



## Regular Article

## UNFCCC's posture on displacement riskification: Conceptual suggestions

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## ABSTRACT

This paper poses the question of whether the discussions within Task Force on Displacement (Task Force) meetings contribute to conceptualisation and riskification of climate-related displacement and slow-onset events. Arguing that the Task Force undertakes displacement riskification, the paper ascertains whether the discussions might be a cue for pinpointing the Task Force's posture on riskification of climate-related displacement. Centring on the Task Force's main mandate, the paper explains displacement riskification through discourse analysis of Task Force's discussions. Discourse analysis of policy statements showed that climate-related displacement and slow-onset events appear to be gaining purchase as part of the FCCC's climate diplomacy strategy because they are explicitly debated at Task Force meetings. The paper finds that the discussions made contributions, but are currently not being incorporated through statements that are reported to the Conference of Parties (COP) – the manager of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). And finds that statements on and framings of displacement riskification may be considered definitive upon approval by the COP. The catch is that most security framings that can be found in the discussions within Task Force meetings has been poorly addressed at the COP mainly because the framings are largely absent in the Task Force reporting to the COP. These contributions/findings underpin the type of political knowledge mostly advanced and thus the likelihood of future directions of riskification politics by the Task Force.

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines the FCCC's Task Force of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (ExeCom WIM). It seeks to ascertain whether the discussions within Task Force meetings contribute to conceptualisation of displacement riskification (or the riskification of climate-related displacement and slow-onset events). Displacement riskification is defined as the construction of displacement in terms of risk associated with climate-related displacement. As the content and broad thrust of common approaches to security studies remain important for this definition, a crucial context in this regard centres on an expanded definition of security to include new concerns and assessment of adverse symptoms like the impacts of climate change. Because such assessment and concerns flow from the literature connected to the mandate of the Task Force to make recommendations on how to avert, minimise and address displacement in the context of climate change, the paper offers working definitions for five key concepts: climate-related security risks, slow-onset events, climate-related displacement, securitisation and riskification.

Climate-related security risks basically comprise food security, water security, coastal degradation, sea level rise, extreme weather-related disasters, civil conflict and climate-related migration/displacement [34]. The FCCC defines slow-onset events as comprising climate-related security risks such as sea-level rise.<sup>1</sup> Climate-related displacement entails human

mobility as a response to climate-related security risks [32]. Securitisation refers to a process in which policy change through effectual speech acts (or policy statements) supported by audience consent occurs in high-politics settings where securitisers urge the audience to urgently adopt extraordinary measure, which may sometimes bypass normal democratic politics, to protect specified referent objects from a specifically identified threat. The paper draws from Corry's [7] separation of securitisation from speech acts based on riskification, which basically implies that as opposed to the threat-based logic of securitisation, riskification centres on the logic of risk and conditions of possibility of harm in view of security politics that promotes long-term precautionary governance. Riskification simultaneously differs from and parallels risk analysis. Beck [4] offers a useful clarification in this regard. Beck argues that during crisis times in a risk society, a world engaged with focused risk-management techniques, we are given the opportunity to study complex cases with a focus on the security-development nexus. The notion of risk society is thus useful for enabling nuanced analysis of cases where there is no immediate security threat or security outcome [17]. It is within these contexts that Corry's [7] framing of the riskification framework is particularly valuable. And by extension, a speech act refers to either a securitising move or riskifying move that turn into respectively securitisation or riskification through audience acceptance.

Arguing that the Task Force undertakes displacement riskification, this paper adds value to the literature on climate-related migration and to the

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<sup>1</sup> FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1, 15 March 2011.

debate on securitisation and riskification. In so doing, it interprets several framings of slow-onset events and climate-related displacement that were presented at Task Force meetings; and contributes to common discussions that may become central to fundamental arguments on climate risk management – a work in progress from a framing perspective. A clearer evidence for said contribution can be inferred from recent studies on climate-related displacement. To highlight a few, in their paper focussing on the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the climate-disasters-displacement nexus, Goodwin-Gill and McAdam [9] mention the Task Force only once as follows: the UNHCR collaborates with the Task Force. Writing on climate-related displacement, Lyster and Burkett [13] mention the Task Force once in each of Abstract, keyword and footnote, followed by four more listings in the following contexts: requested by the Paris Agreement, a relatively new initiative, an achievement of the ExeCom WIM, and it may become an expert scientific panel or committee. Walter Kälin's [12] paper on disaster-displaced persons and the Global Compact on Migration mentions the Task Force's creation only once while Matias' [15] article on climate humanitarian visa and climate change victims highlights the Task Force's establishment twice. None of these authors consider the discussions within Task Force meetings and in terms of displacement riskification; yet one crucial feature of displacement riskification centres on the Task Force's main mandate – to avert, minimise and address climate-related displacement.

This paper is informed by a theoretical analytical interpretation of security framings of displacement riskification undertaken by the Task Force, and the conveyance of security framings to Parties to the COP. The study process started with the basics of a systematic literature review involving problem definition, data sources, search words and ex/inclusion criteria identification. Secondary sources were used to draw out discourses of displacement riskification. Primary sources were used to capture distinct framings of slow-onset events, climate-related displacement/migration, civil conflict and displacement riskification, which – as discussed below – not only complements the riskification framework but extends the framework to centre on security framings related to displacement. Central to the paper is explicit identification of statements that succeeded (or failed) in invoking framings of security.

