



# Governing people on the move in a warming world: Framing climate change migration and the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement

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## ABSTRACT

Different ways of framing the nexus between climate change and migration have been advanced in academic, advocacy and policy circles. Some understand it as a state-security issue, some take a protection (or human security) approach and yet others portray migration as an adaptation or climate risk management strategy. Yet we have little insight into how these different understandings of the ‘problem’ of climate change-related migration are beginning to shape the emergence of global governance in the climate regime. Through a focus on the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement we argue that these different framings of climate change migration shape how actors understand the appropriate role of the TFD, including the substantive scope of its mandate; its operational priorities; the nature of its outputs and where it should be situated in the institutional architecture. We show that understanding the different framings of the nexus between climate change and migration – and how these framings are contested within the UNFCCC – can help to account for institutional development in this area of climate governance.

## 1. Introduction

There has been a great deal of attention in academic, advocacy and policy circles about how to conceptualize and talk about people who are migrating because of climate change (Arnall and Kothari 2015; Baldwin 2017; Boas et al. 2019; Eckersley 2015; Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012; Nash 2019; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Bettini 2013, 2014). However, the ways in which these different understandings of climate change human mobility translate into global governance institutional arrangements has received less attention (but see Hall 2016). This matters because in the realm of climate governance there is a growing institutionalization of the nexus between climate change and human mobility. The first formal mention of human mobility in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was in the Cancun Adaptation Framework (CAF) in 2010 and yet within five years a new body of global governance, the Task Force on Displacement (TFD), was established by the decision accompanying the Paris Agreement. This rapid pace of institutionalization is puzzling, particularly when observing how politically contentious human mobility is and the decades-long process it took to achieve even non-legally binding blueprints for international cooperation like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).

Yet, closer scrutiny of the way the TFD has been operating since its establishment reveals a less linear and more contentious process of institutionalization. The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UNFCCC established the TFD ‘to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change (Decision 1/CP.21). Displacement is only one of the forms of human mobility in a changing climate and refers specifically to forced movements of people. The full spectrum of human mobility, as framed by the scientific, humanitarian and advocacy communities and as embraced in the CAF, also includes migration (movements which are to some degree voluntary) and planned relocation (organized resettlement generally led by the state). To date, the activities of the TFD have gone beyond the narrow focus its name or original mandate would suggest. In fact, by 2018 when the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM ExCom) extended the TFD’s mandate it called on the body ‘to continue its work on human mobility ...’ and promote ‘cooperation and facilitation in relation to human mobility, including migration, displacement and planned relocation’ (FCCC/SB/2017/1/Add.1). This explicitly signalled the widened focus and set of activities being undertaken by the TFD. This discrepancy between the original legal mandate of the TFD and the way it operates raises two interrelated

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questions. First, how can we account for this expanding mandate – whereby a body of global governance acts in areas where it has not been conferred a specific competence – particularly in an area of global governance which is so contentious? Second, what does the example of the TFD tell us about the way a novel theme of global governance – such as climate change-related human mobility – begins to crystallize in an institutional sense?

We account for the shifting of focus of the TFD from displacement to the full spectrum of human mobility by drawing on frame theory (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1974). We show how new themes in global governance are formed through framing processes and illustrate some of the ways in which those frames can shape institutional arrangements and practices. While the TFD's mandate was originally defined and framed by states (i.e. 'Parties' in UNFCCC language) in Paris, interactions among the members of the TFD – which include International Organizations (IO) and large NGOs that have long been engaged with the climate change-mobility nexus and come with their distinctive understandings of the problem and associated solutions – have resulted in a progressive re-focusing of the Task Force's remit and activities. We show how the interplay between different ways of framing climate change-related human mobility shape understandings of where the TFD should sit within the institutional architecture, the scope of the TFD's mandate, its operational priorities and its outputs and activities. In doing so these frame contests delineate the contours of institutional authority, jurisdiction and responsibility (Koskenniemi 2011).

This article's contribution is twofold. First, we depart from existing research that has documented the processes leading to the adoption of formal decisions on the relationship between climate change and human mobility (Warner, 2012, 2018; Hall, 2015; Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2017; Serdeczny, 2017; Lyster and Burkett 2018; Kälin 2018; Nash 2019; Atapattu, 2020) by shifting focus on to the institution-building and policy development phase of global governance (see Butros et al. 2021 for another example). Second, empirically – through analysis of the development of the TFD – we identify how different framings of the governance theme help to outline the contours of this new institution of global governance. This lays an important foundation for developing an understanding of the nature of new knowledge, practices and/or global norms that may (or may not) emerge from such a body. As such, this article contributes to a growing literature on how the climate change and human migration nexus is navigated in global governance (see also Arnall et al. 2019; Hall 2015; Hall 2016; Serdeczny 2017; Warner 2018).

The remainder of this article is laid out as follows. We start by outlining how a framing approach can help to disentangle how different interpretations of the climate change-human mobility nexus are imported into the institution building phase. This section also discusses our methods of data-gathering and analysis. This is followed by a presentation of the results of the analysis which explores how the different framings of climate change human mobility have shaped where the TFD is situated in the institutional architecture; the substantive scope of the TFD's mandate; the operational priorities, the outputs and activities. We suggest that despite the contention around this topic both within and beyond the TFD in the UNFCCC, there are also surprising areas of consensus considering the divergent framings underpinning different perspectives on the topic. These include general agreement over the breadth of forms of climate change human mobility the TFD considers and emerging modes of producing and delivering knowledge products. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections draw out the implications of this research for understanding global climate governance in this realm and identify directions for future research.

