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## **Internal Displacements Due to Climate Change & Natural Disasters In Pakistan: Review & Implementation of UN Guiding Principles for IDPs & their legal status and rights in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The displacements caused by climate change and natural disasters are a pressing issue in Pakistan. Over the years, millions of people have directly been affected by natural disasters which are often caused by climate change., the same number of millions of Pakistanis are also indirectly affected by the destruction from natural disasters, as evident from the food shortages, infrastructure damage, loss of business, and inflation. This paper investigates the specific legal and human rights hurdles that these communities face in displaced communities. By scrutinizing existing legal frameworks in Pakistan seen through the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles for Internally Displaced People (IDP's), this paper aims to offer insights that can inform practical policy recommendations, thus strengthening the legal infrastructure to protect legal rights of environmentally induced IDPs in Pakistan.

**Key words:** Climate, Disasters, Displacement, Recovery, Legal

**Acronyms:** UN, NDMA, IDP, IPCC, ERR, UNFCCC, DTM, NDMC, ERC, FFC

### **Introduction**

Pakistan, with a population exceeding 240 million and diverse landscapes, is among the most climate-vulnerable nations. According to the Global Climate Risk Index, it consistently ranks in the top ten which places 5th between 1999 and 2018 for countries most affected by climate-induced environmental disasters. Climate change and related natural disasters have led to a growing number of climate-induced displacements in Pakistan. For instance, the 2022 floods in Pakistan directly impacted over 33 million people, according to data from the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). It also reports that approximately 8 million people have been displaced to date. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that if current trends continue, the risks linked to climate-induced disasters will intensify in the coming decades (IPCC, 2021).

As a consequence of any natural disaster and in the absence of a solid mechanism to deal with its results, it becomes essential that the state legislator, legal scholars, and humanitarian institutions investigate the legal status of people



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affected by climate-change displacements. Although climate-induced displacement is increasingly recognized as a distinct issue, significant gaps remain in both international and national legal frameworks for protecting the rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Likewise, the lack of effective implementation mechanisms further complicates these challenges. This work shall help to perceive climate change, displacements, and legal/human rights in the context of Pakistan which focus primarily on identifying legal loopholes and advocating reforms.

This paper, thus, aims to study the existing legal frameworks in Pakistan and align it with the UN Guiding Principles, in order to identify the loopholes that shall make the policy makers better understand the complexity. By thoroughly examining the impact of climate change on IDPs, the proposed work focuses on offering policy directions and guidance to enhance the safety and protection of such vulnerable communities.

### **Background of the study**

Climate change, global warming-driven natural disasters, conflicts, and violence force people to leave their homes, disrupting their lives in deeply challenging and often heartbreaking forms. Although their situations may vary and their needs are distinct. But the truth of the problems that are faced by IDP's, are all the same world over. The final outcome is the rebuilding of their lives and the empowerment to overcome such a behemoth task of getting back to their native lands after displacement.

There are several causes ranging from environment, climate, regional conflicts, internal conflicts, military invasions, ethno-cleansing, civil strife, rebellions; which create internal displacements; to elaborate a few; 1) Natural Disasters e.g. floods, earthquakes, landslides, droughts etc Sudan, Ethiopia, Pakistan 2) Internal military conflict by state e.g. separatist/rebellious movements like South American indigenous independent movements. 3) Ethnically driven civil wars e.g. Rwanda, Palestine, Kashmir, Rohingya etc. 4) Man-made disasters such as. Chernobyl, Fukushima, Yangtze River dam project etc.

