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Climate Refugees and the Human Rights Protection Gap: Legal, Ethical, and Psychological Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: The growing effects of climate change are contributing to the ever-increasing scale of forced displacement. However, the concept of “climate refugees” does not have a clearly defined status in international law, which creates significant gaps in the protection of basic human rights. This paper analyzes the concept of climate displacement and the limitations of the existing international legal framework, with special reference to the right to life, health, water, food, housing, and human dignity. It advocates the thesis that the response to climate displacement requires the development of a special international legal framework based on human rights, solidarity and human dignity. At the same time, an analysis of the encyclical *Laudato si'* introduces the concepts of integral ecology and ecological conversion as the basis for a moral transformation of the relationship with nature and vulnerable groups. Carl Jung’s analytical psychology and the concept of the shadow provide a psychological framework for understanding the climate crisis as a confrontation between modern civilization and its own repressed aspects, and the consequences of its relationship to nature. The paper concludes that the effective protection of climate-displaced people requires simultaneous legal, moral, and psychological transformation, based on the universality of human rights.

Keywords: Climate refugees; Climate change; Human rights; Collective shadow; Moral response; Integral ecology

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in the period from 2008 to 2016, extreme weather events, such as storms, floods, forest fires, and extremely high temperatures, led to an average of “21.5 million people annually” being forced to leave their homes [1]. The scale of this problem is further confirmed by data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), according to which natural disasters caused 45.8 million cases of internal displacement worldwide in 2024, the highest annual number recorded since systematic monitoring began in 2008 [2]. Long-term projections indicate the possibility of a further increase in climatically and ecologically conditioned displacement. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) estimates that by 2050, as many as 1.2 billion people could live in countries insufficiently resilient to a variety of environmental threats, including food and water insecurity, natural disasters, rising



temperatures, and rising sea levels [3]. The World Bank's 2018 *Groundswell* report predicted that in the absence of coordinated action on climate change and development, more than 140 million people could become internally displaced by climate change in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America by 2050 [4]. Its 2021 update expanded the analysis to six regions and projected up to 216 million internal climate migrants by 2050 under a pessimistic scenario [5]. "In 2022, 70 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 56 per cent in 2012" [6]. By the end of 2024, 73.5 million people were internally displaced due to conflict and violence, an increase of 6.5 million in just one year and 33 million more than a decade ago [2].

According to Doyle, "the humanitarian consequences are most acutely felt in the many forced migrants who do not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Increasingly central among them today are those driven by climate change, the so-called 'climate refugees', climate 'forced migrants' or (more skeptically) 'climate-induced migrants'" [7]. Due to established social roles, responsibilities, and cultural norms, women, girls, and other groups with special needs often suffer increased risks and a greater burden from the effects of climate change [6].

Some scholars pointed out the psychological, anthropological, ontological, political and ethical aspects of climate mobility, emphasizing that it cannot be explained only by the impact of environmental changes [8–10]. Bettini, in his analysis of the climate migration discourse points out that dominant ways of representing climate migrants can obscure issues of responsibility, power and justice [8,11]. Similarly, Baldwin considers the discourse on climate migration in the context of the wider crisis of Western humanism [9]. Drawing on Baldwin [9], who describes climate mobility as a "crisis of humanity", this paper highlights that the issue of climate mobility is not merely a socio-ecological, legal, or political matter, but can also be viewed as an ethical, psychological, and theological matter. It is necessary to consider the psychological, ontological, and theological aspects of climate mobility in the context of the "crisis of humanism" [9] or the "anthropocene crisis" [8]—as pointed out by authors such as Bettini [8] and Baldwin [9]. According to Bettini: "The crisis that the Anthropocene signifies here is primarily a crisis of the modern/humanist faith in the possibility to master and control the complex biological, atmospheric and geological entanglements humans live in. (...) In this sense, climate migration could be described as a symptom of the Anthropocene. The fantasy that the eruption of climate migration cracks is the modern Anthropos, based on the illusion of a human alterity and superiority in relation to the non-human, to 'nature'" [8]. Therefore, climate migration is not merely a consequence of environmental change; it also raises deeper questions about human beings' position on the planet, their relationship with nature [9], and their understanding of their role in the world [12].