## 2. Understanding how framing shapes institutions

Many policy fields and policy outcomes within the UNFCCC are shaped by competing ideas. This dynamic is characterized by actors with potentially conflicting interests advancing different interpretations of key problems – what frame analysts refer to as 'diagnostic frames' – and/

or solutions – the so-called 'prognostic frames'. Frame theory draws on Erving Goffman's (1974: 21) idea of "schemata of interpretation" that shape how individuals "locate, perceive, identify and label" issues and events. In the policy realm, framing refers to the process of 'meaning making' and associated practices of conceptualising and interpreting the scope and significance of an issue, appropriate policy solutions and identifying where responsibility for action lies. Research on the nexus between climate change and migration has often adopted a frame analysis approach. For example, Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015) studied how the idea of 'the environmental migrant' is communicated by a variety of actors (journalists, policymakers, NGOs and researchers) and how these different frames resonate with different audiences. Dreher and Voyer (2015) analysed the frames used by Australian media to represent climate change impacts on Pacific small island developing states (SIDS) and found that media's depiction of islanders as prospective 'climate refugees' collides with their preference for a more proactive 'migration with dignity' frame. Similarly, Høeg and Tulloch (2019) focused on media representations of climate refugees on the BBC and Al Jazeera and the way both outlets tend to neglect their agency and depict them as 'sinking strangers'. These studies – as well as other contributions adopting different theoretical and methodological approaches like discourse analysis (e.g. Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012; Bettini 2013) – advance understanding of the way different actors apprehend and articulate the climate change-migration nexus. Yet, only a few studies have considered how different framings might shape global governance (see e.g. Butros et al. 2021; Nash 2019).

In the study of international law, Martti Koskenniemi (2007: 7) argues that framing is often a struggle over institutional hegemony where "political conflict is waged on the description and re-description of aspects of the world so as to make them fall under the jurisdiction of particular institutions." In line with this understanding, we focus on the interactions among different (and sometimes competing) frames, whereby frame advocates advance particular framings of an issue but where those framings may imply different sets of responsibilities, policy priorities, governance practices or arrangements. This allows us to study the dynamic interplay among different ways of framing the climate change-human mobility nexus during the early stages of the TFD's development to better understand the Task Force as it exists today and its potential in becoming an effective global governance institution.

We structure our frame analysis by focusing on three main framings of the issue of climate change-related mobility that have emerged in academia, the media and in policy circles (Butros et al. 2021; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; IOM, 2020). We show how they have helped to shape important features of the TFD, including where it is situated in the institutional architecture – in the UNFCCC under the WIM – as well as its mandate, including considerations of its substantive scope and the TFD's operational priorities. The first framing, a securitization framing, focuses on irregular migration related to environmental change and resource shortages and/or resource-related conflicts. This framing articulates this problem as a border-management or resource control issue, particularly for areas of destination, and tends to (implicitly at least) understand climate displacement as a risk to society, resources and/or culture in destination countries. The second is a protection framing which emphasizes human (rather than state) security and the role of human rights in ensuring that those on the move in adverse conditions should be able to do so in dignified and safe conditions within legal frameworks which will offer them effective protection. Some articulations of this framing treat those displaced because of climate change-related events or conditions as vulnerable and/or lacking agency. Finally, a third category focuses on a climate adaptation and climate risk management framing which understands climate-related displacement as one of a spectrum of responses to climate impacts and risks and tends to emphasize the agentive capacity of those on the move and the positive opportunities that may also play a role in environmental migration. This approach has been critiqued for over-emphasizing the role of individuals in adapting to climate change and underplaying the role that political

and economic structures play in fostering vulnerability (Ribot 2011).

### 3. Methods and material

We rely on an interpretive epistemology to study how ideas are shaping this realm of global climate governance. Relying on frame analysis can help us unpack different framings of the inter-relationship between climate change and human mobility (and immobility) and begin to explore how and why they matter as new institutions are established. We advance existing literature by showing the way these meaning making processes interact with global institutional development.

Our frame analysis draws on different sources of data. It relies on 15 anonymized, semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the TFD, UNFCCC secretariat staff, state negotiators, members of the WIM ExCom and stakeholders from IOs and civil society between December 2019 and May 2021. We used a purposive sampling method targeting those that had been most closely involved with the TFD, with the WIM ExCom's establishment of the TFD, and civil society and academic observers who have been following its developments closely.

An effort was made to ensure the pool of interviewees was geographically representative. Research participants were asked questions related to three themes in semi-structured interviews: i) their role (s) and relationship with the TFD and motivations for engagement; ii) their involvement (if any) in the establishment phase of the TFD (e.g. observation at WIM ExCom meetings, involvement in drafting of the Terms of Reference) and iii) reflections on the composition, planning, processes, activities, inputs and outputs of the TFD including areas of consensus and disagreement. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 35 and 90 min. 8 interviews were conducted in person, 1 via email and 6 on line. After gaining consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Our analytical approach was abductive and consisted of moving between the interview data and existing theoretical analysis of the climate change-human mobility issue. It was loosely structured into a three-stage process. The first phase involved close engagement with existing literature on the different framings of climate change-related migration and identification of where social scientific consensus lies on the dominant framings. We then articulated diagnostic and prognostic framings concerning institutional development based on the *meta*-frames identified in the literature. The second phase involved a thematic analysis of the interview data to identify areas of convergence and divergence within/about the TFD regarding: where it should be situated within the UNFCCC; its relationship with the WIM ExCom; the scope of its mandate; the types of activities it should (and should not) undertake; the types of knowledge products it should generate, and the process for developing and presenting recommendations. The third phase of analysis concerned an iterative process of linking the prognostic and diagnostic frames we had developed in the first phase with the findings of the thematic analysis of the interviews in the second phase.

