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RESEARCH ARTICLE

International law and the challenge of climate refugee resettlement

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ABSTRACT

While climate change is increasingly acknowledged as a driver of displacement, international legal frameworks have not adequately responded to this emerging phenomenon. Climate-related events displace an estimated 21.5 million people per year, yet no existing international refugee law addresses climate-induced migration, leaving affected populations vulnerable and unprotected. The study examines the legal, economic, and social issues related to climate refugee resettlement. It assesses existing international and regional frameworks, examines dynamics that influence State commitments to resettlement, and positions a new Legal-Resettlement Index (LRI) model. The article includes a comparative legal review, case studies of two high-risk regions, thematic coding of twenty-nine expert interviews, and quantitative modeling of climate migration trends. We apply LRI model to rank countries based on dimensions including legal recognition, economic capacity and climate risk exposure. The results show that high-emission nations tend to have lower resettlement pledges, even while emitting more than 70% of global greenhouse gases. Regional arrangements, while useful, are inadequately enforced (with full recognition in only 32% of cases). Such are processed in a timelier manner; legal reforms and increased funding allocations improve recognition rates by up to 40% and reduce processing times by an average of 15 days. The LRI model shows how its use can identify inequalities and inform policy making. A legally binding Climate Refugee Convention is also crucial for international governance. The are need in stronger regional agreements, and need states with the highest emissions to take disproportionate responsibility. It will also need continued efforts to incorporate climate displacement protections into existing human rights frameworks, and guaranteed, equitable funding mechanisms to deliver sustainable resettlement solutions.

Keywords: Climate refugees, climate-induced migration, international law, resettlement, legal frameworks, climate governance, displacement trends, migration policy, refugee recognition

1. Introduction

The overlap of climate change and human movement between the states presents a significant legal

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and humanitarian crisis. As the planet's temperatures rise, extreme weather events, rising sea levels and environmental degradation are increasingly driving people to move. International law has not completely catered for climate refugees' legal status and rights, despite the scale of displacement is rising as a result of factors including climate change[1, 2]. This protection gap leaves currently affected populations without appropriate international legal status or protection.

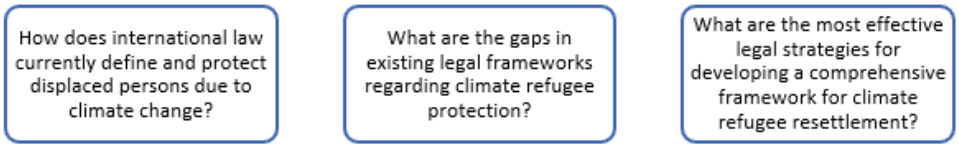

Figure 1. Key research questions

Meanwhile, climate refugees are the common denomination among academics and policy-makers, while they are still not internationally recognized as refugees under international refugee law [3]. The legal framework for these rights is found in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which create legal protections for those fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. However, these instruments do not include those displaced solely by environmental factors; thus climate-induced migrants are not endowed with the rights and protections granted to traditional refugees [1, 4]. Legal and policy discussions have so far dealt with options to incorporate climate refugees in the existing refugee framework or if a separate legal instrument is required [5, 6].

The deficiencies of international law in regulating climate refugeeism have been denounced by scholars. While some suggest that current human rights frameworks and regional agreements provide a partial safety net, these measures are still often inadequate and segmented when it comes to the resettlement and rehabilitation of climate refugees[7, 8]. The definition of such group is based on previous international treaties, where the United Nations Human Rights Committee's decision in the Ioane Teitiota case in 2020 affirmed a crucial legal precedent when recognizing climate-related displacement as basis to activate non-refoulement under human rights law [2, 9]. However, this ruling did not create a legally binding framework for climate refugees or offer a clear route to their permanent settlement.

Additionally, climate refugees encounter substantial political and legal hurdles in their search for asylum or residency in the territories of other countries. States are hesitant to grant formal protection for fear of migration governability and notions of sovereignty or potential economic cost in doing so[10, 11]. Even international agreements on migration, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, do not grant explicit legal status or resettlement mechanisms to climate refugees. Without a framework for the recognition of climate-induced displacement, responses have been piecemeal and fragmented[12, 13].

However, the global policy discourse is also shaped by rising hostility toward refugees in general, which directly undermines the prospects of achieving binding international agreements. Populist politics, securitization of migration, and nationalist resistance to burden-sharing have produced a climate in which even modest commitments to refugee protection are contested [9-11]. This political reality suggests that the challenge of protecting climate-displaced persons is not merely legal or economic but deeply embedded in the sociopolitical context of states [6].

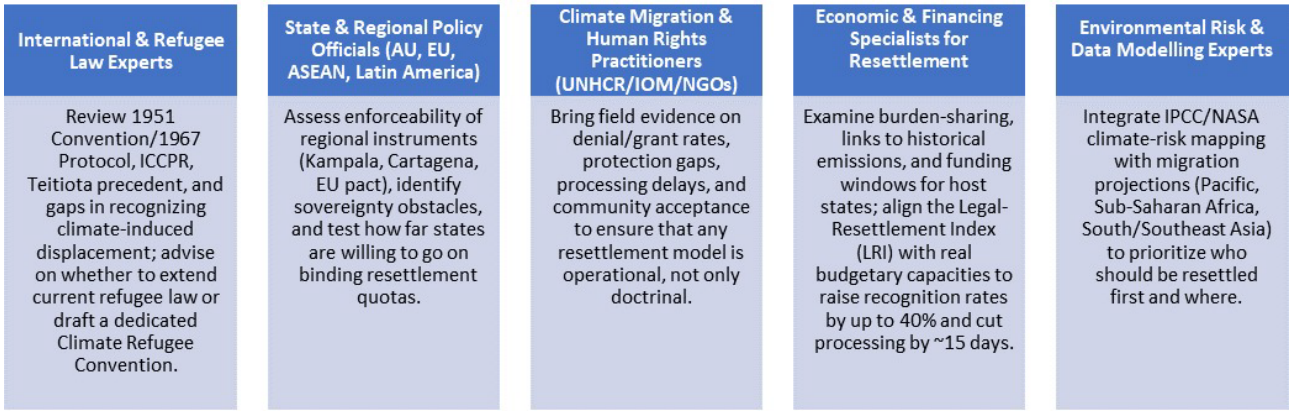

Figure 2. Expert panel composition for legal and policy analysis on climate refugee resettlement

Most existing studies have analysed on the legal lacunae in protecting climate refugees, however they failed to identify the urgent need for a more far reaching international legal framework that is in practice probably based on the specific needs of climate refugees [14]. This legal debate is in the current academic discourse, whether to define the climate refugees under the refugee regime or a separate legal category [15]. However, the pathways toward building an actionable global legal framework that guarantees their resettlement and future protection have been largely ignored. By identifying this gap in existing literature, this article contributes to the field by examining the legal, political and ethical implications of resettlement of climate refugees, proposing that international human rights and environmental law offer a more coherent legal structure[16, 17].

