Developing the concept of Human Mobility in the context of environmental and climate change: the role of knowledge production by IOM and UNHCR

Desenvolvendo o conceito de Mobilidade Humana no contexto das mudanças climáticas e ambientais: o papel da produção de conhecimento pela OIM e pelo ACNUR

*Giulia Manccini Pinheiro**

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

Human mobility as a response to environmental degradation and disasters has been a recurrent feature throughout history. What distinguishes the current era is the intensification of climate change and its consequences, which have increasingly destroyed habitats and livelihoods and pushed greater numbers of people to move (PIGUET, 2013). Despite sporadic references in earlier decades, it was only in the 1990s that policymakers and the international community began to frame this phenomenon as an issue requiring coordinated attention. Since then, research has demonstrated that in the last years disasters have displaced more people annually than conflict and violence (IDMC, 2025). Yet, unlike people recognised as refugees, those affected by environmental and climate-related mobility remain without a biding international protection regime.

Over the past two decades, the intersection of human mobility with environmental and climate change has emerged as a focal point within global governance debates, prompting sustained engagement from a range

* South American Network for Environmental Migration (RESAMA) researcher. E-mail address: giuliamanccini@gmail.com

of international actors. Among these, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have played critical roles in conceptualising, articulating, and shaping the discourse around the Human Mobility in the Context of Environmental and Climate Change (HMCECC) concept.

This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of how IOM and UNHCR have contributed to the development and dissemination of HMCECC as a dominant policy concept through its knowledge produced materials from 2008 to August 2025. Drawing on conceptual history and interpretive policy analysis, and utilising Oliver Nay's tripartite model of *normalisation, fragmentation,* and *assimilation,* the research traces the transformation of meanings, discursive practices, and knowledge production within institutional publications, rather than focusing solely on negotiated intergovernmental language (NAY, 2014, 2013).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This article employs **conceptual history (KOSELLECK, 2004)** and **interpretive policy analysis** (YANOW, 2000) as its analytical framework, complemented by Oliver Nay's approach to the study of policy concepts (NAY, 2014, 2013). Conceptual history provides the theoretical lens to trace how the approach to the concept of HMCECC has shifted over time, capturing the semantic struggles and redefinitions that characterise its institutional use. Interpretive policy analysis offers methodological tools for examining organisational publications as discursive artefacts, focusing on how IOM and UNHCR frame problems, construct categories, and embed meanings in their reports.

Building on Nay's work on the *fragile state* concept (NAY, 2013), the study treats international organisations as producers of hegemonic knowledge and applies his three processes of *normalisation, fragmentation,* **and** *assimilation* to capture how concepts are created, circulated, and adapted across institutional contexts. Together, these approaches enable the study the **transformation of meanings** rather than policy outcomes, aligning with the objective of analysing knowledge production within international organisations.

The rationale for studying IOM and UNHCR publications lies in the concept of *bounded rationality* (CAIRNEY AND ZAHARIADIS, 2016; ZAHARIADIS, 1999), which emphasises that policymakers make decisions under conditions of limited information, time, and cognitive capacity. In such contexts, international organisations' reports and policy briefs are designed

to be short and direct materials focusing on shaping policy choices and are often seen as authoritative knowledge (JASANOFF, 2004). Publications by IOM and UNHCR are both institutional reflections of their mandates and practical reference points for decision-makers seeking guidance on emerging complex governance challenges. These two organisations are selected because they are the UN entities with **specific mandates on human mobility**[2]: IOM with its comprehensive human mobility/ migration mandate (IOM, 1989) and UNHCR with its mandate for the protection of refugees and displaced persons (UNGA, 1950).

The study period is divided into three phases, defined by the adoption of international frameworks addressing mobility, environmental, and climate change. The first phase (2008-2010) corresponds to the earliest references to human mobility umbrella following the adoption of the Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (UNFCCC, 2010). Although the UNFCCC is not an organisation specifically mandated for human mobility, this declaration is recognised as the cornerstone of the conceptualisation of the phenomenon, as subsequent frameworks consistently adopted its wording. The second phase (2011-2018) after the Cancun Framework, considering the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (2015) (UNDRR, 2015), Nansen Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (2015) (NANSEN INITATIVE, 2015), the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016) (UNGA, 2016) the first United Nations resolution on human mobility to explicitly reference climate change and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (2018) (UNGA, 2018) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (2018) (United Nations, 2018). This phase is also marked by the adoption of the Paris Agreement (2015) (UNFCCC, 2015) and the creation of the Task Force on Displacement (TDF, 2017), within the UNFCCC, both of which advanced international recognition of disaster and climate-related mobility. The third phase (2019-present) begins after the adoption of the Global Compacts until the August 2025.

This periodisation situates the analysis of IOM and UNHCR publications within broader global reference points, while keeping the empirical corpus limited to organisational outputs rather than the frameworks themselves. While international frameworks such as the Cancun Adaptation Framework (UNFCCC, 2010), the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015), and the Global Compacts (UNGA, 2018; UNITED NATIONS, 2018) provide critical reference points for periodisation, the present study does not analyse their texts directly. Instead, it focuses on organisational publications to capture how these two institutions conceptualise and

articulate human mobility in the context of environmental and climate change in relation to their mandates. This delimitation ensures that the findings reflect institutional knowledge produced rather than the negotiated language of intergovernmental agreements.

The data was collected through a systematic revision of the IOM *Migration, Environment and Climate Change* online library, UNHCR's digital repository of reports and publications[3], using the tag *Climate Change and Environment*[4], and the *Reliefweb website*[5], using the *organisation* tag of *UNHCR* and *IOM* and filtering words such as *Climate Change, Environment,* and *Disasters*. All relevant publications were reviewed and organised according to institutional authorship, distinguishing between IOM and UNHCR outputs. Publications produced in partnership with other UN agencies or non-governmental organisations were attributed only to the lead organisation under analysis, while joint IOM-UNHCR publications were considered separately in the combined analysis. The documents were examined qualitatively, with attention to the specific vocabulary employed and the contexts in which references to human mobility appeared, including the surrounding paragraph and the thematic section. This analytical strategy follows the methodological framework previously outlined, privileging semantic and discursive production of concepts by international organisations, rather than their reflection in international policy frameworks.

