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# INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF CLIMATE SECURITY NORMS

# ***International Acceptance of Climate Security Norms***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation development brief provides the reader with further insights into how new norms become or do not become accepted in the international political system. The brief puts particular emphasis on how contingencies and windows of opportunity influence the evolution of new international norms. The study examines two contemporary climate security issues with contrasting outcomes – disaster risk reduction and climate-induced migration – in detail to produce new understanding about these mechanisms. The most important policy implications generated from this study is that contingencies have the potential to strongly influence international norm acceptance if they are actively seized and linked to the proposed norm. Actors looking to promote a new norm should thus be perceptive and attentive to contingent events and aim to create favourable conditions such as a common terminology, a proper venue for negotiations and prepare feasible policy alternatives.

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

COP	Conference of the Parties
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ExCom	Executive Committee
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDNDR	International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFDRR	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
UN	United Nations
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Office
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISDR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Different kinds of normative claims and value-laden statements infuse the international political environment. The international community is obliged to act to protect children's rights, prevent wars, ensure sustainable development, ensure free and fair elections, ban antipersonnel landmines and protect fish stocks in the oceans. These and other claims concern "proper behavior" and how society should work to promote and abide by such norms in different ways. But why do some proposed norms become accepted by the international community while others are not? This study investigates this question using two normatively charged international issues as vehicles for explanation.

One issue reflects the norm on the importance of preventing disasters from striking vulnerable communities, and the demand for the amelioration of negative effects through systematic risk and vulnerability reduction. By the end of 2015, most countries in the international community had come to accept the normative premise of disaster risk reduction and managed to commit to the norm in three different international agreements: the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). The norm on reducing disaster risk was further solidified in 2015 in the preamble of the Paris Agreement on climate change and was included in the Sustainable Development Goals. Largely through collaboration at the international level, the norm proposition had become widely accepted.

The other issue concerns the normative question of asylum rights for climate-induced migrants. The notion is that environmental change might lead to cross-border population displacement in ever increasing numbers as a result of global warming – and that there is a gap in international protection



for these groups of migrants. However, in contrast to the norm proposition on disaster risk reduction, protection for climate-induced migration later stagnated. Despite initially strong advocacy and a persuasive humanitarian framing of the issue as “the human face of climate change”, (Gemenne, 2011; Warner, 2011) its proponents are struggling to find a way forward on the international agenda. While rarely outspokenly opposed, the response from the international community time and again has been to delay action, to “investigate more” and to refrain from taking a meaningful stance on the issue of protecting climate migrants.

At first glance, one might argue that the explanation for contrasting outcomes in these cases are evident. For instance, states have nothing to gain by granting climate-induced migrants a right to stay in their countries. (On the contrary, it could be argued that states would have to spend material resources and compromise with their national sovereignty to do so.) Investing in disaster risk reduction, however, could be regarded as a positive insurance policy of sorts. Such considerations play a role, but a closer look reveals that they make up only part of the explanation for different levels of norm acceptance. For instance, why has the international community witnessed the take-up of *some* norms regarding migrants’ rights – or, indeed, human rights at all? And why would states bother to negotiate and adopt an international agreement on disaster risk reduction when they could take similar measures at the national level, without the commitments to support, and provide means and development assistance to, other countries – as stated in the Sendai Framework? A deeper approach to understanding norm evolution – and specifically, their acceptance by the international community – is required to answer what explains the variations in outcome in the two cases of climate-induced migration and disaster risk reduction studied here.

The two suggested norms examined here are not only both climate change-related questions, but also both touch upon fundamental aspects of life and death, require considerable collective action by the international community to be managed effectively and involve basic human rights. In addition, they are complex issues infused with a number of uncertainties and span multiple sectors and issue areas. Both are also linked to broader debates about security, development, resilience, adaptation and humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, three decades after their initiation, the two proposed norms have met with totally different fates.

This study shows that there are key components missing from conventional explanations of norm success and failure. An especially important component highlighted here is contingencies and the windows of opportunity that contingencies may open up. Existing approaches only briefly note the existence of such more or less unpredictable events and largely fail to consider them theoretically and empirically.

The study contributes to our broader understanding of how modern global governance works. A number of transboundary challenges have emerged in recent decades – not least concerning climate change – that pose new challenges to development and international cooperation. This study sheds light on norm acceptance in an increasingly interdependent world, in the hope that readers will gain a richer understanding of the complexities, opportunities and difficulties of norm diffusion in the international system today.

### **1.1. Aims, research questions and contributions**

The general aim of the study is to further develop theory on norm evolution in general and norm acceptance in particular. The *theoretical contribution* of

this study lies in its suggestions on the refinement and enhancement of the study of norm evolution in the international community – specifically, by adding the components of contingencies and windows of opportunity. The central research question that guides the construction of the analytical framework and research on the empirical cases at hand is how we can explain how ideas and claims about appropriate values and behavior in the international system become or do not become accepted. In addition, how do contingencies and windows of opportunity matter in explaining the outcomes of these cases?