This paper argues that protecting individuals displaced by climate change requires more than creating legal solutions. It requires a transformation of the moral and psychological framework through which contemporary societies understand their relationship to nature, vulnerability, and the Other [9]. The broader aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the problem of climate mobility cannot be "understood through simplistic narratives that reify a complex set of relations" [8]. Building on existing research, this paper develops a specific interdisciplinary perspective by connecting Jung's analytical psychology and the ethical vision of Pope Francis laid out in the encyclical *Laudato si'* [12], which emphasize the importance of psychological and ethical transformation of collective consciousness to overcome the crisis of humanism and build a more responsible relationship towards nature and people affected by climate change.

The analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung and the encyclical *Laudato si'* are particularly significant for considering climate mobility in the context of the "crisis of humanism" [9], because they offer a psychological and theological perspective for re-examining the relationship of human beings to nature, their own vulnerability and responsibility for others. Carl Jung's analysis of modernity and the shadow archetype allows for a psychological interpretation of the climate crisis as a conflict with those aspects of modern civilization that have long remained insufficiently recognized and conscious [13]. On

the other hand, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* provides an ethical framework based on integral ecology, ecological conversion, solidarity, and human dignity [12]. These perspectives suggest that the legal recognition and protection of climate refugees should not be understood solely as a matter of developing new legal norms [14], but also as part of moral responsibility and the transformation of collective consciousness [12,13].

The transformation of collective consciousness does not necessarily precede the establishment of legal protection; rather, collective consciousness, legal norms, and institutional practices mutually shape each other [15]. The argument about the importance of transforming collective consciousness in this paper is intended primarily for academics and the wider public interested in the relationship between individual consciousness, collective values, and institutional change. Psychological, philosophical and theological perspectives can contribute to understanding the deeper assumptions that shape social behavior, but their insights should be connected to concrete historical experiences and legal mechanisms of protection. The significance of the idea of the transformation of collective consciousness lies in the possibility of simultaneously reexamining cultural patterns, institutional structures, and forms of social action that affect the realization of human dignity and justice [16].

2. Methodology

This paper is based on a hermeneutic approach, which implies “close reading” and critical interpretation of original psychological, theological, and relevant legal texts [17]. Incorporating psychological and theological perspectives is necessary to understand how collective consciousness can change in the face of global challenges such as climate change and climate mobility. Although legal regulations lay important foundations for protecting human rights and dignity, they cannot fully explain how society develops awareness of responsibility towards vulnerable groups and its relationship with nature. In order to better understand these processes, it is necessary to take into account psychological, moral and cultural factors. Psychological and ethical approaches, especially those dealing with the relation between individual and collective consciousness, enable a better understanding of the symbolic patterns and attitudes that shape the way society responds to the challenges of both climate change and climate mobility. Theological perspectives, on the other hand, provide an ethical interpretation of human responsibility, solidarity, care for creation and the moral importance of protecting vulnerable communities.

This paper primarily covers the hermeneutic method of close reading. This method “involves the careful reading of a (...) text, paying close attention to words and their meaning, syntax, sentence structure, imagery, the themes that are treated, the way the narrative unfolds, and the view of the world created by the text” [17]. Through careful reading and critical interpretation of the relevant texts, this paper explores how psychological and theological ideas can help question dominant values and develop a collective consciousness that encourages a more humane and inclusive attitude toward individuals affected by climate change and forced displacement [14]. These perspectives are not seen as a substitute for legal protection, but rather as a possible contribution to broader cultural and ethical changes that take place in mutual connection with legal and institutional changes.

