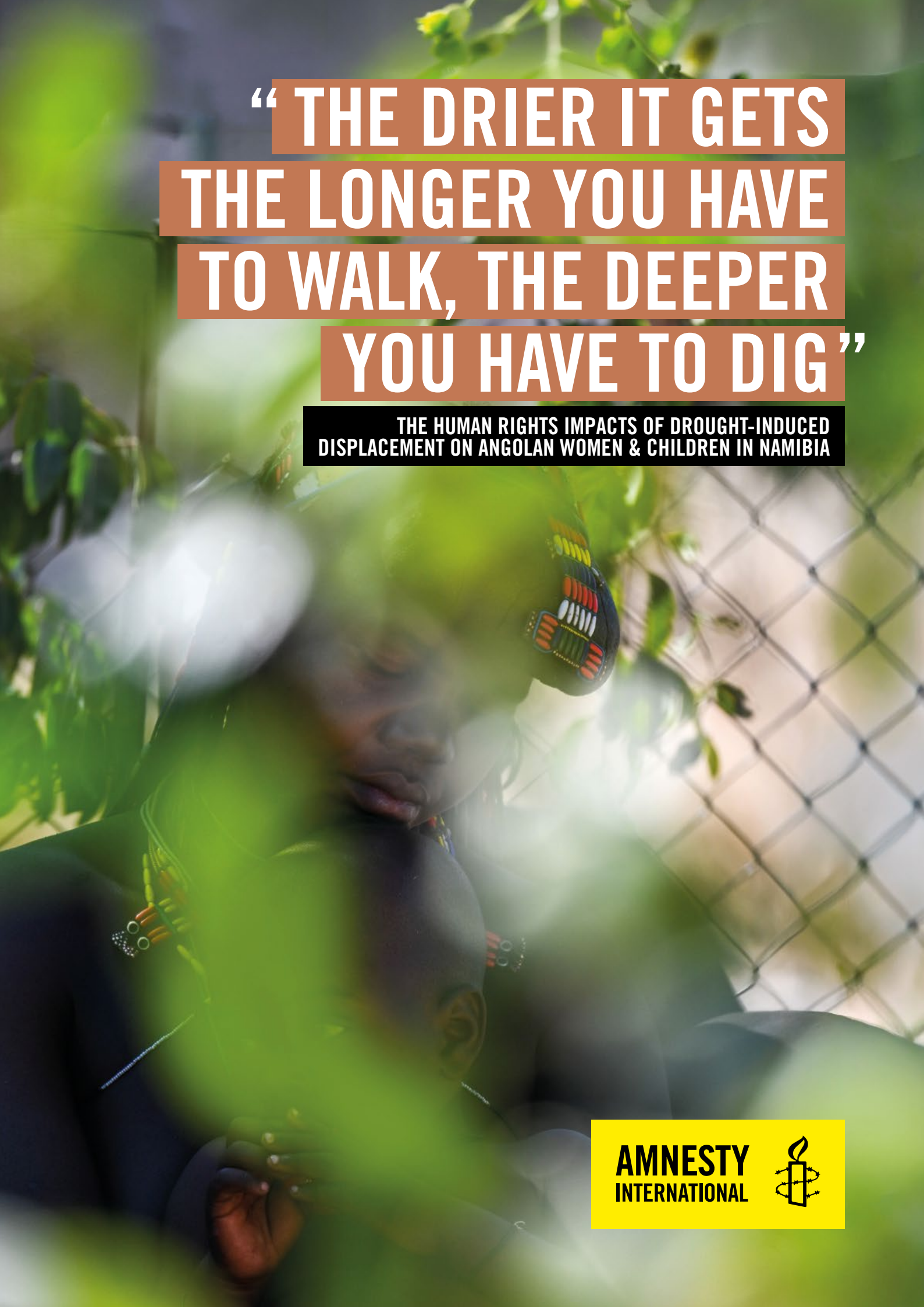




**“THE DRIER IT GETS
THE LONGER YOU HAVE
TO WALK, THE DEEPER
YOU HAVE TO DIG”**

**THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF DROUGHT-INDUCED
DISPLACEMENT ON ANGOLAN WOMEN & CHILDREN IN NAMIBIA**

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GLOSSARY

Banjul Charter

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

ACMI

Africa Climate Mobility Initiative

ACRWC

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

ACHPR

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

ACTHPR

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

Anthropogenic (or human-caused) climate change

The significant and sustained change in climate patterns driven by escalating concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activities and systems, particularly the burning of fossil fuels for energy production, transportation and industrial processes, as well as agricultural practices, deforestation and changes in land use. This report only discusses human-caused climate change, often abbreviated as "climate change".