This paper performs discourse analysis of primary documents sourced from the discussions within Task Force meetings. The primary documents are publicly available on the FCCC's web portal. These include concept notes submitted by specially invited international organisations, summaries of meetings, technical reports on meetings and formal reports to the COP. It should be noted that these documents cannot be equated with analysing a meeting, as these are sanitised and official account that will not account for all the nuance and discussions that took place at specific meetings. Discourse analysis provides insights into whether riskifying moves were undertaken by Task Force members who have held three formal meetings, one stakeholder meeting and two special events at COP24 (2018) and COP25 (2019). More explicitly, discourse analysis of primary documents enables this paper to ascertain if security framings of slow-onset events and climate-related displacement could help uncover several insights as follows. Whether key actors at the meetings have partake in invoking and framing security, whether riskifying moves were (un)successful, whether the framings qualify as part of a broader FCCC's agenda on climate risk management, whether the framings could be fruitfully interpreted as a critical sign of what could materialise on the horizon in the foreseeable future, and whether such framings can be credibly presented as invocation of displacement riskification without incurring undue criticism. To enable credible analysis of said framings, the FCCC's sheer size compelled confining the analytical unit to the Task Force – owner of the mandate to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address climate-related displacement. Notable is the mandate's conformity to the tenets of international instruments (like the Global Compact for Migration and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction), but the mandate sharply contrasts these instruments' mandates because it did not explicitly acknowledge the possibility of a link between climatic impacts and civil conflict onset.

This paper is structured as follows. It presents a general background to securitisation theory, riskification framework, and displacement riskification. It discusses variants of displacement riskification. It provides a short presentation on the Task Force. It then presents the discussions within Task Force meetings; this is where the security framings to be revealed will be uncovered. It offers a critical discussion of findings in which displacement riskification is applied. And then outlines the main findings in the conclusion section.

## 2. General background to securitisation theory, riskification framework and displacement riskification

The displacement riskification approach is an extension of the riskification framework which in turn is an extension of the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory and associated focus of speech act. To discuss this approach is to draw from and contributes to the lively critiques on the interchange between the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory and Corry's [7] seminal work on the riskification framework. The focus on speech acts has exposed securitisation theory to criticisms just as the growing interest in the security dimensions of climate change occurred alongside critiques of both securitisation of climate change and the associated speech acts. As many security scholars believed that risk is undoubtedly the new security in which exceptional measures based on speech acts are permanently introduced to confront hypothetical dangers [7], the critiques oftentimes consider avenues for promoting climate actions. Such actions entail new types of governance inspired by solidarity and a transformation of security practices, but its securitisation remains a dilemma because it occurs within the remit of securitisation theory [28].

Therefore, the audience needs to accept and approve a speech act on displacement riskification as being contextually reasonable for protecting specified referent objects before it can be considered valid. The idea of a speech act, which may entail a wide array of what one can do with choice of words, is a key problem of securitisation theory. Central to this problem is the assumption of a speech act approach that reduces security to a conventional procedure in which the conditions of success must fully prevail for the act to be acceptable, whereas the speech act theory is simply expressed as utterances that achieve an outcome through specific action [3]. Roberts [25] writes on speech acts in discourse context and explains the distinctions between posing a question, making a declarative assertion and the adoption of a goal mainly because these three basic types of language use may be reflected in quite different ways such as syntactic, morphological or lexical. Very plausibly, although normative judgment is not univocally propositional [6], the adoption of a goal rests on the speaker's normative judgment and belief. Among contemporary conventionalists, the conventions that define acts like asserting, questioning and requesting are linguistic conventions and not social conventions [11]. In the section on the discussions within Task Force meetings, careful attention is given to framings so as not to misconstrue or misinterpret linguistic conventions for normative propositions and vice versa, including the more difficult framings that belong somewhere in the middle of these two.

## 3. Variants of displacement riskification and key critique

The genealogy of displacement riskification is best related to Corry's [7] seminal work on riskification which he explains as a socio-political construction of risks or a separate kind of policy statement based on re-theorisation of what distinguishes risk from threats. Corry argues that a re-orientation in the political logic of the security field of this kind, despite being a potentially momentous and challenging transformation, has been insufficiently explained by the Copenhagen School. This is key to the riskification framework. It is the most informatively important source for constructing displacement riskification bearing in mind that climatization is a variant of or closely related to the riskification framework. There are other variants out there that have been used to scrutinise discursive practices and essentially increase the number of terminologies seeking to make sense of the climate change issue from a multilayered risks approach.

Corry's articulation on riskification parallels an argument by von Lucke et al. [30]. von Lucke et al. argue that successful representation of climate change as a security concern has progressed to such an extent that it is firmly established on the political agenda, despite that dispute remains as to the implementation of concrete policies. Corry's acknowledgement of policy statements on climate risks as a securitising move is in alignment with Trombetta's [28] assertion that the Paris School has reoutlined securitisation theory as a mundane process in which the governance of an issue in a specific way reinforces the image of a threat.