There is a critical need to address the rights of people under displacements especially by climate change and environment induced disasters that frequently happen in Pakistan. This study shows that a comprehensive legal framework is absent in our country that might defend the rights of displaced person. This gap in the legal system could be overcome by incorporating laws and processes adapted by different countries around the globe, learning from their experiences and legislation they have put to confirm the legal rights of IDP's. with respect to this Pakistan needs clarity in some pressing issues faced by IDPs including:

- Due to an ambiguous legal position, individuals displaced by climate change often face difficulties to access basic rights and essential services.
- Existing laws do not adequately address the unparalleled challenges confronted by IDP's, including losses of land and other sources of livelihood.
- Absence of legal protection leaves IDP's vulnerable to human rights abuses, such as forced evictions and limited access to healthcare.

Climate-induced displacement laws and policies in Pakistan have received limited academic focus that also reflects the importance and necessity to develop



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a legal framework for it. However, legal experts and concerned quarters have noted that

the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Guiding Principles on IDPs play a key role in shaping national and local legislation, policies, and responses to climate-induced displacement. Nonetheless, gaps remain in adapting international values into national laws and in establishing effective mechanisms to protect and support IDPs.

### Climate Change & Natural Disasters

Internal displacements caused by natural environmental disasters or climatic induced environmental disasters wreak havoc on people lives and almost entire internally displacements. This result in the evictions of people from their residences, their livelihoods shattered and IDPs face unique types of deprivation, including the loss of housing, employment, food etc. Additionally, these individuals often face unique risks of protection which might include armed attacks and abuse while their flight to safety, family separation which results in more unaccompanied, missing, or abducted children, many of whom are trafficked into bonded labor, greater exposure to gender-based violence and sex, especially affects children and women, unlawful capturing of homes, property and land, and relocation to hostile situations where face stigma, discrimination, and harassment.

Pakistan is most vulnerable country to climate change, as Climate Risk Index (CRI) of 2022-25 showed the date released by **GermanWatch**. Adil Najam in 2022 examined that floods in Pakistan resulted in above USD 30 billion in damages and economic losses, with reconstruction requires exceeding USD 16 billion. The disaster affected 33 million people and claimed more than 1,730 lives, disproportionately impacted the poorest and most vulnerable regions. Institutional response remained strained, particularly in addressing healthcare challenges. Stagnant floodwaters in many areas have led to the spread of waterborne and vector-borne diseases which placed over 8 million displaced individuals at risk and created a severe public health crisis. This situation posed a direct threat to, and violation of, the fundamental human rights to health and life in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

Climate change and internal displacements are high interconnected and are frequently impacting. With growing more extreme weather situation, more intense and environmental conditions deteriorate due to global warming, these factors fuel a range of interconnected crises which drives mass migrations, undermines human rights, deepens poverty, reduces livelihoods, strains peaceful community dynamics, and ultimately causes greater levels of forced displacement. Most internally displacements occur due to environmental disasters (including climate change), internal conflicts, communal violence, and persecution, and these calamities often befall on the nations that are especially vulnerable and less-equipped to handle such conditions. IDP's are often compelled to live in remote areas, overcrowded camps, where access to useful life services and infrastructure is limited. This makes them especially vulnerable to climate-related hazards such as droughts, floods, storms, and heatwaves.

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn News 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2025



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Moreover, the crises of climate change, undermining livelihoods and make it more difficult for IDPs to attain self-reliance. This issue can exacerbate tensions and can create conflicts over vital resources including water, fuel, and arable land, threatening peaceful relations between displaced populations and host communities.

Natural disasters often cause substantial loss of life and damage to the environment, personal property, and public infrastructure. These events can arise from weather and climate-related phenomena, as well as from geological occurrences such as earthquakes, landslides, and other disruptions at or beneath the Earth's surface. Pakistan has always seen the brunt of the natural disasters, and over the years millions of people were, and still are displaced, their livelihoods ruined, their houses destroyed, their rights to basic amenities ripped, as a result these internally displaced persons became prone to human rights violations and exploitations.<sup>2</sup>