This paper includes four interrelated research questions: (1) how Carl Jung's understanding of the individual and collective psyche can be applied to interpret the unconscious patterns and values that shape social attitudes toward climate change and climate mobility; (2) how theological understandings of human dignity, solidarity, responsibility and care for creation challenge dominant social attitudes; (3) through which psychological, moral and cultural processes these perspectives can contribute to the change of collective values and the development of social responsibility; and (4) how changes in collective consciousness can be linked to legal norms and institutional practices to advance the protection of human dignity and the rights of persons affected by climate mobility. This research path allows a critical examination of the potential, but also the limitations, of psychological and theological approaches, as well

as their possible role in the mutual shaping of collective consciousness, legal protection, and institutional responses to climate challenges.

3. The Concept of Climate Refugee: The Human Rights Protection Gap

Since 1985, when UN Environment Programme (UNEP) expert Essam El-Hinawi defined “environmental refugees” as individuals “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 jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life” [18]. The term “environmental refugees” has been used to describe this phenomenon [18]. This concept is often used synonymously with the term “climate refugees” [19].

“One of the key challenges in securing protection for those affected by displacement as a result of climate change lies in the complexities involved in defining the term ‘climate refugee’, while also taking the pre-existing discourse surrounding the Refugee Convention and previous attempts to define ‘environmental refugees’ into account. Despite the likelihood of a growing number of climate refugees, there is no international legal recognition for such a group, even if the term ‘environmental refugees’ has been in use since the 1970s” [19].

Bettini emphasizes that climate refugees are often marginalized and perceived as “Other” in public discourse:

“In most mainstream narratives, climate refugees signify an ‘eruption’ of the Other (non-white, non-Western, non-affluent, non-resilient) who, in spite of the combined efforts by international regimes of governance to erect fences and to infuse docility into the vulnerable, reappears at the doorstep of the affluent minorities (...). Here an excess returns to face those (the heavy emitting affluent minority) who have caused the problem and re-encounter the ‘victims’ of climate change that have been expelled economically and ecologically. In such accounts, the vulnerable are reduced to the status of ‘bare life’ (...) with climate refugees and migrants represented as the destitute victims either to be saved (in humanitarian narratives) or to be feared and controlled (as in securitised articulations)” [8].

UNHCR recommends using the term “persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change” instead of “climate refugee” [20]:

“The term climate refugee is often used in the media and other discussions. However, this phrase can cause confusion, as it does not exist in international law. This term is also problematic in attributing displacement to a single driver—climate change—which is better characterized as a ‘risk multiplier’ that exacerbates and combines with other drivers of displacement, as recognized by the Global Compact on Refugees. A refugee is defined as a person who has crossed an international border ‘owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’ (1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees). In some contexts, the definition extends to persons fleeing ‘events seriously disturbing public order’ (1969 OAU Convention; 1984 Cartagena Declaration). Climate change most often affects people within their own countries and typically creates internal displacement before it reaches a level that displaces people across borders. There may be situations where the refugee criteria of the 1951 Convention or broader refugee criteria of regional refugee law frameworks may apply, for example if drought-related famine is linked to situations of armed conflict and violence. Regardless, UNHCR does not endorse the term climate refugee (along with similar terms like climate change refugee and environmental refugee) is not endorsed by UNHCR” [20].

Because of these conceptual ambiguities, it is impossible to determine the exact number of people who are currently and potentially displaced by environmental problems [14]. This lack of conceptual clarity further underscores the need for a dedicated international legal framework. Furthermore, people displaced in the context of climate change may face a lack of basic human rights, such as the right to water, food, health, housing, sanitation, education and, for some, the fundamental right to life [21]. These human rights violations also indicate a violation of human dignity, which is the basis of “the idea of universal human rights” [22]. As Donnelly emphasizes: “Human rights are but one way that has been devised to realize and to protect human dignity” [22]. The Preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) states: “Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” [23]. This principle is further emphasized in Article 1 of the UDHR, which states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” [23].

To protect displaced people fleeing climate-related disasters, UNHCR has created the *Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024–2030*, which sets out a global roadmap for priority actions in support of governments and in collaboration with a wide range of partners [6]. *The Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024–2030* includes the following objectives:

1. People fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters who need international protection are effectively protected.
2. Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have increased access to services that promote the rights-based, sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment.
3. Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved physical and economic means to prepare, withstand, recover and be protected from the impacts of climate change.
4. UNHCR operates sustainably with systems in place to minimize negative impacts on the environment [6].