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CESCR

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Climate adaptation

Actions taken to increase resilience to actual or expected climate change impacts. This can include infrastructure changes, water management strategies and developing drought-resistant crops.

Climate change and disasters

This term is used in this report to encompass both extreme weather events and slow onset changes

that are induced by anthropogenic climate change or whose patterns and intensity are influenced by, or related to, climate change (such as sea level rise, extreme weather events, more intense and frequent cyclones, droughts, king tides and floods), as well as natural or man-made disasters, including environmental disasters that are not directly attributable to climate change – such as tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and so forth. While not all disasters are attributable to climate change, their effects may be compounded by the climate crisis and vice versa.

Climate displacement (or climate-induced or climate-related displacement)

Climate displacement (or interchangeably climate-induced displacement or climate-related displacement) describes the involuntary or forced movement of people caused by the adverse effects of climate change. These terms embrace situations of both internal and cross-border or international climate displacement. Climate may be the primary reason or one of several reasons for which people move.

Climate mitigation

Efforts to reduce, prevent or remove GHG emissions, such as transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency and reforestation.

CBDR-RC

Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities

CRC

Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSOs

Civil society organizations

Disaster Displacement or Environmental Displacement

Displacement caused by natural or man-made disasters not attributable to climate change (e.g., earthquakes, oil spills, nuclear accidents).

El Niño

Warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Equatorial Pacific. It corresponds to the “warm phase” of a larger phenomenon called the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and typically occurs every two to seven years and lasts around nine to 12 months.

FAO

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FEWS NET

Famine Early Warning Systems Network

Greenhouse gas (GHG)

Greenhouse gas is a compound that traps heat in the atmosphere. The emission of GHGs resulting from human activity is the fundamental cause of the “greenhouse effect” leading to global heating. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) accounts for two-thirds of GHGs and the increasing concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere is largely the product of burning fossil fuels.

IACtHR

Inter-American Court of Human Rights

ICCPR

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

ICJ

International Court of Justice

ILO

International Labour Organisation

IOM

International Organization for Migration

IPCC

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

Plans submitted by countries outlining strategies to

reduce vulnerabilities to climate change by building adaptive capacities and resilience and integrating adaptation measures into national policy.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

Plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement outlining their commitments to reduce emissions and address climate change.

OAU

Organization of African Unity

OHCHR

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

People displaced in the context of climate change and/or disasters

Individuals leaving their homes as a result of, or in order to, avoid the adverse effects of climate change or disasters.

SADC

Southern African Development Community

SAMM

Southern African Migration Management

SERAC

Social and Economic Rights Action Centre

SRH

Sexual and reproductive health

SRHR

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

UDHR

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNCCD

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UNFCCC

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WFP

World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“

My children, the children we have here in the village, the ones you see, are my great-grandchildren. Most people have fled to Namibia... there is real hunger and thirst here; that's why the village has become depopulated, with few people here. Those who still had some strength left, felt forced to leave the village for Namibia. Those of us who are here, it is because of lack of alternatives and our age, that no longer lets us walk these long distances. As you can see, there is only one young man you have found here in the village; he is the only one here with us. Most of the young people have gone – in fact, they are the ones that go most, because many of them send help to their families who have stayed here. To tell the truth, many of them are the salvation for their relatives who cannot make the long walk to Namibia.

- *Nghikembua* (not his real name), Cunene Province, Angola, 2021

”

This report examines the patterns of drought-induced displacement from southern Angola to Namibia and the profound human rights impacts on women and children who are disproportionately affected by it.

“

The drier it gets, the longer you have to walk, the deeper you have to dig.

”

This is how a young climate activist described drought-induced displacement: not as a simple story of people “running from drought”, but as a rational response to collapsing systems. People leave, he explained, when the balance of survival tips: when collecting water consumes more energy than the benefits it delivers, and when the state safety net is so thin that staying becomes a greater risk than crossing a border. This report documents how that calculation is playing out for growing numbers of Angolan women and children along the Angola-Namibia border.