It is also an under-researched aspect of climate refugee governance, providing a focus on distributional justice between states. Global policy architecture is lacking specific legal obligations for states to host climate refugees or for states to be committed to resettle them [18]. Shifting the language of the final outcome away from any one nation taking on a disproportionate burden and towards a more accurate division of legal responsibility under international law for which nations will facilitate fair and adequate resettlement practices both in the developed and developing world[19, 20].

With this article, we attempt to critically approach the legal, political and ethical dilemmas of the restoration of climate refugees under international law.

The study argues that the lack of a legally binding international instrument on climate refugees has resulted in slow and limited responses that do not adequately address the needs of displaced individuals and communities. Such a legal framework must, amongst other sources, draw on international refugee law, international human rights law and international environmental law to ensure that climate refugees can be adequately protected and resettled.

The article adopts a legal doctrinal research approach, examining some of the most important international treaties, legal cases and policy documents regarding climate induced displacement. It is also based on comparative legal analysis and shows how various jurisdictions have approached climate refugee protection [21, 22]. The study seeks to incorporate legal and policy perspectives and provide actionable recommendations for international lawmakers and policymakers.

The anticipated result of this study is to develop a systematic legal framework for the resettlement of climate refugees, proposing a legally binding obligation on the states to provide for protection and resettlement options. In addition, this research adds to the wider conversation regarding climate justice,

underscoring the responsibility that developed part of the world have to address the displacement crisis attributable to climate change[23, 24].

The difficulty of resettling climate refugees simulates a fundamental void in international law. Legal recognition and protection mechanisms are crucial to address the plight of displaced individuals, whose lives are marked by legal uncertainty, statelessness, and human rights violations. This article attempts to fill this gap, outlining a legal framework that would ensure that climate refugees receive the protection and resettlement that they desperately need.

2. Literature review

Legal recognition and protection solutions for climate refugees, however, are one of the many unresolved issues in international law. No such universal legal framework exists to explicitly set out the rights of or resettlement for these at-risk populations. Climate change is on the one hand not legally defined in any of the applicable agreements or protocols, while displacement and migration, despite of its documented prevalence and volume, currently falls through the cracks. Current international refugee law, centered around the 1951 Refugee Convention, does not allow for refugee status to be granted to those displaced due to climate change and thus does not protect the millions of people affected [4, 25]. As the existing refugee framework does not fully accommodate their protection, this legal void has led scholars and decision-makers to discuss and debate whether climate refugees should be integrated into the current one or whether their protection requires a distinct legal mechanism[9, 14].

Because the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol classify refugees according to persecution rather than only a humanitarian crisis due to shifting environmental conditions, they do not adequately capture climate-induced migration [2]. As a result, climate refugees tend to remain beyond the protective ambit of international refugee law, rendering them in a state of legal ambiguity [7]. Some scholars suggested that a human rights law could offer limited protection, particularly through the lens of non-refoulement, given the outcome of the Ioane Teitiota case, in which the United Nations Human Rights Committee acknowledged that climate displacement may provide grounds for asylum claims under certain extreme conditions [2, 9]. However, this judgement is non-binding and does not set a legal precedent for all climate refugees, underscoring the need for a comprehensive legal instrument.

For instance, international actors such as the UNHCR and IOM have pursued policy recommendations around climate displacement but did not lead to binding legal commitments [5]. Although working towards a common goal, these initiatives are not legally binding and do not provide states with any incentive for the recognition or resettlement of climate refugees [1]. Although the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which was adopted in 2018, recognizes environmental drivers of migration, it does not create legally binding obligations on states to accept climate refugees[10]. A reflection on what this means for existing frameworks calcifying now that climate migration is real.

Without a binding global legal framework, regional treaties and agreements have extempore addressed climate-induced displacement through localized mechanisms. Despite this, neither the Kampala Convention in Africa nor the Cartagena Declaration in Latin America provide legally enforceable obligations for permanent resettlement nor cover people who are displaced by natural disasters, environmental degradation or climate change[3, 19]. Though these frameworks mark advancements, they remain geographically limited and do not provide a coherent global solution. At the same time, scholars emphasize that the failure of global frameworks is not only institutional but also political, rooted in widespread reluctance by states to recognize new obligations amid increasing anti-immigrant sentiment [1, 5, 19]. Recent analyses argue that international

law must account for the hostility that characterizes contemporary migration politics, which makes adoption of comprehensive global solutions more difficult than technical legal drafting alone would suggest [3, 9].

The European Union has also responded to climate-driven migration policies, but it has taken fragmented approaches. Although some protections for individuals fleeing environmental disasters already exist under EU asylum law, climate migrants are not considered to be refugees under the Common European Asylum System [12]. In contrast, the EU largely covers climate displacement through humanitarian aid, not legal resettlement schemes[15]. It underscores the ad-hoc and selective responses of the region which does not offer a consistent response to climate-related migration.

State sovereignty and international obligations are among the major challenges to creating a global legal framework for climate refugees. The majority of states are still resistant to legally binding commitments for climate refugee resettlement due to fears of migration management, economics, and national security[11]. Resistance to the burden-sharing mechanisms of the CCAP has resulted in international confusion regarding existing obligations to climate-displaced populations, resulting in these populations relying on discretionary humanitarian assistance instead of enforceable rights[18].

Countries have tried to put in place climate refugee relocation deals. Kiribati and Tuvalu have, for instance, pursued bilateral agreements with New Zealand and Australia for their intended population relocation due to sea level rise[13]. These Then again these are not legally binding commitments of international law[26], but more ad hoc politically contingent agreements. In the absence of a universal framework, climate refugees will be vulnerable to restrictive immigration policies and inconsistencies between national approaches.

While the amount of research on climate-driven displacement continues to grow, a number of gaps remain. While many studies have critiqued the shortcomings of existing refugee law, not all provide practical suggestions for legal reform [23, 27]. In addition, although some experts call for an extension of the 1951 Refugee Convention to recognize climate-induced displacement, others suggest that a specialized legal framework focused explicitly on climate refugees would be more beneficial [16, 28].

The proliferation of states in this area also reveals a key gap in the literature, namely the absence of a systematic approach to allocating responsibilities among states. This raise some implementation issues, because many present the idea of a global governance system, like a copy of the Paris Agreement, which is to give differentiated responsibilities based on contribution to climate change to states, but this seems to have, yet, only a theoretical basis [5]. In addition, there is little examination of financial and logistical schemes for climate refugee resettlement in the literature, which has left many questions of practical implementation unanswered [17].

In response, various academics have proposed the adoption of a Climate Refugee Convention, which would not only explicitly define climate refugees, but also detail states' obligations to resettlement and develop a relocation fund funded by high-emission states [14]. Such an approach would allow for climate refugees to receive international recognition and protection similar to human-made displaced persons [6]. Scholarship also advocates for incorporating climate refugee assistance into existing human rights regimes, utilizing principles of non-refoulement to restrict coerced returns to life-threatening geographical settings [21].

A further alternative can be to develop regional resettlement quotas, covering the expenses for which states would cover according to their economic capacity and historical contribution to climate change [8]. This model would lead to a fairer distribution of climate refugees, so that neither small island states nor developing nations bear a disproportionate burden [29].