Bellizzi et al. emphasize that this strategy does not sufficiently develop the human rights of displaced persons in the context of climate change, especially the right to health [24]. Climate change has been recognized as one of the greatest threats to public health in the coming decades [24]. Bellizzi et al. argue that: “The climate crisis is affecting individuals and global public health systems in almost every region of the world. This is particularly evident in the rising cases of malnutrition due to droughts and the increasing incidence of water-borne diseases such as cholera due to floods, which negatively affects already weakened and overstretched health systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries” [24].

Although the right to health is recognized in international human rights law, significant questions remain regarding the scope and implementation of states’ obligations towards persons displaced across borders in the context of climate change [14]. This problem is largely a result of the unclear definition of the concept of *climate refugees* or *environmental refugees* in legal discourse. Relying solely on general human rights conventions that apply to persons displaced in the context of climate change, such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) [25], is not sufficient [7].

Climate change plays a significant role in the forced displacement of people, as highlighted by UNHCR [1] and the European Commission [26]. However, there is still a significant gap in the international legal protection system regarding the protection of climate refugees [19]. Climate change or environmental disasters alone do not represent an independent basis for acquiring refugee status according to the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) [27]. Nevertheless, climate change can act as a factor that exacerbates or encourages persecution, armed conflict, violence and other circumstances, so that in certain cases persons displaced in such a context may meet the criteria for international refugee protection.

In 2018, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights drew attention to significant protection gaps affecting persons displaced across international borders as a result of the adverse effects of climate change, particularly because such displacement does not necessarily fall within the

definition of a refugee under existing international law [28]. This protection gap was further clarified in the Human Rights Committee's 2019 Views, which noted that the effects of climate change and natural disasters may expose individuals to a risk to their right to life that could trigger the principle of non-refoulement, although the Committee found that the particular circumstances of the *Teitiota v. New Zealand* case did not meet that legal standard [29].

The case of *Teitiota v. New Zealand* shows that displacement related to climate change is also a matter of protecting human dignity and fundamental human rights, and not just a matter of environmental protection or migration policy [29]. Although the UN Human Rights Committee did not find a violation in Teitiota's individual case, it recognized that climate change may, under sufficiently serious circumstances, trigger states' non-refoulement obligations where return would expose individuals to a real risk of a violation of the right to life [29]. Significantly, the Committee acknowledged that climate-related conditions may become incompatible with the right to life with dignity even before the most extreme consequences of climate change are fully realized [29].

People displaced in the context of climate change may, in certain circumstances, qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Convention or broader regional refugee law frameworks. However, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the legal and practical meaning of the term "climate refugee" [19].

Despite growing recognition of the human rights implications of climate-related displacement, people displaced across international borders due to climate change currently do not benefit from a universally recognized legal status equivalent to that of refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Bellizzi et al. advocate greater institutional and legal recognition of "climate refugees", as well as the establishment of systematic strategies to adapt to and mitigate the consequences of climate change [24]. Such measures are particularly important for the population of low- and middle-income countries, which are disproportionately exposed to climate risks and their consequences [24].

The adoption of a special international convention that would deal with the protection of displaced persons in the context of climate change could contribute to overcoming existing gaps in the international system of legal protection. Building on the protective mechanisms established by the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, such an instrument could provide a more comprehensive and coherent legal framework to protect the rights and dignity of persons whose displacement is linked to the consequences of climate change. A specific international convention should not only constitute a legal response to displacement related to climate change, but also an institutional expression of a new understanding of human and ecological well-being.