For several years, countries across Southern Africa have been caught in a cycle of extreme weather events, moving from prolonged droughts to sudden, destructive rains that communities are ill-equipped to withstand. The 2023/24 poor rainy season brought the most severe drought in more than a century to the region, leaving families without water, crops, or livestock and deepening existing inequalities. Communities already living in poverty, particularly rural populations dependent on rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism, experienced disproportionate losses, with limited access to social protection, climate adaptation measures, and alternative livelihoods. Women and girls faced increased unpaid care responsibilities as water and food became scarcer, while children, older persons and persons with disabilities, experienced heightened barriers to accessing essential services, education, and healthcare. Their protection needs are urgent and immediate, and their experiences reveal the human impact of the intensifying droughts unfolding across the Angola-Namibia border.

This reality underscores the need for the international community to recognize the injustice faced by these communities and respond with robust cooperation and support. The protection of people displaced by drought-related events is not merely a humanitarian obligation but a fundamental human rights issue. Opportunities exist to reframe the legal protections available for drought-displaced people in southern Africa, to protect against the real threats to their lives and standard of living and to guard against refoulement. It is imperative African states, particularly Namibia and Angola, and the international community, act promptly, collectively and individually, to secure a better future for impacted communities and people.

This report presents the findings of research conducted by Amnesty International in Namibia between May 2024 and May 2026, including three field research trips across the capital city, Windhoek, and the northern regions of Kunene and Omusati. It builds on Amnesty International's previous research on drought, land diversion and food insecurity in southern Angola.

Traditional migration flows disrupted by drought-induced displacement: Intensification of droughts and climate vulnerability in both Angola and Namibia

The border between Angola and Namibia runs through remote, arid and semi-arid terrain that colonial powers demarcated between 1886 and 1931 with little regard for the Oshiwambo-speaking border communities whose seasonal movement across the region long predated it. Migration between Angola and Namibia is neither new nor anomalous; it is rooted in historical patterns of circular movement, shared ecosystems and cross-border livelihoods. Decades of contract labour migration, war and unequal post-independence investment in institutions and

infrastructure entrenched north-to-south migration corridors that persist today, alongside social and family networks that continue to span the border.

It is against this backdrop that a newer and increasingly urgent driver of movement has emerged: drought. It is the persistence and vulnerability associated with displacement driven by prolonged drought and environmental degradation that has catalyzed cross-border migration on a new scale.

Southern Angola, particularly Cunene, Huíla and Namibe provinces, has been among the hardest hit by repeated droughts, and natural disasters exacerbated by El Niño. Anthropogenic climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of such events, compounding existing vulnerabilities. Successive drought cycles – poor rains in 2021/22, a partial recovery in 2022/23, and one of the harshest droughts on record in 2023/24 – have eroded communities' capacity to recover between seasons. The Government of Angola has confirmed that the 2021 drought left 3.81 million people food insecure and over 1.2 million people facing water shortages, with the World Bank estimating economic losses exceeding US\$749 million. These impacts have been compounded by the loss of an estimated 67% of grazing land in Gambos municipality to commercial ranching – including in the Chimbolelo Valley, historically known as “the birthplace of cattle” – and by desertification affecting around 30% of land in Angola's southern provinces, eroding the pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods that communities have traditionally relied on to withstand drought.

Although Angola is Africa's second-largest oil producer, agriculture continues to employ a significant share of the population and remains highly sensitive to climate variability; around 11.1 million Angolans depend on largely rain-fed rural livelihoods. Projections suggest that by the end of the century, south-eastern Angola could warm by up to 7°C, with drought duration in parts of Southern Africa potentially doubling as growing seasons shorten and water stress increases. State investment in climate adaptation, drought preparedness and livelihood protection has remained uneven, hampered by chronic underinvestment, limited finance, weak institutional capacity and inadequate climate-monitoring infrastructure, all of which deepen household marginalization and narrow the options available for survival.

In southern Angola, particularly in Cunene Province, these dynamics are particularly acute and

have compounded over time. Recurrent droughts, extreme heat, and unreliable rainfall patterns, exacerbated by a recent episode of El Niño and effects of deforestation, and likely to become more frequent and severe as a result of anthropogenic climate change, have steadily weakened traditional pastoral and farming systems and eroded people's resilience, pushing many residents to move towards Namibia in search of safety, food, water, work, and essential services. Even when rainfall improves, recovery is slow; lost livestock, depleted food reserves, and weakened livelihoods leave families with few alternatives but to continue moving.

Against this backdrop, women and children – already among the most marginalized – are forced to leave southern Angola and continue to face heightened risks as they cross borders in search of protection.