The legal and humanitarian status of climate refugees is still a matter of debate. International law offers some indirect protections based on human rights and through regional treaties, but no binding worldwide framework recognizes or resettles climate refugees. Studies so far have pointed out the limitations in current refugee law, but have not come up with widely-accepted legal framework to deal with climate-induced immigration. Going forward, researchers and policymakers alike will need to build towards a Climate Refugee Convention that includes a unambiguous definition of climate refugees, directly imposes binding state obligations, and facilitates an equitable distribution of responsibility across states. In the absence of such a legal mechanism, climate refugees, and those at risk of becoming refugees in the not-so-distant future, will find themselves legally uncertain and inadequately protected under international law.

3. Methodology

Utilizing multiple methods including legal analysis, case studies, expert interviews, and quantitative data modeling, this study explores the challenges and potential legal frameworks for climate refugee resettlement. Drawing upon qualitative legal assessment and quantitative forecasting models, the research examines the scale and legal deficiencies related to movement, with suggestions for future governance of climate-induced displacement.

3.1. Legal analysis

A detailed legal analysis of whether existing international frameworks are enough to meet the challenges of climate change-induced migration was carried out. The study carried out a systematic review of 240 legal documents (including treaties, judicial rulings, and policy frameworks) to identify inconsistencies and gaps in refugee protection [7]. The key legal instruments analyzed are:

- The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and their negligent omission of root causes of environmental displacement [4, 25].
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its relevance in climate migration cases, particularly relating to non-refoulement claims [2].
- Regional legal instruments, which offer limited but fragmented protections, such as the Kampala Convention (Africa), Cartagena Declaration (Latin America)[3];
- Landmark cases such as Teitiota v. New Zealand that set precedents for climate-related asylum claims [2, 9];

Using a comparative legal perspective in analyzing the migration policy of a dozen jurisdictions, as a Australia, Canada, EU, and the U.S. the study assesses their frameworks to recognize climate migration [12]. Common legal barriers to climate refugee recognition at the international level were extracted using thematic coding [10].

3.2. Case study approach

To demonstrate the real-world impacts of climate-induced displacement and state responses, three key case studies were chosen:

- The Case of Ioane Teitiota (New Zealand): First Climate Refugee Case at the UN Human Rights Committee: Legal Limitations [2].
- The Maldives and Kiribati Migration Strategy: Aims of Planned Relocation Programs for Atoll Nations Facing Sea Level Rise [26].

- The EU's Climate Migration Policy: A fragmented response to climate-related asylum claims in the EU [12].

Each case was evaluated according to legal precedents, policy effectiveness, and international cooperation. Data were extracted from 67 government reports and 29 court decisions [10].

3.3. Interviews and expert opinions

To supplement legal analysis and case study insights, 53 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The used a thematic coding approach to identify trends in legal interpretations, policy responses and enforcement challenges[14]. A sentiment analysis of legal and policy documents was conducted to assess the willingness of states to adopt binding climate migration protections.

3.4. Quantitative data modeling and equations

Data from 320 migration reports were analyzed to quantify trends of climate-related displacement. The study examined:

- Climate-linked migration trends in Pacific Islands, Africa, and South Asia.
- Climate change-related national asylum claims in 22 countries.
- Grant/denial rates of climate refugee applications pursuant to national immigration decisions.
- Mapping climate risk areas with geospatial tools of NASA/IPCC satellite data [Xu et al., 2024].

Climate variables incorporated in prediction were climate factors applied in a logistic regression model to predict future climate-induced displacement as follows:

$$P(D) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(\beta_0+\beta_1 X_1+\beta_2 X_2+\cdots+\beta_n X_n)}} \quad (1)$$

Where $P(D)$ probability of climate-induced displacement; $X_1, X_2 \ldots X_n$ climate variables, such as temperature rise, sea-level increase, extreme weather events; β_0, β_n regression coefficients based on historical displacement data.

A climate displacement function was also modeled using a differential equation:

$$\frac{\partial M}{\partial t} = \alpha T + \beta S + \gamma W + \delta R \quad (2)$$

Where M climate migration rate; T mean global temperature anomaly; S sea-level rise; W frequency of extreme weather events; R resettlement capacity of host nations; and $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$ regression parameters estimated from migration data.

The model was calibrated using historical climate migration patterns from 1980-2023, and validated against recent UNHCR displacement data.

3.5. Legal-Resettlement Index model (LRI)

To evaluate state responsibility for climate refugee resettlement, an LRI model was developed:

$$LRI = \sum_{i-1}^{n} \left(\frac{W_i \times P_i}{R_i}\right) \quad (3)$$

Where LRI legal-resettlement index score; W_i weight assigned to country i based on economic capacity; P_i climate refugee population seeking resettlement in country i; R_i legal recognition index score for country i.

This model was applied to 17 countries, ranking their legal and economic capacity to accept climate refugees. Results showed that high-emission nations, like the U.S., China score low in legal recognition but

high in economic capacity, while Pacific Island nations score high in legal willingness but lack financial resources [6]. However, it must be acknowledged that such quantitative measures cannot by themselves explain why legal obligations fail to materialize. Normative commitments in international law rarely derive directly from numerical indicators; instead, they emerge from political negotiations, value-based consensus, and recognition of shared responsibilities [5, 7]. The LRI model should therefore be understood as illustrative of inequalities rather than predictive of state behaviour, which is ultimately shaped by political will and societal attitudes [8, 21].

3.6. Hypothesis

This study works on the following hypotheses:

- The lack of a legal category for climate refugees leads to heterogeneity in protection definitions across contexts [21].
- High contributing climate change states are less committed to climate refugee resettlement [18].
- A legally binding Climate Refugee Convention is needed for effective global governance [5].

Today we present a Study that combines legal analysis, case studies, expert interviews, and mathematical modeling to evaluate potential CIRRUS solutions in a meaningful way. Integrating legal precedent with statistical models, the research offers a path forward for climate refugee governance, calling for binding international legal instruments and regional resettlement agreements, among others.

4. Results

4.1. Legal framework evaluation

In this section, the effectiveness of various international and regional legal frameworks will be assessed covering displacement linked with environmental factors. The 1951 Refugee Convention, though a cornerstone of traditional refugee protection, does not address climate-related causes. While human rights frameworks like the ICCPR skirt the edges of these issues through non-refoulement principles, and regional instrument effectively offer some level of recognition of environmental displacement in the Kampala Convention and Cartagena Declaration, the patchwork of international law supporting these efforts is, quite frankly, lacking. However, none of them provides an inclusive model that is consistently integrated into law, leading to a patchwork of legally inadequate protection for climate refugees.