4. Jung's Collective Shadow and the Psychological Dimensions of Climate Change

Baldwin views the contemporary problem of climate mobility "less about 'saving the vulnerable other of climate change' or 'defending borders from the onslaught of climate refugees'" [10], but primarily as a "crisis of Western humanism" [10]. A new understanding of human and ecological well-being, essential for addressing climate change, also includes a psychological dimension. Carl Jung's analysis of the spiritual distress of modernity provides a psychological framework through which the contemporary climate crisis can be interpreted as a crisis of meaning, consciousness, and the relationship between technological civilization and its own psychic foundations [13].

Jung emphasizes the importance of solving the spiritual problem of the modern human being [13]. He describes the modern human being as someone who has lost the previous cultural and religious forms that gave him/her life orientation. He/she can therefore no longer simply live within the framework of an inherited system of meanings [13]. Jung's thoughts on the spiritual crisis of the modern human being are relevant to the contemporary ecological crisis. The climate crisis is not only related to the question of how to reduce harmful emissions and environmental pollution, but also to the question: What idea of a good life should a civilization that can no longer assume unlimited material growth have?

The climate crisis exposes the limits of a purely rational-technological model of civilization. Ever since the Enlightenment, rationality and technology have been thought to solve civilizational problems by themselves [30]. Proponents of the Enlightenment propagated the power of human beings to govern nature by relying on reason, with the aim of subordinating nature to human needs and contributing to social progress [9]. Nature is understood as an object of cognition, control, and instrumental action [10]. Climate change calls into question the Western humanist assumption that humans have control over nature [10]. According to Baldwin: “For climate change exemplifies the recurring modern trope of Nature’s return. This is the inconvenient idea that nature is not simply available to human manipulation without consequence, but contains the everpresent capacity to overwhelm humans. This is the idea that in spite of our efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is an accelerating geophysical phenomenon that exceeds human control, even while humans are its cause” [9]. Jung points to the paradox of modern humans: they have developed enormous intellectual and technical power, but this has not led to their psychological maturity:

“Modern man has lost all the metaphysical certainties of his medieval brother, and set up in their place the ideals of material security, general welfare and humanitarianism. But anyone who has still managed to preserve these ideals unshaken must have been injected with a more than ordinary dose of optimism. Even security has gone by the board, for modern man has begun to see that every step forward in material ‘progress’ steadily increases the threat of a still more stupendous catastrophe” [13].

Jung’s argument leads to the idea that a conscious rational attitude is not sufficient for understanding human behavior and achieving well-being. Climate change should be approached not only as an ecological and technological crisis, but also as a crisis of consciousness and meaning.

For Jung, the crisis of modern civilization cannot be adequately understood in terms of external, material, or technological conditions alone. It also reflects a crisis of consciousness, meaning, and the relationship between the individual and the broader psychic and cultural environment [31]. In the context of climate change, this perspective allows us to understand the ecological crisis as a challenge not only to the sustainability of the planet but also to the psychological foundations of human well-being. According to Jung:

“The gigantic catastrophes that threaten us today are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological order, but psychic events. To a quite terrifying degree we are threatened by wars and revolutions which are nothing other than psychic epidemics. At any moment several millions of human beings may be smitten with a new madness, and then we shall have another world war or devastating revolution. Instead of being at the mercy of wild beasts, earthquakes, landslides, and inundations, modern man is battered by the elemental forces of his own psyche. This is the World Power that vastly exceeds all other powers on earth” [32].

Jung argues that in order to combat or prevent the many disasters that occur in our civilization, individuals must confront their own psyche [31]. For these questions, Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious and the archetype of the shadow, or the collective shadow, are particularly important. He distinguished two layers of the unconscious: the personal unconscious, which reflects personal complexes, memories, and repressed contents, and the collective unconscious, whose basic structure is equally possessed by all people and which is reflected in thoughts, feelings, emotions, and fantasies [33]. Archetypes come from that layer of the unconscious [33].

A key component of Jung’s analytical psychology is his archetype of the shadow, which stands for the unconscious, repressed parts of the psyche that individuals frequently deny or are ignorant of [33]. According to Jung, “the shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly—for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies” [34]. The shadow archetype refers to the unconscious parts of the psyche that a person often neglects or represses.