The *empirical contribution* is to offer a norm-based approach to explaining the particular cases of disaster risk reduction and climate-induced migration, which should be of interest to scholars and practitioners alike. How can the different levels of acceptance that the norm propositions of protecting climate-induced migrants and reducing disaster risk have met in the international community be understood? In addition, this study has gathered and makes use of rich, and in some parts unique, empirical material that provides the norm- and policy-related research on disaster risk reduction and climate-induced migration with novel insights into the developments.

## 1.2. Defining norms

The cases examined in this study are instances of international norm emergence and, in a wider sense, this study is interested in why and how states embrace common values at the global level. Many writers have attempted to offer general definitions of norms which all relate them to values, and feelings of obligation and “oughtness” and appropriate behavior in different ways. Finnemore and Sikkink, for instance, define a norm as a

“standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (1998:891).<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the concept of a norm, this study also refers to other, related, concepts which are used to describe the developments. A central concept is that of a “*norm proposition*” which is used to describe a normative claim which is not yet a standard of appropriate behavior, but which has the potential to become a norm, given a successful norm evolution process.

In terms of outcome, this study focuses on the point in a norm proposition’s evolution where it is *accepted* in the international community. At this point in the evolution of a norm, there should be a significant shift in how the norm is discussed. The new norm does not have to be completely taken for granted but discussions and statements should clearly demonstrate that support for the norm has become mainstream. In other words, support for the norm no longer needs to be justified while opposition needs to be defended. There is an important distinction to be made here between acceptance and implementation or actual change in behaviour. This distinction is particularly important when studying international norm diffusion since there might be a significant gap between the acceptance in principal by international actors (states, organizations or private sector companies) and the actual implementation at the domestic level. A summary of how this study defines the concepts of norm, norm proposition, norm evolution, norm acceptance, norm emergence and the international community can be found in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> For similar definitions, see Krasner 1983:2, Katzenstein 1996b:5 and Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996.

**Table 1. Key definitions**

Concept	Description
Norm	A widely accepted standard of behavior held by a collective body
Norm proposition	A call to create a policy that would regulate behavior
Norm evolution	The process and stages through which norms grow, change and/or diffuse
Norm acceptance	The point in norm evolution when the norm is no longer a proposition but a standard which in essence is considered desirable and which is no longer disputed by a majority of stakeholders.
Norm emergence	The initial stages of norm evolution – from birth of norm to acceptance
International community	Actors, such as states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, epistemic communities and private sector companies, operating at the international level to address a particular topic.

### 1.3. Research design

The case study design adhered to the “plausibility probe” strategy used to assess the utility of a newly designed or revised theoretical framework (Eckstein, 1975). Theoretically suggested factors from the framework were assessed through in-depth qualitative analyses of cases, structured by the framework in question, in order to fully assess its plausibility.

Three types of material were used to investigate the cases: written material from the actors involved, such as policy documents, statements or reports; interviews, primarily with representatives of relevant organizations, civil servants and academics; and secondary material, such as other academic accounts of the course of events.<sup>2</sup> This combination of the different types

<sup>2</sup> See appendices 1 and 2 for an overview of the material.

of material provided different perspectives on the accounts, which together built a detailed and nuanced understanding of the process.

This brief contains a condensed version of the doctoral dissertation *Norm Acceptance in the International Community – a study of disaster risk reduction and climate-induced migration*, previously published at Stockholm University (Jakobsson, 2018). The brief continues next with a description of the analytical framework, followed by a summary of the most important findings of the case studies and ends with a concluding section in which the most important policy implications of this study is highlighted.

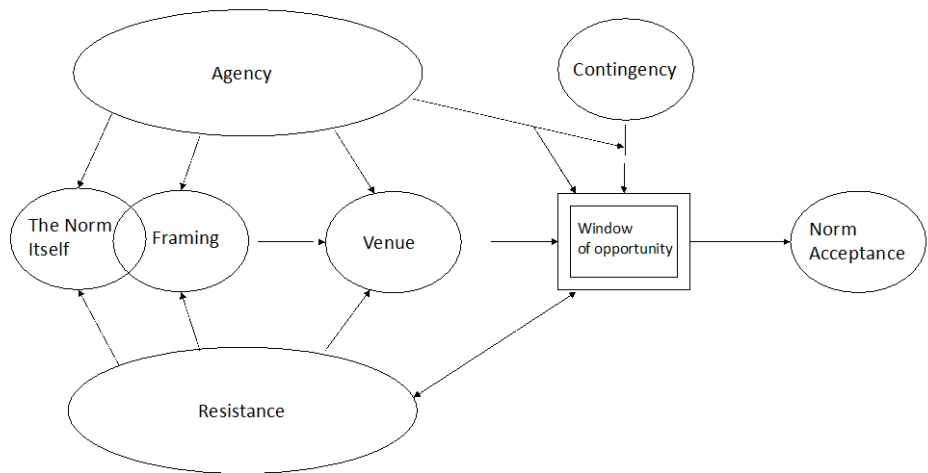
## **2. ANALYZING NORM ACCEPTANCE**

A literature review on research regarding international norm evolution provides the foundation from which important insufficiencies of previous approaches could be identified. The most important deficit is that the influence of contingencies is not theorized in existing frameworks to understand norm evolution. If the surrounding societal events and contextual factors are not systematically accounted for or included in analytical frameworks on norm emergence, the analyst loses the ability to explain the power of joint effects and timing. The analytical framework presented below ameliorates this deficit and also identifies a number of key factors to understanding norm change. It takes the key variables from standard approaches (agency, the norm itself and framing), adds two more recent suggestions from the norm literature (venue and resistance) and, most importantly, adds the component of contingencies (including windows of opportunity).