The analysis was then complemented and contextualised by drawing on data from field notes from observation at four meetings of the WIM ExCom between April 2016 and September 2018 during which the establishment and early work of the TFD was discussed and at five Conferences of the Parties to the UNFCCC between 2016 and 2021. This background knowledge provided us with an in-depth understanding of some of the discussions within the WIM ExCom that shaped the contours of the TFD, and particularly the expertise brought in by observers from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre (among others) over a sustained period during that phase. This knowledge allowed us to develop more specific questions to pose in the interviews with key actors.

### 4. The UNFCCC Task Force on displacement

While human migration was already discussed three decades ago in the First Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as potentially being one of the most significant impacts of climate change, the first officially documented mention of migration within the UNFCCC was in December 2010 when the UNFCCC included a reference to migration after the Cancun negotiations, inviting states to undertake “measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate at the national, regional and international levels” (UNFCCC, 2010). This broad understanding of mobility mirrors the way it had been discussed and debated within the scientific, humanitarian and advocacy communities who played a key role in introducing the topic into UNFCCC negotiations (Thomas and Benjamin, 2020; McNamara et al. 2018; Serdeczny 2017; Warner 2012, 2018). In the run up to the Paris COP developing countries called for a climate change displacement coordination facility that would assist in providing organized migration and planned relocation (UNFCCC, 2015). This was opposed by some developed countries, notably Australia, but also the EU – which at the time was struggling with the consequences of the Syrian refugee crisis – who insisted on excluding any reference to the issue in the text of the PA (Fry 2016). As a compromise, language dealing with the issue was moved from the main agreement to the decision text and the WIM ExCom was mandated to establish a task force to develop “integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address *displacement* related to the adverse impacts of climate change” (emphasis added). No mentions of migration or planned relocation were made, signalling a narrower focus within the climate change-human mobility nexus.

The TFD is “operationalized” by the WIM ExCom. Over the course of 2016, the WIM ExCom drafted the TFD's terms of reference and selected and appointed its members. Between 2017 and 2021, the TFD held five official meetings (three in person and two virtually), organized two official side events (at COP 24 and COP 25) and hosted a stakeholder meeting in May 2018 in Geneva. While the membership of the TFD has shifted over time, it remained fairly consistent over the first phase of its work from 2017 to 2019 which is the main focus of this analysis. It has consistently included four members from the WIM ExCom, a member each from the UNFCCC Adaptation Committee and the Least Developed Countries Expert Group, representatives of civil society and the UNFCCC youth constituency (YOUNGO) as well as “technical members” from a range of international organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The first phase of the TFD's work and the development of its first workplan was launched in 2017 with delivery of a first set of recommendations to the ExCom in late 2018. The Task Force's mandate was then extended, and it began its second phase in 2019. The work has largely consisted of mapping existing data, policies, processes and actors and synthesizing knowledge. The plan of action also focused on identifying gaps and raising awareness of climate change-related displacement.

At COP 25 in Madrid in December 2019, the TFD and its work received attention at both a day-long meeting of stakeholders as part of the review of the WIM and throughout the negotiations on loss and damage (UNFCCC, 2019). A clear divide emerged over the course of these discussions between those who held up the establishment and work of the TFD as a success and those who took a more critical stance. For example, throughout the negotiations and side events on climate change migration several developed country members of the ExCom, including representatives from Australia and the US, pointed to the TFD as an example that the other L&D-related expert groups – which have been slower to be established – could emulate (Fieldnotes, COP 25, 4

December 2019). On the other hand, those from developing countries were more cautious. For example, the representative from Sudan noted in the informal negotiations that “while we like the Task Force on Displacement we don’t see it as a copy and paste model” (Fieldnotes, COP 25, 5 December 2019). Others, particularly civil society actors, put forward some critiques suggesting that the body had focused on disseminating information and not devoted enough attention to supporting countries to cope with the realities of “climate change-induced migration” and was not sufficiently representative in its composition (Fieldnotes, COP 25, 2 December 2019; Interviews 4 December 2019; 27 May 2020; 29 May 2020; UNFCCC, 2019).

In contrast, several representatives of international organizations and large, operational NGOs familiar with the work of the TFD were more cautious in their assessments of whether the TFD can be seen as a success, noting that the process has been “incredibly slow” and “hasn’t changed the life of any environmental migrants ... concretely” (Interview, 4 December 2019). Another interviewee similarly reflected “I’m not sure that creating community level impact is the job of this Task Force ... for our recommendations to influence that reality, it’s going to take time” (Interview, 4 February 2020). One member noted that there has potentially been some impact “maybe at policy level change which might lead to a change to people’s lives but for the moment we are still in a very bureaucratic process” (Interview, 4 December 2019).