3 KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The literature on knowledge production by international organisations offers multiple approaches to understanding why such bodies generate knowledge and how they benefit from it. A Weberian perspective conceives of knowledge primarily as a problem-solving tool, helping organisations fulfil their mandates more effectively. In contrast, a Foucauldian perspective interprets knowledge as a technique of power, serving to legitimise authority and disseminate dominant discourses (BOSWELL, 2009). A further line of research, drawing on the geopolitics of knowledge, highlights how hierarchies of knowledge reflect colonial legacies and Western dominance in methodology and epistemology (AGNEW, 2007; SHAHJAHAN, 2016). This is particularly relevant for international organisations whose headquarters and networks of expertise are largely concentrated in Europe and North America, reproducing asymmetries in global knowledge production (ANGHIE, 1999; WEISS and DAWS, 2008).

Other perspectives within the geographic approach focus on recovering and legitimising local or indigenous forms of knowledge, while also showing how international organisations adapt global frameworks into policy guidance at the local level (ANDREWS, 2013; HYDEN et al., 2004). Nevertheless, many of these approaches tend to treat international organisations as unified actors, strategically pursuing rational objectives. They overlook the influence of institutional structures, donor priorities, symbolic capital, and intra-organisational dynamics on the type of knowledge produced (WILLIAMS and GONZALEZ HERNANDO, 2018). They also tend to neglect the competitive environment in which international organisations operate, marked by asymmetries in mandates and resources, where knowledge is often produced reactively to defend institutional interests and frame concepts in ways that reinforce organisational legitimacy (DOLOWITZ and MARSH, 2000; NAY, 2014).

Finally, scholars highlight that international organisations produce both *analytical knowledge*, which describes and categorises phenomena, and *normative knowledge*, which prescribes narratives and policy solutions (BEHAGUE et al., 2009; KORNEEV, 2018). These forms of knowledge shape international agendas and generate policy recommendations that position organisations as central actors in implementation (PÉCOUD, 2015; ZAPP, 2021). Yet international organisations are only one set of actors in wider transnational knowledge networks that also include diplomats, state agencies, academics, think tanks, NGOs, and the media (NAY, 2014). In this crowded field, policymakers' bounded rationality (QUIRK, 2007; SIMON, 1991) explains why knowledge from international organisations often carries particular weight: decision-makers tend to privilege it as credible, accessible, and politically useful, even when it reflects the institutional interests of the organisations that produce it (BOSWELL, 2009; RAUTALIN et al., 2021).

One of the central challenges in framing the concept of *Human Mobility in the context of environmental and climate change* lies in determining what is included or excluded from it. Some scholars argue that establishing a specific definition and corresponding protection regime risks arbitrarily distinguishing between those deemed worthy of protection and those who are not. For example, it has been questioned why migrants moving in the context of climate change should be granted greater protection than economic migrants displaced by a political or an economic crisis (McADAM, 2011). In contrast, other scholars contend that since climate change can be linked to the overexploitation of natural resources and pollution caused by specific states, those displaced by climate impacts may hold such states liable, a perspective that reinforces the argument for extending protection to them (GORAL, 2014). This debate has gained new relevance in light of the

International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion of July 2025, which affirmed that states bear legal obligations to prevent significant harm to the climate system and may incur responsibility for the impacts of climate change, including those leading to displacement (ICJ, 2025)[6].

In this sense, HMCECC is recognised as a complex and uncertain policy problem, one that can be interpreted through multiple perspectives and incorporated into diverse institutional mandates. Confronted with this regime complexity, the present study will now analyse how IOM and UNHCR have approached the concept in its knowledge materials. The analysis draws on Oliver Nay's framework of three normative processes—*normalisation, fragmentation,* **and** *assimilation*—to examine how the concept has been created and developed within global governance.

4 PHASE I: NORMALISATION (1990 - 2010)

According to Oliver Nay's theory, *Normalisation* is the first stage of the production of hegemonic knowledge by international organisations. Normalisation is the process where one concept, previously used only by small groups of people, gains acceptance by a broader audience, and it starts to be used by policymakers, experts, consultants, bureaucrats, and other stakeholders. As a result, the concept becomes an accepted policy problem and what Nay defines as a" *transnational norm conveying a set of principles, values, and beliefs that are held to be valid and influence how actors perceive the reality and evaluate potential actions*" (NAY, 2014). The characteristics of this stage are the increasing use of the concept in public statements, programmes and references documents, a gradual inclusion of the concept as a distinct category worth attention in the policy analysis, insertion into regulatory rules and procedures, and its dissemination among various audiences and stakeholders (NAY, 2014).

In tracing the conceptual evolution of *Human Mobility in the Context of Environmental and Climate Change*, the period between 1990 and 2010 can be understood as the phase of *normalisation*. During these years, debates emerged concerning the framing of the concept, possible definitions, and its relevance within international policy and academic discussions. The year 2010 represents a key temporal marker, as HMCECC entered the official international policy agenda through its inclusion in the Cancun Agreements under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2010). Although this reference did not establish binding commitments, it is widely regarded as a landmark in the field, as it introduced and consolidated the terminology still used today. In particular, the use of *human mobility* as an umbrella term encompassing migration, displacement,

and planned relocation became the standard vocabulary for describing the phenomenon (JAKOBSSON, 2021). Furthermore, the Cancun Agreements affirmed the connection between climate change and human mobility while recognising that climate change interacts with other social, economic, and political drivers of movement.

4.1 UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the UN agency mandated to protect refugees, with its authority grounded in the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951) and expanded by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNGA, 1967). While its original mandate was limited to post-war Europe, it was subsequently extended to cover other regions and later to include internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, though only with state consent and without altering the scope of the Convention itself (HALL, 2016; McADAM, 2012). Notably, neither the Convention nor the Protocol recognises environmental factors as grounds for refugee status (McADAM, 2012). When debates on *Human Mobility in the Context of Environmental and Climate Change* began to emerge, UNHCR initially maintained that climate change and disasters did not constitute reasons for granting refugee protection. This position started to shift under High Commissioner António Guterres, who in 2007 began publicly linking climate change to displacement in his speeches (HALL, 2016). From 2008 onwards, UNHCR produced studies on the nexus between climate change, disasters, and displacement (UNHCR, 2008), which can be interpreted as the first step to frame the issue. At the programmatic level, UNHCR adopted the view that most displacement driven by climate change would occur internally, thereby aligning with its IDP protection mandate (HALL, 2016; McADAM, 2011). The organisation also submitted policy documents to the UNFCCC in 2009 and 2010, contributing to the inclusion of displaced in the Cancun Agreements (UNHCR, 2010a). These developments correspond to what Nay (2014) describes as the *normalisation phase*, where concepts gain legitimacy through repeated reference in speeches, policy statements, and the production of definitions, statistics, and analyses.