The displacement riskification approach complements common but crucial arguments in discourses on climate risk management. One of these arguments is Corry's riskification framework, which is not the sole complaint against security theory. The riskification framework is a derivative of the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory. In part because scholars have developed variants of the riskification framework from securitisation theory, it would be redundant to discuss this framework without mentioning this theory. Some have argued that climate is transforming security, signalling a climatization of the security field [20] which translates the climate threat into a governable risk [21]. As demonstrated by Maertens and Baillat [14], it is possible to use the climatization framing to not only provide new empirical examples of climate security discourses as unpacked by several scholars, but also articulate how climatization recasts issues such as migration, livelihood security, and military conflict, and creates new ways in which they interact, contradict or reinforce each other. Climatization therefore holds that new practices from the field of climate policy can be applied and introduced into the security field, producing forms of climate risk management.

The displacement riskification approach draws from the riskification framework to understand the management of climate change. As argued by Trombetta [28]: Corry mobilises precautionary- or risk-related approaches to the logic of security to understand theoretical and practical securitisation of certain elements of climate change. Other concepts have been developed to complement this effort, allowing a multilayered risks approach. For instance, crisisification is a crisis-based theoretical innovation on political agenda setting in which climate change is presented as not only needing urgent action but also the basis for analysing securitisation process whereby the climate crisis is constructed as a prominent signifier of threat [22]. Paglia also argues that crisisification may be applied more generally to cases whose crisis status is still emerging like the recent migration crisis in Europe and therefore politically contested. Angela Oels highlights this process, suggesting the security framing of climate change has enabled routine measures of enhancing resilience to disruptions that may result from secondary climate change impacts [19], strategies for managing these anticipated impacts, which may include 'mass displacement' for instance, have been emerging as forms of conflict prevention since 2003 ([21], p. 21). Oels' assertions may be taken as the point at which the displacement riskification approach emerged as a credible approach for analysing the discussions within Task Force meetings.

There are four key takeaway here. First, none of the perspectives above considered displacement riskification in terms of Task Force meetings nor do they consider statements by key actors [such as International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and UNHCR]. But a key undeniable commonality among the perspectives is attention to displacement riskification as part of risk management strategy. This commonality solidifies the credibility of the displacement riskification approach, which is reasserted here as appropriate for analysing the discussions within Task Force meetings. These are important organisations. Indeed, given the partnership between 'the UNHCR', 'the IOM' and the Task Force, the latter is well-placed 'under the UNFCCC' process to help develop 'a definition' for 'climate-related persons' ([26], p.2) since 'the UNFCCC' is yet to officially define to 'avert, minimize and address displacement' ([23], p. 3) – the Task Force's main mandate. Second, although some scholars use risk and threat interchangeably even when their intention is to construct the security implications of climate change without necessarily subscribing

to securitisation theory, this must not be seen as a principled approach to pursuing risk management strategy. It is rather a fair shot at acknowledging securitisation theory as the fundamental origins of any risk management strategy. Third, since the Paris School's facilitates an expanded set of security outcomes based on the politico-sociological approach to mobilising what may be perceived as security threat, we may well envisage distinct traits of a sociological approach to unpacking riskification and securitisation moves. One of such traits is that securitisation establishes a form of responsibility and the underlying idea of deontic powers – for example, authority, entitlement, obligation, duty and rights [2]. Such a sociological distinction appears suitable for studying displacement riskification. Fourth and perhaps more important, displacement riskification, as an analytical tool, specifically focuses on displacement associated with climate change. This focus separates the displacement riskification approach from other variants of riskification.

#### 4. Task force on displacement and displacement riskification

The relevance of displacement riskification must be put in its proper contexts. With the most crucial context being the Task Force, an entity operating within an international institution, whose thirteen core members were appointed based on their expertise in climate governance at national or international level, it is noteworthy to highlight two inseparable decisions made by Parties to the COP. Firstly, Parties to the COP decided to make climate-related migration, displacement and slow-onset events as part of the agenda at COP22 (2016) and COP23 (2017). Secondly, Parties to the COP instructed the ExeCom WIM to create a task force on displacement. The ExeCom WIM responded by developing the Task Force's terms of reference in September 2016, followed by the Task Force's official creation in March 2017 (Table 1). That creation led to two important contexts. First, in November 2017, Parties to the COP invited the Task Force to consider cross-border and internal displacement in accordance with the latter's mandate – to develop recommendations on how to avert, minimise and address displacement in the context of climate change.<sup>2</sup> Second, the Task Force's terms of reference imply that members have the freedom to develop recommendations as they deem appropriate for specific reports, although such freedom does not reduce the ExeCom WIM's influence as the overall manager of all reports' contents [18]. However, there are instances where decisions by the ExeCom WIM were overruled when a specific report is turned into recommendations. Indeed, there is high likelihood for delegating human mobility tasks to the Task Force [26].

Examples of riskification and/or securitisation through practice can be found at international climate negotiations. Since 2007, there has been growing efforts to either riskify or securitise climate change when the United Nations Security Council held its first formal debate on possible linkages between climate change and international security.<sup>3</sup> As such identifying the similarities and distinctions between securitisation and riskification is important in order to better understand and interpret current political debates and their political ramifications in terms of governing the security risks of climate change. Risk governance involves the mechanisms, processes, rules and institutions by which decisions regarding risks are formulated, analysed and implemented as part of risk management strategy to address certain adverse symptoms of climate change. In corollary, securitisation focuses on ungovernable threats that may be defended through performative actions that oftentimes pre-empt the guarantee of security. In contrast, the riskification framework and, by extension, the displacement riskification approach centre on long-term practices of risk governance without triggering extraordinary or nondemocratic measures in the face of conditions of possibility.