Amnesty International found that, since at least 2020, sustained numbers of Angolans have crossed into Namibia's Kunene and Omusati regions, with arrivals intensifying during periods of acute drought. Between January and July 2021, more than 7,000 people – predominantly women, including pregnant and lactating women, children and older persons – crossed into northern Namibia, in a movement a joint IOM-government assessment described as notable in its “magnitude and rapidity” and which humanitarian actors characterized as a humanitarian displacement “crisis”. Crossings occur through a combination of formal, gazetted border posts and informal or unmarked routes, including river crossings, reflecting the absence of comprehensive reception, registration or data collection systems capable of capturing the true scale of drought-related displacement.

Namibia has faced its own escalating drought crisis. On 22 May 2024, the government declared a state of emergency after exceptionally low rainfall left roughly one in five Namibians facing food insecurity; more than 331,000

households registered for the national drought relief programme, and 1.15-1.2 million people – around 38-40% of the population analyzed – were projected to face acute food insecurity between April and September 2024. With the support of international donors, Namibia has invested in climate adaptation and social protection, including drought relief and a contributory social security scheme. Amnesty International found,

however, that these protections extend only to Namibian citizens and permanent residents. Displaced Angolans are systematically excluded from adaptation and social protection programmes, and the Namibian government has repeatedly maintained that there are “no Angolan refugees” in the country, framing cross-border movement as irregular migration rather than displacement requiring international protection.

Displaced and at risk: The documentation challenge that leads to exclusion from services and deportation

There are no realistic, human rights-based or humanitarian pathways through which Angolans displaced by drought can regularize their stay in Namibia: the current bilateral border-resident card system facilitates only short-term, local movement within 30-60km of the border, and asylum – though legally available to Angolan nationals under Namibian law, including after irregular entry – is in practice inaccessible to almost all Angolans arriving from drought-affected regions, with officials telling Amnesty International that drought is not treated as a recognized basis for protection. As a result,

displaced Angolans remain legally invisible and live under persistent fear of arrest, detention and deportation, a fear that shapes daily decisions about whether to seek healthcare and other services.

In the absence of regular migration pathways and protections specifically dedicated to people displaced in the context of the climate crisis and natural disasters, displaced populations encounter difficulties in obtaining legal status, accessing international protection, and securing humanitarian assistance.

Cross cutting human rights impacts: Inadequate standard of living and violations of the rights to housing, health, water and sanitation

Amongst the displaced communities in northern Namibia, housing, water and sanitation conditions documented by Amnesty International fell far short of international law and standards. Many families live in makeshift shelters, built from branches, plastic and cardboard, in severely overcrowded conditions or, in some cases, entirely without shelter. Interviewees described walking long distances or queuing before dawn at communal boreholes,

some shared with livestock, to access water that was often unaffordable or insufficient; sanitation facilities were frequently absent altogether, forcing families, and particularly women and girls, to rely on open areas and increasing exposure to communicable disease and gender-based violence.

Women and children were disproportionately affected by drought-induced displacement,

facing heightened risks to their rights to health, food, water, education, a healthy environment and protection, particularly where displacement occurs in the absence of formal reception, documentation, or social support systems. They experienced structural marginalization arising from irregular migration status, limited access to essential services and social protection, restricted livelihood opportunities and unequal care responsibilities. These intersecting factors left many women navigating prolonged displacement with few pathways towards security, stability or durable solutions.

In particular, displaced Angolans in northern Namibia faced significant barriers to healthcare, including maternal and reproductive healthcare. Amnesty International documented cases of undocumented Angolans being charged higher fees than Namibian nationals, delaying treatment until illness became severe, and avoiding clinics altogether for fear that health facilities were linked to immigration enforcement – as one woman put it, “we only go when the pain is too much; otherwise we just lie down and wait”. Pregnant and lactating women described receiving inconsistent support, often with little or no follow-up or nutritional support after giving birth.

The gendered nature of drought-induced displacement: disproportionate impacts on women and girls

Amnesty International’s findings indicate that significant protection gaps remain for women and girls affected by drought and displacement, as they bear a disproportionate share of negative impacts on their communities and social structures. As documented in this report, prolonged droughts in southern Angola and northern Namibia have intensified women’s unpaid care burdens and increased their exposure to gender-based violence, including during displacement and in host communities. The testimonies gathered and the living conditions witnessed by Amnesty International during field visits, reflected the compounded discrimination women and girls face when gender roles and resulting inequalities intersect with environmental stress, displacement, and irregular migration status.

Amnesty International found that women and girls in affected agro-pastoralist communities already carried primary responsibility for securing water, firewood and food and for caring for children and older relatives – responsibilities made significantly more onerous by displacement and the absence of formal support. These inequalities left women carrying greater

responsibilities for family survival while increasing their exposure to poverty, exploitation and gender-based violence during displacement.