At the same time, Guterres sought to broaden UNHCR's approach to climate-related displacement. In a 2009 speech, he cited estimates that 20 million people had been displaced in 2008 due to climate impacts (UNHCR, 2009), and in 2010 UNHCR issued a background paper on protection gaps and possible responses (UNHCR, 2010b). However, these efforts met with resistance from states and major donors, who opposed expanding protection obligations beyond those already established in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. In parallel, many researchers and members

of the international community warned that reopening political negotiations over the refugee definition risked producing a narrower concept rather than expanding protection (BIERMANN and BOAS, 2008; McADAM, 2011). In light of these political and institutional constraints, UNHCR did not pursue a formal mandate change and instead adopted a more cautious policy discourse thereafter.

4.2 IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951 with a mandate covering all stages of migration, from departure and transit to settlement and integration in host societies. Unlike UNHCR, however, IOM only became part of the United Nations system in 2016, when it joined as a related agency. Within its broader mandate, IOM began engaging in programmatic activities on migration and the environment in the early 1990s, particularly in the context of disaster response (CHAZANOEL and IONESCO, 2018). In 2007, it organised a session of its annual *International Dialogue on Migration (IDM)* on "Migration and the Environment" and issued its first official definition of *environmental migrants (IOM, 2007)*. Two years later, IOM published *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Assessing the Evidence* (IOM, 2009), its first dedicated study explicitly linking climate change and migration. This publication supported IOM's advocacy during the UNFCCC negotiations that led to the inclusion of mobility in the 2010 Cancun Agreements. The following year, IOM dedicated the entirety of its IDM to environmental migration, signalling its intention to consolidate its role as a key actor in the field.

From a programmatic perspective, IOM had long conducted activities relevant to climate- and disaster-related mobility, though without applying the label of "environmental migration" (HALL, 2016). Its strategy during this period can thus be seen as an effort to formalise and disseminate the concept by mainstreaming it into existing programmes and policy debates. In line with Nay's notion of the *normalisation phase*, IOM progressively incorporated the terminology into official discourse and policy fora, particularly through its IDMs in 2007 and 2010. However, compared to UNHCR, IOM produced less **analytical knowledge** in this period, focusing more on programmatic engagement than on conceptual or statistical elaboration. This dynamic reflected differences in symbolic capital: while UNHCR was initially perceived as the lead agency for *climate refugees* and its High Commissioner actively sought to place the issue on the global agenda, IOM's leadership invested fewer resources in shaping member states' positions. Moreover, unlike UNHCR, whose donor-driven governance structure constrained any attempt

to expand its mandate, IOM's broader operational mandate and flexibility allowed it to gradually position itself as a central actor in the governance of migration, environment, and climate change.

During the normalisation phase, UNHCR and IOM approached *HMCECC* in distinct ways. UNHCR played a leading role in producing **analytical knowledge**, publishing studies from 2008 onwards that framed the link between climate change, disasters, and displacement, and submitting technical inputs. IOM, by contrast, relied more on its **programmatic activities** and policy fora, notably the International Dialogue on Migration (2007 and 2010) and the 2009 *Assessing the Evidence* report (IOM, 2009), to disseminate the notion of environmental migration. Whereas UNHCR drew on its symbolic authority to shape the discourse through discourses, IOM advanced the terminology through operational engagement and agenda-setting initiatives. This reflects Nay's description of normalisation as the stage in which a concept gains traction through repeated use, analytical investigation, and the link to institutional legitimacy (NAY, 2013).

5 PHASE II: FRAGMENTATION (2016 - 2025)

Once a concept becomes widely circulated across different audiences, it enters a stage of **fragmentation**. At this point, the concept is debated by policymakers, analysts, academics, and practitioners, which leads to divergent interpretations and local adaptations (NAY, 2014). Nay identifies three dynamics shaping this stage: first increasing analytical sophistication, which enriches debate but also multiplies meanings; second, divergent appropriations by actors who redefine the concept for their own purposes; and third, resistance from those who dispute its validity. This paradox means that the more a concept spreads, the more fragmented it becomes, yet this very fragmentation also extends its reach, allowing it to be mobilised in multiple contexts.

Once the concept of *HMCECC* became globally widespread, it entered a phase of *fragmentation*, marked by disputes between "maximalists" and "minimalists" over its definition and categories (GEMENNE, 2011). While that was a growing consensus that climate change can be linked to human mobility, among other factors, debates focused on how to classify the phenomenon. Movements were classified as internal or cross-border, temporary or permanent, and whether they should be framed as migration or displacement, depending on degrees of voluntariness (GEMENNE et al., 2014; KÄLIN, 2012; KÄLIN and SCHREPFTER, 2012). Other studies focused on the geographical placement of the movement and its changes from local

communities, countries and regions. Analytical studies also highlighted that most climate-related movements occur within developing countries, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations (NASH, 2017).

During this stage, competing theoretical narratives further fragmented the debate. Some scholars resisted securitisation framings and instead applied climate justice principles, arguing that historically high emitters bore responsibility for supporting or hosting displaced populations (MAYER, 2017; WARNER, 2011; ZETTER, 2010). Others advanced an **adaptation perspective**, framing migration as a voluntary and proactive strategy to adapt to climate change consequences build resilience (NASH, 2017; WARNER, 2011). In this view, displacement was seen as a negative outcome of forced movement, while planned migration was interpreted as a positive adaptation mechanism fostering remittances, development, and international capital flows (GEMENNE and BLOCHER, 2017; GROMILOVA and JÄGERS, 2013). These diverging interpretations illustrate how fragmentation enriched the debate but also multiplied categories, expanding the concept's reach while blurring its boundaries, creating the contested landscape in which IOM and UNHCR operated during this period.

5.1 UNHCR

In the fragmentation phase, UNHCR's publications did not constitute a strong independent research agenda but instead relied largely on commissioned or collaborative studies. These works sought to clarify the interconnected drivers of displacement and promote greater consistency in terminology (UNHCR, 2018). Much of this knowledge production was oriented towards the humanitarian perspective, highlighting the intersections between conflict, violence, and disaster or climate-related displacement (WEERASINGHE, 2018), the challenges of cross-border protection (KÄLIN and NINA, 2012), and the broader analytical characterisation of the phenomenon (UNHCR, 2018, 2012). Many of these outputs took the form of articles and often included explicit disclaimers noting that the views expressed were those of the authors rather than official UNHCR positions.

At the same time, UNHCR published reports reflecting internal debates about its mandate and role in relation to climate change and disaster displacement (UNHCR, 2018, 2015, 2014). These publications reveal how UNHCR's contribution during this period moved beyond academic disputes about definitions towards operational engagement in displacement contexts with multiple and overlapping causes. In this sense, the organisation's knowledge production illustrates the dynamics of fragmentation: rather than

advancing a single authoritative interpretation, UNHCR sought to navigate competing views while reinforcing its expertise in humanitarian coordination. This dual strategy enabled the organisation to remain a central reference point in international debates, even while the scope of its mandate remained restricted.