Such practice may well concretise into further entrenchment of the longstanding risk orientation of international resettlement instruments and policies for people displaced across borders in the context of displacement riskification and climate change. The Task Force has an important

<sup>2</sup> FCCC/CP/2017/11/Add.1, 8 February 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y4wx9nco>

<sup>3</sup> UNSC, S/PV.5663, April 2007, <https://tinyurl.com/y5t7f4dv>

**Table 1**  
Key decisions relating to the Task Force.

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Cancun adaptation framework	Loss and damage	COP' role on loss/damage	ExeCom / WIM created	COP approved ExeCom WIM's Workplan	Paris agreement	Task Force's reference terms approved	Task Force created / inaugural meeting	Task Force's recommendations approved

Subsidiary Body for Implementation on Loss and Damage, April 2011, <https://tinyurl.com/y4747akk>

role to play in this regard. It has undertaken preparatory steps for measured but nonetheless discernibly significant groundwork that could lead to policy adoption if relevant and involved actors are further sensitised about the urgency of protection needs of people uprooted from their habitual place of residence. The application of displacement riskification to the discussions within Task Force meetings is thus a much needed contribution to this critical field of policy debate and research as negotiations on resettlement and risk enterprise continue unabated at high-politics settings. It is therefore surprising that the international resettlement policies for development displacement [29,33] is yet to be robustly contextualised in terms of the discussions within Task Force meetings. For instance, literature from the research on climate change and human mobility/displacement that focuses on the FCCC (cf [8,10,16,18,27,31]) together with discourses surrounding these contexts even though not necessarily focused on the Task Force (cf [1,5]) may be excused for the omitted coverage given that the Task Force's creation is fairly recent while this of course plays a role in addressing displacement risk.

Discussing both displacement riskification and the Task Force without considering slow-onset events would amount to an incomplete discussion. Thinking about risks associated with displacement, the reader might intuitively say that they are mostly related to sudden-onset events, often perceived as triggering more chaotic, spontaneous displacement situations. However, due to a need for better communication to decision-makers about slow-onset events and risk management options, despite availability of several approaches for addressing such events,<sup>4</sup> this paper puts an extra focus on framings of slow-onset events because 'displacement associated' with said events is much more complicated to monitor than that triggered by sudden-onset hazards – which happens within short timeframes and their impacts can be measured immediately and directly.<sup>5</sup> In corollary, the paper contributes to knowledge of existing framings of slow-onset events in relation to the discussions within Task Force meetings.

## 5. The discussions within Task Force meetings

This section examines the extent to which policy statements by the Task Force could indicate conceptualisation and riskification of climate-related displacement and slow-onset events. The Task Force is yet to release the technical report on the July 2019 meeting. However, it is not mandatory that a technical report is to be expected from every meeting. The reader should not be surprised if this document is not even planned. But is to be expected that displacement riskification may have occurred at the meeting. The Task Force has been sensitive and active about global climate governance, which is underpinned by certain international processes and instruments whose number has multiplied in that past two decades. Many stand out among these processes such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (henceforth Sendai Framework). With the latest being the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (henceforth Migration Compact), the Task Force's main mandate parallels the mandates assigned to some of the instruments which are dictated to some extent by different mandates but share several similarities. These instruments remain crucial for the collective goal

<sup>4</sup> FCCC, Slow onset events: Technical paper, FCCC/TP/2012/7, November 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/y49mkzdz>

<sup>5</sup> IDMC, Monitoring methodology for displacement associated with drought, January 2020, p. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/y35ludq6>

seeking to provide immediate – where and when possible – and sustainable support to host communities sheltering people displaced within and across borders. Due to their normative underpinnings, we may well expect that the Task Force is familiar with displacement riskification. In this light, let us look and see the performative function of this conceptual framework.

### 5.1. Inaugural meeting

Statements made by international organisations at the inaugural meeting championed the displacement riskification trend, illuminating a general understanding of how they have understood and conceptualised displacement riskification. The ExeCom WIM provided general information about what should be expected from the Task Force.<sup>6</sup> The latter requested concept notes that should inform the meeting. Five key organisations were among those that submitted concept notes. These include the ILO, the UNDP, the UNHCR, the IOM and the IDMC. The technical report on the inaugural meeting is unavailable publicly – if there is one – but these organisations provided information about their strategic programmes on climate-related migration and forced displacement. Based on information made available at the respective websites, one can envisage a common posture pointing to the practise of displacement riskification by these organisations.