During Amnesty International’s visits, women repeatedly described being the first to forgo food, the last to rest, and the ones responsible for sustaining their families through drought, displacement, and poverty. Many arrived carrying infants or travelling with several young children, having walked long distances in extreme heat with little water. Single mothers and pregnant or lactating women described constant anxiety about feeding their children, finding safe shelter and avoiding exploitation, while older women spoke of the humiliation of depending on strangers for basic needs after a lifetime without ever expecting to cross a border. Barriers to sexual and reproductive healthcare, combined with heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking, further compounded women’s heightened risks.

Children at risk: The heightened risks faced by drought-induced displaced children – education, health, child labour and trafficking

Children displaced from southern Angola faced multiple, overlapping risks arising from poverty, irregular migration status and limited access to documentation, healthcare and education. Many were not registered at birth, heightening the risk of statelessness once families cross the border, and Amnesty International found that food insecurity and household responsibilities frequently interrupt or foreclose children's education altogether. The combination of poverty, drought-related displacement, lack of documentation, inadequate living conditions and limited mental health and psycho-social support created conditions that

undermine children's physical and mental health, compromising their survival, development and overall well-being.

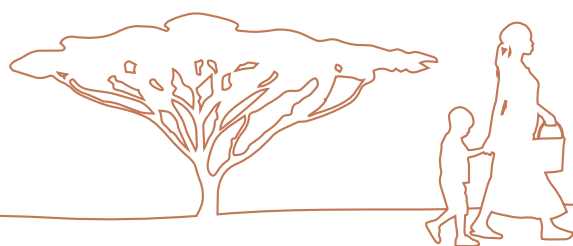
Chronic poverty and the absence of effective protection mechanisms left children vulnerable to child labour, exploitation and trafficking. Amnesty International also documented cases of unaccompanied and separated Angolan children in Namibia's urban areas, and found that returns of children to Angola have often proceeded without adequate safeguards, family tracing or individualized assessment of the human rights risks of return.

Lack of regular status and regularization opportunities lead to human rights violations including collective expulsions and refoulement

These findings raise serious concerns under international and regional human rights law, including with respect to the rights to life, an adequate standard of living, health, education, and non-refoulement, protected under instruments such as the ICCPR, ICESCR, the CRC, CEDAW, the UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol, the OAU Refugee Convention, the Banjul Charter and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as under Namibia's own Constitution, which guarantees human dignity, equality before the law and protection from inhuman or degrading treatment to all persons within its jurisdiction. In particular, the absence of specific legal frameworks for people displaced in the context of drought-related events, other disasters and/or climate change often means that their needs are not adequately addressed by existing refugee protection mechanisms.

On 4 June 2025, Amnesty International witnessed Namibian authorities round up about 40 Angolan nationals, including women and children, at a community centre in Opuwo, and transport them the same day to the Ruacana border – over 100km away – for handover to Angolan authorities, without individualized screening, information about asylum or protection options, or assessment of the risks upon return. Under international law, such a state-organized transfer amounts to a prohibited collective expulsion.

In other instances, Angolan children have also been subject to government-facilitated forcible returns without adequate safeguards.



Recommendations: Justice for drought-displaced Angolan women and children in Namibia

The displacement of communities due to prolonged drought and other environmental stressors in southern Angola, particularly in Cunene Province, underscores the urgent need for a robust human rights response. As this report demonstrates, justice requires more than emergency humanitarian assistance. Across interviews and focus groups, displaced Angolans consistently described justice as the ability to live with dignity, care for their families and access essential rights: shelter, food, water, healthcare, education and legal recognition. As one woman living in Opuwo told Amnesty International: “I want shelter and school for my children.”

The government of Namibia has an obligation under international and regional human rights law to consider a rights-based approach to migration, ensuring that displaced Angolans who crossed into the country because of climate-related events and/or natural disasters have access to universal human rights, including registration and documentation needed to access rights. State authorities should conduct individual assessments before deportations and consider the human risk associated with return.

This report calls on the **Government of Angola:**

- to strengthen climate adaptation, drought preparedness and civil registration systems, and
- to cooperate with Namibia on the protection of displaced children;

on the **Government of Namibia:**

- to end collective expulsions, ground return decisions in individualized protection assessments, and establish accessible protection and regularization pathways, and
- to include displaced Angolans in national adaptation planning and non-discriminatory access to healthcare and education;

on **high-income, historically high-emitting states:**

- to rapidly and equitably phase out fossil fuels and
- to scale up climate finance and loss and damage funding;

and on **SADC, the African Union and the wider international community:**

- to strengthen regional protection frameworks and
- to expand safe, rights-based migration pathways for people displaced by climate change and disasters.