5.2 IOM

Drawing on its established operational role in disaster response, IOM used the fragmentation period to consolidate its position as a central actor in the governance of *HMCECC*. Unlike UNHCR, IOM's mandate was broader and more flexible, allowing it to address both voluntary and forced movements triggered by disasters and climate impacts (HALL, 2016). This institutional flexibility enabled the organisation to claim expertise across the full spectrum of mobility and to expand its field activities accordingly.

IOM's knowledge production on HMCECC grew exponentially after 2010[7]. The organisation launched thematic series on migration, environment, and climate change, and between 2015 and 2018 issued 15 policy briefs that examined the manifestations of the phenomenon across multiple countries, consistently employing the conceptual definition adopted in the 2010 Cancun Agreements. Between 2011 and 2018, IOM also produced around 95 additional publications, most of which analysed the dynamics of the phenomenon at both national and regional levels. Among these, a particularly influential publication was the annual *State of Environmental Migration* (2010-2020) (IOM, 2010), which generated qualitative data on global environmental migration trends and provided regular updates on the evolving links between climate change and mobility.

In 2014, IOM produced its first *Compendium of IOM's Activities in Migration, Climate Change and the Environment (Flavell and Chazalnoel, 2014)*, followed by the *Compendium of IOM Activities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience* (IOM, 2015). These compilations were intended to demonstrate the multitude of the organisation's programmatic engagement and were updated in the subsequent years. However, experts partially criticised these efforts, observing that the lack of coherence and overarching guidance across activities reflected—and in some respects reinforced—the fragmented nature of the concept. In 2016, IOM also published the first *Atlas of Environmental Migration (IONESCO et al., 2016)*, which mapped diverse manifestations of mobility and highlighted the limitations of available quantitative and qualitative data. The *Atlas* explicitly promoted the framing of migration as an adaptation strategy, emphasising context-specific and locally grounded policy responses rather than advocating for the development of a new binding protection instrument.

At the institutional level, IOM consolidated its engagement with the creation in 2015 of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division at its headquarters (CHAZANOEL and IONESCO, 2018). This was the first structure within an international organisation[8] dedicated exclusively to the issue and represented an effort to systematise IOM's activities and centralise its role in knowledge production. During this period, IOM became one of the strongest advocates of the "migration as adaptation" narrative, portraying mobility as a proactive resilience strategy rather than solely as a negative consequence of environmental stress (GEMENNE and BLOCHER, 2017; GROMILOVA, 2016; McLEMAN, 2017). This framing brought IOM's discourse into alignment with the broader climate governance agenda under the UNFCCC, where adaptation and resilience had become central pillars.

During the fragmentation period, both UNHCR and IOM expanded their knowledge production on *HMCECC*, but in ways shaped by their mandates. UNHCR mainly relied on commissioned or collaborative studies to clarify terminology, examine protection gaps, and explore links between disasters, conflict, and displacement. These outputs often carried academic disclaimers and reflected the limits of its refugee-focused mandate. IOM, by contrast, produced a far larger body of publications, including the *State of Environmental Migration* series (IOM, 2010), the *Compendium of Activities (IOM, 2015)*, and the *Atlas of Environmental Migration (IONESCO et al., 2016)*. This prolific output aimed to consolidate expertise and advance the framing of migration as an adaptation strategy, aligning more closely with climate governance debates.

Despite these differences, both organisations contributed to the fragmentation of the concept. UNHCR highlighted the definitional uncertainties and the challenges of extending the refugee protection, while IOM's diverse initiatives sometimes revealed incoherence and reinforced the multiplicity of interpretations. Yet both tried to counter uncontrolled appropriations by producing knowledge that legitimised their approaches and reinforced their authority in international debates. In this way, UNHCR and IOM exemplify Nay's notion of fragmentation: rather than a unified conceptualisation, the period was characterised by competing narratives and divergent emphases, which expanded the reach of HMCECC but also blurred its boundaries. The contrast between UNHCR's cautious, protection-oriented publications and IOM's expansive, programmatic approach illustrates how institutional positions shaped their strategies, while their shared reliance on knowledge production reflects a common attempt to maintain hegemony in a contested field.

6 PHASE III: ASSIMILATION (2016 - 2025)

Assimilation is the gradual process by which organisations revise, complement, and perpetuate hegemonic concepts by incorporating additional insights and critical perspectives through carefully selected, non-competitive procedures. At this stage, they also reject radically divergent interpretations in order to maintain the policy agenda promoted by their most influential member states. As Nay (NAY, 2014) summarises, assimilation is "*the dynamic process that ultimately facilitates the incorporation of heterodox views into the dominant paradigm, without revision of the doctrinal foundations set out by the most powerful member states*."

The process of knowledge assimilation has defined steps: first, the development of internal resources to capture new emerging policy ideas, usually through the establishment of working groups, task forces, and networks; second, the organisations invest considerable resources in the production of policy reports, drafted by consultants selected according to non-competitive procedures; and third, the organisations also consult with external scholars, analysts, and bureaucrats with divergent views, but they only incorporate ideas suitable to be adapted to the already established terminology and framework (NAY, 2014).

6.1 UNHCR

In this period, UNHCR increased its knowledge production on HMCECC compared with the previous phase. It expanded its analysis of the interplay between conflict, violence, disasters, and climate change, often adopting a country-level perspective. While UNHCR maintained a central role in bringing the protection dimension into knowledge production, its focus remained shaped by its mandate, emphasising the links between drivers of refuge and environmental or climate-related displacement. Publications increasingly turned to internal displacement and country-specific case studies, while also addressing cross-cutting themes such as gender, internally displaced persons, and statelessness.

6.2 IOM

After 2019, IOM significantly expanded its knowledge production on HMCECC. Whereas between 2011 and 2018 the organisation produced 110 publications, in the six years from 2019 to August 2025 it published 193. The thematic emphasis also shifted: while earlier work concentrated on categorising and defining the phenomenon, more recent publications focus on cross-cutting issues such as gender, indigenous communities, children and

youth, food security and agriculture, water governance, urban development, and labour migration, while continuing to analyse localised manifestations. The dominant narrative remained that of migration as an adaptation strategy, with a strong emphasis on context-specific policy suggestions.

