

CBM AUSTRALIA POLICY NOTES

Climate-induced forced displacement

The CBMA policy note provides a **high level overview** of our **understanding and policy position** on relevant topics, and outlines our **engagement with these areas** in conjunction with our partners and other areas of the organisation.

Definitions

'Forced displacement' occurs when **individuals and groups are driven to flee** by factors such as force, compulsion, or coercion. The defining characteristic of forced displacement is **"the absence of will or consent"**.ⁱ Common causes of forced displacement are violence, conflict, persecution, and natural or man-made disasters. **People with disabilities are among those most vulnerable to and disproportionately impacted by forced displacement**, with forced displacement processes having the capacity to create or worsen existing disabilities.

'Climate-induced forced displacement' is increasing and is manifested in various ways. **Climate change can be a direct driver of disasters, for example, however it can also lead to forced displacement through its consequences**, such as socioeconomic deprivation or human rights violations. This is particularly relevant for **climate-induced conflicts that stem from climate-induced disasters** that can manifest in the depletion of and reduced access to resources such as food, land, and water.ⁱⁱ Examples of drivers of climate-induced forced displacement are depletion of natural resources used for subsistence or income generation, and extreme weather events such as flooding, cyclones, and hurricanes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Background

There is a **high prevalence of displacement in the regions of world most heavily impacted by climate change**, with 84 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing from highly climate-vulnerable countries in 2022.^{iv} In the same year, nearly one million people were displaced by drought and the threat of famine in Somalia, cyclones affected tens of thousands of people in Mozambique who were already displaced by violence, and frequent hurricanes in Honduras drove displacement.^v **People with disabilities**, who experience higher rates of poverty and inadequate housing, are **more likely to be displaced by disasters due to heightened exposure and vulnerability to environmental hazards**, however their ability to migrate from these conditions is constrained.^{vi}

Climate-induced disasters contribute heavily to forced displacement. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that **in 2021 one displacement per second occurred due to extreme weather events.**^{vii} Most people displaced in this context are likely to be internally displaced, however cross-border migration can also occur.^{viii} Events such as **floods, cyclone, and tsunamis are all examples of extreme climate-related events that directly trigger forced displacement**, however slow onset events like sea level rise and desertification are also drivers of displacement.

Terms such as **'forced environmental migration'** have been used to describe the **movement of people away from regions significantly affected by climate change** – often to other areas within their own country – as an **adaptation strategy**. This can be understood as a **form of displacement** in that the decision to move is a result of climate change. For **people with disabilities**, however, they are not as easily able to flee and are **more likely to remain trapped in dangerous environments.**^{ix}

Climate-induced conflict is a key – yet perhaps more complex – driver of displacement. **One way that climate change leads to conflict is competition over shrinking resources stemming from environmental degradation.**^x In 2022, intercommunal violence erupted in the north of Cameroon over dwindling water resources leading to tens of thousands fleeing.^{xi} Another way that **resource depletion can lead to conflict is by contributing to the conditions for political unrest**. While not primarily a climate-induced conflict, analysis of the civil uprising in Syria in 2011 notes that the region experienced record drought from 2007 to 2010, leading to massive crop failure and resultant unemployment. As many as 10.5 million people were displaced to urban centres, contributing to the social environment for political unrest.^{xii}

Climate refugees and international law

People displaced by climate change are increasingly referred to as **'climate refugees'** yet this term is **not officially recognised in international law**. Displacement solely in the context of climate change is not covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention. For those who cross international borders to escape conflict induced by the effects of climate change, the Convention can be applied due to requiring protection from conflict or persecution. **For the many individuals fleeing climate-related disasters who are displaced internally**, however, they are currently **unprotected by international law**.

CBM Australia's position on climate-induced forced displacement

CBM Australia (CBMA) is **committed to addressing the impacts of climate change on people with disabilities** in countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The

IDMC has stated that **inhabitants of developing island states in the Pacific are some of the populations most at risk** of disaster-induced displacement.^{xiii} In its [submission](#) to the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (IDEARS) which is set to be released in 2024, **CBMA calls for climate change and humanitarian strategies to be inclusive of people with disabilities**, with a strong emphasis of meaningful inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation planning. This will become increasingly important as the impacts of climate change grow.

CBMA supports a **'twin-track approach' to humanitarian action** which involves mainstreaming disability inclusion alongside disability-specific programming that directly benefits people with disabilities.^{xiv} **An increase in inclusive data** is crucial to this process so that people with disabilities are counted and no longer left behind due to programming which is not accessible for people with disability.

To facilitate this, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, released in 2019, are an important mechanism for agencies to **develop humanitarian programs that involve people with disability in both the design and implementation process**.^{xv} The Guidelines also relate to **displaced people with disabilities, who often face barriers to accessing shelter and evacuation centres and WASH facilities**.

