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**DISPLACING EVACUATIONS: A
BLIND SPOT IN DISASTER
DISPLACEMENT RESEARCH**

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Displacing Evacuations: A Blind Spot in Disaster Displacement Research

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ABSTRACT

Evacuations are a recognised form of displacement but have been largely overlooked in the forced migration literature. This is curious, given that many of the 33.4 million new internal displacements in 2019 were pre-emptive evacuations. This article examines the nature of evacuations in the context of disasters and climate change and suggests some reasons for the research gap. One reason may be the lack of clarity between pre-emptive evacuations, on the one hand, and arbitrary displacement, on the other – with the former often regarded as a proactive, positive means of moving people out of harm’s way. Another reason may be that many academics writing about displacement want to produce “policy-relevant research”, and if policymakers do not prioritise categories of inquiry, such as “evacuations”, then researchers may overlook them as well. In the disaster displacement context, the three-pronged typology of displacement, migration, and planned relocation – used in key instruments and policymaking processes – has also been adopted by academics. Evacuations have not featured as a standalone area of inquiry. Further conceptual and empirical analysis would help to ensure that evacuations are “seen” in their own right, and that operational responses are better tailored to protection needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Evacuations are a recognised form of displacement,¹ but they have been largely overlooked in the forced migration literature when it comes to disasters and the impacts of climate change – and certainly in contrast to the burgeoning scholarship in that field on displacement, migration, and planned relocations.² Likewise, there are

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1 See, for instance, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 11 Feb. 1998, principle 6(2)(d), and the inclusion of evacuations in the annual *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (GRID) of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

2 This article does not address evacuations in the context of armed conflict: Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 75 UNTS 287, 12 Aug. 1949 (entry into force: 21 Oct. 1951), Art. 49; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 1125 UNTS 609, 8 Jun. 1977 (entry into

international standards on mass evacuations in the context of disasters³ and numerous domestic laws, yet we have an incomplete understanding of how and why evacuations are used, what makes them successful or not, and when they come to an end.

This is curious, given that more than a third of the 33.4 million new internal displacements in 2019 were pre-emptive evacuations led by states,⁴ in all regions, and often in very large numbers. For instance, Typhoon Lekima in China led to the evacuation of more than two million people,⁵ while in Bangladesh, Cyclones Fani and Bulbul resulted in the evacuation of 1.7 million people and 2.1 million people, respectively.⁶ In developed countries, such as Australia and the United States, most internal displacement takes the form of pre-emptive evacuations by disaster risk management agencies or bushfire authorities.⁷

In refugee and migration studies, displacement is generally regarded as the indicator of extreme risk and vulnerability. By contrast, evacuations seem to have acquired a slightly different normative quality. In its 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), the IDMC observed that because evacuations have “successfully reduced the number of people killed in a number of large disasters”, they “highlight the fact that not all displacement is negative”.⁸ Likewise, the IDMC suggested that although a new cyclone early warning system adopted by Fiji in November 2019 could “trigger more displacement in the form of evacuations”, it “will reduce disaster mortality risk”⁹ – the implication being that this is a worthwhile trade-off. Similarly, the IDMC regarded Bangladesh’s high number of pre-emptive evacuations in 2019 as “testament to the government’s efforts in preparedness. [...] allowing them to evacuate and saving many lives”.¹⁰

force: 7 Dec. 1978), Art. 17; Guiding Principles, principle 6(2)(b). These will be examined as part of the wider project of which the present contribution forms a part.

3 Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, *The MEND Guide: Comprehensive Guide for Planning Mass Evacuations in Natural Disasters* (2014), available at: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/mend-guide-comprehensive-guide-planning-mass-evacuations-natural-disasters-pilot-document> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).

4 IDMC, *Methodological Annex*, Geneva, IDMC, 2020, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/downloads/2020-IDMC-GRID-methodology.pdf> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020), 24; IDMC, *GRID 2020*, Geneva, IDMC, 2020, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020), 8. In South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific, where most displacement was recorded, the majority of such displacement was government-led pre-emptive evacuations. *Ibid.*, 14.

5 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 40, referring to JBA Risk Management, *Two Million Evacuated in China as Typhoon Lekima Makes Landfall in the Western Pacific*, Skipton, JBA Risk Management, 2019, available at: <https://www.jbarisk.com/flood-services/event-response/typhoon-lekima/> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).

6 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 49, referring to UNICEF, *Bangladesh Cyclonic Storm Fani Situation Report No 2*, Dhaka, UNICEF, 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/unicef-bangladesh-cyclonic-storm-fani-situation-report-no-2-9-may-2019> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020); BRAC, *Cyclone Bulbul Situation Report-2*, Dhaka, BRAC, 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/cyclone-bulbul-situation-report-2-500pm-bst-10-november-2019> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).