“The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period” [34].

Jung expanded this concept with the idea of the collective shadow, which includes unconscious, repressed, and unaccepted aspects characteristic of a certain group or society [31]. The archetype of the collective shadow can serve as an interpretive framework for understanding the collective fears and moral dilemmas that accompany climate change, as well as the difficulty of modern society in confronting its own contribution to environmental degradation.

According to Jung, “unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. At all counts, it forms an unconscious snag, thwarting our most well-meant intentions” [35].

The archetype of the collective shadow presents the following problem: “A group which is psychologically split by being consciously identified with ethical values and at the same time unconscious of its shadow will display, in addition to unconscious feelings of guilt, a psychological sense of insecurity which is a compensation for the self-righteousness of its conscious attitude” [36].

From a Jungian perspective, dealing with the climate crisis requires not only external institutional reform but also the transformation of collective consciousness. The ecological crisis confronts modern societies with dimensions of their own existence that have been marginalized or excluded from their dominant self-understanding: dependence on nature, vulnerability, limitation, and the consequences of destructive patterns of development. In this sense, the climate crisis can be interpreted as an encounter with the shadow of modern civilization.

5. A Moral Response to Climate Displacement: Pope Francis and *Laudato si’*

Pope Francis interprets climate displacement more broadly than just the issue of migration policy [37]. From his perspective, it is a moral issue concerning human dignity, solidarity, and responsibility toward vulnerable communities. In the encyclical *Laudato si’*, he connects the climate crisis with its social and human consequences, especially emphasizing the position of poor and vulnerable communities, who often feel the consequences of environmental degradation the hardest [12].

Ecological degradation can thus lead to the loss of living conditions and force people to leave their homes, thus the ecological crisis simultaneously becomes a question of justice, solidarity and protection of human dignity [14]. Francis states that climate refugees.

“are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, widespread indifference to such suffering is still taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded” [12].

Protecting people displaced by climate change is a matter of climate justice, not just a question of migration policy. The pontiff states:

“Since the effects of climate change will be felt for a long time to come, even if stringent measures are taken now, some countries with scarce resources will require assistance in adapting to the effects already being produced, which affect their economies. In this context, there is a need for common and differentiated responsibilities...‘The countries which have benefited from a high

degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused” [12].

A similar opinion is represented by Bellizzi et al.:

“All relevant stakeholders, especially countries of the Global North, should uphold human rights by supporting adaptation and mitigation strategies and by harnessing the potential of climate mobility. The rationale for this is simple: climate change, largely driven by the Global North, is forcing people to flee, thus limiting their access to human rights like the right to health. It is therefore the responsibility of the Global North to make sure access to those rights is upheld or restored” [24].

However, in 2022, the United States experienced 18 separate “billion-dollar” weather and climate disasters, causing at least 474 fatalities and approximately US\$165.1 billion in total damages [38]. Among these disasters was Hurricane Ian, which struck Florida in September 2022 and caused at least 152 fatalities and an estimated US\$112.9 billion in damages [38]. Ian was the third-costliest hurricane in the United States since 1980, following Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey, and was also among those with the highest number of fatalities [38].

In July 2021, extreme rainfall caused severe flooding in parts of western Germany, north-eastern France, eastern Belgium, the eastern Netherlands and Luxembourg, resulting in more than 200 deaths and extensive damage [39]. Such incidents should act as a reminder that disasters linked to climate change are not just confined to the Global South and that the impacts of major catastrophes, such as displacement, that are typically associated with impoverished nations are spreading across the globe [39].

In his encyclical *Laudato si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis presents the ecological crisis as a moral crisis [12]. *Laudato si’* is addressed not only to Catholics but also to “all people of good will” [12]. The encyclical focuses on the ecological crisis and the question of human responsibility for climate change.

In the encyclical *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis indicates that the climate crisis is not only an environmental crisis, but also a crisis of “human responsibility” [12]. According to him, ecological problems cannot be reduced exclusively to protecting nature, because they relate to how individuals organize their social, economic, and political lives, as well as their relationship to other people and the natural world [12]. Francis develops the concept of “integral ecology” [12], which includes:

1. Environmental, economic and social ecology

“When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality” [12].