CBM Australia engagement

CBMA's approach to climate change adaptation embraces **building community resilience to disasters and disruptions**. This resilience relates to **sustainable climate-proof livelihoods, risk reduction measures and preparing for humanitarian response**. As people with disabilities are often left behind, our programs ensure that those most at risk and their organisations, are included in these programmatic aspects. **Disaster Risk Management** brings together all of these humanitarian programming aspects and is applied in our work in Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Philippines.

In an advocacy capacity, CBMA has released a [paper](#) on inclusive humanitarian policy and its IDEARS submission outlining its stance on the topics of climate change and inclusive humanitarian action. **People with disabilities have long been ignored in international climate negotiations and domestic climate policies**.^{xvi} CBMA will engage in national advocacy efforts and provide support to CBM Global's advocacy on climate change to encourage more inclusive responses.

Annex: Associated resources

Bloomberg – [What People With Disabilities Know About Surviving Climate Disasters](#)

- This article provides an in depth look at the **exclusion of people with disabilities from emergency planning**. While it largely focuses on the United States, it includes important insights from global best practice for disability-inclusive disaster planning and why people with disabilities face greater risk of displacement.

CBM Australia – [CBM Australia’s International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy \(IDEARS\) submission](#)

- This submission details **CBMA’s recommendation to the Australian government on climate change and humanitarian response** in addition to other detailed recommendations to improve disability equity in international development.

Centre for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD) – [Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative](#)

- This briefing paper looks at the **link between climate change and displacement and migration** and proposes a rights-based legal protocol under the UNFCCC for climate-induced migrants.

Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) – [Climate change, conflict and displacement](#)

- This edition of Humanitarian Exchange provides an in-depth look at the relationship between climate change, conflict, and displacement across different crisis settings.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) – [Disability, disasters and displacement](#)

- This briefing paper presents the **current knowledge on how people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by disasters** and calls for data disaggregated by disability to improve the inclusivity of humanitarian responses.

[Disaster Displacement in Asia and the Pacific](#)

- This report aims to **fill the gaps in understanding the scope of displacement in Asia and the Pacific**. It presents trends in disaster placement, social and economic impacts, and encourages for further investment to be made in DRR and durable solutions.

[Displacement, Disasters and Climate Change](#)

- This page provides a brief **overview of IDMC's work in disaster displacement**. It includes links to the organisation's key publications in the area and a global overview of IDPs by disaster.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – [Climate change and conflict: Impact on displacement](#)

- This page provides an **overview of the combined effects of climate change, environment, and conflict**. It looks at patterns of displacement in response to climate change the need for greater investment in disaster prevention.

United Nations Climate Change – [Conflict and Climate Change](#)

- This page provides an overview into the **interaction between climate change and conflict**, including how climate change impacts more vulnerable regions, its links to increasing displacement, and resource depletion.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) –

[Climate change and displacement: the myths and the facts](#)

- This article provides an **overview of five major misconceptions in relation to climate change displacement**, including the idea of "climate refugees" and what classifies as "climate-related displacement."

[Disability, Displacement and Climate Change](#)

- This joint publication by UNHCR, IDMC, and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) outlines the **risks faced by people with disabilities before, during, and after displacement processes have occurred**, as well as disability-inclusive approaches to mitigate displacement risks.

¹ UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (2007), [Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons](#).

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- ii CPRD (Centre for Participatory Research and Development) (2015), [*Climate Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative*](#).
- iii EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum) (2023), [*Asylum Report 2023*](#).
- iv UNHCR (2023), [*Climate Change and Disaster Displacement*](#).
- v UNHCR (2022), [*UNHCR's Grandi urges world leaders not to forget displaced people at COP27*](#).
- vi UNHCR, IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre) & IDA (International Disability Alliance) (2021), [*Disability, Displacement and Climate Change*](#).
- vii United Nations Climate Change (2022), [*Conflict and Climate Change*](#).
- viii IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent) (2021), [*Displacement and climate: Key terms*](#).
- ix ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) (2021), [*Climate change and conflict: Impact on displacement*](#).
- x CPRD (2015), [*Climate Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative*](#).
- xi UNHCR (2022), [*UNHCR's Grandi urges world leaders not to forget displaced people at COP27*](#).
- xii CPRD (2015), [*Climate Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative*](#).
- xiii IDMC (2022), [*Disaster Displacement in Asia and the Pacific*](#).
- xiv CBM Australia (2023), [*Disability equity within humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery*](#).
- xv IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) (2019), [*IASC Guidelines, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2019*](#).
- xvi Bloomberg (2023), [*What People With Disabilities Know About Surviving Climate Disasters*](#).