## 2.1. Analytical framework

*Agency* refers to the actors (mainly so-called norm entrepreneurs) that initiate, advocate and attempt to drive the norm proposition towards acceptance. Agency features prominently here and, as Figure 1 suggests, it influences all the other parts of the framework. Norm entrepreneurs are expected to have the most leverage for influence if they are well-respected, coordinated and unified in the pursuit of their objectives. Moreover, the entrepreneurs need access to relevant policy forums and to be successful and strategic in their activities aimed to highlight the importance of the norm proposition (Björkdahl, 2013; Gest et al., 2013).

**Figure 1. The dynamic relationships of the analytical framework**



*The norm itself* concerns the content, clarity, precision and scope of the norm proposition. This factor assumes that a norm proposition that is complex, wide in scope and is unclear in terms of definitions as well as its

origins and effects would be less likely to reach acceptance (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Legro, 1997).

*Framing* is a description of the links and connections between the norm proposition and established norms and policy areas. Previous norm research has concurrently shown that the ways in which new norm propositions are related to existing norms and policy areas has great effect on determining its legitimacy or sensitivity (Bailey, 2008; Blok, 2008; Elgström, 2000; Florini, 1996; Knight, 2011; Ottendörfer, 2013; Rost Rublee, 2009; Youde, 2008). It also has an effect on the venue(s) in which the norm proposition can be handled.

*Venue* represents both the institutional home (that is, the agency, commission and/or secretariat which has the norm proposition in its portfolio) and the platform for discussion (which can be a series of summits or meetings partly or fully devoted to the proposition). The venue can be new, specifically constructed for the norm proposition in question, or already established but with a scope that to at least some degree covers the proposition. Ideally, the venue would also have a mandate to address the norm proposition. The expectation is that an institutional setting in which the norm proposition can be catered for is necessary, or at least facilitating, for norm acceptance (Coleman, 2011).

*Resistance* is a fairly new addition to norm-related research and includes different forms of neglect, opposition or defense of the status quo aimed at counteracting norm acceptance. Scott and Bloomfield (2017) considers the typical “antipreneur” (opposed to the entrepreneur) to be an actor defending the status quo, rather than preventing norm change. Harvey and Mitton (2017) argues that antipreneurs of this kind are more likely to be successful, simply because the status quo aligns with existing norms and



actors are generally more prone to be path dependent. However, opponents can also take the form of “rival entrepreneurs” where the resistance consists of promoting other, competing norms (Scott and Bloomfield, 2017).

The most important contribution of this framework is that of *contingencies* and the effect of the *windows of opportunity* that contingencies might open up. Contingencies are understood here as more or less unexpected and dramatic external events (such as natural disasters, unexpected election results, migration flows, war, a terrorist attack or a new technological discovery) which might intervene in the norm emergence process. Such events might trigger moments or periods of potential change, conceptualized as windows of opportunity. The study argues that theorizations of contingencies and windows of opportunity (and similar potentially decisive moments) are well-used and developed within the policy literature but that the norm literature have largely failed to adequately account for their effects. Therefore, this study borrows from writers within the policy field to understand contingencies (Birkland, 1997; Schedler, 2007; Shapiro and Bedi, 2007, for instance) as well as moments of potential change such as “focusing events” (Birkland, 1997), “punctuations” (Baumgartner and Jones, 2002), “critical junctures” (Collier and Collier, 1991), “windows of opportunity” (Kingdon, 1995) and “external perturbations” (Sabatier, 1998). The study argues that it is not enough for a contingency to occur but norm entrepreneurs must actively connect the contingency to the norm emergence process in order to produce a window of opportunity. The expectation is also that the previous five factors of the framework must have reached a certain level of maturity, and preferably be favorable at approximately the same time, in order for the window to have a productive outcome.

Against the background of this conceptualization of the factors of the framework, the following sections use the framework and probe its plausibility on two empirical cases: disaster risk reduction and then climate-induced migration.

### **3. DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

Disaster risk reduction has its origins in academic interests of the 1970s, when researchers began to accentuate the consequences of future disasters if the issue was not properly addressed. Historically, there had already been a history of the United Nations fulfilling a function during disasters. A specialized UN agency for disaster relief – the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) was created in 1971, but its general objective was to respond to disasters rather than to reduce or manage risks (Hannigan, 2012; Interview 2.4). Later, the United Nations General Assembly appointed the 1990s the “International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction” (IDNDR), but the idea of states cooperating with each other to reduce disaster impacts through risk reduction had not substantially caught on in the policy community at this point.