Compared to the ILO's belief that labour migration is a lifeline for some people to cope, adapt' and 'prevent later displacement' because climate threats may jeopardise human livelihoods,<sup>7</sup> it is significant that the IOM adopts a similar posture judging by its 'institutional engagement on migration, climate change' which includes facilitating 'migration as an adaptation strategy', preventing 'forced migration resulting from environmental factors and climate change', and providing protection to affected populations where forced migration cannot be avoided.<sup>8</sup> The tone of riskification becomes clearer with the UNDP's statement that the 'key root causes' driving migration and displacement include 'governance challenges', climatic impacts, 'protracted conflicts and violent extremism'.<sup>9</sup> These statements underpin the UNHCR's commitments to providing 'practical solutions for the protection of people displaced by the effects of climate change and natural disasters' with respect to the 'relationship' between 'conflict and instability' and 'displacement'.<sup>10</sup> Despite engagement with displacement in the 1990s and thereafter, during which UNHCR's operations have extended to cross-border displacement resulting from sudden-and slow-onset climate-related impacts [9], UNHCR's coordinated involvement in climate-related displacement finally emerged in 2007 [10]. All this intuitively demonstrates the organisations' postures at that meeting, assuming there is no significant deviation.

### 5.2. May 2018 stakeholder meeting

At this meeting participants were grouped into thematic sessions to facilitate collaborative, deeper and constructive dialogue. In line with the FCCC's guidelines, the Task Force requested submissions before the meeting. Although the request did not explicitly require the logic of riskification, it expected submissions to complement the topics already addressed in the

<sup>6</sup> ExeCom WIM, First meeting of the Task Force, May 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/y2eovgth>

<sup>7</sup> ILO, Warsaw International Task Force on Displacement, 2017, p. 2, <https://tinyurl.com/y6qfpy2q>

<sup>8</sup> IOM, Migration and climate change: From shadows to spotlight, 2017, p. 3, <https://tinyurl.com/y25qaseg>

<sup>9</sup> UNDP, Promoting development approaches to migration and displacement, 2017, p. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/y28txbjw>

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2017–2021. January 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ya893f2h>

Task Force's Workplan for the 2017/18 period. Eight<sup>11</sup> targeted organisations responded to the call. The submission by Oxfam made a clear riskifying move with the following statement: “the Global Compact on Refugees recognizes that ‘environmental degradation and natural disasters’ are drivers and exacerbating factors in situations of conflict/persecution”, yet this Global Compact ‘does not explicitly guarantee protection, assistance and solutions to people displaced by disasters and/or in the context of climate change’.<sup>12</sup> Oxfam recommends this context ‘should be central’ to the Task Force’s mandate. Oxfam’s choice of security framing (should be central to the Task Force’s mandate) could be read that the organization might eventually become a member of the Task Force. This explains why Oxfam features prominently in this paper. One key message emerged from a session moderated by the UNHCR, that the challenge of loss and damage related to climate-related displacement was already a global concern.<sup>13</sup>

At another session during the stakeholder meeting, one participant raised ‘the Somalia context in 2011-2012 and 2016’ as a case in which some ‘states recognized the multi-causality of root causes behind refugee flows’, including the ‘dynamics’ of the ‘nexus between climate and/or disaster with conflict and/or violence’.<sup>14</sup> This is a clear effort to galvanise those partial to the riskification logic into catalysing actions. Although the logic was not chased up, Professor Walter Kälin’s closing statement, at a parallel session, reflected the Somalia context. Kälin envisioned a scenario where Somalia’s future is a prototype of how the Task Force’s Workplan may be impactful. If Kälin – the Envoy to the Chair of the PDD – mean an indirect link between climate consequences and displacement, then his statement conforms to the Task Force’s Workplan for circa 2017/18 which acknowledges the link by prioritising mapping of institutional policies and frameworks on linkage.<sup>15</sup> Kälin enlightens participants on how national mobility policies often prioritise security concerns without emphasising how to conceptualise climate-related displacement. To minimise and even avert displacement risk, he recommends that climate responses should help people to stay through strengthening a community’s resilience, planned relocation, and integrated approaches that address the protection needs of displaced people.<sup>16</sup> Whereas managing displacement risk is contentious as various European countries have attempted to contain displacement to where it originated, Kälin’s suggestions are problematic. Reason been that the suggestions which are framed within a climate resilience lens simultaneously imply helping people to stay and restricting displacement within the place of origin. In any case, the technical report on the stakeholder meeting contains a summary of the Kälin-led study and the recommendations that were presented at COP24 (2018).

In yet another session at the stakeholder meeting, one participant talked about riskification, citing the ‘multi-causality’ nature of climate-displacement-conflict nexus.<sup>17</sup> That was a good opportunity to engage in riskification, but no evidence suggests participants explored this nexus. One reason why the riskification logic appeared unsupported may be due to how participants have conceptualised displacement riskification. Deeper engagement with the nexus is crucial for consideration of all that comes in the future in relation to the terms of definition. Such engagement would have revealed that when you come down to it, what is more important is how participants have understood and defined the logic of riskification. In a parallel session during the meeting, the IDMC sees potential disaster and the possibility to trigger a cascade of hazards when slow-onset events, prompted by rapid-onset events and decreased ecosystem services, interact with other risk factors such as violence.<sup>18</sup> Acting on behalf of the Advisory

Group Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the IDMC offered more credible articulation than the participant who mentioned the climate-displacement-conflict nexus. The CSOs is a Task Force member and is represented by the IDMC. It leads the implementation of an important activity – assessing the state of knowledge on displacement related to slow-onset events – in consultation with the reference group, composed of three international organisations (IOM, UNDP and UNHCR). Since it is not unusual for slow-onset events to be prompted by rapid-onset events and decreased ecosystem services, the IDMC believes that slow-onset impacts can act as a threat multiplier for other factors of crisis but usually not the dominant input. Compared to that participant’s logic of riskification, the IDMC proved itself an indispensable stakeholder – as reflected in its synthesis of existing research.

