Chapter 4
Resilience and Mental Health Challenges of Climate Refugees:
Adjusting to Forced Relocation in the Current Legal Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Climate change-induced catastrophes, which have been shown to have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health outcomes, are anticipated to lead to an increase in human migration beyond existing levels. This chapter examines the complex relationship between resilience and mental health difficulties in the context of climate refugees, who are persons who are forced to relocate as a result of the consequences of climate change. Further, it explores the many aspects of resilience that people experience while facing the psychological consequences of being displaced from their residences. It examines the current legal frameworks that pertain to climate refugees, with a focus on finding any deficiencies and contradictions that contribute to the heightened vulnerabilities experienced by this particular group. This research aims to influence policy conversations and encourage a more holistic approach to addressing the well-being of climate refugees in the face of increasing environmental realities by shedding light on the nexus of resilience, mental health, and legal complexities.

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INTRODUCTION

In a period characterised by the intensifying complexities of climate change, the growing occurrence of natural calamities, and the relentless ascent of sea levels, individuals displaced due to climate-related factors are emerging as a particularly susceptible and profoundly impacted demographic on a global scale. *Kiribati* and *Tuvalu*, two Pacific states, are now confronted with the pressing issue of sea-level rise, which poses an urgent danger to their territories as the approaching water steadily engulfs their landmasses (Web et al., 2023). The coastal areas of *Bangladesh,* characterized by high population density, are subject to frequent flooding events, resulting in the displacement of a significant number of people (Lázár et al., 2020). The *nation of Syria* had a prolonged period of drought, which, while not directly linked to climate change, exacerbated the shortage of resources and the insecurity of food, so playing a role in the displacement of people inside the country (Selby et al., 2017). Indigenous populations in *Alaska* and *Louisiana* are faced with the challenges of coastal erosion and melting permafrost, which have compelled them to relinquish their historic territories (Maldonado et al., 2021). In the present scenario, island states such as the *Maldives* are confronted with significant issues of an existential kind due to the encroachment of increasing sea levels onto their territorial boundaries (Lelean, 2021). The vulnerability of *Haiti* was intensified as a consequence of the earthquake that occurred in 2010, resulting in further instances of relocation (Llorente-Marrón et al., 2020). Scientists and policymakers have long recognized climate change as a pressing issue that requires urgent attention.

Climate migration is a specialized discipline within the field of migration that pertains to individuals who have been compelled to leave their native lands as a result of the adverse impacts of climate change (Ari & Gokpinar, 2020). These impacts may include rising sea levels and other climate change-induced phenomena such as drought, water scarcity, extreme weather events, deforestation, air pollution, and other climate-related disasters. The phenomenon of migration is expected to undergo significant growth at a rapid rate worldwide in the foreseeable future, unless proactive measures are taken to mitigate the impacts of climate change caused by human activities. Initially, climate migrants were referred to as "environmental refugees" by El-Hinnawi in a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) study. El-Hinnawi defines environmental refugees as "*people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardizes their existence and/or seriously affects the quality of their life*" (El-Hinnawi, 1985). This definition encompasses a comprehensive overview of various climate-induced migration patterns and environmental-driven forms of mobility. The question of whether it is preferable to have a definition that is so broad and comprehensive, or