When assessments show that return would expose displaced Angolans to serious harm, then Namibia should offer international protection.

At the same time, stronger adaptation, drought preparedness and resilience measures in Angola are essential to reduce the conditions that continue to force people to leave their homes.

Finally, Angola and Namibia are both low-emitting countries facing disproportionate exposure to a crisis they did little to cause, with climate change exacerbating the severity and impacts of recurrent droughts against a backdrop of existing environmental, economic and development vulnerabilities. Women, children and the poorest households bear the greatest burden. Under international human rights and environmental law, high-income, historically high-emitting states bear heightened responsibility to provide climate finance – including for adaptation, drought preparedness, resilience-building and loss and damage – to support countries and communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis.



The Kunene River that divides Angola, left, and Namibia, right. © Amnesty International, 2025

This report presents the findings of a research study conducted by Amnesty International in Namibia between May 2024 and May 2026, including field visits, qualitative interviews and meetings with authorities and other stakeholders, communications providing formal rights of response, desk research and a review of Namibia's domestic law and policy.

It builds on previous research conducted by Amnesty International in Angola between 2019 and 2022, which laid the groundwork for understanding the evolving dynamics of displacement, human rights, and increasing environmental challenges in the region. That research was published in 2021 in the briefing, *The End of Cattle's Paradise: Severe Drought and Food Insecurity in Southern Angola*.¹ This report also draws on Amnesty International's previous findings on land diversion, food insecurity and drought-related displacement in southern Angola, included in its 2019 report, *The End of Cattle's Paradise: How Land Diversion for Ranches Eroded Food Security in The Gambos, Angola*.²

For the current report, Amnesty International conducted three research trips in Namibia – in May/

June 2024, May/June 2025 and April/May 2026 – to gather testimonies from individuals displaced from Angola in the context of drought-related events, with a particular focus on women and children. Field visits were carried out across multiple locations, including the capital city, Windhoek, and northern Namibia, including the Kunene and Omusati Regions. Amnesty International researchers visited Opuwo, the capital of the Kunene Region in northwestern Namibia, as well as communities elsewhere in the region, including Onyungurura and Otjimuhaka, Epupa, Etunda village and its agricultural centre, Outapi, Ruacana, and Ondangwa. The research team also engaged with local stakeholders, including regional council officials in Outapi and Opuwo and staff at the Kakurukaze Mungunda charity in Opuwo, and visited sites where displaced Angolan nationals were being housed by the Namibian authorities.

The research team further conducted observational analysis at key border areas, including the Ruacana gazetted border post and informal crossing points such as Otjimuhaka (also known as Swartbooisdrift). These observations confirmed that cross-border

1 Amnesty International, Angola: *The End of Cattle's Paradise: Severe Drought and Food Insecurity in Southern Angola* (Index: AFR 12/4452/2021), 29 July 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr12/4452/2021/en/>
 2 Amnesty International, Angola: *The End of Cattle's Paradise: How Land Diversion for Ranches Eroded Food Security in The Gambos, Angola* (Index: AFR 12/1020/2019) 15 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr12/1020/2019/en/>

movement occurs through a combination of formal border posts and informal routes, including river crossings and unmarked paths, reflecting the varied and often unregulated nature of mobility along the Angola-Namibia border.

In total, Amnesty International interviewed at least 167 people, including rights holders, community leaders, government officials, representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), academics, and members of the UN Country Team. This included 11 focus group discussions and 58 individual interviews. Of the individual interviewees, 38 were women, 24 were men and four were children. There were also 14 discussions with key informants. In total, 87 women, 54 men, and 12 children were interviewed. Children were interviewed only with the informed consent of a parent or guardian and, where appropriate, in the presence of a parent, guardian, or trusted adult, in accordance with Amnesty International's child safeguarding and research protocols.

Prior to conducting interviews in communities, the research team sought permission from relevant community leaders to enter the communities and engage with residents. This facilitated access and ensured interviews were conducted respectfully and in accordance with local protocols. Permission from community leaders did not affect the voluntary nature or confidentiality of participants' involvement, and all interviewees provided informed consent before participating. During community visits, local interpreters provided simultaneous interpretation between English and Otjiherero to ensure participants could communicate in their preferred language.