### Some major natural disasters in Pakistan

In the last 75 years Pakistan has seen countless natural disasters of variable magnitudes, from earthquakes, to Tsunamis from cyclones to internal conflicts, from droughts to landslides; yet the common denominator has always been environment, and particularly climate change. A recap of the major natural disasters is illustrated below, which has impacted millions of lives over the years. Pakistan faces a variety of climate-induced and man-made disaster risks that pose serious threats to both human life and infrastructure. These include natural hazards such as earthquakes, droughts, floods, landslides, tsunamis, cyclones and storms, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), and avalanches. Additionally, the country is vulnerable to man-made disasters including industrial and transport accidents, radiological and nuclear incidents, forest and urban fires, and military or civil conflicts. Collectively, these risks require robust disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies to ensure national resilience and public safety.

YEAR	PLACE & MAGNITUDE	HUMAN DEVASTATION
1935	Quetta earthquake 7.7 scale	Dead 60,000 , 10000 displaced
1945	Southwest Baluchistan 8.1 scale	Dead 4000, 10000 displaced
1950	Punjab Floods	Dead 2900, 120000 displaced
1970	East Pakistan Cyclone	Dead 500,000; 1 million displaced
1974	Hunza earthquake 6.5 scale	Dead 5300, 100000 displaced
2000	Baluchistan Drought	Dead 100; 1.4 million impacted
2005	Kashmir Earthquake 7.6 scale	Dead 80,000; 3.3 million displaced

<sup>2</sup>Din NU. Internal displacement in Pakistan: con-temporary challenges. Published by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.



2007	Cyclone (Sindh/Baluchistan)	Dead 750; 400000 to 1.5 million displaced
2010	Hunza Landslide	Dead 30; 20000 displaced
2010	Punjab/KPK floods	Dead 1600; 6 million displaced
2022	Pakistan & Kashmir floods	Dead 1800; 12 million displaced

The human cost is irreparable, which resulted from the climate induced disasters in Pakistan, millions perished and millions are left with the deep scars of tragedies and trauma which they have to live through all their lives. The economic impact is uncalculatable, as the estimated economic cost could be expanded beyond the years, and recovery from such disasters wreaking havoc on a third world nation like ours, is unfathomable. Because economic loss from such disasters eventually lead to aid and loans to accommodate the internally displaced persons, the loans, are again a curse for a poor country like ours.

## Climate Change Internal Displacements Pakistan

Pakistan has seen internal displacements frequently and major causes as mentioned before are natural disasters, and climate induced displacements. , and in recent years particularly from 2008 to 2023, the estimated IDPs were 5.1 million. <sup>3</sup> using Displacement Tracking Matric (DTM), UN International Organization for Migration, showed a declining trend in IDPs since the last major floods of 2022. According to its recent survey 1.5 million of IDPs have returned to their native regions, and up till 2024 23000 remain as IDPs, primarily due to the absolute destruction of their home regions and/or conflict in the region. As different factors resulted in the increasing number of IDPs, affected annually.

Apart from the UN Guiding Principles and constitutional safeguards, Pakistan lacks specific legislation for IDPs. The study urges the state to meet IDPs' basic needs and actively support their return home. Further IDPs face barriers to education and jobs after return which hinders their ability to rebuild their lives. Collaborative efforts are needed in handling departmental liabilities in humanitarian responses, especially in IDPs cases.

The responsibility for preventing internal displacements in first place and then protecting IDPs and other affected groups within the country resides with authorities of the State. Particularly, when environmental disasters, induced by climate change occur. The IDPs become vulnerable may finish in areas where State authority is either deficient or have implementation challenges. In such situations, non-State actors also bear responsibility to prevent displacement and safeguard internally IDPs. When States require assistance or cannot confirm national security, the international community assumes a useful protective role. However, closing this “protection gap” has been difficult which owes to the issue's sensitivity within the affected country and the significant shortcomings in the international framework.

