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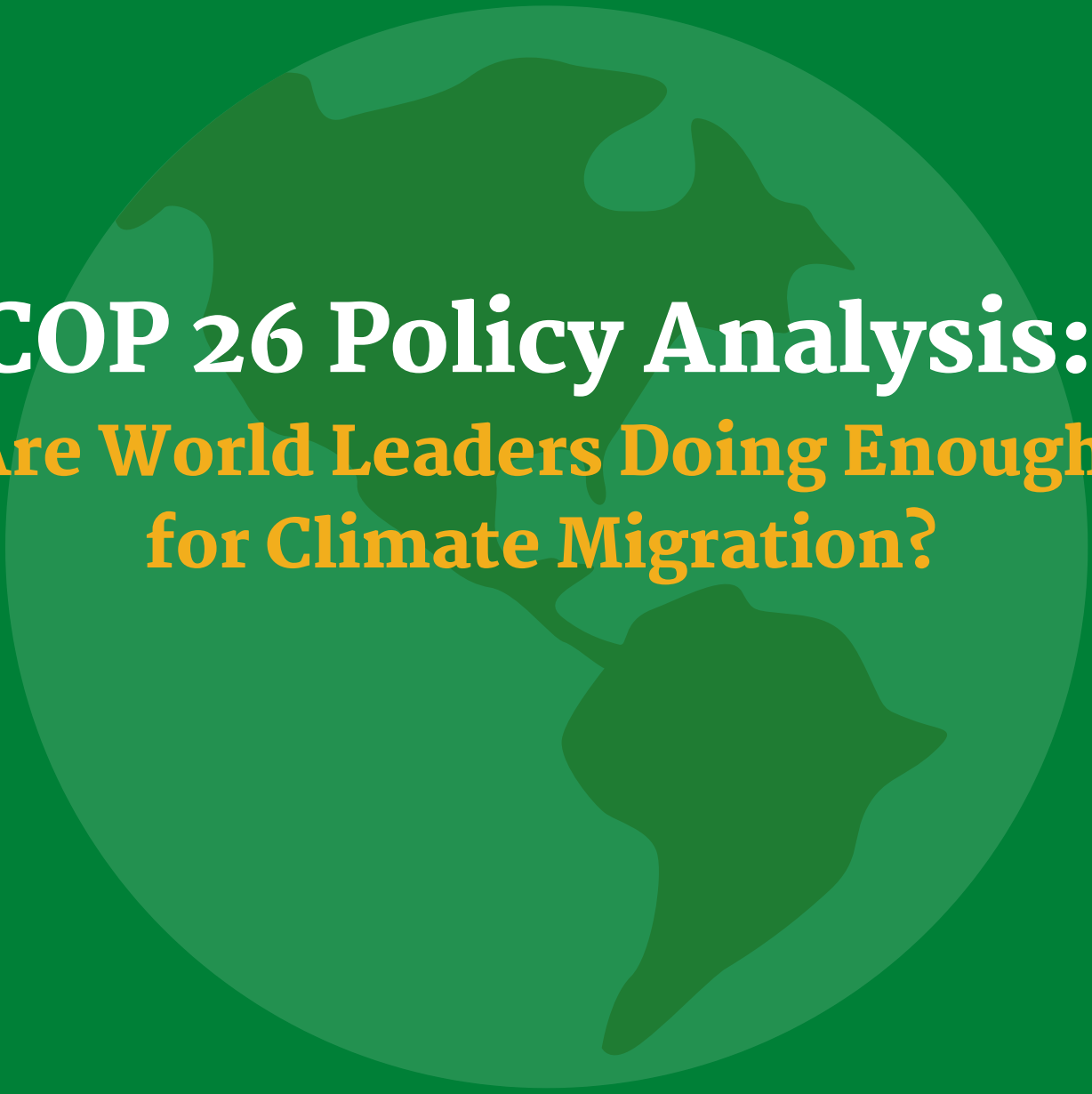
OUR CLIMATE STORIES



COP 26 Policy Analysis:

Are World Leaders Doing Enough for Climate Migration?