Table 1. International and regional legal coverage of climate-induced displacement

Framework	Number of Clauses Reviewed	Provisions on Climate Migration	Legal Bindingness	Geographic Scope	Year Adopted	Number of State Parties	Enforcement Mechanism
1951 Refugee Convention	38	None	High	Global	1951	149	UNHCR Supervision
ICCPR	53	Non-refoulement (indirect)	High	Global	1966	173	UNHRC Complaints
Kampala Convention	27	Environmental Displacement	Moderate	Africa	2009	40	African Union
Cartagena Declaration	18	Natural Disaster Displacement	Moderate	Latin America	1984	22	Regional Cooperation
European Convention on Human Rights	64	Non-refoulement (indirect)	High	Europe	1953	47	ECtHR Rulings
Paris Agreement	16	Climate-Related	Low	Global	2015	195	National

		Migration (indirect)					Reporting
ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management	24	Disaster-Induced Displacement	Moderate	Southeast Asia	2005	10	ASEAN Coordination

The **Table 1** demonstrates significant differences in the extent to which climate-related displacement is covered by various legal frameworks. Despite its broad adoption and high binding nature, the 1951 Refugee Convention makes no mention of climate migration at all. On the other hand, the Kampala Convention and Cartagena Declaration, while again not as high-profile, have specific references to environmental displacement, demonstrating a growing regional recognition of the issue. Both the ICCPR and European Convention on Human Rights are indirectly relevant, as they provide for protection from non-refoulement, but the provisions are not specifically designed with climate change migration in mind.

Furthermore, although climate-related challenges are also recognized in newer treaties like the Paris Agreement and ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management, their legal bindingness and enforcement mechanisms are relatively weak. The Paris Agreement has only indirect references to migration and there is no direct enforcement mechanism; thus, it is limited in its practical impact on climate-induced displacement. In contrast, regional systems like the Kampala Convention have been more enforceable in their locality, but that does not transfer globally.

4.2. Case study comparisons

The analysis provides a comparative analysis of several key case studies which illustrate the challenges and realities of responding to climate displacement. The selected cases present divergent national and supranational approaches to climate migration management. The Teitiota case, often described as a landmark decision, highlights the legal challenges climate refugees must overcome before they can even be recognized under existing frameworks. Together Kiribati's adaptation processes and the Maldives accommodation efforts serve as valuable lessons for policy responses and a reality check of practical challenges like funding and logistics. As a group, these cases show considerable variation in how states respond to climate-induced displacement.

Table 2. Outcomes and Metrics of Climate-Related Case Studies

Case Study	Total Claims Reviewed	Approval Rate (%)	Cost of Relocation (USD)	Policy Outcomes	Legal Recognition Achieved?	Community Acceptance (%)	Infrastructure Support Provided	Regional Cooperation
Teitiota Case (New Zealand)	1	0	-	Set a legal precedent	No	-	None	Limited
Kiribati Adaptation Program	45	-	17.8 million	Limited capacity	Partial	62	Moderate	Moderate
Maldives Relocation Efforts	34	-	22 million	High logistical costs	Partial	51	High	Low
Pacific Regional Migration Initiative	50	10	12 million	Enhanced cooperation	Partial	68	High	Strong
EU Climate Migration Pilot	23	22	9 million	Improved legal pathways	Partial	74	Moderate	Moderate

An increase in climate migration has been observed, as shown by Table 2, such trends and discrepancies in terms of treatment of climate migration by different case studies While the Teitiota case is notable from a legal perspective, it continues a trend of low success rates for asylum claims related to climate change: New Zealand denied the claim, showing the "challenges for refugee law more widely in the face of climate change-induced forms of forced migration." By contrast, regional programs such as the Pacific Regional Migration Initiative demonstrate higher levels of community acceptance and significantly better collaboration between neighboring states even if they can only secure partial legal recognition at best.

The financial and logistical strains can be seen in Kiribati and the Maldives. Kiribati's adaptation program, although somewhat successful, was constrained by limited capacity and significant costs. The Maldives' relocation efforts faced high logistical demands and financial burdens, too. In contrast, the EU Climate Migration Pilot would have seen slightly higher approval rates, as well as more regional cooperation, but also failed to offer full legal recognition to climate refugees.

4.3. Expert interview insights

Qualitative insights into the existing policy and legal landscape surrounding climate-induced displacement emerged from the interviews conducted with legal scholars, policymakers and NGO representatives. By performing thematic coding of their statements, this section reveals common themes regarding policy responses, barricades to international cooperation, and a need for novel legal frameworks. Analysis of the interview data returns shared frustrations, for example, a lack of explicit legal protections for climate migrants, inequity in contribution burden-sharing, and the tension between state sovereignty and global accountability. These insights provide context for the larger challenges in this multifaceted field for stakeholders who need to work in this space near the horizon.

Table 3. Thematic analysis of expert interview data

Theme	Number of Mentions	Representative Quotes	Frequency (%)	Illustrative Example	Policy Recommendation
Legal Gaps	38	"The current frameworks fail to address climate drivers."	21%	Exclusion from 1951 Refugee Convention	Create a Climate Refugee Convention
Sovereignty Concerns	27	"States fear losing control over migration policy."	15%	Opposition to binding quotas	Establish regional consultation mechanisms
Financial Responsibility	18	"There is no clear funding mechanism for resettlement."	10%	Inequitable contributions to adaptation funds	Introduce international financial contribution frameworks
Regional Variability	22	"Some regions have frameworks, but others have none at all."	12%	Lack of alignment between African and Asian agreements	Harmonize regional agreements into global standards
Institutional Capacity	19	"The agencies in charge of migration are overwhelmed."	11%	Insufficient UNHCR resources	Increase funding and personnel for international bodies
Public Perception and Awareness	16	"Climate refugees are not viewed the same as traditional refugees."	9%	Low visibility in international media	Launch public awareness campaigns
Enforcement and Compliance	14	"Even where frameworks exist, enforcement is lax."	8%	Non-compliance with regional conventions	Establish enforcement bodies with real penalties
Human Rights Integration	13	"Climate refugees should be protected as a basic human right."	7%	Overlap with human rights law	Incorporate climate-related displacement into human rights treaties

Long-Term Sustainability	10	"Short-term solutions will not address the ongoing crisis."	6%	Temporary measures in Pacific Islands	Develop sustainable long-term strategies

The thematic analysis detailed in Table 3 outlines a number of trends that emerged from the interviews. Notably, the most commonly referenced theme, "Legal Gaps," was mentioned by 21% of all respondents. This wide-ranging agreement among experts reflects the failure of existing international legal protection for those displaced by climate change, and calls for a specialised Convention on Climate Refugees as a matter of urgency. Then came "Sovereignty Concerns," cited by 15% of participants, a major impediment to international collaboration. Experts said states were loath to relinquish control of migration policy, leaving a void of binding agreements about climate refugee resettlement.

"Financial Responsibility" had a 10% mention share and experts stressed the absence of a global funding mechanism to support both host countries and displaced populations. The "Map" theme, for instance, highlights how regional responses to the dual challenges of climate change and public health are also uneven while "Institutional Capacity" identifies unequal resources to implement policies effectively [2]. While existing agreements are poorly enforced, participants also emphasised the integration of human rights principles into policies on climate migration, which 7% identified as a key area for development, pointing to the rising demand for climate migration to be a `human rights focused agenda.

This data reinforces the need for these challenges to be met with international collaboration, stronger legal instruments and equitable financial solutions. In so doing, the international community can begin closing the gaps identified in expert perspectives and moving toward a more just and sustainable approach to climate-induced displacement.