The first of, thus far, three world conferences on disaster reduction, was held during the IDNDR in Yokohama, Japan, in 1994. The outcome of the conference was the “Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation” (United Nations, 1994), which was the first step in formalizing the norm proposition of reducing disaster risk. By the late 1990s, however, the UN had come to a crossroad on its work on disaster reduction with the IDNDR coming to an end, and was ready to let it go. Due to the persistence of states such as Japan, Germany and Switzerland, as well as the impact of a very powerful El Niño

event in 1997–98, however, another path was taken and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) was developed instead. Furthermore, a UN secretariat was established to administer and ensure the implementation of the ISDR – the UNISDR.<sup>3</sup> Exceptionally small compared to other UN secretariats, with only a handful of staff initially, UNISDR had a difficult time influencing and steering other UN bodies. However, it eventually grew into the most important international setting for consultations, negotiations and progress on the alleviation of disaster impacts (Interviews 2.1; 2.13; UNISDR, 2012).

After a few years of setting up the structures of the new secretariat, the UN member states were making arrangements for a second world conference on disaster reduction in Kobe in January 2005 (UNISDR, 2005). However, on 26 December 2004, only a few weeks before the conference, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami killed over 200,000 people, mainly in Southeast Asia, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history (UNISDR, 2005). For the conference in Kobe, and for disaster management and risk reduction as a whole, the tsunami changed everything. Suddenly, the acuteness of disaster reduction was undeniable to the states present and the human and economic consequences of disasters were perceived as completely unacceptable (Interview 2.1). Instantly, the status of the Kobe conference was transformed to a high-level event with high-level state representatives, and the size of delegations as well as the cohort of journalists exploded. One of the interviewees described it as “the red carpet was rolled out” (Interviews 2.3; also described in interviews 2.10; 2.11; 2.13). The outcome of the conference in Kobe was the Hyogo

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<sup>3</sup> In May 2019, the UNISDR changed its acronym and is now known as the UNDRR.

Framework for Action (HFA), 2005–2015, which focused on building resilience to disasters.

From the start, the HFA was intended to have a successor of some type, and once the UNISDR secretariat had established that this was the desire of the international community, an extensive round of regional and global consultations commenced to establish what such a successor framework should entail (UNISDR, 2013; Interview 2.1). These consultations culminated in the third world conference on disaster risk reduction in Sendai in 2015 where all UNISDR states agreed to adopt the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The framework is unique in its specific and quantified targets for addressing DRR, and was adopted without any major conflict over substance. Not only was the Sendai Framework a much more concrete and specified document than its predecessors but advocates also managed to incorporate the SFDRR and the norm of disaster risk reduction into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement, providing fertile ground for further diffusion of the norm. In general, the evolution of DRR and the adoption of the Sendai Framework is a success story in norm acceptance in international politics.

The question therefore arises, how can we understand this process? By making use of the analytical framework created for this study (see section 2.1.), as well as the empirical case material collected, the developments of DRR from an idea to a widely accepted norm has been analyzed. In doing so, the analysis provided detailed insights into the developments and outcomes in this specific case, the findings of which are summarized below.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For the full analysis and background to the conclusions, see Jakobsson 2018 (the full-text version of this study).

### 3.1. Summary of analysis on the case of disaster risk reduction

In terms of *agency*, the analysis has identified the UNISDR as a key norm entrepreneur and that they have functioned both advocates and experts. The UNISDR even provided a venue for discussions on the norm proposition. Furthermore, entrepreneurs have managed to recognize windows of opportunity to further push for DRR.

Regarding *the norm itself*, the analysis shows that even though the norm proposition to reduce disaster risk is highly complex and infused with a large degree of uncertainty, this does not seem to have been a particular impediment to acceptance (contrary to theoretical expectations). Through targeted efforts by norm entrepreneurs to create a common understanding, the negative effect of the complexities was ameliorated. In addition, the proposition has been perceived as legitimate and a subject of universal concern.

In terms of *framing*, the norm proposition of DRR has made two major shifts in in this regard: first, from preparedness and response to prevention; and, second, from a humanitarian issue to a development issue. In addition, DRR has been strongly connected to climate change. While the connections to other norms and issue areas have been sensitive at some points, framing has also been helpful as it has contributed to a greater focus on and clarification of the content and objectives of the norm, and opened doors to broader forums such as the UNFCCC and the SDGs.

The factor of *venue* seems to have had a strong bearing on facilitating norm acceptance. The summits organized by the UNISDR, especially the world conferences and the global platforms, provided an institutional setting fully devoted to discussing, negotiating and addressing DRR.

There has been little *resistance* to DRR as such. Although the proposition has been shown to struggle with de-prioritization, conflicts within the SFDRR negotiations have concerned external matters. The generally positive attitude to DRR has had a facilitating effect on norm acceptance.