7 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 43, 53.

8 *Ibid.*, 14.

9 *Ibid.*, 43.

10 *Ibid.*, 49, referring also to A. Habib, M. Shahidullah & D. Ahmed, “The Bangladesh Cyclone Preparedness Program: A Vital Component of the Nation’s Multi-Hazard Early Warning System”, in M. Golnarahhi (ed.), *Institutional Partnerships in Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems: A Compilation of Seven National Good Practices and Guiding Principles*, Heidelberg, Springer, 2012.

Despite this, there is evidence that displacement may be prolonged for many evacuees whose homes are damaged or destroyed.¹¹ There is a common yet flawed assumption that people will be able to return to their homes shortly after a disaster.¹² Whereas some people may be able to return after just a few hours, others may be unable to return – or settle elsewhere – for years,¹³ with serious consequences for their livelihoods, access to resources, legal status, and overall well-being. Although there is evidence to suggest that displacement by disasters is less likely to be protracted than displacement by persecution or conflict,¹⁴ there is also a large data collection gap which means our knowledge is incomplete.¹⁵ While some states do compile robust figures,¹⁶ a scoping study by the IDMC in 2015 concluded that there are probably many more people living in protracted disaster displacement than previously thought. This has “significant implications for people who remain displaced but are not counted, and [for] those responsible for protecting and assisting them”.¹⁷

There is therefore a research gap when it comes to expressly examining the space between short-term, temporary (and often recurrent) evacuations and long-term, permanent relocations, where people may be caught in a legal limbo without sustainable or durable solutions. In some contexts, such people are described simply as the homeless or the urban poor; in others, they are identified as internally displaced persons whose needs are understood within a rights-based framework.

As such, evacuation plans should include possibilities for local integration or planned relocation if return is not viable.¹⁸ Indeed, assumptions that underpin the traditional “durable solutions” paradigm need to be rethought in the context of disasters and climate change.¹⁹ At times, evacuees may continue to find themselves in precarious circumstances and remain at risk of exposure to further disasters and displacement (sometimes over and over again). Authorities may prevent them from returning to their homes if the area has been declared a danger or no-build zone, or if land has been irrevocably altered or livelihoods destroyed.²⁰ This means that “a responsible durable solutions policy would require the promotion of permanent

11 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 8; see e.g., 41 (Philippines).

12 J. McAdam, E. Bower, S. Weerasinghe & T. Wood, *Submission to the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change*, Submission, Sydney, 6 May 2020, 4–5.

13 IDMC, *Methodological Annex*, 8.

14 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 12. For instance, IDMC estimated – conservatively – that at the end of 2019, some 1.9 million people remained displaced as a result of disasters (representing just 5.5 per cent of the global total that year): *Ibid.*, 47. By contrast, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 77 per cent of the world’s refugees are in protracted situations: UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*, Copenhagen, UNHCR, 2020, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/See200e37.pdf> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020), 24.

15 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 12. See also IDMC, *Methodological Annex*, 24–25.

16 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 58 (Uruguay) and 83 (Philippines).

17 IDMC, *Methodological Annex*, 25; scoping study mentioned there. See also, IDMC, *Recovery Postponed: The Long-Term Plight of People Displaced by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Radiation Disaster*, Geneva, IDMC, 2017, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/20170206-idmc-japan-case-study.pdf> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).

18 *MEND Guide*, 97.

19 *Ibid.*

20 See McAdam et al., *Submission to the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel*, 4; A. Sherwood et al., *Resolving Post-Disaster Displacement: Insights from the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda)*,

resettlement elsewhere instead of return”.²¹ In this vein, it has been suggested that durable solutions should be “[re-]conceptualized as opportunities to not only resolve past displacement and return to (or ideally enhance) the status quo, but equally to avert future displacement”.²²

2. THE LAW

Under human rights law, states *must* respond to threats to life and limb occasioned by natural hazards, including the adverse impacts of disasters and climate change. This may include an obligation to evacuate people at risk,²³ including by force under certain limited conditions.²⁴ The right to life means that where a disaster risk is known, authorities must have a plan in place for emergency evacuations,²⁵ order the evacuation of those whose lives are at imminent risk, and ensure that evacuation orders are enforced until the threat has dissipated.²⁶ Evacuations must be carried out in a non-discriminatory manner that respects other human rights.²⁷

Washington, Brookings Institution/International Organization for Migration, 2015, available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/brookings_haiyan_report.pdf (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).