Critics argue, however, that framing migration as adaptation repackages the mainstream development agenda, portraying migrants as drivers of development while perpetuating North-South inequalities through phenomena such as brain drain and the interruption of remittance flows (BETTINI and GIOLI, 2016). The emphasis on labour agreements as a tool of proactive migration obscures climate justice debates and questions of responsibility for climate change that had been central in the normalisation phase. In this way, states can claim to be addressing the issue without acknowledging their obligations or committing to structural reforms. For IOM, this framing is advantageous, as it secures funding for adaptation and labour-exchange programmes at the local level, reinforcing its legitimacy and consolidating its position as an expert in the field.

The reproduction of hegemonic knowledge in this period was carefully managed: cross-cutting perspectives were selectively incorporated through non-competitive procedures, while more sensitive viewpoints, particularly those of affected communities and divergent voices calling for stronger protection or binding mechanisms were excluded. As a result, crucial perspectives for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, and for the development of more equitable responses, were marginalised in the assimilation process.

In conclusion, during the assimilation phase, both UNHCR and IOM consolidated their positions as hegemonic knowledge producers on HMCECC by following the three steps of assimilation identified by Nay. First, both organisations developed **internal mechanisms** to capture new policy ideas: UNHCR created working groups to integrate climate and disaster dimensions into its protection strategy, while IOM established the Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division, which expanded its thematic output and institutionalised its expertise.

Second, both engaged in **selective incorporation of perspectives**. UNHCR emphasised the protection of displaced populations while cautiously including cross-cutting issues such as gender, statelessness, and internal displacement. And IOM also broadened its agenda to include themes like indigenous communities, youth, food security, and labour migration, while continuing to advance the narrative of migration as an adaptation strategy. In both cases, however, radical reinterpretations such as calls for binding protection mechanisms or climate justice approaches were excluded, reflecting the influence of donor priorities.

Third, both organisations pursued **partnerships and global networks** to reinforce their positions. UNHCR and IOM engaged in initiatives such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement and the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, while IOM also played a central role within the **UN Network on Migration**, created to coordinate the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration. Through these platforms, both organisations positioned themselves as central hubs for knowledge exchange and policy development. These partnerships allowed them to assimilate heterodox ideas into dominant paradigms, while maintaining control over the conceptual boundaries of HMCECC. Thus, although UNHCR and IOM adopted different emphases, one centring on protection, the other on programmatic adaptation strategies, their practices converged in using assimilation to reinforce existing frameworks, legitimise their authority, and align knowledge production with the agendas of their most influential member states.

Nevertheless, the assimilation process does not fully capture important characteristics of the current state of HMCECC. First, it overlooks the role of institutional multistakeholder partnerships where IOM and UNHCR work alongside other international organisations and civil society actors, often producing knowledge collaboratively. In the face of mandate restrictions, resource scarcity, and shifting global priorities, one hypothesis is that these partnerships have become a key strategy to sustain their position as hegemonic knowledge producers.

7 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The trajectory of HMCECC within international organisations illustrates the full cycle described by Nay: from its *normalisation*, when the concept was first stabilised through official references and analytical studies; to its *fragmentation*, when divergent interpretations and competing narratives multiplied across local and global contexts; and finally to its *assimilation*, where selected perspectives were incorporated into dominant frameworks while radical alternatives were excluded (NAY, 2014).

Across the three phases of normalisation, fragmentation, and assimilation, UNHCR and IOM displayed distinct approaches to knowledge production that reflected their mandates, constraints, and institutional strategies. UNHCR's knowledge was consistently shaped by its protection mandate and the limits of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. During the normalisation phase, it led in producing analytical studies that highlighted the links between violence, conflict and climate change, and disasters, while consistently framing these within a refugee protection lens. In the fragmentation phase, UNHCR continued to emphasise

protection challenges, publishing studies that reinforced the terminology and the intersections between displacement drivers, while carefully navigating donor resistance and mandate restrictions. In the assimilation phase, UNHCR incorporated cross-cutting themes such as gender, statelessness, and internal displacement but remained focused on programmatic protection, largely avoiding narratives that might have expanded its obligations. By contrast, IOM's knowledge production was broader and more prolific. From its early advocacy of "environmental migration," to the creation of the MECC Division in 2015, and the exponential rise of publications after 2019, IOM consistently promoted migration as an adaptation strategy, linking its discourse to programmatic and operational activities in disaster management, labour mobility, and resilience.

Despite these differences, UNHCR and IOM also share important commonalities that illustrate how hegemonic knowledge is consolidated in international governance. Both organisations strategically used knowledge production as a means of legitimising their authority, aligning their narratives with the agendas of Global North countries, and engaging in selective incorporation of cross-cutting perspectives while excluding more radical alternatives such as binding protection mechanisms or climate justice framings. Both engaged actively in multistakeholder partnerships using these networks to reinforce their centrality in the governance of HMCECC. Together, their trajectories demonstrate how IOs combine discursive strategies, institutional mechanisms, and partnerships to maintain their authority, while shaping the boundaries of what counts as legitimate knowledge in the field.

Across these phases, they also leveraged their knowledge production as a strategic mechanism to position themselves as policy entrepreneurs. By producing and disseminating knowledge on HMCECC, UNHCR and IOM not only shaped the conceptual framework but also advocated for specific policies and programmes that aligned with their mandates and expertise. Their strategic framing of the issue allowed them to present themselves as the leading actors capable of implementing solutions. This approach enabled them to secure both financial support and political backing from member states, consolidating their role as central players in the global governance of human mobility related to environmental and climate change impacts (BOSWELL, 2009; NAY, 2014).

8 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

A critical analysis on Nay's framework highlights several methodological limitations. While the normalisation-fragmentation-assimilation cycle offers a useful narrative for tracing conceptual change, it tends to linearise

developments into tidy stages and underestimates the overlap, feedback loops, and contradictions that characterise organisational practice. The framework also privileges publications over material drivers such as budgets, staffing, and donor earmarking, and treats international organisations as coherent units, overlooking the internal contestations between headquarters, country offices, and different departments (BARNETT and FINNEMORE, 2004; BUEGER and GADINGER, 2018; MARCH and OLSEN, 1989). In addition, this analysis underplayed the discussions of planned relocation as a form of human mobility and the organisation´s mandates.

The methodological design of this study, centred on publications as the unit of analysis, reinforces some of these blind spots. Focusing exclusively on official outputs risks introducing publication bias, since what is uploaded, translated, or cleared does not necessarily reflect the full scope of organisational practice. Moreover, many publications are written by consultants or in collaboration with external authors, with disclaimers that blur organisational ownership and complicate the attribution of ideas (BOSWELL, 2019; PARKHURST, 2017). Donor funding and earmarked priorities also shape which themes are selected for publication, often more directly than discourse alone (MOSSE, 2005; STRATHERN, 1997). These issues point to the limits of document analysis, as the drafting pathways, clearance processes, and internal dissent rarely appear in the final texts, leaving gaps between what organisations publish and how they implement knowledge on the ground (JASANOFF, 2004; SHORE and WRIGHT, 2011).