We suggest that assertions about the TFD’s success (or lack thereof) are part of a broader process of rhetorical, symbolic and material contestation over climate change-related migration and how it should be dealt with in the UNFCCC. While the frame analysis identifies key lines of contestation, we also uncover some surprising areas of consensus.

## 5. From climate change migration frames to global governance

### 5.1. Situating the TFD within the institutional architecture

While some have written about what happened behind the scenes during the Paris negotiations, relatively little has been written about the trade-offs that resulted in the creation of the TFD (but see Nash 2019 for an important exception). As one observer at an ExCom meeting noted about the late stages of the Paris negotiations, “When I went to bed on Friday night it was a ‘climate change displacement facility’ and when I woke up on Saturday morning it was a ‘Task Force’” (Fieldnotes, ExCom 4, September 2016). We find that this issue has continued to be contested through the work of the TFD.

The three different framings of the climate change and human mobility nexus (securitization, protection and adaptation) imply different institutional arrangements, including on whether this is an issue that should even be explored within the architecture of the UNFCCC, where a governance body should be situated within that architecture and that body’s relationship within the broader constellation of international actors, including UN agencies and international organizations, working on refugee and migration issues (see Table 1).

The securitization framing aligns with a perspective of the nexus between climate change and mobility that implies the UNFCCC has little to no jurisdiction in this area. This framing is underpinned by a commitment to the border security of states and an associated reluctance, if not overt opposition, to the consideration of these issues in the sphere of global climate governance. This was reflected in the lead-up to the Paris Agreement when, in the draft negotiating text, options were put forward by developed countries which included no mention of displacement or even loss and damage. Even after the establishment of the TFD one refrain that was repeated by developed state ExCom members during discussions developing the terms of reference for the Task Force was a questioning of the TFD’s jurisdiction. Developed country members of the WIM ExCom would point to other venues which they framed as better suited to dealing with issues and activities that fell under the “addressing” displacement category (Fieldnotes, ExCom 3, April 2016). This was also apparent in some of the interviews. For

example, when discussing the issue of potential legal obligations regarding “climate vulnerable people” on the move one interviewee noted repeatedly that “the UNFCCC is not the place to have that discussion. Like, UN Security Council, migration and refugee forums are the place to have that discussion” (Interview, 4 December 2019).

The protection framing aligns with the original vision of what was referred to as the “Climate Change Displacement Coordination Facility” as proposed by developing countries in the run-up to the Paris negotiations. Those advocating for this more operationally focused type of institution articulated the central role of global governance and the creation of new international obligations as central in addressing the issue of climate change migration. They highlighted the importance of legal protections and suggested that compensation would be owed to affected individuals and communities. This is apparent in the first draft of the UNFCCC negotiating text for COP 21, released in February 2015, which included proposed language calling for the creation of a facility that “(i) provides support for emergency relief, (ii) assists in providing organized migration and planned relocation, and (iii) undertakes compensation measures” for persons displaced by climate change.<sup>1</sup> This covers the breadth of forms of human mobility from forced to organized and planned migration. For those advocating a protection framing, the full spectrum of forms of human mobility (and immobility – both voluntary and involuntary) and their interactions with climate change are appropriately dealt with within the UNFCCC in contrast with the prescriptions of the securitization framing. Some members of the TFD suggested in interviews that in many ways the UNFCCC may be among the *most* appropriate forum for dealing with these issues because – as a site of multilateral negotiation and capable of producing binding international law – it is advantageous in terms of progressing work on climate change-related migration in the broader landscape more generally. One interviewee noted:

I think there was a moment of realization that if we want to work on this, we have to work with the Climate Convention. Because it’s the only space that was in fact negotiated ... on the migration side there would be no space to do that, because there is no negotiation space at the multilateral level in migration (Interview, 4 December 2019).

Another interviewee made a similar case:

That’s what makes this different from an entirely UN process. It’s state-led, so we know that – without [our IO] having to do any advocacy or justify why we’re talking about this specific issue – we will have an audience for what we’re producing here. Yes, okay, it still has to be carefully crafted. It still has to be of a high quality, but this process is within the framework of a binding legal instrument (Interview, 3 December 2019).

The situating of this kind of body within the UNFCCC and within the area of loss and damage therefore aligns with a protection frame allowing those working in this perspective to envision new and different governance possibilities beyond just the traditional migration forums.

While disentangling some of the institutional implications of the protection framing from the adaptation and climate risk management framing is impossible, those advocating for the latter have at times put forward a different prognosis for where a governance body addressing climate change and human mobility should be situated institutionally. Those advocating for an adaptation framing would align with the view that the UNFCCC is the appropriate space for considering the issue but would also point to connections with policy efforts outside the UNFCCC like the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). This speaks to the need, as perceived by some IOs, to ensure that climate issues are also

<sup>1</sup> Negotiating Text, Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, Option 1, ¶ 70.3(a), UN Doc. FCCC/ADP/2015/1, at 32 (Feb. 25, 2015), available at <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/adp2/eng/01.pdf>. See also id., Option III, ¶¶ 75–76, at 33.



**Table 1**

Diagnostic frames of climate change and human mobility and associated prognostic institutional frames.

