



MIGRATION YOUTH & CHILDREN PLATFORM SUBMISSION TO THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON HUMAN RIGHTS

CALL FOR INPUT: VIEWS OF YOUTH-LED AND YOUTH-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS 75 YOUTH DECLARATION

This is a youth-led submission on behalf of the Migration Youth & Children Platform (MYCP), the Migration Constituency of Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), in consultation with global grassroots youth, youth-led organisations, networks, collectives and movements.

Introduction

MGCY is the UN General Assembly-mandated official, formal and self-organised space for children and youth (below 30 years of age) to contribute to and engage in the UN since 1992. MYCP is a space for youth to participate in high-level migration advocacy and a global network of thousands of individuals and youth-led organisations (up to 30 years old) representing all regions of the world. As youth advocates, we acknowledge that climate mobility, driven by environmental degradation and climate change, is rapidly becoming a central element of the migration and human rights discourse. We are deeply concerned by the lack of protections or human rights frameworks to protect those most affected. Through this submission, we hope to bring attention to this topic and to shed light on the urgent need for comprehensive protections and equitable solutions for those displaced due to environmental crises.

What are the challenges the world is facing now, how they will affect the future of human rights, and what future do you want for human rights?

This year, the world is witnessing unprecedented life-changing events due to climate change and environmental degradation. The fires in Canada, Greece and Hawaii, the cyclones in Vanuatu and the increase in summer temperatures across Europe are just a prelude to what is yet to come. Our survival is at stake; with each day that passes, climate change and human-driven environmental degradation threaten our survival and undermine our fundamental human rights.

With the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, people in vulnerable regions find themselves in situations where they are forced to be displaced from their homes, disrupting human mobility patterns and driving strict border regimes. This climate mobility disproportionately impacts children, youth, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups who have contributed least to global warming but stand to lose the most in its wake.

With this in mind, we must ensure that the human rights of all people are respected, including young migrants, refugees, and stateless peoples displaced by climate change and environmental degradation. While international law provides a framework for their protection, in practice, this framework falls short of meeting mass movements of people across borders. In reality, the lack of protections for climate refugees¹ is severely disturbing. We are deeply concerned that given the devastating implications of environmental disasters, there is no legal definition for a climate refugee, consequently limiting national and international legal protections for those displaced. As a result, cooperation between nations, including amendments to international conventions, has never been so critical and vital in finding equitable solutions and upholding the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of legal status, as they seek refuge from environmental and economic crises, not of their own making.

¹ Persons displaced across an international border as a result of environmental disaster/climate change

So, when we are asked what future we want for human rights? We say that while the challenges are immense looking ahead, the opportunities are also great if we seize them. Only by embracing diversity and our shared humanity can nations develop managed migration programs, humanitarian corridors, and plans for relocation that balance security interests with compassion. With youth representation in human rights governance, political will and imagination, we can build a more resilient and just world where people are not left behind but rather welcomed and empowered as equal partners in progress. If we ground our actions in human rights and recognise our common fate, there need not be a clash of civilisations but rather a convergence of shared interests and responsibility for our global home. That is the future we envision and work towards, with youth and vulnerable persons at the centre.

What are your recommendations to decision and policymakers, including governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and others, to advance human rights in the future?

Decision and policymakers must recognise that climate change will exacerbate migration challenges for children and youth in the coming decades. If we look at the current trends, hundreds of millions will be displaced by rising seas and intensifying natural disasters, disproportionately impacting indigenous communities with deep cultural and spiritual connections to threatened lands and waters.

We must safeguard against framing climate migration as an economic opportunity and ensure full respect for human rights and cultural identities. For instance, indigenous youth find themselves at the intersection of many disasters whose effects threaten their history, identity, and survival. When forced to migrate from their traditional lands, Indigenous Peoples leave behind their spiritual connections and sacred sites and risk losing their traditional knowledge and languages due to this climate mobility and increased vulnerability of the community's elders. This leads to far-reaching consequences, such as the loss of their resilience and ability to adapt to environmental changes and the preservation of languages, culture and traditions.

As a result, we must pursue mitigation and adaptation strategies to bolster resilience for those most vulnerable. For instance, as we have seen in the last few years, coastal nations and small island states (SIDS) face existential crises, driving their inhabitants to migrate as climate refugees or potentially meet their demise. We must address the root drivers of environmental degradation, which are often tied to unsustainable production and consumption patterns. For instance, human-driven environmental disasters could be prevented by having comprehensive guarantees of Indigenous collective identities, traditional lands, and knowledge, which, by being placed at the centre of policies and decision-making, would prioritise the protection of their rights fundamental rights with all of their components, which in turn would prevent the root events leading to human-driven environmental degradation.



The advancement of human rights must include the people on the front lines, which include children & youth. Youth can lead - through collaboration, innovation and adequate funding, young people can make strides towards the advancement of human society and the protection of human rights and the planet. The Migration Youth Forum is the flagship initiative and an official youth preparatory space for the GFMD Summits, implemented in 2018. This international event has successfully built the capacity of young leaders to advocate for migration issues and raise awareness of their rights. Furthermore, MYCP has previously demonstrated the tremendous potential impact of the Youth Innovation Award model – a global contest empowering young leaders to drive innovative solutions for migration challenges. The inaugural Youth Leadership and Innovation Award for Migration (YLIA), organised as part of youth engagement in the 2021 Global Forum for Migration and Development Summit, awarded cash prizes totalling \$33,000 and mentorship support to three winning youth initiatives. The programme was designed to provide visibility and tangible support to young innovators. This is just one example of a multitude in which young people can bring change if empowered, listened to, and given the chance.