SEEK

HAELLA stichting

COP26 Policy Analysis: Are World Leaders Doing Enough for Climate MIgration

Foreword

SEEK recognizes climate induced migration to be an issue growing in salience and urgency. SEEK's project "I am Because We are: Our Climate Stories" aims to bring these voices of people and communities affected by climate change and call for the urgency of a climate action to protect the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities. In tandem with this project, the report "COP26 Policy Analysis: Are World Leaders Doing Enough for Climate MIgration" provides relevant stakeholders with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of COP26 in addressing future climate migration. This analysis will provide a bedrock for future policy recommendations to be built.

Acknowledgments

The policy report is authored by Brooke Ellen Moore. The review process was managed by Umbreen Salim and Sumbal Bashir. The support for the project is provided by Haëlla Foundation. The views expressed are that of the author and do not represent the position of the Haëlla Foundation. Learn more about SEEK's work on climate migration at: https://www.seekresearchnetwork.eu/ourclimatestories.

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Executive Summary

In examining the outcomes of COP26, this report finds that there were both strengths and shortcomings of COP26. A huge success for COP26 was the increased importance placed on Loss and Damage, a topic inextricably tied to climate induced migration and the loss of ancestral land. While increased coverage is important, the call for Loss and Damage specific financing was met with the creation of a dialogue, demonstrating a lack of urgency. COP26 additionally saw increased project proposals and financing, particularly for adaptation, a huge victory for countries feeling the impacts of climate change. With that said, for these projects and financing, climate migration was not discussed as an issue in and of itself, but rather indirectly through pillars such as mitigation. A main avenue for addressing climate migration is reducing overall emissions. COP26 saw NDCs that were disappointing and insufficient in order to reduce global emissions enough to keep the goals of the Paris Climate Accord alive. COP26 saw the creation of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, being a large initiative to shift away from fossil fuels. Though an important step, the world's biggest polluters did not join. The global methane pledge, however successfully made a pledge to reduce emissions while also acting as a symbolic step, being spearheaded by the US, a historically large polluter. Lastly, COP26 saw the creation of the Glasgow breakthroughs with impressive goals to reduce emissions. Though implementation plans on these are still needed, the goals themselves represent a shift in the right direction.

COP26 Policy Analysis

1. Introduction

With climate-induced dsasters increasingly becoming a part of today's reality, migration is increasing manifold due to the climate change crisis. With environmental and climate crises such as erosion, rising sea levels and severe weather conditions, individuals globally are forced to flee and relocate, and the impacts are disproportionately felt by certain countries and communities. According to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Displacement Report, in 2020 disasters caused the internal relocation of 30.7 million people (IFRC 2021, 4). Furthermore the report states that 98% of those displaced "faced weather and climate hazards" (IFRC 2021, 6). As climate migration becomes an increasingly serious issue, it has become a topic of concern added to the agenda of the Conference of the Parties. While climate migration and displacement has clearly been happening for years, how to properly address current displacement while avoiding future climate migration has proven difficult.

1.1 What is Climate Migration?

As climate change worsens, its impact is disproportionately felt by certain countries and communities. High and middle-income countries account for less than 50% of the world population, but are together responsible for 86% of the global CO2 emissions (INEE 2022).

With issues such as erosion, rising sea levels and severe weather conditions individuals globally are forced to flee and relocate. While this report predominantly focuses on climate migration, climate refugees and internally displaced persons will be addressed as well.

- In 2001 the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies World Disasters Report estimated that there were currently 25 million environmental refugees (Brown 2008, 11).
- In 2005, the UN University's Institute for Environment and Human Security estimated that by 2010 the amount of environmental refugees would increase to 50 million (Brown 2008, 11).
- According to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Displacement Report, in 2020 disasters caused the internal relocation of 30.7 million people (IFRC 2021, 4).
- Per the report, 98% of those displaced "faced weather and climate hazards" (IFRC 2021, 6).

As climate migration becomes an increasingly serious issue, it has become a topic of concern added to the agenda of the Conference of the Parties (COP). While climate migration and displacement has clearly been happening for years, how to properly address current displacement while avoiding future climate migration has proven difficult.