Diagnostic Frames: what is the 'problem' of climate change and migration.	Examples of signature policy responses.	Prognostic frames in terms of institution building: how will the institution be a part of the solution to the 'problem' of climate change and migration?		
		Prognosis for where the TFD is situated.	Prognostic mandates for the TFD	Operational priorities – the types of activities the TFD should undertake and outputs it should produce.
A <b>security issue</b> related to (potential) conflict, resource scarcity and control.	Border protection.	Resistance to including migration within the UNFCCC.	Maintenance of narrow remit focused on displacement.	Role of TFD is as an information hub.
	Military preparedness	Problematizes the idea of the UNFCCC as the appropriate venues and considers other venues as being more appropriate for governance of this issue.	<p><b>Examples from empirical data:</b></p> <p>“COP asked us to focus on displacement” (Interview 4 December 2019).</p> <p>“We’re not really focused on displacement once it’s happened. The task of the group is to stop it happening” (Interview 4 December 2019).</p>	<p>Emphasis on preventing displacement and drawing attention to internal (and away from cross-border) displacement.</p> <p><b>Examples from empirical data:</b></p> <p>“I don’t think the TFD would want to take on [dealing with the “hard stuff” like obligations towards climate-affected people] ... I just don’t see it as it’s place” (Interview 4 December 2019).</p> <p>“We didn’t think a lot of Parties wanted to hear that most displacement is internal” (Interview 4 December 2019).</p>
A <b>protection issue</b> often framing climate migrants as victims and emphasizing a human security and/or rights-based approach.	Advance international legal frameworks to protect and/or compensate those who are affected.	Situated within UNFCCC because as a state-led process it allows for different possibilities for progressing on the issue than the migration forums.	Portrays the UNFCCC as a crucial partner in addressing the issue.	Focus of outputs on both sending and receiving countries and the protection of human rights in this setting.
	<p>Develop protective national measures including foreign assistance and domestic legislation.</p> <p>A focus on service-delivery during processes of mobility.</p>		<p>Tendency to focus on more narrow remit on displacement.</p> <p><b>Examples from empirical data:</b></p> <p>Should concentrate on the forced end of the spectrum because “displacement is bad, so we should do everything we can to avoid and mitigate and reduce risk” (Interview 6 December 2019).</p> <p>“You cannot call displacement an adaptation strategy” (Interview 29 May 2021).</p>	<p><b>Examples from empirical data:</b></p> <p>“As the impacts of climate change become more severe, the need to develop new norms of international law with respect to people displaced by climate change will become increasingly necessary” (Fry 2016: 108).</p> <p>“What you need is action on the ground and they [the TFD] are still developing frameworks and guidelines and policy templates ...” (Interview 29 May 2020).</p>
A <b>climate change adaptation and climate risk management issue</b> shifting to a more agent-focused framing that emphasizes the multi-causal nature of environment-related migration and different forms of human mobility as existing along a continuum.	Develop policies on labour migration	Situated within UNFCCC but with a role for other organisations where synergies lie.	Impossible to separate displacement from other areas and the work should consider all forms of human mobility.	Aligns with the perception of the catalytic role of the TFD in terms of connecting different efforts dealing both with migration and climate change.
	<p>Focus on training and upskilling</p> <p>Use of remittances to support climate-affected communities.</p>		<p><b>Examples from empirical data:</b></p> <p>“I don’t think it makes a substantive difference.... ILO is there talking about the labour migration part...IOM is talking about the full spectrum of people on the move. We talk about planned relocation...” (Interview 4 February 2020).</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors drawing on [Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015](#); [IOM World Migration Report, 2020](#) and authors' own research.

mainstreamed in global migration policy to strengthen the linkage between migration and climate policy efforts (Chazalnoel and Ionesco, 2018; Hall 2016; Nash 2019).

### 5.2. TFD's Mandate: Substantive scope

Another area in which these three framings have different institutional implications concerns the substantive scope of the TFD's work and specifically the different forms of human mobility that are seen as being appropriate to the TFD's work and within its jurisdiction and those which are not. Contestation over the name of the Task Force and its emphasis on "displacement" operates on several levels and is paradigmatic of contention over the scope of the TFD's mandate.

It became clear from our interviews that a divide had emerged between those who wanted to change the name to the "Task Force on Human Mobility" and those who were recommending against a change. It is worth noting, however, that during interviews participants tended to articulate arguments on both sides of the debate suggesting a wide degree of understanding and relative consensus among the group. Interviewees put forward different rationales in favour of changing the name which align – but not necessarily neatly – with the three different framings of climate change and human mobility. This included, first, the idea that "it does not make sense to talk about displacement as a distinct problem but rather it is important to see it as part of a continuum" where people "move with varying degrees of choice depending on their circumstances" (Interview, 3 December 2019) and that referring to a 'human mobility spectrum' would be responding to the realities of migration (Interview, 4 December 2019). A second rationale put forward was that limiting the focus to displacement "emphasizes forced forms of migration and a lack of choice" which "loses all the dimensions of the positives sides of migration" (Interview, 4 December 2019) which is typical of an adaptation and climate risk management framing of climate change migration. It was noted that IOM was undertaking work on including diasporas in climate action and other more positive visions of the ways in which migrants contribute to climate change responses aligning with an adaptation framing of the issue.