- 21 M. Bradley & J. McAdam, *Rethinking Durable Solutions to Displacement in the Context of Climate Change*, Washington, Brookings Institution, May 2012, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/05-displacement-bradley-mcadam.pdf> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).
- 22 McAdam et al., *Submission to the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel*, 4. As Bower's research on Nepal shows, onward mobility was a dominant coping strategy after the 2015 earthquake; return was often considered to be unfeasible or undesirable: E. Bower, "The Pursuit of 'Durable Solutions' in Internal Disaster Displacement Situations: Re-thinking the Assumptions of an Inherited Paradigm", The Hugo Conference, University of Liège, 3–5 Nov. 2016, abstract available at: <http://events.ulg.ac.be/hugo-conference/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/formidable/12/Hugo-Conference-2016-Abstract-Bower.pdf> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020).
- 23 See further B. Burson, W. Kälin, J. McAdam & S. Weerasinghe, "The Duty to Move People Out of Harm's Way in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 37, 2018, 379–407; International Law Association, Sydney Declaration of Principles on the Protection of Persons Displaced in the Content of Sea Level Rise, Annex to Res. 6/2018 (Aug. 2018), principle 5, and commentary in D. Vidas, D. Freestone & J. McAdam (eds.), *International Law and Sea Level Rise: Report of the International Law Association Committee on International Law and Sea Level Rise*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2018, 57–58.
- 24 Guiding Principles, principle 6(2)(d). See also, W. Kälin, *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons: Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters*, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/13/Add.1, 5 Mar. 2009, para. 42:

The duty to protect the life and security of persons entails, in particular, an obligation to evacuate persons from zones where they face imminent dangers for life and limb caused by a disaster. A failure to assist persons who cannot leave such zones on their own may amount to a human rights violation if competent authorities knew or should have known the danger and would have had the capacity to act.

- 25 European Court of Human Rights, *Budayeva v Russia*, Appl. Nos. 15339/02, 21166/02, 20058/02, 11673/02, and 15343/02, 20 Mar. 2008, para. 152.
- 26 *Ibid.*, para. 153.
- 27 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *IASC Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters*, Washington, Brookings–Bern Project on Internal Displacement, Jan. 2011, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/OperationalGuidelines_IDP.pdf (last visited 27 Jul. 2020), A.1.5; Guiding Principles, principle 8; E. Sommaro, "Derogation from Human Rights Treaties in Situations of Natural or Man-Made Disasters", in A. de Guttery, M. Gestri & G. Venturini (eds.), *International Disaster Response Law*, The Hague, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2012, 337.

While human rights law also protects the right to freedom of movement, this right is not absolute. Thus, authorities may order people to evacuate if it is “necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others”, and any restrictions on rights are “provided by law” and “consistent with other” human rights.²⁸ The tension between the right to free movement and the right to life has not yet been examined by any international treaty-monitoring body or regional court.²⁹ However, a disaster-related evacuation is only permitted if “the safety and health of those affected” requires it and it is for the shortest time possible.³⁰ If these conditions are not met, then the evacuation may amount to unlawful, arbitrary displacement.³¹

Notwithstanding these strong legal underpinnings, mandatory evacuation orders are not used by all states, and where they do exist, prosecution for evading them is often extremely low.³² Studies examining why people flout evacuation orders reveal a number of motivating factors, including “the magnitude and proximity of the disaster, past encounters with disasters, vulnerability of dependents, and consistency and clarity of warnings”.³³ For minority and/or impoverished communities, “the choice not to evacuate is often not a choice at all”.³⁴

Research into Australian responses to bushfire evacuation orders shows that people do not make decisions according to a binary “stay” or “go” framework. Rather, researchers have identified seven archetypes, ranging from people who deny that a threat exists, to those who are determined to evacuate safely, through to those who are self-reliant, well-prepared, and experienced with fires but willing to evacuate in certain conditions.³⁵ Recognising this diversity, especially ahead of an emergency, is important for policymakers and responders alike to ensure that communications and preparations are appropriately targeted. Well-planned, evidence-based strategies are essential given that the exigencies of an emergency necessitate rapid decision-making, often in changing conditions and with resource constraints.

28 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 999 UNTS 171, 16 Dec. 1966 (entry into force: 23 Mar. 1976), Art. 12(3); Protocol 4 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Securing Certain Rights and Freedoms Other Than Those Already Included in the Convention and in the First Protocol Thereto, ETS No. 046, 16 Sep. 1963 (entry into force: 2 May 1968), Art. 2; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNGA Res. 217A(III), 10 Dec. 1948, Art. 13.