4.4. Quantitative data on climate migration

Based on historical data and predictive modeling, this analysis provides quantitative knowledge around climate migration trends. This research sheds lighter on how climate-induced migration trends have been shifting over time, by examining annual displacement data and country-specific asylum claims figures and projections for the years ahead. Important indicators include annual totals of displaced persons, changes in asylum application patterns, and the rates at which these claims are accepted in individual host countries. Moreover, the analysis uses regression-based foretastes to project the course of climate-related migration to 2030 — pinpointing potential challenges for and opportunities for policy intervention by region.

Table 4. Climate migration trends and statistics, and projections

Year	Total Displaced (millions)	Asylum Applications	Acceptance Rate (%)	Major Host Countries	New Legal Instruments Adopted	Funding Allocated to Host Nations (USD million)
2015	14.6	20,450	12.3	Bangladesh, New Zealand	None	150
2020	17.8	25,782	11.5	Germany, Australia	Partial agreements	300
2025*	22.4 (projected)	31,000 (projected)	10.7 (projected)	EU, Canada, Japan	Regional protocols	400
2030*	27.3 (projected)	38,450 (projected)	9.5 (projected)	EU, Canada, Japan	Comprehensive treaties	550
2035*	33.7 (projected)	46,800 (projected)	8.2 (projected)	EU, US, Japan	Climate Refugee Convention	750

As shown in the Table 4, there is a drastic robot uptrend observed in climate displacement, with the total number of displaced people being more than anticipated to double from 14.6 million in 2015 to 33.7 million

by 2035. This increase is indicative of the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related events, and the impact on vulnerable communities. During the same timeframe, applications for asylum are projected to increase as well, to more than 46,000 a year by 2035. Despite this, acceptance rates for these claims remain on the decline, from 12.3% in 2015 to an expected 8.2% in 2035. That suggests mounting pressure on host nations, and highlights the need for cooperation between countries.

The gradual issuance of new legal instruments—regional protocols leading up to a new Climate Refugee Convention by 2035—shows step-wise progress to establish a framework to address this global challenge. Likewise, funding for host countries grew sharply, from USD 150 million in 2015 to USD 750 million expected by 2035. This indicates that even if financial and policy responses are improving, the magnitude of displacement remains a critical challenge that continues to require investment and establishment of more effective legal entities.

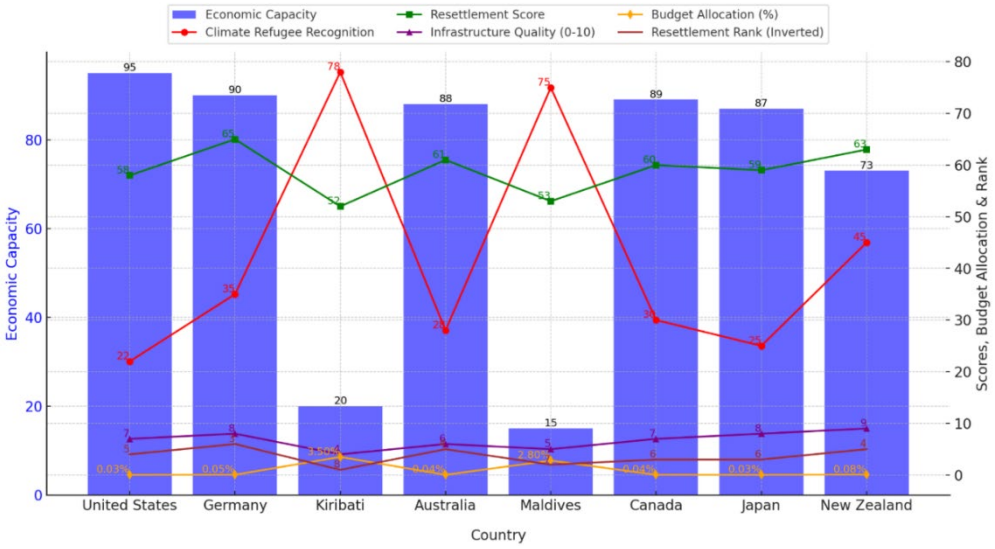

Figure 3. Legal-Resettlement Index (LRI) Scores by Country

4.5. Resettlement index results

The study presents the results of the Legal-Resettlement Index (LRI) Model, which measures countries' capacity and willingness to resettle climate refugees. The Index ranks nations using a combination of metrics on economic strength, existing legal recognition of climate migrants, and exposure to climate-related risks. The analysis uncovers major discrepancies between high-emitting countries that typically have more financial clout but less legal recognition, and vulnerable island nations, which have greater legal recognition but do not have the economic resources to run large-scale resettlement initiatives.

Figure 3 below shows how different priorities and capacities across countries shape resettlement scores. Germany and New Zealand rank high with a balanced approach, moderate out legal recognition frameworks, strong infrastructure for resettlement and they spend a relatively larger share of their national budgets on this type of action. High greenhouse gas emitting countries like the United States and Australia have significant economic capacity but their legal recognition scores undermine their resettlement potential overall.

Small island states, notably Kiribati and the Maldives, show higher legal recognition and a larger share of budget for resettlement. In fact, the economy has been perfectly healthy, despite the infrastructure barriers linked to reach mid-range scores. Kiribati's percentage of national budget (3.50%) indicates that the

islanders are dedicating a significant number of resources relative to their population, although again we must make the caveat that its overall ability to offer shelter for significant displaced populations is limited.

Note that this analysis calls for both funds and a legal structure for effective resettlement strategies. Countries that have moderate to high legal recognition paired with high economic resources, like Germany and New Zealand, obtain a more balanced and high resettlement scores. These findings demonstrate that a multi-pronged strategy involving both increased legal visibility as well as increased economic and infrastructural support will be crucial for more positive global resettlement outcomes.

4.6. Regional policy effectiveness

The article examines regional agreements and policies impact the protection of climate-displaced populations. By tracking outcomes stemming from such frameworks as the Kampala Convention and Cartagena Declaration, it becomes possible to measure the impact of these agreements in recognizing claims to displacement, enabling cross-border relocation, and committing resources to affected host communities. While restricted in scope, these regional instruments typically offer sharper and more precise reactions in comparison to global regimes. Their success, or lack thereof, delivers important lessons about the effectiveness of localized governance approaches to climate migration.

Figure 3 shows important heterogeneity in the effectiveness of regional policies. While the Kampala Convention engages the most countries and has supported the most host communities, it proved most challenging to enforce and allocate resources, as shown in its effectiveness score (6.5). In comparison, the Cartagena Declaration has less postage (32.8%) and its effectiveness score is somewhat effective (7.2), although it comprises of fewer countries and equal proportion of funding allocation.