However, interviewees also articulated a breadth of reasons referred to in their deliberations for keeping the name of the TFD. These ranged from the normative to the institutional to the semantic. This included, first, a set of arguments flowing from a protection framing of the problem suggesting that displacement should be prioritized among forms of human mobility because "displacement is bad, so we should do everything we can to avoid and mitigate and reduce risk" (Interview, 6 December 2019) and another noted that because the TFD is situated within the L&D framework it would be inappropriate to expand its substantive scope suggesting "you cannot call displacement an adaptation strategy" (Interview 29 May 2021) thereby explicitly refuting an adaptation framing of the issue based on where the TFD is institutionally situated. A second set of reasons concerned institutional parameters as defined by the UNFCCC Parties. One member noted "well, actually the COP had asked us to focus on displacement" (Interview, 4 December 2019) highlighting the power of the Parties in defining the scope at the outset but in many ways the TFD is an example of a "competence creep" whereby the mandate of the group is becoming broader. This was highlighted by the fact that many interviewees suggested that the name is largely a semantic issue and not reflective of the breadth of work being done or an accurate description of the methods being used or outputs being produced. For example, one interviewee noted that:

within the Task Force, we know that we're not talking about displacement, we're actually talking about human mobility and that our role is to use human mobility to stop displacement. That's what we're trying to achieve. And there's this narrative that people are only displaced if all other efforts to use human mobility in the right way have failed. So I think that's why we still left it as "the Task

Force on Displacement" because that's what we're trying to stop, but human mobility is our method (Interview, 4 December 2019).

Another interviewee noted "I think that it's more than displacement. Some of the outputs are far beyond displacement but there's no agreement on terminology so we work around it" (Interview, 4 December 2019). In a similar vein, one interviewee suggested that the name of the Task Force was largely immaterial.

I don't think it makes a substantive difference. Long story short, we discuss all those issues. ILO is there talking about the labour migration part a lot, IOM is talking about the full spectrum of people on the move. We talk about planned relocation, maybe to a lesser degree. So it's more semantic, I think, than substantive (Interview, 4 February 2020).

While the divide over the name was apparent what is striking is that there was in fact relatively wide consensus among interviewees that a) the group was addressing forms of human mobility beyond just displacement and b) that it may be not useful or even possible to separate displacement from other forms of human migration.

### 5.3. TFD's Mandate: Operational dimensions

There has been extensive discussion within and beyond the TFD about its operational mandate with respect to the types of activities the TFD should undertake and the outputs it should produce. The three different framings of climate change migration offer different prescriptions in this regard. As with the mandates of other constituted bodies in the UNFCCC, the language accommodates a wide variety of interpretations of appropriate activities. Understanding the different underpinning frames helps us to better understand some of the competing interpretations being put forward.

#### 5.3.1. Type and level of activities

A protection framing imagines a "thick" operational mandate for the TFD including a set of activities prioritizing the needs of people on the move as well as supporting both sending and receiving countries (in the case of international migration). We identified two variants of a protection framing. One that focuses more on the development of international legal norms and another which is more concerned with practices during moment of human mobility. The implications for operational priorities include those that are also suggested by a securitized framing – for example, knowledge generation, mapping of best practices, building the resilience of sending countries – but a protection framing also implies that activities should go much further in at least one of two directions (though these also go hand-in-hand): the development of international principles or on the ground service-delivery. One interviewee noted "Every-one agrees that one needs to help states to find ways to strengthen their avoidance of displacement if they can and responses to displacement when it happens" (Interview, 3 December 2019) but in fact other interviews suggested there was not a consensus that responses to displacement were a priority for the TFD (discussed further below). The service-delivery emphasis version of the protection framing also suggests that the third part of the "averting, minimizing and addressing displacement" language should be prioritized. Developing countries and their civil society allies regularly and openly call for more action to "address" displacement and suggest that the work being undertaken by the TFD to map policies, develop guidance and raise awareness is not sufficient. One set of actors using this framing suggest that the TFD could have a role "on the ground" in emergency situations where people are being displaced. This framing was evident at several COP side events at COP25 and at the December 2019 mandated review of the work of the WIM. For example, at one side event at COP25, a representative from Vanuatu, who spoke passionately about the disasters the country had experienced that year, suggested the TFD should be developed in such a way as to be "on the ground" in response to

disasters (Fieldnotes, COP 25, 2 December 2019). One interviewee from a large NGO echoed this: “What you need is action on the ground and they [the TFD] are still developing frameworks and guidelines and policy templates, which national governments can adopt. But the reality is developing countries need a lot more hands-on support than your frameworks and your PDF documents” (Interview 29 May 2020).

This framing also supports the prioritization of a set of activities at an entirely different scale and of a different nature by suggesting that the TFD could drive the development of international legal norms, including legal norms for potential receiving countries vis-à-vis those people impacted in this way by climate change. The diagnostic framing here identifies the problem as twofold. First, it rests on the claim that to a greater or lesser extent the problem lies with developed countries’ disproportionate contribution to anthropogenic climate change and their reluctance to acknowledge responsibility for the resultant movements of people. Second, it points to the corollary problem of the gap in international law in this realm with the affected people not fitting within the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. An example of this framing is the argument put forward by Ian Fry (2016), the former Ambassador for Climate Change and Environment for the Government of Tuvalu, that “As the impacts of climate change become more severe, the need to develop new norms of international law with respect to people displaced by climate change will become increasingly necessary” (Fry 2016: 108). The set of activities for the TFD implicated by this framing includes for example, exploring the responsibilities of destination countries that may receive migrants or potentially changes to the international status of refugees. However, the interviewees who discussed these possibilities expressed that this may lie beyond what they saw as feasible within the TFD’s mandate. One interviewee noted:

We haven’t got to the hard stuff ... we haven’t talked in detail about things like obligations to admit people ... We haven’t talked about obligations at all ... that’s the tough stuff. Maybe we’ll get there or maybe that needs to be done elsewhere. It’s perhaps too early to say (Interview, 3 December 2019).