Finally, and most importantly, analysis on the factor of *contingencies* shows that the combination of the Kobe Conference and the Indian Ocean tsunami triggered a crucial *window of opportunity* that made the Hyogo Framework for Action much more salient and was the seedbed for developments leading up to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The occurrence of these contingencies and the seizing of this opportunity had a critical significance for norm acceptance in this case.

Taken together, the case of disaster risk reduction shows how a confluence of events and favorable conditions have had such a strong influence over developments that it is reasonable to say that the outcome cannot be adequately understood without acknowledging it. What was a fairly unknown technical policy question suddenly rocketed to the top of the international agenda and relatively swiftly became broadly accepted, as demonstrated by powerful new international agreements for example.

It should be stressed that it was not the coincidence of the Indian Ocean tsunami and the conference in Kobe *in itself* that resulted in norm acceptance, but that this immense boost in salience opened a window leading to acceptance. This critical window had such a strong influence on the outcome of developments because it occurred at a time when norm emergence had reached a certain level of maturity, and the timing was just right for the following reasons. The norm proposition had had time to mature, in the sense that it had been clarified enough for stakeholders to understand essentially what it was about. A venue – in the form of UNISDR

and its world conferences and platforms – had been established, which offered a foundation for focused discussions to address the norm. A group of norm entrepreneurs, spearheaded by the UNISDR secretariat, was devoted, prepared and had a platform that gave them access to policy makers and, most importantly, a sufficient number of individual norm entrepreneurs recognized the prospects that came with the tsunami in order to turn the spotlight on the already arranged conference in Kobe. In addition, the large group of stakeholders who had remained relatively passive or distant up until this point were now set in motion. Indeed, the pre-planned conference in Kobe was one of the main reasons that the window of opportunity could be seized and utilized to advance the norm proposition. For state representatives, the conference and the prepared draft represented a readily available solution and a way to demonstrate instant capacity to take action.

A particular variable – apart from contingencies – that stands out in the case of disaster risk reduction is the early existence of a fully devoted venue in which UN discussions and negotiations on the norm proposition could take place – first within the IDNDR and later through UNISDR. Apart from spreading knowledge about and promoting disaster risk reduction, one of UNISDR's most important activities was to actively work on a “common language” regarding terminology and technical information. The analysis conducted here suggests that these efforts to unify concepts were one of the main reasons why such a complex and broad norm proposition as disaster risk reduction did not encounter the impediments that would have theoretically been expected in terms of norm clarity and content. These aspects proved especially important in facilitating advancement of norm acceptance during windows of opportunity.

With these insights in mind, the brief now turns its attention to a case with less success in terms of norm acceptance: protection for climate-induced migration.

#### **4. PROTECTION FOR CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION**

The proposed norm under study here is one that suggests that there should be international protection – that is, some kind of right to asylum – for those who are displaced as a consequence of environmental degradation (especially degradation related to climate change), which is expected to intensify in the future. The arguments underpinning this norm proposition often make the case that those fleeing persecution, war or violence have the right to apply for protection from a country other than their country of origin. The claim here is that environmental causes, such as sea-level rise, hurricanes, floods, drought and earthquakes, can also be a cause of cross-border displacement and it is argued that there is a gap in international commitments to protect this group. Environmental reasons, for instance, are not among the reasons for which one can be granted asylum under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. The norm proposition thus states that the international community should address this and ensure such rights to protection. While advanced data estimates show that an average of 26.4 million people have been displaced by disasters each year since 2008 (Yonetani, 2015), there is neither consensus among the international community nor a formal agreement on how to protect those who flee their home countries due to climate-related events. This norm has thus failed to be widely accepted by the international community.

In 1985, Essam El-Hinnawi used the concept “environmental refugees” in a report for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). While



environmental factors have impacted human mobility throughout history, this marked the introduction of the concept of climate-induced migration to international politics. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) picked up on the issue in the early 1990s and introduced it into the climate change policy sphere when it stated that “the gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration” (IPCC 1992). Throughout the 1990s, the links between environmental degradation, climate change and human mobility were discussed, in international institutions and among academics.

Around 2007, the issue of climate-induced migration made its way beyond the circle of the most initiated and became known to a wider sphere. In fact, during this time, “climate refugees” became a buzz word and every actor with even the remotest interest in climate change, migration, security or humanitarian action seemed to make it a matter of their concern. The result was a great rush of reports and statements in this period. The normative gap in the international protection for this group and the propositions to fill the gap also became more outspoken during this period, not least from the academic community. This sudden boost, which certainly moved the issue of climate-induced migration, and the question of related protection, to the heart of the international political agenda, was a result of a connection between the climate change and security agendas – a topic of huge concern to the political and academic community at the time. In addition, advocates managed to frame climate-induced migration as “the human face of climate change” and thus attach moral and humanitarian connotations to the subject.