### 5.3. September 2018 meeting

For this meeting, the IDMC lucidly articulated riskification in its reporting containing a synthesis of literature. Alongside highlighting that the literature identifies four major ways in which slow-onset events may turn into disasters and contribute to increase displacement risks, the IDMC points to another logic of riskification:

Slow-onset events are not a direct catalyst for violent conflict but are often characterised as multiplier or magnifier of pre-existing conflicts because they uniquely hold the potential to not only exacerbate already fragile situations but also fuel conflict over resource scarcity. ... Conflict, violence and other polarized societies, political ideologies and socio-ethnic divides can further contribute to the disruption of livelihoods. ... Conflicts are a main responsibility of fragile governance structures and the inability of the state and relevant stakeholders to ensure peace. ... In situations where conflict and/or other economic, social, cultural, and political instability factors are present simultaneously with slow-onset events; such factors may amplify the impacts of slow-onset events, ultimately leading to potential migration.<sup>19</sup>

One framing centres on what awaits countries who may be unlucky to fall victim of weak governance structures. In this reasoning, slow-onset events, migration and conflict are riskifying framings. This is a reasonable observation because climate change is widely recognized as an aggravator of migration and conflict though only few examples of climate change as the sole factor in migration may be proven. However, isolating climate change as the sole driver of migration or displacement would complicate identification of the persons affected.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the deterioration of slow-onset events is likely to aggravate humanitarian crises and could lead to climate-related displacement if improperly addressed.

Based on case studies of extant knowledge on the risks of climate-related displacement, the IDMC extracted and synthesised these framings from the literature. With the self-contained, policy-inclined statements which are neither inhibited nor hemmed in by expectations, boundaries, conditions and blaming, the IDMC, in an effort to both clarify its position and convince other participants about potential responses, framed not only a synthesis of existing articulations that riskified slow-onset events but also slow-onset impacts as consequential for people’s security and, in effect, brought the profile of impacts into empirical dialogue. In the paragraph above, slow-onset events had challenged human rights, jeopardising people’s sense of safety by putting their livelihoods at risk. Despite the strength of these riskifying statements which touch on key possibilities and issues surrounding slow-onset events, there is no explicit evidence of support from other participants at the meeting. One key reason for the less than clear support for the agenda could be conceptual and methodological issues surrounding climate-related migration. As this remains a familiar challenge of climate risk management, the IDMC agrees that articulating a consistent picture of and planning for displacement is difficult due to the diverseness of slow-onset events, the broad spectrum of impacts and

<sup>11</sup> ActionAid International, CARE International and Refugees International (joint submission), Changemaker Norway, Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice, Overseas Development Institute, South American Network for Environmental Migrations (RESAMA), UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and World Trade Institute.

<sup>12</sup> Oxfam Submission, 2018, p. 5, <https://tinyurl.com/ybr67uhv>

<sup>13</sup> Task-Force meeting report, May 2018, p. 16, <https://tinyurl.com/y3vbq78f>

<sup>14</sup> Task Force meeting report, May 2018, p. 16, <https://tinyurl.com/y3vbq78f>

<sup>15</sup> TaskForce’s Workplan, <https://tinyurl.com/yblu3xo8>

<sup>16</sup> Task Force meeting report, May 2018, pp. 9–10.

<sup>17</sup> Task Force meeting report, May 2018, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Task Force meeting report, May 2018.

<sup>19</sup> IDMC, Synthesizing the state of knowledge to better understand displacement related to slow onset events, August 2018, p. 7, <https://tinyurl.com/qus9fs6>

<sup>20</sup> EU, SWD/2013/0138 final, 2013.

the types of mobility. Understanding the challenge requires concrete and detailed information on:

The potential effects of various slow-onset processes which are likely to interact with other displacement factors, including resilience, violence, and rapid-onset events. Slow-onset events often are a hidden aggravating factor in many contexts, acting as a threat multiplier for other factors of crisis such as the economic, social, cultural and political factors. Given potential interaction with other factors, slow-onset events in combination with acute food insecurity may render populations more vulnerable to rapid onset events.<sup>21</sup>

This interpretive analogy of slow-onset events makes the IDMC, like the IMO, the UNDP and the UNHCR, a repository of technical knowledge. The analogy reflects expert even if not exhaustive interpretations arising from the multi-layered interactions between development, climate risk, security risk and slow-onset events. In presenting these interactions as needing adequate attention, the IDMC contextually riskified slow-onset events to enable the phenomenon to be addressed from development and security approach, although not necessarily from a security approach because the riskifying statements are, development-wise, apparently stronger than a security approach. Despite the overall riskification framing, slow-onset events, for the Task Force, appears to be turning out as an issue for development strategists who, it is to be expected, can draw from the FCCC's experience. The latter is well-familiar with the linkages between slow- and rapid-onset events based on a technical paper published in 2012. In it, the FCCC 'aims to generate a knowledge base' on both the linkages and approaches to identifying, analysing and addressing concerns about slow-onset events.