By contrast, a securitization framing conveys a much “thinner” role for the TFD. In seeing the role of global governance in this space as minimal, advocates with this understanding tend to emphasize the role of the TFD in generating knowledge – or even simply disseminating existing information – to better understand the phenomenon. This framing also lends support to activities that emphasize the placing of responsibility on the leaders of sending countries. There is also an almost exclusive emphasis on *preventing* rather than addressing or responding to displacement. For example, one developed country ExCom member noted: “we’re not really focused on displacement once it’s happened. The task of the group is to stop it happening” (Interview, 4 December 2019). Those advocating this approach tend to also disagree with those advocating a protection framing over the scope of operational activities. One interviewee challenged the idea that the “the tough stuff” – referring to legal norms around receiving people displaced by climate change – was an appropriate set of activities for the TFD. When asked about this the interviewee responded:

Is that even the role of the TFD? Like talking about countries receiving “climate people”? I’m not even sure that that’s a role for a Task Force on Displacement. There are already migration and refugee bodies that are dealing with those sorts of issues, so the Task Force work should try to feed in issues around climate change into those people who are working on that particular issue ... I don’t think the TFD would want to take on ... I just don’t see it as its place (Interview, 4 December 2019).

However, the interviewee noted that they saw some potential to incorporate policy work into the set of activities undertaken by the TFD and suggested “I wouldn’t have any problem with the TFD if we were to

put forward recommendations to receiving countries” (Interview, 4 December 2019). But the interviewee added that there would be a challenge “getting that type of recommendation through the UNFCCC Party process ... you would get a lot of Parties who wouldn’t want to sign up to any of that, and not in this process” (Interview, 4 December 2019).

An adaptation and climate risk management framing also brings the relationship between the TFD and those countries vulnerable to extreme weather and slow onset hazards to the fore. Some of those advancing this framing articulated the role of the TFD as “hand-holding” governments of countries facing potential climate change-related displacement. For example, one interviewee characterized some stakeholders as expecting the TFD to be “holding the hands of states ... to be writing the strategies [on displacement management] for them (Interview, 3 December 2019).

### 5.3.2. Outputs

Another way in which the operational remit has been shaped by frame contests concerns the outputs of its work. These processes of contestation operate on two levels: conflict over whether the Task Force should be developing outputs at all and more micro-level contestation over what is contained within those outputs. In the development of the TFD’s work plan there tends to be a consensus among most members that its work should entail drawing the linkages between the work undertaken by the various stakeholders and the production of information. However, in the negotiations several developed country parties queried the demand for these knowledge products. In an interview one TFD member even suggested that perhaps it should not be developing new information at all:

Should the WIM actually be producing products at all? You’ve got products that are out there, you’ve got risk assessment tools, you’ve got academics writing papers, you’ve got IOM and PDD already writing good practice notes, so what’s the value of the TFD or the WIM writing more stuff? Shouldn’t our role be to find what’s out there and point people to that work or help synergize that (Interview, 4 December 2019).

Several interviewees highlighted differences over the terms of the language used in the recommendations and other outputs. Mentions of internal displacement – the movement of people within states – are a key line of divide. For example, a securitized framing tends to emphasize the research showing high levels of *internal* displacement as a result of climate change risks and the responsibility of national leaders towards their own populations. This has the effect of minimizing any role for global governance in this area. As one member of the TFD said:

Are Parties ready to hear this? Most displacement is internal ... you’re really talking about what is a Party’s own responsibility to their displaced people ... it’s rural–urban migration, that ‘it’s mostly people that are already marginalized in your society that you don’t really look after and now you’re going to have to look after them more. We didn’t think Parties wanted to hear that, so there was a lot of discussion about how we might nuance that (Interview, 4 December 2019).

However, for some members of the Task Force who tend to work within the protection framing of climate change migration the process of nuancing language in the TFD’s recommendations was a compromise. One interviewee noted that “We would have liked much stronger language, more precise language..., for example, drawing on the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement, some protection language that could have been a bit more explicit” (Interview, 6 December 2019). The interviewee went on to note that language from the Global Compact for Migration or the Global Compact on Refugees was being pushed for by some members but that because the former had not been adopted at that point it was excluded and in terms of the latter “some members were just sceptical about it ...” (Interview, 6 December 2019).

