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USAID Must Include Climate-Related Displacement in its Climate Strategy

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recently released its draft Climate Strategy for the years 2022-2030. The Strategy outlines the agency's goals and methods for reducing the negative effects of climate change on vulnerable populations over the next decade. Using both targeted direct actions and a broader systems-change approach, the Strategy aims to build "climate resilience" and help "limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius as called for under the Paris Agreement." The resilience prong emphasizes risk mitigation and management, with a strong focus on preventing disasters before they occur.

While the Strategy briefly mentions the effects of climate change on human displacement, it does not address the extent to which climate disasters can permanently displace entire communities, nor does it provide for a plan to support those who have already been displaced. To truly combat the human toll of climate disasters, USAID's Strategy must include not just risk prevention and mitigation, but also disaster response and provision of vital goods and services for the millions of people already displaced by these events.

The Case for Including Climate Migration in the Strategy

A climate disaster mitigation strategy cannot be considered complete without addressing climate migration. The bleak reality is that climate-related disasters will continue to occur and to worsen, even with USAID's mitigation efforts. Under the Paris Agreement, over 140 countries have made bold climate-related pledges to reduce emissions and help keep global temperatures from rising a catastrophic three degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Their goal under the Agreement is to keep temperature rise at or below 1.5 degrees. However, according to the [Climate Action Tracker](#), "[p]olicy implementation on the ground is advancing at a snail's pace... targets for 2030 remain totally inadequate [and current pledges] put us on track for a 2.4° temperature increase by the end of the century."

Why does this matter? What effect does global temperature rise have on people? According to the U.S. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the difference between a 1.5 degree increase and a 2 degree increase is [drastic](#):

- At 2 degrees, "61 million more people in Earth's urban areas would be exposed to severe drought" than at 1.5 degrees.
- At 2 degrees, as many as 270 million more people would be exposed to water insecurity than at 1.5 degrees.
- At 2 degrees, "more than 70 percent of Earth's coastlines will see sea-level rise greater than .66 feet," resulting in 10.4 million more people exposed to flood risks than at 1.5 degrees.
- At 2 degrees, several hundred million more people will be plunged into climate-related poverty than at 1.5 degrees.
- At 2 degrees, about 10% of livestock range in Sub Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean, Central Europe, and the Amazon will disappear, resulting in increased food insecurity

All of these factors contribute to increased forced migration. When people cannot grow crops or raise livestock to feed themselves, they must migrate to find food elsewhere. When

their homes are destroyed by flooding, they become displaced. When they lose their livelihoods and can no longer do the things they previously did to stay alive, they leave. Regardless of USAID's initiatives — and the pledges of countries around the world — to reduce the effects of climate change, it won't be enough to stop human migration resulting from climate disasters. Thus, any plan that claims to "strengthen climate resilience," and integrate "climate into all areas of ... development and humanitarian assistance," must address the worsening plight of climate migrants.

Recommendations for the Strategy

The Strategy barely mentions climate migrants until the second appendix, in which it vaguely states that "USAID helps displaced populations and migrants and supports them when possible through humanitarian and development assistance. Moving forward, USAID will increase its focus on support for those already facing climate impacts," including migrants. The Strategy must take a more direct, comprehensive, and proactive approach to ensure that USAID is prepared to handle the needs of people before they are even forced to move.

Plan for Migration Before it Occurs

One direct action goal in the Strategy is to "strengthen climate resilience of populations vulnerable to climate impacts." While this may be helpful to mitigate disaster, it will not be enough to prevent displacement from occurring in the first place, and it may not be enough to bring people back once they have moved. This goal must also include strengthening disaster response and assistance for people who have begun to migrate. It must include actions such as fostering strong relationships with nearby communities or neighboring countries that could take in migrants when disaster strikes, ensuring safe evacuation routes, building up resources in safe areas to account for sudden influxes of people, and creating green work opportunities to employ displaced people in projects that promote climate resilience. It must also include direct action to help prepare populations for migration, resilience building, and return to their homes.

