

Resolution 2115 (2016)¹

Forced migration: a new challenge

Parliamentary Assembly

1. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, about 50 million people have been displaced worldwide in recent years because of conflicts, persecution and violence, or as a result of natural, chemical or nuclear disasters.
2. Despite having grown in intensity, the above-mentioned factors are not recognised by the international conventions governing migration and there is no international instrument designed to protect persons forced to move for reasons other than political or security-related ones.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly further notes that there is no agreement on the terminology used or on the definition of victims of forced migration. Applying the term “refugee” to victims of forced migration is controversial as environmental factors are non-discriminatory and no form of “persecution” is involved in these situations.
4. According to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change, the movement of people could be the biggest single consequence of climate change in the coming years. It also estimates that the flow of environmental migrants will reach 150 million by 2050, while the “Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change” puts the figure at closer to 200 million.
5. The Assembly underlines that the impact of climate change and natural, chemical or nuclear disasters varies depending on the vulnerability and adaptability of the populations concerned, and on the capacity of States to prevent or deal with such events.
6. The Assembly emphasises the need to acknowledge the vulnerability of the populations concerned and to remedy any gaps in their protection status.
7. The Assembly recalls, however, that the international conventions provide for an indirect right of admission and residence if sending a person back to their country of origin would amount to inhuman treatment, thus enabling the principle of *non-refoulement* to apply.
8. Referring to existing guidelines and international standards, the Assembly notes that these texts apply only in exceptional cases and for a limited time.
9. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the steps taken by Sweden and Finland to grant temporary protection in cases of environmental displacement and also the Nansen Initiative led by the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, which is intended to fill the legal gap in the protection of people displaced as a result of natural, chemical or nuclear disasters.
10. The Assembly therefore recommends that member States:
 - 10.1. give greater priority to devising protection policies and norms for victims of natural, chemical or nuclear disasters and for the victims of the consequences of climate change;
 - 10.2. acknowledge the vulnerability of these groups and ensure that their fundamental rights are fully observed;

1. *Assembly debate* on 22 April 2016 (18th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13983](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: M. Philippe Bies). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 22 April 2016 (18th Sitting).



- 10.3. review the relevant international rules and expand them to include a definition for these migrants;
- 10.4. revise the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, by means, for example, of an additional protocol;
- 10.5. adopt measures to prohibit any over-exploitation of natural resources and pursue solutions aimed at meeting people's fundamental needs;
- 10.6. implement strategies for the successful integration of persons displaced for environmental reasons, whether they are internally displaced or have been forced to emigrate to another State;
- 10.7. ensure full respect for the fundamental rights of displaced persons and take the necessary measures to resettle the populations concerned, especially in cases where their territory has disappeared as a result of natural, nuclear or chemical disasters;
- 10.8. prepare country/regional reports in order to gather information and assess the outlook for environmental migration.