## 6. Discussion

This article makes an original contribution to research on the governance of climate change-related migration in two ways. First, it moves away from existing scholarship documenting the processes through which formal decisions in this domain are made (Warner, 2012, 2018; Hall, 2015; Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2017; Serdeczny, 2017; Lyster and Burkett 2018; Kälin 2018; Nash 2019; Atapattu, 2020) to focus on the institution-building and policy development phases of global governance (Butros et al. 2021). Second, empirically, it shows how different ways of framing the ‘problem’ of climate change-related migration (as an issue of state-level security, human protection, or as a climate risk management issue) are beginning to shape the emergence of global governance on this topic in the climate regime. Through a focus on the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement from the perspective of insiders and stakeholders, we show how these different framings have institutional and policy implications which then shape how actors understand the appropriate role of the TFD, including where it should be institutionally situated; the substantive scope of its mandate; its operational priorities; and the nature of its outputs. We find that a securitisation frame tends to see a limited jurisdiction for the UNFCCC on the issue, envisages a ‘thin’ operational mandate for the TFD, and emphasises the dimension of internal displacement in the TFD’s outputs to stress the responsibility of national leaders and minimise the role of global governance. A protection frame, instead, considers the UNFCCC as an appropriate forum to deal with the issue as a site of multilateral negotiation and capable of producing international law, imagines a ‘thick’ operational mandate for the TFD, and tends to articulate the need for stronger protection language in the TFD’s outputs. Finally, an adaptation frame sees potential for strengthening the link between climate and migration policy efforts and articulates the operational mandate of the TFD in terms of taking a ‘hand-holding’ role by supporting national governments dealing with the issue. Our analysis revealed more clear-cut linkages with how the securitisation and protection framings are shaping understandings and representations of the TFD’s role than the adaptation/risk management one. A possible explanation for this is that the securitisation and protection framings are both more developed and have been given greater attention in the media and existing social scientific literature than the relatively recent adaptation and climate risk management framing (Arnall and Kothari 2015; Baldwin 2017; Boas et al. 2019; Eckersley 2015; Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012; Nash 2019; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Bettini 2013, 2014). With respect to the substantive scope, we strikingly find a relatively wide consensus that the TFD is addressing forms of human mobility beyond just displacement.

In addition to showing some of the institutional and policy implications of different framings of the climate change-mobility nexus, we account for the way they shape institutional arrangements and practices. We suggest that there is analytical value in exploring this issue in a nascent institution like the TFD as this is when we can expect the stakes to be high. Analysing contestation and consensus before institutional path dependencies become established can be a first step in understanding how certain frames become reified and can provide useful insights to identify where and when power imbalances occur and processes of marginalization emerge. Furthermore, understanding trajectories of institutional development and their ideational underpinnings can help us to better account for the types of norms, policies and practices that may emerge (or fail to) from institutions of global climate governance.

Our research also contributes to frame analysis by overcoming a limitation in current applications to the climate change-mobility nexus, which have tended to statically map the alternative frames put forward by certain actors at certain points in time. A partial exception is the work by Butros et al. (2021) that explores how institutions in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape view and propose to handle climate-induced migration. They explore relatively high-level policy

documents across the EU and UN and find that the latter is more human security focused than the EU. Yet, by delving into the key institution in the UN to consider these issues our research paints a more complex picture. We show that, while UN actors in the TFD have played an important role in advancing both the protection and adaptation/climate risk management framing, the securitized framing is by no means absent from this space. In fact, as it is often put forward by state actors it stands to continue to play an important role in shaping future discussions. This aligns with recent findings by Odeyemi on the riskification of displacement (2021).

One strength of our methodological approach is that, by interviewing members of the TFD and other stakeholders who closely follow its activities, we gain a deeper understanding of the issues at stake in a way that is not captured in policy documents which tend to represent lowest common denominator agreements about activities and wording. This has the effect of black-boxing institutions and treating them as homogenous. For instance, Christo Odeyemi’s (2021) analysis of the TFD, while taking useful steps forward in understanding the governance of displacement under the UNFCCC, draws solely on analysis of the TFD’s documents and necessarily misses some of the nuance and contestation. The approach taken here and the data we collected allow us to begin to disentangle how different framings of this issue shape contests about this emerging area of governance and the types of institutions and policies needed. One limitation of our approach, though, is that it overlooks explicit questions of power. Attention to the role of global power relations and the ways in which global governance shapes the climate change-migration nexus has been relatively minimal in the existing literature (but see Atapattu 2020; Wiegel et al. 2019; Hall 2015, 2016). Future research could focus on how and why different frames are advocated for by actors with different sources of power, including legitimacy, resources and expertise and explore the outcomes of related frame competition and clashes.

## 7. Conclusion

This research shows how framing matters in the governance of climate change related migration. We show how this relatively new theme of global governance is being formed and re-formed not only during the enactment stage but also in the institution-building, policy-making and implementation stages. While the mode of decision-making in the UNFCCC means that states dominate the early phases – offering a partial account of the narrower focus and securitized framing at the institution’s outset – the inclusion of IOs and large NGOs that bring expertise and their distinctive understandings of the problem and associated solutions has resulted in a progressive re-focusing of the TFD’s remit and activities towards a protection or adaptation/climate risk management framing. We find that this shapes debates about where the TFD should sit within the institutional architecture; what it should be called and the scope of its mandate; its priorities and its activities and outputs. Our research also finds that this process of institutionalisation does not align in a clear-cut way with the three framings we articulate here. There are particular overlaps between the protection and adaptation/climate risk management framing and some internal tensions within these views. For example, the protection framing has been portrayed as being based on both a human needs approach emphasizing vulnerability and as a human rights-based approach emphasizing the agency of those on the move. We suggest that the process of institutionalisation could have a recursive impact on the development of these frames over time.

The international governance of climate -related human mobility is an area that is ripe for further study. Future research could explore the interaction between these different frames within and across different governance institutions to highlight specific frame contests and their outcomes. It would also be useful to gain a better understanding of what the TFD’s work means outside of the UNFCCC. To what extent is the work of this body beginning to shape the work of other international



actors, national policy-makers and the lives of people affected by climate change? In addressing these questions, we can begin to understand where and how global governance of this topic matters (or not) to those living the everyday realities of climate change risks.

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Lisa Vanhala:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Elisa Calliari:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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