## 6. Applying displacement riskification

This section applies displacement riskification as an analytical tool, thus confirming the fact of discussions within Task Force meetings as related to climate-related displacement and slow-onset events. The confirmation should illuminate whether the statements were part of the FCCC's climate diplomacy strategy, including why and how the statements are utilised and with what consequences. In other words, the section discusses how the Task Force has understood and conceptualised displacement riskification. Despite that climate change has changed (and would continue to change) the perceptions and conceptions of security within the FCCC's Task Force, the potential for a strengthened international principle on climate-related displacement is quite weak. The weakness cannot be ascribed to lack of engagement because the Task Force continue to talk about the security risks of climate change. The weakness is due to an important finding: framings of (or statements on) displacement riskification are largely absent in the Task Force reporting to the COP. Riskification may be considered successful when the COP approves specific issues based on policy statements by riskifying actors which convincingly frame and express such issues as urgent security risks. When these actors frame a statement on security, the contexts surrounding the framing largely dictate how the underlying meanings of risks and threats therein are bargained with and perceived by the decision-maker of the COP. Success still depends on whether the COP will accept the framing as meeting the requisites of urgent political responses and measures, or at least the legitimisation thereof. It is worth noting here that the COP is often very bound by previously agreed framings. In what follows, those two findings are responsible for the weakened statements on displacement riskification as a normative agenda.

The Task Force's report to COP25 (2019) reflects the absence of sufficiently convincing riskifying statements on displacement riskification, broadly construed. And with many statements that one may draw upon as foundational support of displacement riskification neither satisfying the conditions of successful riskification nor materialising in formal reports, the reporting could be commended for omitting possible climate-security-conflict linkage. It could also be held responsible for the omission because the linkage is heavily contested. On a long-term basis, the reporting may not be riskification friendly, so it seemed at first glance, which would

<sup>21</sup> Synthesizing the state of knowledge to better understand displacement related to slow onset events, August 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/qus9fs6>

become secondary when recommendations for future action are completely devoid of statements that reflect a semblance of ordering a riskifying move. However, many statements in the concept notes for Task Force meetings draw upon the logic of riskification. With recursive focus on slow-onset impacts, riskifying actors clearly encapsulated riskification tone at the meetings. Various statements by Oxfam and the IDMC are indeed clear qualifiers for opening sentences in a riskifying move. Where and when such statements are heavily redacted into certain recommendations for the COP, the statements lost not only their original framing but the original intent, not to mention the possibility of redaction leading to the COP's possible unawareness of the original riskifying framings.

Even if we look beyond the limiting thought patterns of specific contexts in submissions by organisations, the Task Force's reporting to COP25 (2019) is largely devoid of statements that may qualify as riskifying moves for action before and after manifestation of events like slow-onset impact. Non-acknowledgement of riskifying statements – even if informal – may impede timely provision of protection to populations in need. Examples of such statements can be found in the IDMC's report and Oxfam submission. In its comprehensive technical report to the Task Force in August 2018, the IDMC urges the Task Force to 'systematically record loss and damage (including displacement)' in terms of slow-onset events, to improve research framing the interactions between slow-onset impacts and other drivers of displacement (including conflicts) and 'recognise' these contexts 'as a development issue'.<sup>22</sup> According to Oxfam's submission for the May 2018 Task Force stakeholder meeting, although the Global Compact on Refugees 'does not explicitly guarantee protection, assistance and solutions to people displaced by disasters and/or in the context of climate change', we should not discount the fact that "environmental degradation and natural disasters' are drivers and exacerbating factors in situations of conflict/persecution".<sup>23</sup> These are solid riskifying framings.

What is perhaps more important is why Oxfam used what is essentially a clear parlance of security logic in its submission and whether there is evidence that Oxfam's submission is truly significant. Yes, there is evidence, but in an indirect manner. There is certainly one key motivation although one cannot be absolutely certain. In 2017, Oxfam conducted a research project that was previously embargoed. The embargo process may seem overly cautious at first glance, but embargo often enhances research integrity because scholars and publishers can prevent misinformation and erroneous findings through in-house vetting before formal publication. Oxfam investigates the disproportionate incidence and impact of displacement linked to climate change in lower-income countries, as well as on Indigenous peoples.<sup>24</sup> There is high likelihood that the riskifying move by Oxfam – in the submission for the Task Force stakeholder meeting<sup>25</sup> – was influenced by the project's findings, which were based on case analysis of displacement data but acknowledgement of 'socially constructed gender roles' which is to say 'climate change is not gender-neutral'.<sup>26</sup>

From this end arises two important questions. First, can the Task Force ultimately be conceptualised of as a homogenous entity? While the Task Force has managed to arrive at common recommendations, the individual members of the Task Force definitely do not agree about everything. Future researchers might want to explore the question given that this paper contributes to identifying the shared meaning of displacement riskification and begins to show how the meaning is constituted as an object of knowledge. Second, to what extent are any riskification moves that are made connected to the mandate of the Task Force to make recommendations on how to avert, minimise and address displacement in the context of climate change? If this is the case then perhaps the mandate setting rather than behaviour at Task Force meetings is worth putting under the microscope. To realise its Workplan for the 2017/2018 period, the Task Force assigned

<sup>22</sup> IDMC, Synthesizing the state of knowledge, August 2018, pp. 29–34.