Prioritize Multi-Lateral and Inter-Agency Collaboration

The Strategy outlines plans to collaborate with other specialized U.S. government agencies and international institutions in order to achieve particular strategic objectives. This same interagency and multi-lateral collaboration necessary as it pertains to climate migration. USAID must consult and coordinate with the International Office of Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other bodies with expertise in migration and displacement not only to understand the most pressing needs of persons displaced or migrating due to climate change, but also to ensure additive, and non-contradictory, strategies between agencies and bodies addressing this issue.

Include Future Migrant and Host Communities

Perhaps most importantly, the Strategy aims to implement more inclusive decision-making by calling for partnerships with "Indigenous Peoples and local communities," and empowering "women and youth" to lead climate actions. It mentions in a side bar that "marginalized and underrepresented populations," including displaced persons, migrants, and people with

disabilities, should be included in these initiatives. This vague language on inclusion is not enough; migrants and both present and future host communities must be on the front lines of decision-making regarding climate migration. Direct actions under these goals must include working with potential future host communities, to figure out how they can adapt to accommodate climate migrants, what extra resources they have and what they would need when migrants arrive, and how migrants can integrate into their communities as assets as opposed to being viewed as burdens. All planning must include and center the experiences of people with disabilities, who are often left behind when disaster strikes.

While USAID's Climate Strategy represents an ambitious plan to try to preempt and mitigate climate disasters, it is missing the reality that no matter what the agency does, climate disasters will continue to occur and cause mass displacement. By incorporating goals and direct actions to prepare for inevitable migration flows, USAID can help lessen the hardships of migration on both migrants and their host communities. Early preparedness before disaster strikes can help get people out of danger quicker, ensure no one is left behind, and provide for the basic needs of those displaced.

United States Issue Updates

State Department Orders all Non-Emergency Personnel to Leave Embassy in Ethiopia

On November 5, the U.S. Department of State ordered all non-emergency U.S. government employees working at the embassy in Ethiopia to leave as conflict in the country continues to escalate. The State Department also urged all U.S. citizens still in Ethiopia to depart quickly while commercial flights are still available, warning that embassy employees might not be able to assist them once flights stop. While the embassy remains open and staffed by essential personnel for now, the State Department's website warns that the embassy has "limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens." To read the travel advisory, click [here](#).

CBP Memorandum Rescinds Metering Policy

In a memorandum released on November 1 by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Acting Commissioner Troy Miller instructed CBP officers at ports of entry to "strive to process all travelers, regardless of documentation status, who are waiting to enter, as expeditiously as possible." The memorandum rescinds the "metering" policy put in place by the previous administration, which allowed CBP officials to turn away people at the border after processing a certain number of migrants each day. According to the new memorandum, CBP officials "may not instruct travelers that they must return to the [port of entry] at a later time or travel to a different" port for processing. The memo encourages CBP to increase staffing at ports to manage a steady stream of arriving migrants. This policy will make it easier for migrants and asylum seekers to seek protection at the border in a timely manner without being turned away. To read the memorandum, click [here](#).

Inspector General Report Finds "Many Factors" Hinder Medical Staffing at ICE Detention Centers

On October 29, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General released a report finding that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency responsible for running immigration detention centers, has difficulty maintaining adequate medical staffing at the centers. The report pointed to "remote locations, competing opportunities, difficulty offering competitive pay rates, and cumbersome hiring processes" as making it difficult to hire and retain qualified professionals. The report recommended that ICE evaluate the feasibility of offering hiring incentives for medical employees and including specific medical staffing requirements in contract negotiations. It also recommended evaluating staff capacity to expedite application processing and to determine whether more staff would result in more effective oversight of medical care in the facilities. To read the full report, click [here](#).