29 Burson et al., “The Duty to Move People”, 395.

30 Guiding Principles, principles 6(2)(d) and 6(3); African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, 23 Oct. 2009 (entry into force: 6 Dec. 2012) (Kampala Convention), Art. 4(4)(f). See also *MEND Guide*, 27–28.

31 Guiding Principles, principle 6(1); Kampala Convention, Arts. 3(1)(a) and 4(1); Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons to the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region, 30 Nov. 2006 (entry into force: 21 Jun. 2008), Art. 3(1). For further analysis, see Burson et al., “The Duty to Move People”, 397.

32 Curtis was unable to find any such prosecutions in the United States: B. Curtis, “Criminalizing Non-Evacuation Behavior: Unintended Consequences and Undesirable Results”, *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 2, 2015, 503–548, 524.

33 *Ibid.*, 526, referring to K. Elder et al., “African Americans’ Decisions Not to Evacuate New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina: A Qualitative Study”, *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(Suppl. 1), 2007, S124–S129.

34 Curtis, “Criminalizing Non-Evacuation Behavior”, 526.

35 K. Strahan, J. Whittaker & J. Handmer, “Self-Evacuation Archetypes in Australian Bushfire”, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 27, 2018, 307–316.

While lessons have been learned from poor evacuation practices, such as the numerous policy and operational failings by US authorities during Hurricane Katrina in 2005,³⁶ there remains much to improve. In practice, lines of authority are often blurred, and in federal states (such as the United States and Australia), a lack of clarity between federal and state responsibilities can create cumbersome obstacles.

3. THE RESEARCH GAP

Given the nature and scale of evacuations in practice, the absence of deep conceptual work on – or detailed empirical analysis of – evacuations in forced migration scholarship is puzzling. Some tentative explanations are offered below.

First, evacuations are often regarded as a *proactive* measure to move people to safety in the face of an imminent threat, rather than a form of displacement. This is reflected in the examples above from the GRID 2020 report.³⁷ Since people may evacuate on their own initiative, they may not be formally recognised or counted, especially when they go to stay with relatives or friends rather than in evacuation centres. Although the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement recognise that evacuations are a form of internal displacement, they will not constitute “arbitrary displacement” in a disaster if “the safety and health of those affected requires their evacuation”.³⁸ That said, planned relocations and migration can also constitute pre-emptive, protective measures,³⁹ so this factor alone does not adequately explain the comparatively sparse literature on evacuations in this context.

Secondly, there may be a “chicken and egg” problem. The data do not yet allow a clear distinction to be made between pre-emptive evacuations and displacement in response to disasters,⁴⁰ which perpetuates a lack of conceptual clarity and may make quantitative analysis difficult. When does pre-emptive evacuation (which may be voluntary) become arbitrary displacement? Added to this quandary is the fact that evacuations may be very short-term and geographically confined, and people may be evacuated multiple times (e.g. from recurrent flooding). These elements may challenge traditional conceptions of “displacement”. A related point is that domestic authorities are primarily responsible for carrying out evacuations and may not conceive of such movement as displacement;⁴¹ were international actors more involved, the framing might be different.⁴²

Thirdly, and related to the point above, academics writing in this field are often eager to produce “policy-relevant research”. This “dual imperative” has been described as a common characteristic of refugee law scholarship, which is similarly an area that is “heavily influenced by international organizations and networks of

36 See e.g., A. L. Fairchild et al., *Ethical and Legal Challenges Posed by Mandatory Hurricane Evacuation: Duties and Limits*, New York, National Center for Disaster Preparedness, 2006, available at: <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8183FW8> (last visited 27 Jul. 2020). There were some important changes to US law and policy as a result.

37 See notes 8–10 of this article.

38 Guiding Principles, principle 6(2)(d).

39 See, for instance, K. E. McNamara et al., “The Complex Decision-Making of Climate-Induced Relocation: Adaptation and Loss and Damage”, *Climate Policy*, 18, 2018, 111–117.