Another limitation of this approach is the treatment of partnerships. Ignoring these collaborative processes risks overstating the autonomy of international organisations and understating the ways in which authority and expertise are co-constructed. Methodologically, this suggests the need to complement document analysis with approaches such as network mapping, funding-flow analysis, or interviews with key actors to capture how knowledge circulates and whose perspectives are incorporated or excluded (BUEGER and GADINGER, 2018; LATOUR, 2005).

9 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conclusion, this study has traced the evolution of *Human Mobility in the Context of Environmental and Climate Change (HMCECC)* through the knowledge production of UNHCR and IOM, showing how their outputs reflect broader processes of normalisation, fragmentation, and assimilation. While the analysis has highlighted the central role of these organisations in consolidating hegemonic framings, it has also shown that this process is partial, selective, and shaped by mandates, donors,

and partnerships. The limitations of Nay's framework remind us that knowledge production is never linear nor exclusively organisational, but embedded in networks of actors, resources, and competing narratives. Recognising these dynamics not only helps to explain how HMCECC has been constructed as a global policy category but also underscores the silences, exclusions, and tensions that persist in its framing. Ultimately, this study contributes to the critical understanding of international organisations as knowledge producers, while pointing to the need for further research that incorporates affected communities' perspectives, examines practice beyond publications, and interrogates how global framings translate into national and community realities.

NOTES

[1] This article has undergone revision with the assistance of an AI language model solely for the purpose of improving the clarity and coherence. The content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this article are entirely the work of the author.

[2] Other United Nations agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), acknowledge aspects of human mobility in their mandates. However, it is not the central focus of their mandates. While these agencies implement programmes that intersect with human mobility, their core objectives primarily address other areas. These agencies engage with human mobility in the context of their broader themes, such as labour rights or child welfare, rather than considering it as a primary concern (ILO, 1919; United Nations, 1989).

[3] https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/data-and-publications/reports-and-publications?sm_topics[]=Climate%20change%20and%20environment

[4] Only publications in English were analysed.

[5] https://reliefweb.int/organizations

[6] The International Court of Justice recognises **displacement as a direct consequence of climate change**, particularly from phenomena such as **sea-level rise**. The Opinion highlights that climate impacts may lead to the **forced movement of populations,** both internally and across borders, with implications for **territorial integrity** and **statehood** (para. 357). It also links displacement to **human rights obligations**, affirming that states have duties to protect affected populations and to respect the principle of **non-refoulement**, meaning they cannot return individuals to territories rendered unsafe by climate impacts (para. 378).

[7] A total of 110 publications in english were analysed in the mentioned period, according to the Environmental Migration Portal. https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/data-and-resources

[8] The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) was established in 2016 and is **not** a United Nations-bound agency. It is a collaborative initiative formed by a group of governments, international organisations, and civil society actors, with a specific focus on addressing the challenges faced by people displaced due to disasters and climate change. Its unique nature lies in its role as a **non-binding, voluntary network**, offering a space for dialogue, policy development, and the sharing of best practices. Unlike UN agencies with a formalised mandate, PDD serves to bring together various stakeholders to coordinate efforts and promote solutions for those affected by displacement, but it does not have the institutional authority or binding commitments typically associated with UN bodies.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

AGNEW, J. Know-Where: Geographies of Knowledge of World Politics. **International Political Sociology** 1, 138-148, 2007.

ANDREWS, M. **Do Inernational Organizations Really Shape Government Solutions in Developing Countries?** Faculty Research Working Paper Series, Harvard Lennedy School CID Working Paper No. 264, 2013.

ANGHIE, A. Finding the Peripheries: Sovereignity and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century International Law. **Harvard International Law Journal** 40, 1-80, 1999.

BARNETT, M., FINNEMORE, M. **Rules for the world**: international organizations in global politics. Cornell University Press, United States of America, 2004.

BEHAGUE, D., TAWIAH, C., ROSATO, M., SOME, T., MORRISON, J. Evidence-based policy-making: the implicationd of globally-applicable research for context-specific problem-solving in developing countries. **Social science and medicine** 69, 1539-1546, 2009.

BETTINI, G., GIOLI, G. Waltz with development: insights on the developmentalization of climate-induced migration. **Migration and Development,** 5, 171-189, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2015.1096143

BIERMANN, F., BOAS, I. **Protecting climate refugees:** the case for a Global Protocol. Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development, 2008.

BOSWELL, C. Research ´experts´, and the Politics of Migration. In. RUHS, M.; TAMAS, K.; PALME, J. (Eds.) **Bridging the gaps**: linking research to public debates and policy-making on migration and integration. Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 2019.

BOSWELL, C. **The political uses of expert knowledge:** immigration policy and social research. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511581120

BUEGER, C., GADINGER, F. **International practice theory**: new perspectives, 2nd ed. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018.

CAIRNEY, P.; ZAHARIADIS, N. Multiple streams analysis: A flexible metaphor presents an opportunity to operationalize agenda setting processes. In.: ZAHARIADIS, N. **Handbook of public policy agenda setting**. Collections: Social and Political Science. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

CHAZANOEL, M.T., IONESCO, D. Advancing the Global Governance of Climate Migration through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Global Compact on Migration. In.: BEHRMAN, S.; KENT, A. **"Climate refugees" beyond the legal impasse?** New York: Routledge, 2018.

DOLOWITZ, D., MARSH, D. Learning from abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making. **Governance** 13, 5-24, 2000.

FLAVELL, A., CHAZALNOEL, M. T. **Compendium of IOM's Activities in Migration, Climate Change and the Environment.** International Organisation for Migration, Geneva, 2014.

GEMENNE, F. How they became the human face of climate change. Research and policy interactions in the birth of the 'environmental migration' concept. In.: IOM - INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION. **Migration and climate change**. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2011.

GEMENNE, F., BLOCHER, J. How can migration serve adaptation to climate change? Challenges to fleshing out a policy deal. T**he Geographical Journal**, Vol. 183 , N. 4, 2017.

GEMENNE, F., BRÜCKER, P., IONESCO, D. **The state of environmental migration**. Science Po Press, 2014.

GORAL, L. **Climate change and state responsabity:** migration as remedy? Lund University, Faculty of Law, 2014.