After this, the norm proposition of protection for climate-induced migration had found a venue of sorts within the UNFCCC negotiations and it was formally acknowledged in the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework

(UNFCCC, 2011). However, its introduction into a formal policy setting also forced the proposition to face the reality of sensitive political interests, especially regarding climate change, loss and damage, and migration. It became increasingly clear how difficult it would be to properly address the issue, and the desirability of action was thus thrown into question and became politically contentious. This polarization culminated at the UNHCR ExCom and ministerial meeting in 2011 when a majority of member states refused to take on further responsibilities for disaster displacement or to develop a framework to cover the protection gap (McAdam, 2014). As a consequence, a large part of the discussions on this norm proposition had to be taken out of the UN for the time being and continued within the Nansen Initiative.<sup>5</sup>

A new opportunity for acceptance came with COP21 in Paris in the fall of 2015. After some controversies, human mobility in relation to climate change was finally mentioned in the outcome text of the conference – in a promise to create a “task force” to further investigate the issue (UNFCCC, 2015). While it was considered positive that human mobility was even mentioned in relation to the Paris Agreement, this did not in any way indicate an acceptance of new or enhanced protection standards or even a willingness to take concrete action on the norm proposition. Indeed, political will was further reduced by contextual factors such as the rise of anti-immigration parties in Europe and large influx of refugees and migrants to Europe at this time. So, at the conclusion of the crucial year of 2015 – the end of the time frame of this study - the norm proposition of enhanced protection for climate-induced migration had failed to be formalized and

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<sup>5</sup> A platform for discussions and experience exchange around disaster displacement.

gain acceptance. A detailed analysis of the developments in this case reveals several intriguing mechanisms at play. The main findings from this are summarized below.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4.1. Summary of analysis and conclusions on the case of climate-induced migration**

The normative claim to ensure international protection for climate-induced migrants evokes several intriguing questions. Why did this proposition – which seemed so righteous in relation to human rights and urgent in relation to the increased consequences climate change, and which was the buzz word for actors on climate security for a number of years – fail to gain international acceptance? Is it plausible that the components of contingencies and windows of opportunity provide important leverage to the explanation?

An analysis of the *agency* involved in the case of climate-induced migration shows that a small and well-coordinated group of norm entrepreneurs (spearheaded by the UNHCR, the IOM, the Nansen Initiative and a handful of academics) have had access to policy makers, but their support for the norm proposition eventually declined as the prospects for success were limited and compromises over content were reached. While one of the strengths of the entrepreneurs was their direct access to policymakers and states in different ways, their positions also required them to concentrate on creating consensus around the norm or at least shaping it into something

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<sup>6</sup> The full analysis and background to the conclusion can be found in Jakobsson 2018 – the full-text version of this study.

politically feasible rather than to safeguard the original content of the proposition.

Moreover, analysis about the content and clarity of the norm – i.e. *the norm itself* – shows that the proposition was negatively affected throughout the process by unresolved uncertainties over definition, scope and causal relationships. The discussions regarding this norm proposition were consistently infused with definitional debates and uncertainties around the phenomenon, not to mention differences regarding whether climate-induced migrants should be seen and handled as a separate group of migrants or not – thereby fundamentally questioning the rationale of the proposed norm. These persistent difficulties in clarifying the norm and achieving unity on definitions seem to have had a great impedimentary effect on norm acceptance in this case. Policymakers have had a hard time grasping what the norm proposition was about and how it should be properly addressed. Not even among the key entrepreneurs and most important organizations involved was there complete unity over definitions. This was the result of different institutional traditions within the organizations (for example regarding the scope of “migration” vs “displacement”) and a desire to do the norm proposition justice by encompassing the complexity and diversity of the phenomena and the required solutions.

In terms of *framing*, the proposition was clearly connected to norms on climate change, migration and security, and has been framed as the human face of climate change. These connections seem to have had a positive effect in drawing political attention to the proposition and putting it on the agenda, but a negative effect on gaining acceptance of the proposed norm, due to the sensitive connotations of some of these issue-areas.

The case evidence on the factor of *venue* displays that the proposition has found a type of institutional home within UNHCR, the IOM and to some extent within the UNFCCC. However, only a small number of officials regularly deal with the norm proposition. In addition, UNHCR member states have been reluctant to formalize the norm and it was questioned whether the UNFCCC was a beneficial setting for negotiations, partly because of its enormous scope.

In terms of *resistance*, however, the analysis shows that there were high levels of resistance and polarization regarding the desirability of this proposition which proved negative for its acceptance. The low level of political appetite for accepting a protection norm on climate-induced migration was demonstrated by different kinds of resistance over the years. The case analysis shows that such resistance was a contributory factor to the developments in both 2011 and 2015, but also how neglect, de-prioritization and “agenda-exclusion” (Bloomfield and Scott, 2017; Tallberg, 2003) have been at least as powerful forms of resistance as outspoken opposition.