2. Cultural Ecology

Globalized consumer culture contributes to cultural homogenization, suppressing differences between societies and endangering cultural diversity as a value common to all humanity [12]. Single, universal rules and technical solutions cannot adequately respond to all environmental and social problems. If problems are solved exclusively by the application of uniform regulations, there is a risk of neglecting the particularities, needs, and life circumstances of specific communities [12]. Therefore, local communities must be involved in decision-making and enabled to participate in creating solutions adapted to their social, cultural, and environmental context [12].

3. Ecology of Daily Life

Improving the quality of human life cannot be viewed separately from the natural and social environment in which people live [12]. True development implies not only the improvement of material and social living conditions, but also the preservation of the environment, which is an inseparable part of human well-being [12]. “Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment” [12].

4. The Principle of the Common Good

The idea of the common good, a fundamental and unifying premise of social ethics, is inextricably linked to integral ecology [12]. “The common good is ‘the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment’” [12].

A moral solution to the problem of climate displacement requires a constant observation of displaced persons as subjects of dignity, rights and solidarity [12]. Pope Francis’ concept of integral ecology provides an appropriate ethical framework for this transformation, as it rejects the separation of environmental degradation from social injustice. Climate displacement should therefore be seen not only as a consequence of environmental change, but also as a moral issue related to how societies recognize and exercise their responsibility to vulnerable communities [12].

One of the key ethical messages of the encyclical *Laudato si’* is the connection between ecological and social justice [12]. Pope Francis also emphasizes that environmental responsibility does not only apply to the current generation, but also implies the obligation to preserve living conditions for future generations: “Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice” [12]. The pontiff challenges the “technocratic paradigm” [12]:

“This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation... This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers, and technology experts. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that ‘an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed’” [12].

Pope Francis does not reject technology or science [40]. “What the pontiff truly rejects in this encyclical is not modernity (much less science) but a particular modern philosophy about the relationship between modernity, science, and technology—what Pope Francis calls the ‘technocratic paradigm’” [40]. He sees the problem in assuming that every problem can be solved through technological progress without changing how people think and relate to nature [40].

Francis argues that laws and political measures are not enough [12]. What is also needed is a change in human consciousness, values, habits, and attitudes towards nature and other people. *Laudato si’*, relying on the words of Saint John Paul II, calls for an “ecological conversion” [12]. According to Pope Francis, “the ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion... This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care” [12].

Francis’ idea of ecological conversion can be brought into productive dialogue with Jung’s understanding of psychological transformation. While Jung emphasizes the necessity of raising awareness of previously unrecognized aspects of the psyche, Francis calls for a transformation of humanity’s

relationship to the natural world and vulnerable communities. In both cases, transformation requires overcoming an inadequate form of consciousness that isolates the individual from the wider relational context in which he exists.

Jung's analytical psychology and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* help to see the problem of climate displacement from a broader perspective. They indicate that the legal protection of climate refugees should be accompanied by a change in collective consciousness. Jung explains why people and societies often do not want to admit their own responsibility, while *Laudato si'* encourages a reconsideration of the relationship to nature and other people.

Jung's notion of the collective shadow can be connected to what contemporary society hardly recognizes as a consequence of its own way of life. This includes "responsibility for environmental destruction", the "consequences of unsustainable production and consumption", as well as "social inequalities that make certain communities particularly vulnerable to climate change" [41]. In this sense, climate refugees can become a symbol of those problems that societies that have contributed to a greater extent to greenhouse gas emissions do not want to fully face [10]. Representing them as threats, burdens or helpless victims can divert attention from the issue of responsibility and enable the preservation of the favorable image that these societies have of themselves. Jung's theory thus helps to understand the psychological dimension of the "crisis of humanism". Jung's notion of the collective shadow can be connected to those parts of modern society that are difficult to recognize and accept as a consequence of one's own way of life [33]. If society does not face its own collective shadow, legal protection can remain focused only on the consequences of the climate crisis, while ignoring the deeper causes arising from existing values, beliefs and lifestyles.