Amnesty International also interviewed community leaders, traditional authorities, and national, regional, and local government officials, including the office of the deputy president, to understand the impacts of recurrent drought and cross-border displacement on affected communities. Further interviews were conducted with representatives of local CSOs and members of the UN Country Team, to triangulate findings and provide additional context on the humanitarian and human rights impacts of recurrent drought and climate-induced displacement in southern Angola and northern Namibia.

The principles of informed consent³ and do no harm were respected at all times. To protect the privacy of all interviewees and focus group participants, this report uses pseudonyms for those who chose to remain anonymous and withhold other identifying information. Amnesty International reimbursed modest travel costs for people who set up initial meetings with impacted individuals and introduced researchers to relevant stakeholders. Amnesty International also provided in-kind compensation for interviewees and focus group participants. No other compensation was provided for participation in the research.

Amnesty International complemented field research with extensive desk research, including a thorough review of policy documents, government statements, and literature on climate change and displacement, as well as reports and recommendations of regional and international human rights bodies. The desk review also considered climate attribution studies examining the extent to which anthropogenic climate change contributed to the severity and frequency of droughts and other extreme weather events affecting southern Angola and the wider Southern African region. Statistical data and development indicators were extracted from various national and international databases such as those of the UN, World Bank, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other relevant databases.

In August 2026, Amnesty International sent letters to the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of International Relations and Trade. The letters detailed the main research findings and requested further information in relation to those findings. At the time of writing, Amnesty International had not received a response.

Amnesty International would like to thank the interlocutors, local civil society and other stakeholders who enabled us to conduct this research. Most importantly, we thank the women, men and children and their guardians who took the time to share their lived experiences with us. Without them, this report would not be possible.

³ Prior to the interviews, Amnesty International's researchers explained the purpose of the interview and the ways in which the data would be used, and obtained interviewees and focus group participants' informed consent. Interviewees and focus group participants were explicitly informed that they could end the interview at any time, could choose not to answer specific questions, and were given the option of anonymity.

BACKGROUND: THE ANGOLA-NAMIBIA BORDER

The border between Angola and Namibia runs through remote, largely rural areas marked by arid and semi-arid ecosystems, where access to water, grazing land and livelihoods is highly climate-sensitive. These areas are inhabited by communities with shared cultural, linguistic and historical ties.⁴ For centuries, pastoralist and agricultural communities have navigated the landscape across what are now national boundaries.

The migration dynamics between Angola and Namibia are deeply rooted in colonial legacies that disrupted Indigenous mobility systems, fragmented ethnic communities and institutionalized displacement. These historical dynamics continue to shape patterns of mobility, underscoring the need for policy responses that recognize customary practices, the particular human rights risks faced by women, girls, and boys, harmonize legal frameworks, and invest in underdeveloped border regions.

During Amnesty International's research trips in May 2024 and May 2025, various stakeholders noted that while migration has long been part of traditional movements in the region, recent trends indicate a shift driven by environmental and economic pressures.

3.1 History of movement between Angola and Namibia

Movement between present day Angola and Namibia (and vice versa) has long been integral to the socio-cultural dynamics of the region, rooted in shared ethnic ties, kinship networks, and economic exchanges.⁵ These movements were traditionally seasonal and centred around grazing patterns, trade, and familial visits, reflecting the fluid nature of borders in the region before colonial demarcations.⁶

Prior to the establishment of colonial borders, communities such as the Ovakwanyama, Ovahimba, Herero, Kuvale, Chimba, and other Oshiwambo-speaking peoples occupied territories that now span southern Angola and northern Namibia. Seasonal mobility formed an important part of social and economic life, enabling communities

to access grazing land and water, engage in trade, maintain kinship networks, and pursue livelihood opportunities. While movement was regulated through customary institutions, local political authority, and negotiated access to land and resources – and at times shaped by conflict and competition – it was not constrained by the international borders and immigration controls introduced during the colonial period. The imposition of these borders fundamentally altered long-established patterns of mobility, dividing communities whose social, cultural, and economic ties continued to extend across what became the Angola-Namibia border.⁷

4 United States (US) Office of the Geographer, "International Boundary Study No. 120: Angola–Namibia (South-West Africa) Boundary", 24 March 1972, pp. 2–5, available at <https://library.law.fsu.edu/Digital-Collections/LimitsinSeas/pdf/ibs120.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2026).