1.2 How is climate migration addressed?

Addressing climate migration consists of two factors: combatting the drivers of climate change, and creating programs and policies that increase resilience against and preparedness for climate migration. As this report intends to evaluate the success of COP26 with regards to global environmental governance, COP26 outcomes will be evaluated in the following two fields:

1. Reductions in the causes of climate change that cause climate migration
2. Steps to strengthen the support and accommodation of climate migrants in partner countries

2. COP26 Analysis

2.1 Reductions in the causes of climate change and climate migration

As climate migration is a symptom of climate change, one of the key steps global society can take towards decreasing climate migration is combating climate change. While the majority of COP26 deals with measures that address climate change, SEEK has identified two main areas that embody the steps taken towards decreasing climate change: Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and transitions away from fossil fuels.

2.1.1 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

Currently the NDCs finalized at COP26 only make up 80% of emissions (UNFCCC 2021c). This is also assuming countries meet their goals which, historically, they have not always done. As for country specific NDCs, the targets made by top polluters fell short of significant progress.

- The U.S. sent in an updated NDC where they pledged a 50-52% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030 (National Climate Advisor, and Special Presidential Envoy for Climate 2021). At the moment they are “broadly on track” according to their NDC report (NCA and SPEC 2021).
- China, the world’s other largest polluter, pledged to adopt “more vigorous policies and measures, and aims to have CO2 emissions peak before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060” (“China’s Achievements” 2021).

The U.S. pledged an NDC that is insufficient to put us on course to avoid climate catastrophe. China likewise has an insufficient pledge that is furthermore incredibly vague, resembling a goal more than an actual emission reduction pledge. Thus, the NDCs at COP26 prove insufficient to avoid the future impact of climate change that will create further climate migration.

2.1.2 Transitions away from fossil fuels

Fossil fuel extraction and use is one of the largest contributors to climate change. Thus, assessing the COP26 measures to reduce fossil fuel extraction and use is key in evaluating the success of COP26 in its efforts to curb climate change. Of the numerous pledges and agreements made that could have been discussed this report will focus on three for brevity.

Powering Past Coal Alliance

The Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) is built up of nation states, subnational governments, organizations and businesses committed to transitioning from coal to clean energy sources (Powering Past Coal Alliance n.d.). While this alliance was created before COP26, COP26 was seen as a step forward, as 28 new members joined the alliance. In order to meet the goal of keeping the global temperature rise well below 2 degree Celsius, it was found that OECD member countries and the EU28 countries would need to phase-out coal by 2030 at the latest (PPCA n.d.). The PPCA has a declaration that includes, amongst other goals, a commitment for OECD and EU countries to phase out coal by 2030, with other countries phasing out by 2050 (Rocha et al. 2016). For this reason, new membership is seen as a step forward in achieving this necessary goal. New members from COP26 included Ukraine with the third largest coal consumption in Europe, Chile who uses coal for roughly 40% of electricity consumption, and New Mexico, increasing the number of U.S. state members (PPCA 2021b, PPCA 2021a). While new membership is a positive step forward, the issue remains that the top global polluters are still not members of the PPCA.

Global Methane Pledge

The Global Methane Pledge (GMP) was created with the goal to maintain global temperature rise within 1.5 degrees celsius (European Commission 2021). The pledge was taken by over 100 countries that, together, make up 70% of the global economy (EC 2021). The main goal of the pledge is by 2030 to reduce methane emissions by 30% (EC 2021). If 30% reductions are achieved, this pledge could by 2050 reduce warming by 0.2 degrees celsius (EC 2021). This pledge should be considered as a success not only because it takes a large step forward in reducing emissions, but also due to the fact that it was spearheaded by the U.S.. The GMP represents a change in attitude that hopefully represents a future of commitment to the global environmental agenda.

Glasgow Breakthroughs

The Glasgow Breakthrough Agenda was created by the United Kingdom alongside 42 other world leaders, representing nations that account for 70% of the global GDP (UNFCCC n.d.). The Breakthrough Agenda was designed as a series of plans to help ensure the goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius remains in reach (UNFCCC n.d.). The Agenda focuses on goals in key sectors that were chosen due to their high environmental impacts, such as power, road transport, steel, hydrogen, and agriculture (UNFCCC n.d.). The Breakthrough Agendas contain impressive goals such as “Zero emission vehicles the new normal - accessible, affordable and sustainable in all regions by 2030”, “near-zero emission steel the preferred choice in global markets” by 2030, and “affordable renewable and low carbon hydrogen globally available by 2030” (UNFCCC n.d.). While these goals prove essential in decreasing global emissions, as of yet the goals remain goals without thorough guides for implementation.