6. Conclusions

Climate change represents one of the most significant challenges of contemporary humanity, not only in ecological but also in legal, moral and psychological terms. An increasing number of people are forced to leave their homes due to floods, droughts, fires, rising sea levels, "extreme temperatures and other consequences of climate change" [42]. However, the existing international legal framework does not recognize climate refugees as a separate category, while existing protection mechanisms do not provide a comprehensive response to specific forms of displacement associated with climate change [24]. The case of *Teitiota v. New Zealand* shows that human rights law already provides certain protection possibilities, but at the same time it also points to the limitations of the existing system [29].

This paper advocates the view that it is necessary to consider the establishment of a specific international legal framework for the protection of persons displaced in the context of climate change. Such a framework should not be based solely on an expansion of the traditional concept of refugee, but on an approach that places human rights, human dignity, solidarity and justice at its core. Its aim should be to overcome existing protection gaps and to provide legal status and effective protection mechanisms to those who, due to climate change, are deprived of the opportunity to continue living in their homes in safety and dignity.

However, a legal solution alone is not enough. Starting from *Laudato si'*, the climate crisis requires an "ecological conversion", that is, a deeper change in the way people understand their relationship with nature, other people and future generations [12]. Pope Francis thus treats the climate crisis not only as a question of environmental protection, but as a crisis of relationships, responsibility and solidarity. In this sense, the protection of people displaced by climate change becomes a matter of moral obligation towards those who have often contributed the least to the climate crisis, while at the same time bearing its most severe consequences.

Carl Jung's analysis of modernity [13] and the shadow archetype allow for further deepening of this argument [34]. The climate crisis can be understood as a kind of confrontation of modern civilization with those aspects of its own development that it has suppressed or insufficiently recognized—the excessive exploitation of nature, unlimited economic growth, the dominance of instrumental rationality and the

neglect of the consequences of its own actions. In this sense, climate-displaced people represent not only victims of climate change but also a visible expression of the consequences of the collective choices of modern society.

Connecting Jung's perspective with the ethical framework of *Laudato si'* therefore shows that a twofold transformation is necessary: on the one hand, a transformation of legal institutions that would ensure adequate protection for climate-displaced persons, and on the other hand, a transformation of collective consciousness that would enable the development of a new relationship towards nature, vulnerability and intergenerational responsibility. Legal recognition without such a moral transformation risks remaining a mere institutional response to the consequences of the crisis, while moral change without legal protection cannot provide real security and the exercise of rights. In this sense, the establishment of an international convention on the protection of persons displaced in the context of climate change would be more than a normative extension of the existing system [14]. It would represent a step towards recognizing the shared responsibility of humanity and towards building a legal order based on human dignity, solidarity, ecological responsibility and the universality of human rights [43].

Legal protection, by itself, cannot fully overcome the perception of climate refugees as passive victims or threats to social stability [8] if such representations remain present in the collective consciousness. At the same time, a change of consciousness without appropriate legal mechanisms would not be sufficient to ensure the realization of rights and institutional protection of climate refugees [43].

Linking the legal solution with the transformation of collective consciousness therefore aims to show that legal reform and a change in consciousness are not separate processes, but complementary elements of broader social, ethical, and political transformations [43,44]. In this sense, the proposed convention is not only an instrument of international law, but also an expression of a changed understanding of human responsibility and solidarity in the conditions of the climate crisis [43]. This approach makes it possible to see climate displacement not only as a legal and humanitarian problem, but also as a challenge to existing anthropocentric understandings, which view human existence as separate from the natural world [8]. The link between law and collective consciousness is therefore very significant. Sustainable protection of climate refugees requires both institutional recognition of their rights and a reexamination of the value assumptions underlying the attitude towards individuals affected by climate change [44].

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Informed Consent Statement

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