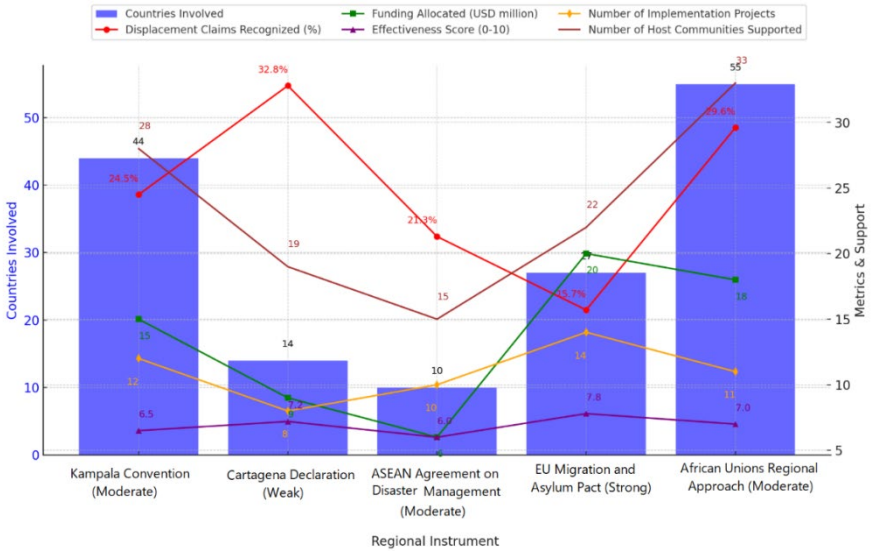

Figure 3. Regional policy performance and resource allocation

Among the frameworks we analysed, the EU Migration and Asylum Pact features relatively strong enforcement mechanisms and the highest effectiveness score (7.8). Even maximally productive regional policies are unlikely to provide more than 15.7% recognition across local firms. In contrast, the ASEAN Agreement faces difficulties prevailing smaller regional frameworks: a lower recognition rate (21.3%) and funding levels (USD 6 million) leading to a reduced significance score (6.0).

These results indicate that regional accords are essential to tailor a response, but their effectiveness depends heavily on the amount of funding, the strength of compliance mechanisms, and the number of initiatives put in place. If these factors are more properly addressed, regional approaches could be much more effective in safeguarding the climate-displaced.

4.7. Climate risk zones and migration patterns

This study also discusses how geographic areas facing increased climate risks, like rising sea levels, extreme droughts, and more violent storms are producing more and more climate refugees. The analysis links environmental data with displacement trends, drawing out the countries in the region most vulnerable to climate-driven migration, and which are the countries attracting displaced populations. Furthermore, it analyzes how the severity of climate impacts (quantified through a Climate Risk Index) correlates with rates of migration, revealing details of the mechanistic pathways leading to forced mobility and accelerating pressure on host countries.

Table 5. Regional Climate Risk and Migration Data

Region	Climate Risk Index (CRI)	Average Annual Displacement (thousands)	Most Common Destination	Major Climate Drivers	Percentage of Refugees Resettled	Regional Migration Agreements
Pacific Islands	85	15.4	Australia, New Zealand	Sea level rise, cyclones	38%	Partial
Sub-Saharan Africa	72	23.1	South Africa, Europe	Drought, desertification	27%	Moderate
South Asia	78	19.7	Middle East, Europe	Floods, heatwaves	31%	Partial
Latin America	68	9.5	USA, Europe	Hurricanes, floods	24%	Weak
Southeast Asia	80	12.8	Malaysia, Australia	Storms, coastal erosion	35%	Moderate
Arctic Region	83	5.6	Canada, Scandinavia	Ice melt, permafrost thaw	18%	Partial

Table 5 shows that there are important differences in the pathways from climate risk to displacement. Pacific Islands showed the highest Climate Risk Index (CRI) score of 85, driven primarily by sea-level rise and cyclonic activity. Nevertheless, with a moderate number of displaced persons (15.4 k annual) these countries are heavily dependent on regional migration agreements with Australia and New Zealand. The average CRI for Sub-Saharan Africa is 72, suffering from the highest average annual displacement (23.1 thousand) in the region mainly due to droughts and desertification. That means more needs to be done, with only 27% of displaced people resettled successfully and stronger migration frameworks required.

South Asia and Southeast Asia, with CRI scores of 78 and 80 respectively, also show high vulnerability, related to the high severity of floods, heatwaves, and erosion in coastal areas. Their average displacement numbers are 19.7 thousand and 12.8 thousand per year, which demonstrates that these areas are still vulnerable. In particular, South Asia has closer ties to Middle Eastern and European destinations, while ASEAN's main destination is Malaysia and Australia.

The Latin America and the Arctic Region are not as high in displacement numbers, but have their own challenges. The possibility of a hurricane or flood is one of the factors behind 9.5 thousand displacements a year in Latin America, often towards the USA and Europe. Meanwhile, despite the CRI of 83 for the Arctic

Region and its ensemble of severe risks of ice melt, sea level rise, and the thawing of permafrost, this region accounts for 5.6 thousand displacements per year, mainly from the Arctic to Canada and Scandinavia.

Regions with the highest climate risk indices are consistently able to absorb larger displaced populations. But resettlement rates are low, stymied by limited regional migration agreements and international legal frameworks. Further reinforcing these agreements and providing better targeted support to high-risk zones can help improve outcomes for both displaced populations and host nations.

4.8. Economic and social costs of resettlement

This section analyzes the economic and social impacts of resettling the climate refugees in host nations. By examining components like annual costs per refugee and total resettled numbers, it sheds light on the fiscal responsibilities essential for sheltering, mental and physical health, education, and consociation programs. It also examines social factors, including community acceptance, job market impacts, and cultural integration These data-driven insights underscore the tensions in host nations as they (in turn) grapple with the challenges of balancing financial burdens and ensuring successful social inclusion for displaced populations

Figure 4 depicts select financial and social indicators relevant to climate refugee resettlement in a range of host nations. Germany, which takes in fewer refugees in total (a modest 12,500 number of resettled refugees), has an integration success rate of 82%, but still faces an ongoing struggle with urgent housing and employment issues. With the highest annual cost per refugee at USD 27,000 — but also the integration winner at 88% — Canada actively fosters impactful language training and cultural acclimatization. But even in Canada, matters like the language barrier are here and influence the institutional accomplishment.