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration (DTM-Pakistan)2023





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This study has found that displacement in Pakistan is often the result of natural disasters and climate change. While some types of displacement are particularly relevant to Pakistan, others are more applicable on a global scale. These types of displacement are categorized as follows:

**Temporary displacement** refers to individuals who are temporarily uprooted due to climate-related events such as hurricanes, floods, storm surges, or tsunamis. These individuals are generally able to back to their homes once the situation is cleared. **Permanent local displacement** involves people who are displaced permanently within their own regions due to irreversible environmental changes, such as sea levels rises, scarcity of clean water, coastal flooding, or increasingly frequent storm surges. **Permanent IDPs** describes individuals who, although remaining within their country, are relocated away from their genuine homes that returning is no longer feasible. For instance, this may include families moved from one part of the country to another.

**Permanent regional displacement** occurs when relocation within the home country is not possible, prompting individuals to move to neighboring countries offering long-term safety. This type of displacement has rarely occurred in Pakistan, with the exception of scenarios such as the Indo-Pak wars. In such cases, the term "IDPs" may broaden to include refugees. Finally, **permanent inter-continental displacement** applies to those who cannot find safety or relocation options within their country or neighboring regions and are instead offered protection in a different continent. Among these types, IDPs remains the most intensive yet often face humanitarian crises globally which are driven by a variety of complex causes.

### Global Impact of Internally Displaced Persons

Internal displacement affects around 25 million people worldwide and is increasingly recognized as one of the most tragic challenges of our time. Often caused by traumatic events linked to violent conflicts, severe human rights abuses, and widespread discrimination, displacement almost invariably results in profound hardship and suffering for affected communities. It tears families apart, disrupts social and cultural ties, ends stable employment, interrupts education, limits access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare, and exposes vulnerable individuals to violence, including attacks on camps, kidnappings, and sexual abuse. Whether they seek refuge in camps, flee to rural areas to escape threats of persecution and violence, or integrate into similarly disadvantaged and marginalized communities, internally displaced persons constitute one of the most vulnerable populations, urgently in need of support and protection.

### LEGAL STATUS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Who qualifies as an IDP? When internal displacement first became a priority on the global agenda thirty years ago, a major challenge was establishing a clear definition. It was understood that IDPs are people on the move within their own country, without crossing international borders. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol do not apply to IDPs, though their movement may resemble that of refugees. Nonetheless, IDPs are not included in the



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international legal definition of refugees.

As stated that IDPs are *“Individuals or groups who have compelled to flee from their homes or places of residence, especially due to the conflict of arms, widespread violence, abuses, or natural disasters, and which has not crossed an internationally border universally”*. Some key components of the above statement need to be emphasized. It refers to **persons or groups of persons** who are **forced or obliged to flee or leave**, highlighting the **involuntary nature** of their movement. These individuals are displaced from their **homes or places of habitual residence**, typically **as a result of or in order to avoid** the effects of conflict, violence, disasters, or other threats. Importantly, these persons **have not crossed an internationally recognized state border**, distinguishing them from refugees and placing them within the category of IDPs.

This definition encompasses various causes for displacement when compared to the 1951 refugee convention. The acknowledgment of human rights abuses as a cause for displacement was the most important. Natural and artificial disasters were included as well, which is especially significant in the age of climate change, given the increasing instances of displaced populations due to disasters. Moving away from areas with either short-term or long-term environmental hazards has been recognized as a safety strategy, making it a primary cause for displacement.

### Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Dr. Francis Deng, the representative of the Secretary-General on IDP's, faced a challenge in the 1990s when the UN Human Rights Commission requested to create a normative framework” to improve the protection of IDP's.

The Representative initially took on the responsibility of creating an analysis and compilation of legal values related to IDPs, which he presented to the Commission on Human Rights in 1996. This research concluded that current international law offers adequate protection for the unique needs of internally displaced individuals in numerous areas, although there are some ambiguous areas where further clarification is needed. Building on this extensive research, the current Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were developed and presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998. The goal of this document is to address the human rights requirements of internally displaced persons by explicitly defining their protections.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, introduced in 1998, compile key norms from international humanitarian, criminal, and refugee law to protect IDPs. They define IDPs, outline state obligations, and serve as the global standard for internal displacement, reaffirming IDP rights under international law and recognized by the UN and other bodies.