2.2 Steps to strengthen support of climate migrants in partner countries

2.2.1 Adaptation

Regarding a strengthening in the preparedness of countries for climate migrants, COP26 provided several successes. For climate migration, aiding countries to adapt to and mitigate against climate change and natural disasters is key in helping avoid the displacement of individuals. COP26 saw a record amount of financial pledges towards adaptation with a pledge to double the 2019 adaptation finance by 2025 (UNFCCC 2021c). This would be substantial in helping countries adapt to climate change, thus decreasing potential climate migration. While these pledges are important, it is necessary to note that financing has been an area lacking follow through. Previously developed country Parties had agreed to pledge $100 billion per year collectively by the year 2020, however they fell short of this goal (UNFCCC 2021b). For that reason it will be key for countries to remain diligent to their pledges and to be held accountable for a failure to follow through.

2.2.2. Loss and Damage

Loss and damage saw a large step forward at COP26, rising in importance to become level with adaptation and mitigation. Loss and damage is the acknowledgement that there are irreversible damages from climate change, historically at the hand of developed nations, requiring attention and compensation (UNFCCC 2014). This is linked to climate migration, as many of these irreversible damages have already caused and will continue to cause displacement, typically in countries with low historical and current emission levels.

COP26 saw a push for developed countries to provide resources such as technology in order to further projects under loss and damage (UNFCCC 2021a, 7). With that said, a key goal of COP26 was to create a financial mechanism for loss and damage. Instead, the Glasgow Dialogue on Loss and Damage was created in order to discuss the matter of financing over several years until June 2024 (UNFCCC 2021a, 8). Thus the financing of loss and damage requires further attention and was not sufficiently addressed at COP26.

2.2.3. Projects

A last area to address with regards to the advancement on the importance of climate displacement would be programs and international clout. In recent years, including COP26, there has been significant advancement on projects that address adaptation and capacity building. Numerous projects were outlined in the 2019 *Report of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts* (UNFCCC 2019). Projects include the creation of national plans surrounding human mobility, and aiding in preparedness though contingency plans and evacuation plans (UNFCCC 2019). While projects are necessary steps to ensure the preparedness of countries for internal displacement, climate migration did not receive the international attention at COP26 that it should have. For this reason, conversations surrounding projects should focus on the topic of climate migration specifically. Furthermore, these conversations should be led by the voices of displaced individuals and community activists to create more meaningful engagement of climate-affected communities in decision making.

2.2.4. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

As of now, the most important international document concerning climate migration is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The framework covers a lot of ground, delving into the need for increased resilience and programs that prepare countries for displacement (UNDRR 2015). The framework lays out the following seven goals:

(a) Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower the average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020–2030 compared to the period 2005– 2015;
(b) Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020–2030 compared to the period 2005–2015;9
(c) Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030;
(d) Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030;
(e) Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020;
(f) Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of the present Framework by 2030;
(g) Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to people by 2030. (UNDRR 2015, 12)

Most importantly, the framework calls upon the global community to cooperate in achieving these goals. While in terms of climate migration this is the most progressive document as of yet, the fact that it is a framework means it is soft-law (Orellana 2014). Thus, the framework is better described as political goals with no ability for enforcement. While soft-law is important in creating global norms and eventually customary laws (Orellana 2014), in the meantime this document provides little tangible protection for those who are displaced by climate change. While the Sendai framework was written before COP26, COP26 fell short in this regard, as it made no tangible steps to strengthen the goals outlined in the Sendai framework. Furthermore, the Sendai framework focuses primarily on internal displacement (UNDRR 2015). In anticipation of future climate migration due to severe weather events and living conditions, future COP conferences should create a document or treaty that strengthens protections for those who are internally and internationally displaced by climate change.

Conclusion

While COP26 saw many steps forward, gaps remained in the measures taken by the world leaders to reduce the impact of climate change. Emission pledges, though an improvement, fail to keep global society on track to meet its goal of 1.5 degrees celsius. The conference saw admirable steps forward in reducing fossil fuel reliance, however the plans as of yet are lacking and it will be crucial for these goals to materialize into tangible action. Lastly in terms of policies, COP26 made limited progress. The successes highlighted in this report were from projects or goals outlined before COP26. COP26 itself saw little advancement and accountability on these goals and thus on protection for current and future climate migrants.

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