GROMILOVA, M. **Finding opportunities to combat the climate change migration crisis:** the potential of the "adaptation approach." Pace Environmental Law Review, 2016.

GROMILOVA, M., JÄGERS, N. Climate change induced displacement and migration law and human rights law. In.: VERSCHUUREN, J. (Ed.) **Research handbook on climate change and adaptation law**. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013.

HALL, N. **Displacement, development, and climate change:** international organizations moving beyond their mandates, Global institutions. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London; New York, 2016.

HYDEN, G., COURT, J., MEASE, K. **Making sense of governance:** empirical evidence from 16 Developing Countries. Lynne Rienner, Bouder, CO, 2004.

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ). **Obligations of States in respect of climate change**. Advisory opinion. 2025. Available at: < https://icj-web.leman.un-icc.cloud/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf >. Accessed at: Sept, 2025.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT MONITORING CENTRE (IDMC) **Global Report on International Displacement - 2025** (GRID). Geneva: IDMC, 2025. Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2025/ >. Accessed at: Sept, 2025

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO). **Constitution of the International Labour Organization.** Paris, FR: OIT, 1919. Available at: < https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/ILO%20Constitution-2021-%5BJUR-210720-001%5D-Web-EN.pdf >. Accessed at: Sep. 2025

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). **Compendium of IOM Activities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience**. Geneva: IOM, 2013. Available at: < https://publications.iom.int/books/compendium-iom-activities-disaster-risk-reduction-and-resilience >. Accessed at: Sep. 2025

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). **The state of environmental migration**. Series 2010 - 2020. Geneva: IOM, 2010/2020. Available at: < https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/state-environmental-migration>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). **Migration, environment and climate change**: assessing the evidence. Geneva: IOM, 2009. Available at: < https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migration_and_environment.pdf >. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). **Migration and the environment**. Discussion Note. Geneva: IOM, 2007. Available at: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1411/files/MC_INF_288.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). Constitution of the International Organization for Migration, 1989. Geneva: IOM, 1989. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/iom-constitution>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025

IONESCO, D., MOKHNACHEVA, D., GEMENNE, F. **Atlas of Environmental Migration**. Oxfordshir, UK: Routledge, 2016. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315777313

JAKOBSSON, E. **How climate-induced migration entered the un policy agenda in 2007-2010:** a multiple streams assessment. PaG 9, 16-26, 2021. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i4.4519

JASANOFF, S. **States of knowledge:** the co-production of science and social order. Routledge, London, 2004.

KÄLIN, W. Conceptualizing Climate-induced Displacement. In.: Mc ADAM, J. (ed.), **Climate change and displacement**. multidisciplinary perspectives. Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Hart Publishing, 2010. Pp. 274. £45.00. ISBN: 9781849460385.

KÄLIN, W., NINA, S. **Cross-Border displacement in the context of climate change.** UNHCR, Geneva, 2012.

KÄLIN, W., SCHREPFTER, N. **Protecting people crossing borders in the context of climate change normative gaos and possible approaches, legal and protection policy.** Research Series. Geneva: UNHCR, 2012.

KORNEEV, O. Self-legitimation through knowledge production partnerships: International Organization for Migration in Central Asia. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies** 44, 1673-1690, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1354057

KOSELLECK, R. **Futures past**: on the semantics of historical time. Columbia University Press, New York, 2004.

LATOUR, B. **Reassembling the social**: an introduction to actor-network-theory. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

MARCH, J. G., OLSEN, J. P. **Rediscovering Institutions:** the organizational basis of politics. Free Press, New York, 1989.

MAYER, B. Climate change, migration and the law of state responsibility. In.: MAYER, B.; CRÉPEAU, F. **Research handbook on climate change, migration and the law**. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017.

McADAM, J. **Climate change, forced migration and international law**. Oxford, 2012.

McADAM, J. Swimming against the tide: why a climate change displacement treaty is not the answer. **International Journal of Refugee Law**, 2011.

McLEMAN, R. Climate-related migration and its linkages to vulnerability, adaptation, and socio-economic inequality: evidence from recent examples. In.: MAYER, B.; CRÉPEAU, F. **Research handbook on climate change, migration and the law**. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017.

MOSSE, D. **Cultivating development**: an ethnography of aid policy and practice. Pluto Press, London, 2005.

NANSEN INITATIVE. **Agenda for the Protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change**. Geneva: NANSEN INITATIVE, 2015. Available at: < https://disasterdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PROTECTION-AGENDA-VOLUME-1.pdf >. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

NASH, S. L. **Negotiating climate change in crisis**: global climate politics in critical perspective. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017.

NAY, O. International organisations and the production of hegemonic knowledge: how the world bank and the OECD helped invent the fragile State concept. **Third World Quarterly** 35, 210-231, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.878128

NAY, O. Fragile and failed states: critical perspectives on conceptual hybrids. **International Political Science Review** 34, 326-341, 2013.

PARKHURST, J. **The politics of evidence:** from evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence. Routledge, London, 2017.

PÉCOUD, A. **Depoliticising migration:** global governance and international migration narratives, Mobility & politics. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, 2015.

PIGUET, E. From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees": the curious fate of the natural environment in migration studies. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers,** 103, 148-162, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2012.696233

QUIRK, P. J. Agendas, alternatives and public policies, John W. Kingdon, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1984, 240 pp. **Journal Pol. Anal. Manage.** 5, 607-613, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.4050050316

RAUTALIN, M., SYVÄTERÄ, J., VENTO, E. International organizations establishing their scientific authority: periodizing the legitimation of policy advice by the OECD. **International Sociology**, 36, 3-24, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920947871

SHAHJAHAN, R. A. International organizations (IOs), epistemic tools of influence, and the colonial geopolitics of knowledge production in higher education policy. **Journal of Education Policy**, 31, 694-710, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1206623

SHORE, C., WRIGHT, S. Conceptualising policy: technologies of governance and the politics of visibility. In.: SHORE, C.; WRIGHT, S.; PERÒ, D. (Eds.). **Policy worlds**: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power. Oxford: Berghahn, 2011.

SIMON, H. A. **Models of my life.** Basis Books, New York, 1991.

STRATHERN, M. 'Improving ratings': audit in the British University system. **Eur. Rev**. 5, 305-321, 1997. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1234981X(199707)5:3<305::AID-EURO184>3.0.CO;2-4

TDF, U. **Task force on displacement**. Warsaw International Mechanism, Katowice, 2017.