Regarding state accountability, the Guiding Principles emphasize that sovereignty includes the duty to protect and assist all citizens, including IDPs, without discrimination, in line with international human rights and humanitarian law. Second, while individuals displaced within their own country continue to enjoy the full range of rights afforded to the general population, displacement creates specific vulnerabilities that must be acknowledged. Therefore, to ensure that displaced persons do not lose access to their fundamental rights, states have a responsibility to implement targeted protective measures and support systems. These measures must address the unique



challenges faced by IDPs and guarantee that they are treated equally to non-displaced citizens.

### **Guiding Principles on IDPs and Pakistan's Legal framework**

In Pakistan, there is still a legal gap regarding the recognition of rights for IDPs affected by disasters. At the same time, no dedicated policy exists that comprehensively addresses internal displacement or displacement specifically triggered by disasters. Although Pakistan launched its first National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) in 2012 and later the Framework for Implementation of Climate Change Policy (2014-2030) in 2014, neither of these documents tackles disaster-induced displacement. In March 2022, the Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) introduced a revised edition of the NCCP. Nevertheless, despite the positive nature of this development, the policy gives only superficial consideration to displacement by identifying 'heightened climate change-related migration' as one of the vulnerabilities Pakistan faces regarding climate threats. It lacks detailed policies or actions to direct sustainable solutions, such as the return, resettlement, or reintegration of individuals displaced by disasters. This disparity is also apparent in the nation's National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy and the National Disaster Risk Management Framework.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan, on the other hand, lacks any national legislation or policies put in place to address the needs of internally displaced individuals. The only legal document that mentions displacement is the Land Acquisitions Act of 1894. The Act is a leftover from Pakistan's colonial era, when landowners were sidelined and their land was taken for public use, frequently without their consent. Pakistan does have the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP), which is a non-governmental organization that provides reports on internally displaced individuals. It generates statements and reports and offers suggestions to the government representing internally displaced individuals.

Additionally, at the provincial level, the government of Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) established a Return Policy Framework in collaboration with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2009. The provincial government pledged in the return policy to consult internally displaced individuals during a phase of national responses. Nonetheless, there is no proof that consultations have occurred at any time. There have been instances where internal displacement was observed or where policies could have been implemented. For example, the Climate Change Policy of 2012 recognized displacement due to the impacts of climate change and incorporated prevention strategies. In 2018, the Guidelines on Foreign Assistance emphasized the government's primary role in disaster response and detailed the conditions and coordination methods for foreign aid during major disasters.

At the global stage, the rights of IDPs are addressed by the Guiding Principles on IDPs from the High Commissioner officer for Human Rights. These principles aim to protect the rights of communities affected by displacement and direct both national and international reactions in these circumstances. Nonetheless, it does not impose any responsibility on the states, as national authorities hold the main responsibility to deliver humanitarian aid and protection to individuals in need during crises. Several states today have integrated these principles into

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<sup>4</sup> The Rule of Law in Pakistan Key Finding 2017 [aponce@worldjusticeproject.org](mailto:aponce@worldjusticeproject.org).





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legislation or used them as the foundation for developing policies. Examples include Sri Lanka, Georgia, Burundi, Colombia, Armenia, Angola, Uganda, Peru, and the Philippines.