Finally, even though the case of climate-induced migration is a case of stagnated norm acceptance, the factor of *contingencies and windows of opportunity* gives substantial explanatory leverage also for understanding the underlying mechanisms of this outcome. A tracing of this process reveals three distinct points in time when there was the potential for significant norm advancement and which can be understood in terms of contingencies and windows of opportunity, albeit in different ways. At the first point, in 2007–2008 (when it was taken up as part of the overall climate security agenda in international politics), there was a small window of opportunity that lead to some degree of norm advancement and the eventual introduction of the norm proposition in an UNFCCC setting. At the second point, in 2011, the UNHCR unsuccessfully tried to persuade the

UNHCR ExCom to commit further to protection norms for climate-induced migration. The analysis shows, however, that there was too much resistance and no window of opportunity at this time – which suggests a reason why it was difficult to achieve norm advancement at this point. The third point, in the fall of 2015, presented some promising circumstances – such as the COP 21 in Paris. But instead, contingencies in the societal and political landscape were such that a negative window was produced – leading to less norm advancement than had been previously been hoped for.

As this summary of the case analysis suggests, insufficient fulfilment of the first five factors can partly account for the lack of broad norm acceptance. However, none of these factors seems able to explain the – so far – unsuccessful norm acceptance in its entirety. In addition, compared to the case of disaster risk reduction, this case shows that catastrophes were not made effective use of in the same way in order to try to open up windows of opportunity. Possible boosts in salience thus failed to come and, when they did, there were no comprehensible and feasible solutions for policymakers to consider. In sum, there was no lack of moments of potential change in this case, but these windows came at the wrong time, without other sufficiently developed factors, and thus did not result in a successful outcome.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARD AN IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF NORM ACCEPTANCE**

This study set out to understand different levels of norm acceptance in international politics. It established that the prevailing standard approach to explain norm evolution of which the most important deficit was that it failed to theorize the elements of intervening contingencies – thereby ignoring a

possibly essential explanation for outcomes of norm acceptance. This study has striven to remedy this by creating a novel theoretical framework that builds in and theorizes the importance of contingencies in the norm acceptance process.

The case study on disaster risk reduction provided an example of how a natural catastrophe which coincided with an already planned and prepared summit on the subject interacted to propel disaster risk reduction toward norm acceptance. The case concerning international protection for climate-induced migrants showed how three particular moments in time had promising potential to advance the norm toward greater acceptance but largely failed because there were no solutions to act on; because either no viable window opened up to drive further attention and ultimate acceptance or the window was “negative”.

A central finding is that contingencies enhance understanding of norm acceptance in successful as well as in stagnated cases. However, it is not contingencies in themselves that automatically produce norm change. The case studies rather suggest that, if actively connected to the specific norm proposition, they function as triggers of moments of potential change, here referred to as windows of opportunity. These windows, in turn, cannot be utilized unless the other factors in the framework are favorable, have reached a certain level of maturity or are improved with the help of the window.

Moreover, including contingencies and windows of opportunity as an additional explanatory dimension provides insights into why a new norm proposition would be prioritized in an otherwise crowded international political agenda, something that the other factors cannot individually address. This analytic dimension thus reveals the combined effects of the other factors and touches on the relationship between norm emergence and

the policy process. As such, it shows why some contingencies matter in the norm acceptance process while other contingencies have little or no effect.

For instance, the disaster risk reduction case suggested that the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami placed unprecedented attention on the issues of disaster risk and prevention, but it was the coincidence with the pre-planned conference in Kobe as well as the maturity of the other factors that propelled norm acceptance. The conference gave stakeholders an opportunity to immediately take action on disaster risk reduction and was quickly tied to continuing work on the topic and further commitments on the Sendai Framework (HFA2) 10 years later. The case of disaster risk reduction illustrates how several factors had sufficiently matured when this major contingency intervened.

The climate-induced migration case showed how similar kinds of contingencies (such natural disasters) did not have the same effect on this norm proposition. In this case, the contingencies that have arisen have not been so strongly linked to the norm emergence process and there have not been any available alternatives (such as feasible policy proposals) to turn to in the same way. Apart from the small window of opportunity in 2007–2008, when there was heightened salience and brief progress made on the issue but no substantial norm progress or lasting change, the case of climate-induced migration also demonstrated an example of a crucial moment in time when a potential window never opened (that is, at the 2011 UNHCR ExCom negotiations) as well as a “negative window” (when the contextual factors in 2015 created strong resistance to enhanced protection mechanisms). In this way, the case analyses have demonstrated how consideration of contingencies and windows of opportunity can be used to provide deeper and richer understanding of both successful and unsuccessful cases of norm acceptance.



It is mentioned above that the first five factors in the framework also proved to be of importance to norm acceptance, but it is crucial to note that none alone can adequately account for the outcomes. That said, the case studies indicate some findings regarding some of these factors that are of particular importance to highlight.

To begin with, the clarity of the norm proposition and common definitions regarding its content, aim and scope have been crucial for the prospects for advancing norm acceptance during windows of opportunity or the possibilities of opening such windows. However, and somewhat counterintuitive to theoretical expectations, it does not seem as if norm complexity and wide scope were unsurmountable hurdles. This is indicated by the case material on disaster risk reduction. The norm proposition on disaster risk reduction is both highly complex and wide in scope – it touches on several policy areas, it is infused with uncertainty and unpredictability, and it covers a range of possible measures. Nonetheless, this does not seem to have been a hindrance to the disaster risk reduction process as entrepreneurs actively – and successfully – worked to create a common language and a common terminology around the issue. Moreover, technical assistance from the research community – highlighted by UNISDR in the Global Assessment Reports – has also helped in specifying disaster risk and how it can be handled.