40 IDMC, *GRID 2020*, 47.

41 For instance, this conceptualisation was missing in the Australian context during the 2019–20 bushfires.

42 My thanks to Sanjula Weerasinghe for suggesting this point.

practitioners that actively take part in and promote particular kinds of scholarly production”.⁴³ While the benefits of a closely connected academic–policy community are considerable, there are also potential drawbacks, including that the “opportunity to influence may at times risk stifling deeper reflection and foundational critique”.⁴⁴

As such, if policymakers do not prioritise certain categories of inquiry, such as “evacuations”, then researchers may overlook them as well. This concern was identified some years ago by Oliver Bakewell, who argued that by adopting the classifications and priorities of policymakers when formulating their own research questions, researchers were privileging a “policy-relevant” worldview and thereby rendering other groups of forced migrants invisible.⁴⁵

How has this played out in the field of disaster displacement? The first significant global policy development in this context was the Cancún Adaptation Framework of 2010, which called on states to enhance action on climate change adaptation, including through “[m]easures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced *displacement, migration and planned relocation*.”⁴⁶ These three types of movement were subsequently used to frame other key processes and instruments in this area, including the Nansen Initiative’s Protection Agenda⁴⁷ and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.⁴⁸ While both of these acknowledged evacuations, it was generally in passing rather than analytically (even though evacuations may lead to planned relocations). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that academic research over the past decade has adopted the same typology as these on-going policy processes.

Even so, instruments on disasters, such as the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction⁴⁹ and the 2010 Inter-Agency Standing Committee Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters,⁵⁰ do

43 R. Byrne & T. Gammeltoft-Hansen, “International Refugee Law Between Scholarship and Practice”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 32(2), 2020, 181–199, 185.

44 C. Costello, M. Foster & J. McAdam, “Introducing International Refugee Law as a Scholarly Field”, in C. Costello, M. Foster & J. McAdam (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Refugee Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2021.

45 O. Bakewell, “Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(4), 2008, 432–453; see also O. Gonzalez-Benson, F. T. Temprosa & S. Shlebah, “From Policy Irrelevance to a Return to Relevance: Active Strategies in Forced Migration Research”, *Refugee Review*, 4(1), 2020, 69–83.

46 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Sixteenth Session, Held in Cancn from 29 November to 10 December 2010: Addendum: Part Two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at Its Sixteenth Session*, FCCC Dec. 1/CP.16, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1, 15 Mar. 2011, para. 14(f) (emphasis added).

47 Nansen Initiative on Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement, *Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change*, vol. 1, Geneva, The Nansen Initiative, 2015, available at: <https://nanseninitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PROTECTION-AGENDA-VOLUME-1.pdf> (last accessed 27 Jul. 2020).

48 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, UN Doc. A/RES/73/195, 19 Dec. 2018, Objective 2, paras. 18(h)–(l); Objective 5, para. 21(g)–(h). Both the Protection Agenda and the Global Compact mention evacuations, but they are not part of the typology used to frame forms of/responses to mobility.

49 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, UNGA Res. 69/283, 23 Jun. 2015.

50 IASC *Operational Guidelines*, 15ff.

address evacuations, with the latter incorporating detailed practical guidance. The Sendai Framework calls on states to “[s]trengthen the capacity of local authorities to evacuate persons living in disaster-prone areas”⁵¹ and to “[p]romote regular disaster preparedness, response and recovery exercises, including evacuation drills [. . .] with a view to ensuring rapid and effective response to disasters and related displacement.”⁵² However, these instruments are less central to forced migration than those mentioned above, and perhaps for that reason, have been less influential for scholars in this field.

A final reason for the research gap could be that studies of disaster/climate change-related mobility slot into a pre-existing body of scholarship on displacement, migration, and planned relocations generally (the latter linked to studies on development-forced displacement and relocation). By contrast, there was – and, as yet, still is – no comparable field of forced migration evacuation studies.

4. CONCLUSION

As climate change exacerbates the frequency and severity of disasters, evacuations in anticipation of – and in response to – imminent harm are likely to increase. While evacuations can provide a vital emergency tool to rescue people from crises, they also have the potential to displace people and undermine long-term protection needs. The literature’s current blind spot thus creates considerable scope and momentum for research on the role of evacuations as a pre-emptive response to the impacts of disasters and climate change, and on solutions for those who remain without protection over a protracted period. Notwithstanding helpful practical guidance on evacuations,⁵³ conceptual ambiguity (including the normative ‘rescue’ paradigm) may obscure underlying rights violations/deprivations and the availability of durable solutions. If neither policymakers nor academics focus on evacuations as a category of inquiry, then there is a risk that the needs and rights of those who move will be overlooked. Further detailed, empirical analysis would help to ensure that evacuations are “seen” in their own right, and that operational responses are better tailored to people’s protection needs. As part of this, protection principles derived from refugee and human rights law should be fully incorporated into the conception, planning, and implementation of evacuations to help safeguard against foreseeable risks.

51 Sendai Framework, para. 33(m).

52 *Ibid.*, para. 33(h).

53 See e.g. *MEND Guide; IASC Operational Guidelines*.