### **Legal Framework Formulation Under Guiding Principles**

The rights that IDPs and all individuals hold under international law must be embodied and implemented in the Pakistan's national legal system. Countries have advocated for reinforcing legal frameworks to safeguard IDPs and have been urged to advance the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement via national laws. To guarantee that national laws safeguard the rights of IDPs and remain consistent with the Guiding Principles and the international legal norms supporting them, it might not be essential or suitable in every situation to implement laws specifically for IDPs. Ultimately, the rights of IDPs are not standalone; they are rights that all citizens or regular residents of a State possess. The unique circumstances of internal displacement frequently present specific challenges for IDPs in accessing and enjoying their rights.

The importance of IDP-specific legislation in protecting the rights of IDPs depends on the context and the state's response. In many cases, amending existing laws may be sufficient to address the particular protection challenges that arise from internal displacement. Certainly, even when there are laws specifically for IDPs, changes to broader legislation are frequently necessary. For example, to tackle the specific challenges that IDPs encounter in exercising their rights to property, documentation, education, or political involvement, merely recognizing these rights in an IDP law is typically inadequate; instead, it will be essential to revise the applicable general national laws (such as civil status laws, education acts, or electoral codes) to eliminate the legislative barriers that IDPs confront.

It is useful that the national legislative framework acknowledges the rights and guarantees owed to IDPs according to international law and aligns with the State's obligations under international law. It is thus crucial to examine and assess national laws regarding their alignment with international legal benchmarks and, based on this evaluation, to determine any legal reforms required to uphold the rights of internally displaced persons. In certain nations, local associations of lawyers have undertaken research on national laws and subsequently collaborated with governmental bodies to align those laws with the principles and, consequently, with the international standards that support them. Certainly, national laws and policies are typically most effective when developed in collaboration with civil society, including the IDPs themselves.

In a situation of internal displacement caused by climate changed induced national disasters, it is essential to take into account two different forms of national legislation:

1. Laws that are generally applicable may not specifically tackle internal displacement, but they are still relevant to issues impacting those who are internally displaced. For instance include: administrative regulations outlining how individuals can recover lost personal property, regulations establishing rules and processes for seeking compensation; electoral statutes specifying voter eligibility requirements; and educational laws clarifying admission standards and languages of instruction.



2. Legislation specifically aimed at tackling cases of internal displacement. These might appear in various shapes. In certain cases, governments have enacted legislation concerning a particular stage of displacement, for example, outlining minimum criteria to be followed during the processes of return, resettlement, and reintegration. In various instances, governments have implemented extensive national legislation regarding internal displacement, addressing every stage of displacement, from prevention to resolutions, and all reasons for displacement, including conflicts and disasters.

Several countries around the world have enacted national laws specifically addressing internal displacement, including Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Georgia, Peru, Russia, and Turkey. Understanding the national legal framework and its significance in safeguarding the rights of DPs is essential. In this regard, it is important to stay informed about national regulations and policies related to internal displacement and the specific issues faced by IDPs. One must also assess how well these policies align with the state's obligations under international law and whether they are consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Additionally, offering appropriate guidance to governments on improving national legislation is crucial to ensure that IDPs face no legal barriers in exercising their rights. Raising awareness among IDPs about the laws and policies that affect them is equally important, as it empowers them to advocate for and assert their rights. Moreover, promoting and monitoring the implementation of relevant national laws and policies in cases of internal displacement helps ensure accountability and effectiveness. Finally, efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of national authorities to enforce these laws and policies. This can be achieved through training programs, awareness campaigns, technical assistance, program support, and mobilization of necessary resources.

Like many other countries, Pakistan has enacted legislation and formulated strategies for disaster risk management that align with international standards, including the Guiding Principles, though it is still in infancy and a huge behemoth task of resources scarcity and administrative nightmares still loom over the projected policies, yet schemes have been proposed to incorporate disaster risk management into development policies and practices. Nonetheless, because of poor governance, insufficient political will, economic limitations, widespread corruption, and over ambitious initiatives, these policies and plans have not been carried out effectively.