For the case of climate-induced migration, lack of clarity and a lack of unified definitions seem to have been major impediments to norm acceptance. Like disaster risk reduction, climate-induced migration has also touched on many different phenomena, in this case different kinds of migration with different origins – even though they all are environment-related. While many attempts were made by the community on climate-induced migration to reach unified definitions, the definitional debate

remained fragmented. One reason for this is that the various major actors on the issue (such as UNHCR, the IOM and the Nansen Initiative) have somewhat different views on the scope of the issue that should be addressed and what should be included in the concept of migration (in relation to displacement). Looking at the two cases side by side, the case evidence suggests that it might not be the complexity of the norm proposition that is the greatest impediment to norm acceptance – the lack of common terminology seems to be a bigger problem.

In addition, the case evidence demonstrates how a clear and devoted institutional platform in the case of disaster risk reduction was a crucial vehicle for creating and diffusing common terminology and definitions and thus clarifications of the norm proposition. As such, institutional capacity ameliorated the complexity that would otherwise be expected to hinder norm acceptance. The norm proposition on protecting climate-induced migration did not have the same obvious all-encompassing platform to diffuse such common language.

Research on contingencies and windows of opportunity has sometimes been criticized on the grounds that such events are impossible to predict and are thus not amenable to predictive theory. The analysis in this study, however, suggests that some degree of prediction is possible with regard to the theorizing of contingencies. For instance, while norm entrepreneurs cannot calculate exactly when a window will open, they can be relatively certain that some type of window will open at some point in the process. The leverage then lies in preparations for the potential window to be properly seized. The norm entrepreneurs should be aware of what types of contingency are likely to open a window, what a window would look like (in order to recognize it) and how to be prepared (that is, to work on creating awareness and clarifications regarding the content of the norm, to prepare possible

alternatives and solutions, and to create channels for access to policy makers) and, when the time comes, be ready to activate appropriate linkages and highlight possible solutions.

This study argues that contingencies, and a theorization of moments of potential change or windows of opportunity, should always be included in explanatory tools on norm acceptance. Important explanatory aspects might otherwise be missed. Against this background, this development dissertation brief ends with a summary of the key policy recommendations and take-away's for practitioners:

- Contingencies impact norm acceptance processes at the international level. Such events cannot always be predicted, but some contingencies of some type will always arise.
- Contingencies (be they more or less dramatic or unexpected) must be actively linked to the new norm in order for it to become potentially effective through windows of opportunity.
- A connected contingency is more likely to lead to a leap in norm acceptance if the norm proposition is already:
  - promoted by a well-coordinated group of advocates with access to policy forums.
  - clear in definitions and implications.
  - connected to other well-established norms or policy areas which are considered legitimate and salient.
  - has been taken up by a venue, i.e. a setting in which discussions and negotiations regarding the norm proposition can be pursued.
  - is not subject to too much resistance.
- Advocates for a new norm and practitioners looking to advance acceptance on a certain norm proposition should strive to:

- create a common language and terminology regarding the norm proposition.
- make use of available technical assistance.
- find proper venues or safeguard existing ones.
- prepare feasible policy alternatives.
- seize contingencies and actively use them in order to create windows of opportunity.

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## **APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIAL ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

### **Interviews**

15 in-depth individual interviews were conducted between 2 February 2017 and 14 June 2018 with representatives of the following organizations (in alphabetic order):

- Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Geneva
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Geneva
- National Center for Crisis Management Research and Training (CRISMART), Swedish Defence University, Stockholm

- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Stockholm
- Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), Karlstad and Stockholm
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Brussels, Geneva and New York
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Geneva

The following, additional, organizations were represented as previous employers to some of the interviewees, these are mentioned here as the interviewees' experience from there also proved valuable in their answers:

- Commission on Climate Change and Development (CCDC)
- Disaster Preparedness ECHO Programme (DIPECHO), European Commission
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
- The World Bank
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

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## APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIAL ON CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION

### Interviews

16 in-depth interviews with 17 individuals were conducted between 21 November 2013 and 13 October 2017 with representatives of the following organizations (in alphabetic order):

- Academics, Liège and Brussels
- CLIMA department of the European Commission, Brussels
- DEVCO department of the European Commission, Brussels
- Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Brussels
- HOME department of the European Commission, Brussels
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Geneva
- International Organization for Migration (IOM), Brussels and Geneva
- Migration Policy Institute, Brussels
- Nansen Initiative, Geneva
- Norwegian Refugee Council, Geneva
- Platform for Disaster Displacement, Geneva

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Brussels and Geneva

The following, additional, organizations were represented as previous employers to some of the interviewees, these are mentioned here as the interviewees' experience from there also proved valuable in their answers:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

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