Asylum Seekers Seek Relief from MPP in Court Case

On October 28, six asylum seekers subjected to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) filed a motion in *Immigrant Defenders Law Center v. Mayorkas*, asking the judge to immediately allow them to return to the United States to pursue their asylum claims. The asylum seekers all have final removal orders as a result of being unable to attend their immigration proceedings due to MPP restrictions. The asylum seekers argue that they will suffer irreparable harm if they are not allowed back into the country to seek asylum, and that MPP violates their rights to seek asylum, to access counsel, and to a full and fair immigration hearing. To read the motion, click [here](#).

Around the World in International Migration

Deaths of U.S.-bound Migrants At New Highs

Migrant deaths in Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexico border have reached a record high with two months left in 2021, [according to new figures](#) from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM has found data to corroborate 490 deaths from January to October, with the real figure likely several times higher. In 2020, IOM recorded 410 deaths, up from 194 deaths in 2015, the first year of the project. Because of challenges with data collection, IOM relies on reports of death in local media and via local non-profit organizations. Explore the data in the Missing Migrants Project [here](#).

Migrants in the Crossfire as Belarus Forces Them into Poland

As part of an ongoing geopolitical conflict with the European Union (EU), Belarus has begun to [forcibly push undocumented migrants in its territory over the Polish border](#). New video footage released by Poland shows Belorussian troops firing guns into the ground and scuffling with migrants to intimidate them into crossing into Poland. Officials from neighboring EU countries claim that Belarus actions are retribution for EU sanctions resulting from clear human- rights abuses. Poland's border agency says it registered 16,000 irregular crossings into its territory since August, and 5,000 irregular crossings in October alone. Other migrants have traveled to Latvia and Lithuania. Approximately 4,000 migrants remain camped at or near the Belarus-Poland border.

Fighting in DRC Displaces 11,000

New conflict in the eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has displaced at least 11,000 people into Uganda in a single day, according to the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR). Militia groups and Congolese armed forces have fought across North Kivu's Rutshuru Territory. Most of those displaced have been women and children. UNHCR operates facilities for recurring displacements throughout the region, which allows for tracking of new events. Officially, Uganda's borders are closed to asylum seekers due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the government agreed to a humanitarian exception and granted safe passage to the displaced.

300,000 Afghan Arrivals in Iran since Taliban Takeover

Local sources and non-governmental organizations including the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) have reported approximately 300,000 arriving Afghans into Iran since the end of August, or approximately 4,000-5,000 per day. They join approximately 800,000 Afghan refugees in Iran. The United Nations has appealed for \$136 million to support Afghans in Iran, alongside a projected total figure of 500,000 new arrivals into the country. In recent years, domestic conflict within Iran over Afghan arrivals and the Afghan undocumented population has clouded a history of welcoming refugees. Of the 5 million Afghans who live outside the country, 3.6 million live in Iran.



USCRI's Action and Resources on Afghanistan

For more information about the crisis in Afghanistan, resources for Afghan allies, and updates, please check out the links below:

[Resources for Afghan Allies](#)

[Human Faces of the Crisis in Afghanistan](#)

[USCRI Statement Calling for Extension of Evacuations](#)

[USCRI Snapshot: Humanitarian Parole for Afghan Evacuees](#)

Upcoming Meetings & Events

USCRI Special Event: A Conversation with Javier Zamora, “Unaccompanied” Poet, Nov 16

On Tuesday, November 16, USCRI will host a special event with Javier Zamora. Zamora has recently published a collection of poetry titled “Unaccompanied” and will talk about migration, childhood, and loss. To register, click [here](#).

UNICEF Learning Series on Migrant Children—Throughout November

Beginning in November, UNICEF is offering a new learning series titled “A Humanitarian Approach to Working with Migrant Children and Adolescents.” The learning series consists of live, interactive workshops, delivered remotely, and space is limited. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

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If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Policy and Advocacy Division at policy@uscrimail.org.