An overview of some of the legislations done over the years, taking guidance from UN Guiding Principles as the foundations for the policy formulation, as illustrated below:

## Key legislations, policies & plans framework in Pakistan

Legislation/Policy	Scope	Implementation by	Purpose
The Calamities Act 1958	National	Govt. Of Pakistan	State action during emergencies response



			relief
ERRA Act 2011	National	ERRA	Rehabilitation, reconstruction, development, institutional framework
National Disaster Management Act 2010	National Provincial, District	NDMA	Framework for DRM for disaster management cycle
National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2013	National Provincial, District	NDMA	Outlines priorities for reducing risks from proactive perspective with special focus on preventing mitigation and preparedness
National Disaster Management Plan Implementation Road Map 2016-2030	National Provincial, District	NDMA	Prioritizing activities for the period of 2016-2030 with focus on multi hazard risk assessments capacity building community resilience and raising awareness
The National Disaster Response Plan 2019	National Provincial, District	NDMA	Disaster response framework based on identified roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders

## National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)

The key factor in Pakistan's response to natural disasters and how to cope with it aftermath, the creation of National Disaster Management Authority. NDMA serves as the primary federal agency responsible for managing the entire range of Disaster Management Activities. It was established in 2007 via the NDM Ordinance and ultimately received parliamentary approval through an act of Parliament in 2010. It serves as the executive branch of the National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC), created under the leadership of the Prime Minister, functioning as the highest decision-making authority in Disaster Management. NDMA seeks to create sustainable operational capability and professional expertise to manage the federal government's emergency response during a national disaster.

Before the formation of NDMC and NDMA in 2010, there existed four primary agencies for disaster management at the national level, namely: The Civil Defense Department, Emergency Relief Cell (ERC), Federal Flood Commission (FFC), and National Crises Management Cell (NCMC).

Disaster management in Pakistan is a delegated responsibility, with the primary duty for disaster response resting with the provincial governments. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) functions as a national-level support mechanism for the provinces. The disaster management framework in Pakistan



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is structured across three levels. At the *federal level*, the NDMA provides supplementary support to provincial and district authorities, namely the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs). At the *provincial level*, the system serves as an essential intermediary that assists district authorities and coordinates with NDMA to ensure the timely delivery of rescue and relief efforts to affected areas. Finally, the *district level* acts as the point of direct aid distribution to impacted communities. However, this level currently remains the most vulnerable component of the disaster management system, as many provinces have yet to fully operationalize and activate the district-level organizations.

The key national policies, frameworks, and guidelines addressing disaster risk management and response in Pakistan include a wide range of strategic documents and operational plans. Key documents include the *National Disaster Risk Management Framework* (2007–2012), *National Disaster Response Plan* (2010), and *Disaster Risk Management Needs Assessment Report* (2012). Also important are the *National Disaster Management Plan* (2013–2022), *DRR Policy* (2013), and *National Plan for Industrial/Technical Disasters*. Other notable plans include the *Annual Monsoon Contingency Plans* (2010–2017), *National Drought Mitigation and Response Plan*, *Policy Guidelines on Vulnerable Groups in Disasters*, *National Gender & Child Cell Framework* (2013), *Pakistan School Safety Framework* (2016), and a 2014 study on early and forced marriages in disasters.

Further, resources such as the *Training Manual on Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster* (2014), SOPs on separated and missing children, and the *Child Protection in Emergencies Trainers Manual* support inclusive response planning. Meanwhile, the Karachi Heat Wave Study (2015), *National Fire & Life Safety Provisions* (2016), and SOP for Air Crash Handling offer targeted response strategies. The Karachi Heat Wave Study (2015), *National Fire & Life Safety Provisions* (2016), and Air Crash Handling SOP offer targeted response measures. Complementary frameworks, including the *National Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan*, *MOVERE* and *GOERE* Guidelines, *MHVRA* Guidelines, *Disaster Risk Insurance Framework*, and *MIRA* Guidelines, collectively form the core of Pakistan's institutional and policy approach to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response.