<sup>23</sup> Oxfam Submission, 2018, p. 5, <https://tinyurl.com/ybr67uhv>

<sup>24</sup> Oxfam, Uprooted by climate change. Responding to the growing risk of displacement, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ta4398v>

<sup>25</sup> Oxfam Submission, 2018, p. 2, <https://tinyurl.com/ybr67uhv>

<sup>26</sup> Oxfam, Uprooted by climate change. Responding to the growing risk of displacement, 2017, pp. 30–31.

**Table 2**  
Task Force's Workplan – 2017/2018 (Adapted from FCCC website).

Task	Undertaken by	Supported by
Map institutional frameworks and mandates within the UN system to avert, minimise and address displacement	PDD	ILO
Map existing international/regional guidance/tools on averting, minimising and addressing displacement	UNHCR	
Provide global baseline of climate-related disaster displacement risk	CSOs	IDMC
Map relevant policies/institutional frameworks that address the climate-displacement nexus at the national level	IOM	

tasks to the six organisations. As shown in Table 2, the individual tasks assigned to each of the organisations is directed towards a common goal: achieving the Task Force's mandate. The tasks also implicitly hint at displacement riskification. What is the point: one can argue that the riskification framings presented by each organization in its submission for meetings have been influenced by the assigned task. But most of the framings is nowhere to be found in the reporting to the COP. Although most discourse analysts would probably argue against securitisation and overly strong risk statements in relation to displacement in this field, this paper takes such a positive stance in relation to risk for an important reason. Although the dynamics of the complex climate-security-displacement nexus are contingent on a whole lot of factors that are internal and external to the nexus, upgrading attention to a security issue can be served by sensitising decision-makers to think more in security terms where and when necessary. Moreover, and as noted above, security framings can be found in the documents submitted by the organisations to the Task Force. The documents are sometimes informed by public opinion poll. This is an important reason why the COP ought to be clearly notified about relevant security framings, which, in a sense, can be taken as voices from below – the people displaced and in need of protection.

## 7. Concluding remarks

This paper considered the question of whether the discussions within Task Force meetings contribute to conceptualisation and riskification (or displacement riskification). The analysis showed that the Task Force has undertaken displacement riskification, and this has contributed to its understanding, conceptualisation, and riskification of climate-related displacement as well as slow-onset events. However, most security framings that are found in the discussions within Task Force meetings has been insufficiently addressed at the COP because the framings are mostly absent in the Task Force reportings to the COP. Furthermore, the current literature is yet to satisfactorily explain this breakthrough, which is vital for interpreting why various technical recommendations from the meetings have informed annual COP where decisions about displacement are ultimately signed off or rejected – in view of further consideration upon demonstration of convincingly new developments. This is a credible finding because the synthesis of detected changes in framings of statements revealed clear engagement with displacement riskification. More precisely, there is clear evidence of efforts to avert, minimise and address climate-related displacement and address slow-onset impacts. In short, if we are to believe that a riskifying statement imply a compelling motion for urgent measures in a high-politics setting – namely the COP – there is little to no engagement.

Embracing displacement riskification for interpreting policy statements can potentially turn Task Force meetings into a leading site where efforts to properly delineate the boundaries of climate-related displacement can become more concretised. This prescription aligns with the aim of the meeting held in September 2018 – to fine-tune and finalise the recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address climate-related displacement. In this light, the discussions within Task Force meetings, especially the technical reports on meetings, provide comprehensive

information on organisational/procedural matters and membership since the creation of the Task Force. The technical report on the May 2018 meeting, co-authored by the IOM and the PDD, offers an objective synthesis of existing literature which is not too different from the September 2018 reporting. The report in May mentions violence (twice), conflict (once), risk/risks (72 times) and displacement (226 times).<sup>27</sup> By comparison, the report on the September 2018 meeting mentions violence (4 times), conflict (8 times), risk/risks (185 times) and displacement (666 times).<sup>28</sup> The frequency more than doubled in the September reporting. If one is to make a single deduction from these numbers, the displacement riskification context of the mandate, whether direct or indirect, is being taken seriously. This is a key driver of the Task Force's posture on climate-related displacement and slow-onset impacts. Key organisations that constitute Task Force members (namely IDMC, IOM, PDD, UNHCR, UNHCR and UNDP) should be seen as coalescing into an incredibly formal alliance that pushed for stronger engagement with climate-related displacement and slow-onset events. If this is any indication of what is to come, then deeper engagement with these topics is to be expected which may well lead to their being recommended to the COP for policy consideration. This expectation brings a key policy implication. Displacement riskification is coming to light as a critical part of discussions at Task Force meetings. This has created an opportunity for the FCCC to build on this momentum by consolidating it into a cornerstone for future deliberation at the COP. Researchers might want to progress the contributions/findings – especially the fact that the Task Force has undertaken displacement riskification in the context of climate-related displacement and slow-onset events. Altogether, since the entire Task Force's mandate is concerned with knowledge creation and collation, researchers are encouraged to utilise the displacement riskification approach.

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## Data availability statement

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there is no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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<sup>27</sup> Task Force meeting report, May 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Task Force meeting report, September 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y6ryp6bp>

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