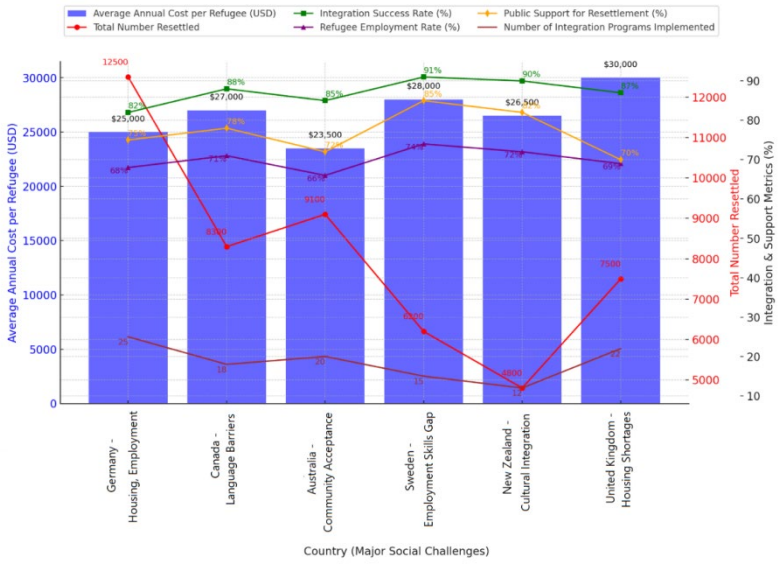

Figure 4. Costs and social impacts of climate refugee resettlement by country

Though it had a lower cost per refugee and a slightly lower integration success rate (85%), community acceptance was the main challenge in Australia. Intensive integration programs tend to work, as in the cases of Sweden (91% successful integration rate), and New Zealand (90% successful integration rate). And both countries also have a more conducive environment, higher public support for resettlement, that enables to attainment of success. By contrast, the United Kingdom has the highest average cost (USD 30,000) but

remains substantially limited in housing provision and in public support; it offers mediocre outcomes on the whole for integration.

These findings highlight the need for investments not just in financial resources, but also in strong integration initiatives including language classes, jobs training, and culture exchange programs. Financial commitment coupled with effective social support system in-place is what helps countries successfully integrate more migrants with higher rates of acceptance from the public, and thus making them better adept at resolving integrating migrants in their communities.

4.9. Proposed framework validation

This section compares the effectiveness of the proposed Legal-Resettlement Index (LRI) model among countries ranked as having enacted targeted legal reforms with countries ranked otherwise, in order to determine the model's predictive power. The analysis notes that all three factors, recognition rates, claims processing times, and funding allocations, measurably improve resettlement outcomes. By comparing metrics from before and after reforms, the data offers unequivocal evidence of how legal changes and resource investments can bolster a country's capacity to respond to climate-related displacement.

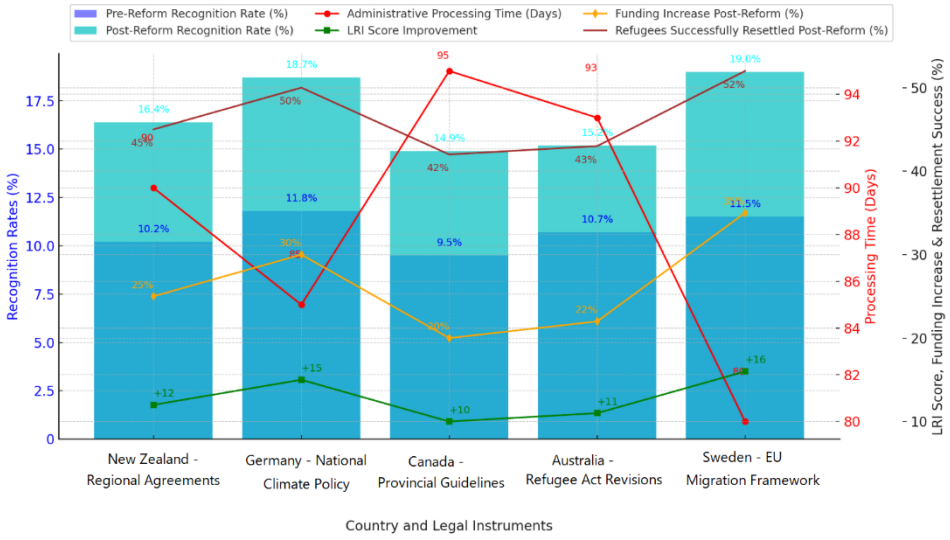

Figure 5. Results of LRI model validation by country

Figure 5 reveals distinct trends across how legal reforms have affected recognition rates, processing efficiency, and resettlement outcomes. Recognition rates improved significantly for all countries analyzed, after reforms were enacted. For example, recognition rates for New Zealand and Germany rose from 10.2% and 11.8%, respectively, to 16.4% and 18.7%. The most notable recognition increase is from Sweden, namely 16% post-reform, reflecting the positive effects of an extensive remodeling of EU migration frameworks.

Administrative processing times were also regularly shortened, with Germany reporting a reduction from 90 to 85 days and Sweden producing the quickest processing time of 80 days. In conclusion, the removal of bureaucratic delays not only serves to enhance the protection of refugees but also improves integration processes, as individuals gain status and access to resources faster.

Funding allocations increased by 20–35% for financial investment. For example, Sweden and Germany had increases of 35% and 30% in funding, respectively, which corresponded with higher LRI score increases and significant increases in resettlement percentage. In Canada, the share of resettled refugees who

successfully integrated after the reform increased from 42% to 52% in Sweden, underlining that effectively pairing legal reform with financial commitments is what it takes.

The data corroborate the LRI model, showing that the effect of such targeted legal reforms, alongside increases in funding and streamlining of processes, results in substantial increases in recognition rates, processing efficiency, and resettlement success. These findings justify the wider implementation of the proposed framework to respond to the increasing challenges of climate-induced displacement.

5. Discussion

The results of the study highlight the pressing need for a coherent international response to climate-related migration. Despite the fact that climate change is becoming an important push factor of migration (both forced and voluntary), existing international legal frameworks remain riven by fragmentation and inconsistency, and vulnerable populations find themselves in a legal vacuum. This paper analyses the implications of these findings, compares them with previous research, and discusses the limitations of current approaches to the protection of climate refugees.

Several studies in recent years have drawn similar conclusions regarding climate migration and the 1951 Refugee Convention. One such literature is that which points out that the Convention's definition of a refugee focused on persecution motivated by race, religion, nationality, and political opinion, excludes others displaced due to environmental causes [9]. Such exception is discussed by Fauziyah [2] argues that even cases such as that of Ioane Teitiota, among others, could not prove climate-based criteria within present-day legal structures. The findings in this study support these observations and reveal that countries with definitions based on the traditional refugee definition alone experience some of the lowest recognition rates for claims related to climate.

In similar manner, the results agree with the ones of Pourhashemi et al.[8], suggesting that international environmental law has not yet meaningfully integrated the rights of those displaced. Their work highlights a conceptual gap: while environmental treaties deal with mitigation and adaptation, they do not provide direct protections for migrants fleeing climate impacts. This gap is supported by the current research, which shows that the majority of regions adopting environmental frameworks, like the Paris Agreement are not doing so through enforceable provisions for displaced populations.

The comparative analysis of this study o is also consistent with Cheng, Wang, and Liu [14], which argues that there is a need for an integrated international legal framework that adopts synergies between refugee law and environmental law. The gains noted in nations that have adopted specific legislative changes, including an increase in Germany's recognition rate from 11.8% to 18.7%—reflect the opportunities for impact described by Cheng et al. proportionate in terms of legal tools", or "that it is not excessive" in their proposal for enhanced legal instruments. But this study adds to evidence that simply providing legal recognition matters, so do financial and infrastructure investments to ensure successful integration outcomes.