### **Infrastructure Capacity To Cope With Natural Disasters And Displacements**

Pakistan has faced a variety of natural disasters over the past ten years, starting with a significant earthquake in 2005 in the Kashmir area that resulted in the deaths of more than 75,000 individuals and is considered one of the most severe natural calamities in South Asia.<sup>1</sup> The year 2010 experienced some of the worst flooding in Pakistan's past, claiming 1,800 lives and impacting 21 million people.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, floods led to the deaths of 178 individuals and affected 1.5 million. In 2014, 367 individuals perished as a result of extensive flooding, marking the “fourth straight year of severe monsoon rains in Pakistan. In 2015, residents of Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, faced a heat wave that claimed the lives of more than 1200 individuals.

In theory, Pakistan currently possesses a robust institutional framework to anticipate and react to natural disasters. The NDMA serves as the primary





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agency at the federal level for managing disaster-related activities. As stated on their website, “during a disaster, all parties involved, such as Government Ministries / Departments / Organizations, Armed Forces, INGOs, NGOs, and UN Agencies collaborate and are part of the NDMA to carry out a unified operation.” The NDMA represents a significant advancement over the National Calamities (Prevention and Relief) Act of 1958, which once regulated disaster management efforts.

The goal is to enhance disaster readiness and emphasize risk mitigation. Even with these institutional advancements, conflicting interests continue to be an issue at all levels, particularly regarding the political economy of disaster assistance. The overlap of missions among policy-making institutions also leads to coordination problems and communication shortcomings. NDMA is responsible for coordination, while provincial disaster management authorities (PDMAs) excel in monitoring water inflows and allocating resources as needed. Other government and donor agencies provide technical support to these institutions. SUPARCO, along with its Space Application Center for Response in Emergency and Disaster (SACRED) partnered with UN SPIDER, issues flood alerts. The military, summoned by the government, also assists disaster-related institutions to aid in civil defense efforts. Systems for early warning are also available for various disasters.

### **Analysis of Internal Displacement Mechanisms**

Examination of disaster policies and experiences after 2005 shows that there are primarily short-term strategies for response and relief, while there is a comparatively diminished emphasis on prevention, preparedness, and enhancing capacities. Regulatory and legislative shortcomings along with institutional deficiencies continue to exist in addressing vulnerabilities and enhancing livelihoods. In the absence of top-down support, communities in the impacted regions have started to become more politically involved. Nonetheless, the NDMA as well as the related establishment has shown efforts to bring up solidarity among the community and bolster community perseverance, specifically in regions situated in floodplains or frequently at risk of hazards. This is mainly because of limited awareness regarding institutional inertia and the insights developed from the DRR and administrative policies and implementations prior to 2005.

Pakistan's Army has time and again functioned and exhibited laborious planning, regulation in use of resources, and remained focus. The institution collaborated in all aspects of the challenges and offered unwavering support in respect of resources and rescue drives. It helped effectively to mitigate the harm, consequently preserves both the existence and livelihood.

Data show that poor resource management and low awareness in developing nations lead to greater harm than in developed ones. While no nuclear accidents have occurred in the country, vigilance is essential. Constructing dams and barrages is an increasing necessity.

### **Conclusion**

To effectively address internal displacement caused by climate-induced disasters and population movements, Pakistan must align its post-disaster management policies with the UN guiding principles on internal displacement. This requires a





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comprehensive, rights-based national strategy encompassing prevention, protection, support, and rehabilitation. Accurate data collection, particularly on vulnerable groups, is essential, along with improved collaboration with international organizations to establish early warning systems. Recognizing environmental instability as a security risk, securing adequate funding, and strengthening disaster response capacities are also useful. Furthermore, adopting the UN Guiding Principles, improving inter-agency coordination, reviewing legal frameworks, and, where needed, creating specialized environmental policing units will ensure a sustainable and effective approach to managing internal displacement.

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