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (UNDRR). **Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-2030**. Geneva: UNDRR, 2015. Available at: < https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf?startDownload=true>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC). **Paris Agreement**, 2015. Paris, 2015. Available at: < https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf > . Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC). **The Cancun Adaptation framework, decision 1/CP.16.** Cancun, ME. UNFCCC, 2010. Available at: < https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Dec1.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED **N**ATIONS **G**ENERAL **A**SSEMBLY (UNGA). **Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.** Geneva: UN, 1967. Available at: < https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/protocolrefugees.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED **N**ATIONS **G**ENERAL **A**SSEMBLY (UNGA). G**lobal Compact on refugees, 2018.** New York: UN, 2018. Available at: < https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/2018/en/124198>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED **N**ATIONS **G**ENERAL **A**SSEMBLY (UNGA). **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Resolution 71/1, 2016.** New York: UN, 2016. Available at: < https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_71_1.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED **N**ATIONS **G**ENERAL **A**SSEMBLY (UNGA). **Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, A/RES/428(V)**, 14 December 1950. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/constinstr/unga/1950/en/72586> Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) **Climate change, disasters and displacement.** Geneva: UNHCR, 2018.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) **The environment and climate change**: An Overview (Updated Edition). Geneva: UNHCR, 2015.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) **The environment and climate change**: An Overview. Geneva: UNHCR, 2014.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) Displacement, climate change and natural disasters. (Cap. 7). In: UNHCR. **The State of the World's Refugees 2012**: in Search of Solidarity. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Available at: < https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/unhcr/2012/en/90419> Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR). "**Protection gaps and responses**. Presented at the high commissioner's dialogue on protection challenges. Geneva, UNHCR, 2010a. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4d09e47a9.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR). **Climate change and statelessness:** an overview - background paper on protection gaps and possible responses. Geneva, UNHCR, 2010b.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR). **Climate change could become the biggest driver of displacement:** UNHCR Chief. Geneva: UNHCR, 2009. Available at: < https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/climate-change-could-become-biggest-driver-displacement-unhcr-chief>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR). **Climate change, natural disasters and human displacement**: A UNHCR Perspective. Geneva: UNHCR, 2008. Available at: < https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4901e81a4.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR). **Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees**. Geneva: UNHCR, 1951. Available at: < https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4ca34be29.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS (UN). **Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, 2018.** New York: UN, 2018. Available at: < https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025

UNITED NATIONS (UN). **Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989**. New York: UN, 1989. Available at: < https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

WARNER, K. **Climate change induced displacement:** adaptation policy in the context of the UNFCCC Climate Negotiations. (Research Paper No. 18), UNHCR Legal and Protection Policy Research Series. UNHCR, 2011.

WEERASINGHE, S. **In Harm's Way**: international protection in the context of nexus dynamics between conflict or violence and disaster or climate change, LEGAL AND PROTECTION POLICY RESEARCH SERIES. Geneva: UNHCR, 2018. Available at: < https://www.unhcr.org/in/sites/en-in/files/legacy-pdf/5c1ba88d4.pdf>. Accessed at: Sep. 2025.

WEISS, T. G., DAWS, S. (Eds.). T**he Oxford handbook on the United Nations.** Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008.

WILLIAMS, K.; GONZALEZ, H. M. Organisations and policy-relevant knowledge production. **Int J Polit Cult Soc** 31, 127-129, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-018-9279-9

YANOW, D. **Conducting interpretive policy analysis**. Thousand Oaks/London New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2000.

ZAHARIADIS, N. Ambiguity, time, and multiple streams. In.: SABATIER, P. A. **Theories of the policy process.** Boulder/Cambridge: Press Published by Westview Press, 1999.

ZAPP, M. The authority of science and the legitimacy of international organisations: OECD, UNESCO and World Bank in global education governance. Compare: **A Journal of Comparative and International Education** 51, 1022-1041, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2019.1702503

ZETTER, R. Protecting people displaced by climate change: some conceptual challenges, In.: McADAM, J. (ed.), C**limate change and displacement. Multidisciplinary merspectives**. Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Hart Publishing, 2010. Pp. 274.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolving role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in defining Human Mobility in the Context of Environmental and Climate Change (HMCECC) from 2008 to 2025. Using conceptual history and interpretive policy analysis, alongside Oliver Nay's three-phase model—normalisation, fragmentation, and assimilation—the study examines how both organisations have shaped discourse and knowledge production on HMCECC. While IOM and UNHCR maintained consistent vocabulary, their approaches shifted over time: from establishing links between climate change and mobility, to generating analytical data, and, ultimately, to consolidating the concept's dominance by connecting it with broader themes like gender, indigenous rights, and agriculture. UNHCR emphasised the links between conflict, violence, and environmental change, whereas IOM presented migration as an adaptation strategy that favours localised solutions. Despite differences, both organisations kept their knowledge production within their mandates through selective framing. The article also critiques Nay's framework, noting its limitations in addressing multistakeholder partnerships and alternative narratives from civil society and academia. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of international organisations in constructing and maintaining dominant policy concepts while offering solutions within their own mandates.

Keywords: Human mobility; Climate change; Knowledge production; UNHCR; IOM; Global governance

RESUMO

Este artigo explora o papel em evolução da Organização Internacional para as Migrações (OIM) e do Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados (ACNUR) na definição de Mobilidade Humana no Contexto das Mudanças Climáticas e Ambientais (HMCECC) de 2008 a 2025. Utilizando história conceitual e análise interpretativa de políticas, juntamente com o modelo de três fases de Oliver Nay — normalização, fragmentação e assimilação — o estudo examina como ambas as organizações moldaram o discurso e a produção de conhecimento sobre HMCECC. Embora a OIM e o ACNUR tenham mantido um vocabulário consistente, suas abordagens mudaram ao longo do tempo: desde o estabelecimento de vínculos entre mudanças climáticas e mobilidade, passando pela geração de dados analíticos e, por fim, pela consolidação da dominância do conceito, conectando-o a temas mais amplos como gênero, direitos indígenas e agricultura. O ACNUR enfatizou os vínculos entre conflito, violência e mudanças ambientais, enquanto a OIM apresentou a migração como uma estratégia de adaptação que favorece soluções localizadas. Apesar das diferenças, ambas as organizações mantiveram sua produção de conhecimento dentro de seus mandatos por meio de enquadramento seletivo. O artigo também critica a estrutura de Oliver Nay, observando suas limitações ao abordar parcerias multissetoriais e narrativas alternativas da sociedade civil e da academia. Essa análise contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda do papel das organizações internacionais na construção e manutenção de conceitos políticos dominantes, ao mesmo tempo que oferece soluções dentro de seus próprios mandatos.

Palavras-chave: Mobilidade humana; Mudanças climáticas; Produção de conhecimento; ACNUR; OIM; Governança global