely to disadvantage certain countries compared to others” (2022, 311). Moreover, as of yet, few countries have incorporated averting, minimizing or reducing displacement in their climate adaptation funds.

*Reparations*

Finally, we turn to the issue of reparations for displacement caused by climate change – a contentious and operationally difficult issue. There seems to be a consensus that those most responsible for climate change emissions should pay the cost of the damages caused by those emissions. As Chapna and Ahmed (2021, 86)) summarize, “Reparations are generally understood as an effort to redress significant societal harm through actions of wrongdoing and through in-kind and monetary means.” This would mean identifying those entities most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, recognizing the harms that they have caused and providing reparations to those who have experienced the harms. While much attention has focused on carbon emissions by states, some have argued that major fossil fuel companies that have realized huge profits should be held responsible for reparations and one study has calculated the amount in reparations due by the 21 largest oil companies (Lakhani 2023). Reparations could take the form of cash payments to those who have been displaced; while unlikely to cover the damages of loss of cultural heritage or social networks, providing funds directly to the displaced could provide them with the necessary resources to rebuild their lives elsewhere. While it would be difficult to come up with a fair system for calculating appropriate monetary compensation, it would not be impossible and there are lessons to be learned from compensation programs developed for displaced Bosnians after the wars in the Balkans where IDPs who chose not to return to their communities received compensation to enable them to settle elsewhere. While it would be possible to calculate appropriate compensation for those displaced by disasters and climate change, the fact that the numbers of the displaced are so high (on average 25 million people a year displaced by sudden-onset events) even modest reparations would be very expensive, Developed countries would likely balk at being asked to foot the bill for reparations, particularly given the lack of definitive evidence that all sudden-onset disasters are caused by climate change. Nonetheless, the issue of reparations should be considered in the context of the Loss and Damage mechanism as a clear remedy for the injustice experienced by those displaced by climate change.

Others have argued for a different sort of reparations – the admission of people displaced by climate change to the territories of those responsible for climate change. While this idea would certainly be rejected by most developed countries – most of whom are already implementing draconian measures to prevent the arrival of those displaced by conflict or violence -it too could provide an effective remedy to those displaced by climate change. While not couching their actions in terms of climate justice (or admitting responsibility for causing displacement), a number of countries are beginning to develop humanitarian admissions programs for those displaced by disasters and climate change, such as the Nordic countries and Argentina.

An even bolder form of reparation, as Angell argues, is that entire political communities threatened with displacement are owed new sovereign territory to be ceded by the big emitting states (cited by Fruh 2021). The issue of relocating entire island communities threatened by climate change, most often raised in the case of small Pacific Island countries (though hotly rejected by those countries) is one that often surfaces in the literature. But the history of relocations in the Pacific is a painful one (McAdam 2014) and to begin to think about relocations is, in effect, to give up on mitigation measures – to curb the emissions that are displacing people,

Much, perhaps most, of the those working on issues of environmental displacement do so from a humanitarian perspective – how to respond more effectively to those displaced by disasters and climate change. A human rights approach focuses attention on upholding the rights of those displaced and has been (albeit unevenly) incorporated into humanitarian response. Disaster risk reduction brings in the needed perspective of measures to prevent displacement in the first place and to mitigate the worst effects of environmental hazards. Applying a climate justice lens to environmental displacement puts issues of fairness and equity front and center in efforts not only to avert, mitigate and address displacement but also to redress the harms incurred by those who are displaced by disasters and climate change. A climate justice approach also directs our attention to those who cause climate change and their responsibility towards those who suffer the effects of their actions. Issues of reparations, resettling those affected by climate change, and ceding territory to environmentally displaced persons all seem like aspirational measures unlikely to advance in today’s political climate. But measures to redress injustice – whether racial injustice, gender injustice, or injustice for indigenous people and those with disabilities - are always aspirational, Progress in redressing injustice requires tenacious advocates who are not afraid to push governments and raise uncomfortable questions to those in positions of power.

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1. Note that as early as 2011, the *Foresight report* (UK 2011) found that people were moving from areas of high environmental risk to areas with even greater risk, citing the case of Bangladeshis moving from fragile coastal areas to informal settlements on the margins of large cities, such as Dhaka, where they were at even greater risk of landslides. The *Foresight* *report* also identified those who do not or cannot move – the so-called ‘trapped’ population – as being at particular risk. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)