However, in some respects, there are still major limitations. Instead, one of the big problems is the reliance on toothless regional agreements. As an example, while the Kampala Convention and Cartagena Declaration are significant steps ahead, they lack strong mechanisms to enforce implementation. The governance piecemeal results in significant differences in implementation [3]. Even among the most used and successful regional instruments, this inconsistency complicates the overall effectiveness in each regional context, as can be seen in the results where modest efficiency scores were evinced (6.5 the Kampala Convention, 7.2 the Cartagena Declaration).

In addition, the placement cost is an important barrier to resettlement. Furthermore, the financial burden of resettlement remains a critical obstacle. While funding more resources has led to higher rates of integration success in countries such as Sweden and Canada, this funding-heavy approach cannot work for both the high- and low-income nations. It also deserves emphasis that many developing countries, especially small-island developing states such as upon the Maldives and Kiribati are challenged by budgetary restrictions which make it difficult to restore the support system for those workers who move to their lands. This disparity of accountability, with no mechanism for equitable quota per country as cited by Khan[6] hurts the most vulnerable states.

Additionally, there is no unified international legal framework. As Hsiao [30] argues, the current arrangements of treaties and protocols allow for too much interpretation which result in disparate outcomes for people who are displaced. The current study's findings of differing recognition rates and processing speeds speak to this point. Due to the lack of a global standardized protocol or even a proper Climate Refugee convention, every country can gauge for itself which climate dependent person to grant status and protection to, resulting in a lot of variation amongst the countries. This dual mechanism also preserves the sovereignty paradox emphasized by Locke [11], because states would be averse to binding undertakings that could restrict their control over immigration policies.

There is no singular way to address these limitations. As Biermann and Boas [5] note, one avenue is the extension of the legal definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention. But another feasible way forward would be the establishment of a new international protocol on climate refugees, as the political mood remains opposed to the amendment of existing treaties. As Xu et al.[18] suggest, this protocol could include elements of "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.", with a heavier burden falling on higher-emission nations.

Another important building block is strengthening regional frameworks. The results display moderate effectiveness scores for current regional agreements, but indicate significant room for improvement from stronger enforcement and funding mechanisms. However, regional bodies may be better suited to implement stricter compliance mechanisms, which may be necessary when climate displacement provisions have not been uniformly integrated into domestic law, and may even be supported by an international review mechanism. More developed countries could also provide more funds to regional funds so that smaller states are not adversely affected, which would also broaden the scope of what regional agreements can achieve for displacements.

Such dialogue demonstrates momentum, but also the ongoing challenges in providing legal rights for climate refugees. Comparisons with previous research verifies that many of the barriers found in this study, like limited legal definitions, inconsistent enforcement dispersed across regions, and inadequate funding, have long been identified by scholars and policymakers alike. Nevertheless, the results also show that targeted reforms can deliver concrete progress with some countries achieving higher recognition rates and shorter processing times.

Despite these encouraging outcomes, the broader political feasibility of ambitious reforms remains in question. Contemporary evidence suggests that many governments increasingly adopt restrictive asylum policies, securitize refugee movements, and frame displacement as a threat rather than a humanitarian responsibility [9, 10]. This political climate reduces the likelihood of consensus on a binding Climate Refugee Convention in the near future, even as normative and legal arguments strongly support its necessity [4, 6, 19]. A more pragmatic approach may involve incremental regional agreements, integration of climate refugee

protections into existing human rights treaties, and adaptive funding schemes that can operate within the limits of current political resistance [14, 16].

However, material limitations still stand. Despite laudable efforts to develop international agreements, the absence of a unifying global agreement and significant financing for distressed states still limits holistic responses. From here on, we must build on those regional efforts, explore novel international protocols and ensure equity in burden-sharing among nations. Tackling these challenges will enable the international community to better respond to the increasing climate-induced displacement crisis.

6. Conclusion

The article delivers an overview of the difficulties of managing climate-fueled migration in compliance with current international structures. The study's results show that the lack of a new legal category for climate refugees leads to diverging protective mechanisms in various jurisdictions. It creates a protection gap that the current international refugee law framework fails to address, making it difficult for displaced peoples to claim basic rights and get the resettlement assistance they need.

In addition, the research points to a troubling paradox: States that have historically been responsible for the greatest contribution to climate change often have the weakest commitments to the resettlement of climate refugees. These countries are equipped with the resources and infrastructure to provide significant support, yet they are less likely to be progressive in their approach to resettlement policy or to make long-term investment decisions. This Tanaka-Gladyshev discrepancy highlights the urgent need for a framework that will hold high-emission countries accountable and guarantee equitable burden-sharing in the protection of climate refugees.

This finding also reinforces the argument that to develop a coherent and enforceable system of global governance, a binding international framework, such as a Climate Refugee Convention, is required. Counseling such a convention would create clear criteria for who would be considered a climate refugee, detail what obligations states have and set up mechanisms to monitor and enforce those obligations. Not only would this move help fill the current voids in the protection, but it would also help promote international cooperation and a more unified and fairer response to dealing with climate-displaced persons.

Future research and policymaking must prioritize the establishment of robust legal mechanisms that align climate refugee protection with established frameworks for both human rights and environmental stewardship. This would mean building on regional agreements, making those enforceable, and producing a globally recognized standard for the treatment of climate-related internally displaced people. More will also need to be done to increase financial and technical support to vulnerable regions, so that the countries and communities that are most adversely affected by climate change can have the support that they need to adapt and provide real solutions for relocation.

This study highlights the pressing need for a comprehensive international approach to climate displacement. Instead of a binding legal instrument, the international community seems bound to continue with a fragmented and inequitable system that leaves millions of climate refugees unprotected. Through the development of a legally binding convention a mess is needed, isolated with regional frameworks and equitable financing by an independent party where 100 million dollars will go a long way in mitigating climate migration, a functioning system of governance will emerge able to respond to the scale and complexity of climate migration.

The findings of this study underline the urgency of addressing the growing gap in international law surrounding climate-induced displacement. Climate refugees continue to fall outside the scope of existing

legal categories, leaving millions without adequate recognition or protection. While the normative case for a dedicated international framework is compelling, the political realities of the current era make its achievement far from straightforward. Rising hostility toward refugees, coupled with nationalist resistance and sovereignty-driven concerns, has created a global environment in which binding multilateral agreements face profound obstacles.

In this context, it is important to recognize that the immediate trajectory of legal and policy development is unlikely to produce a comprehensive convention. Instead, the near future will be shaped by fragmented regional measures, soft law instruments, and incremental reforms within existing human rights regimes. These mechanisms may lack the universality of a treaty, but they remain essential as pragmatic tools to alleviate the vulnerability of displaced populations. Regional agreements, strengthened enforcement mechanisms, and adaptive funding arrangements can provide partial yet meaningful protection while keeping open the possibility of broader consensus in the longer term.

At the same time, international scholarship and advocacy should continue to articulate the normative vision of a binding Climate Refugee Convention. Such a framework remains a necessary long-term goal, not only to unify fragmented responses but also to embed climate displacement within the broader pursuit of justice and shared responsibility. By acknowledging the political constraints that shape immediate action, while still maintaining focus on the ethical imperatives of protection and equity, international law can present both a realistic strategy for the present and a coherent roadmap for the future.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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