

Safeguarding humanitarian aid workers from climate risks

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global Literacy and Enlightenment



Forum: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Issue: Safeguarding humanitarian aid workers from climate risks

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Introduction

Climate change is affecting the health of people around the world and making humanitarian response more difficult. The health impacts of climate change include injuries and deaths, heat-induced diseases, changing patterns of respiratory, waterborne, and vector-borne diseases and mental health issues. The impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by many groups. Finally, climate change and environmental degradation are also making it more difficult to provide humanitarian assistance.

Definition of Key Terms

Heat-induced diseases

Heat-induced diseases are illnesses caused by exposure to high temperatures and the body struggles to maintain normal temperature. Some examples of heat-related illnesses are heat strokes, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rash.

Humanitarian aid workers

Humanitarian aid workers are people who help others in need during emergencies. They provide food, water, shelter, medical care, and other essential support to save lives and reduce suffering. They often work in dangerous environments to help communities in need.

Heat stress management

Managing heat stress is the process of protecting people from becoming too hot at work or staying at high temperatures by actions such as providing shade or cool places to rest, ensuring regular water breaks to prevent dehydration, scheduling work at cooler times of the day and wearing light clothing to stay cool.

Climate risks



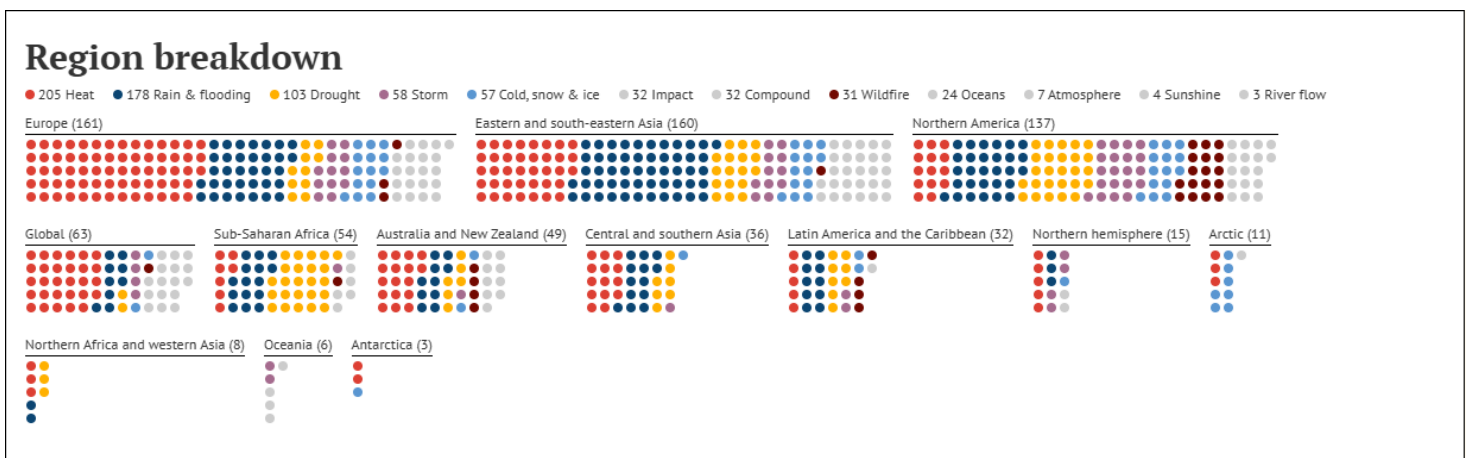
Climate risks are risks caused by changes in the climate, such as extreme weather events or long-term impacts. These risks can harm people, animals, the environment, and economies.

General Overview

Protecting humanitarian workers from climate risks has become an area of focus in recent years, particularly as the impacts of climate change have intensified. These impacts have increased over the years due to the combination of rising global temperatures, changing weather patterns and the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Over the last 2 decades, more than 80% of disasters have been linked to climate. These extreme events have multiple severe consequences for the humanitarian needs of millions of people worldwide.

They affect some highly vulnerable countries and communities that have already experienced occasional or chronic climate hazards, as well as ongoing social and environmental problems, to continuous and extended crisis situations, where emergencies such as epidemics, food insecurity, malnutrition and forced displacement are common.



Parties Involved

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

CARE International, Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam are integrating climate risk mitigation into their fieldwork. These NGOs provide assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from health care.



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Refugees, internally displaced people, and stateless people are on the frontline of the climate crisis. UNHCR is working to protect them and build their resilience to its current and future impacts, while reducing our own environmental footprint.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

OCHA works to protect humanitarian aid workers from climate risks by gathering data on climate-related threats, such as floods, storms, and heat waves, to help predict risks in the field. OCHA also coordinates disaster response plans to ensure that humanitarian workers are prepared and have the tools and resources they need to stay safe. In addition, it trains aid workers in how to manage extreme weather conditions and protect themselves while helping others. Finally, OCHA sends early warnings of climate-related hazards so that aid workers can avoid dangerous situations.

Timeline of Events

- 1989 Recognition of climate change as a global issue and humanitarian organizations are starting to take climate-related risks into account in their projects.
- 1992 The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) establishes international cooperation on climate issues, indirectly addressing the vulnerabilities of aid workers in regions prone to disasters.
- 2007 Humanitarian organizations are beginning to address the impact of heat waves, floods, and other climate risks on field staff through established internal safety protocols.
- 2009 Oxfam and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) emphasize climate risks in humanitarian programming.
- 2015 The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is focused on building resilience, providing direct support for the protection of frontline workers in disaster risk and climate risk zones.
- 2020 COVID-19 pandemic highlights the crossover between climate risks and health challenges, forcing organizations to address the complex risks.
- 2022 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issues a guide to ensure the operational safety of humanitarian workers in climate-affected areas.



Previous attempts to solve the issue

Voluntary Assistance from Organizations

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have adopted policies to ensure staff are prepared for climate-related risks. These include implementing protocols for heat stress, providing guidelines for working during extreme weather conditions and supporting the mental health of workers facing recurring disasters.

The collaboration with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

The IASC has established guidelines and developed networks, such as the Environment and Humanitarian Action Network, to integrate climate risk management into the humanitarian sector. This cooperation promotes the exchange of knowledge and practical solutions among international and local agencies.

Possible solutions

Early warning of weather conditions by implementing systems that monitor the climate and alert workers in advance to help in the case of extreme weather events.

Reduction of reliance on fuel-based generators by applying sustainable energy alternatives, such as solar or wind power to field operations.

The establishment of climate-resilient infrastructure by creating dedicated offices, shelters, and facilities, using materials and designs that can withstand local climate hazards and incorporate renewable energy systems to protect workers from extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods, and heat waves.

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