5 Andrew Niikondo, "Regional integration in the Southern African Development Community (SADC): A case study of cross-border migration in Oshikango, Namibia", 2008, available at <https://repository.unam.edu.na/items/5f1d5983-8056-46b0-9885-7eca9a8c749d> (accessed 4 August 2026).

6 Hidipo Hamutenya, "Namibia and Angola: Analysis of a symbiotic relationship", in Anton Bösl, Andrew Du Pisani and Dennis U. Zaire (editors), *Namibia's Foreign Relations: Historic Contexts, Current Dimensions and Perspectives for the 21st Century*, 2014, pp. 81–109, available at https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8ad998dc-963b-eaef-b9fa-f169c37e9097&groupId=252038 (accessed 4 August 2026).

7 Gregor Dobler, "Boundary drawing and the notion of territoriality in pre-colonial and early colonial Ovamboland", 2008, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, Volume 3, <https://www.namibian-studies.com/index.php/JNS/article/view/14/14>, pp. 7–30; Cristina Udelmann Rodrigues, "The Kwanhama partitioned by the border and the Angolan perspective of cross-border identity", 2017, *African Studies*, Volume 76, Issue 3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2017.1325615>; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Integrating Human Mobility Through a Rural Livelihood Lens into National Adaptation and Mitigation Planning: Guiding Framework*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd4361en>

3.2 The legacy of colonialism

Colonial borders were drawn in Europe with little regard for local geography or peoples, seeding later disputes.⁸ The northern border of Namibia (the former German South West Africa) between the mouth of the Cunene River and the Caprivi Strip was defined by two contracts, one between Portugal and Germany in 1886, and the other between Great Britain and Germany in 1890.⁹ These colonial-era boundary demarcations were later formally confirmed between 1926 and 1931, when South Africa and Portugal reached agreements on the delimitation of the border along the midline of the Cunene River.¹⁰

From the late nineteenth century onwards, colonial rule fundamentally reshaped mobility across what is now the Angola-Namibia border. Following Germany's colonisation of South West Africa (1884) and Portugal's consolidation of colonial administration in Angola, thousands of Angolans were recruited into systems of contract labour to work in mines, commercial farms, and other industries in South West Africa.

In the process of colonial border demarcation, colonial powers arbitrarily divided ethnic groups and communities across newly imposed boundaries.¹¹ After the 1927/28 demarcation, many Ovakwanyama shifted from the Angolan side into South-West Africa (today's Namibia); settlement of previously empty buffer zones followed, sharpening internal boundary conflicts among Ovambo polities.¹² Colonial powers

subsequently introduced passport systems and formal border controls, designating those who crossed without legal documentation as “irregular migrants”,¹³ despite the fact that communities on both sides of the border shared the same ethnic and cultural identities.¹⁴

During Namibia's War of Independence (1966–1989) and the Angolan Civil War (1975–2002),¹⁵ the border became increasingly militarized, while also serving as a critical route for civilians fleeing conflict. These successive periods of colonial labour migration and armed conflict entrenched north-to-south migration corridors and social networks that continue to underpin much of today's cross-border movement, including migration that now occurs outside formal immigration channels.¹⁶

Post-independence differences in institutional capacity and migration governance have further shaped these dynamics. While Namibia has developed comparatively stronger border management and administrative systems, decades of conflict left many parts of southern Angola with more limited public services and civil administrative capacity.¹⁷ At the same time, the legacy of colonial rule – including different legal systems, official languages, and administrative structures – continues to create practical barriers for people crossing the border, affecting access to documentation, public services, and legal protection.¹⁸

- 8 Emmanuel M. Gbenyenye, “African colonial boundaries and nation-building”, 2016, *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 8, Issue 2, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ink.v8i2.218>
- 9 Jana Moser, “Border Contracts – Border Conflicts: Examples from Northern Namibia”, September 2008, Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries: Cartography in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, International Cartographic Association Commission on the History of Cartography, available at <https://history.icaci.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Moser.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2025).
- 10 US Office of the Geographer, “International Boundary Study: Angola–Namibia” (previously cited).
- 11 Dobler, “Boundary drawing and the notion of territoriality in pre-colonial and early colonial Ovamboland” (previously cited).
- 12 US Office of the Geographer, “International Boundary Study: Angola–Namibia” (previously cited).
- 13 Amnesty International avoids the term “illegal migration” in favour of “irregular migration” due to its potential negative connotations and implications. “Illegal migration” can stigmatize individuals by implying criminal behaviour, while “irregular migration” more accurately reflects that the migration status is not conforming to legal or administrative requirements, rather than labelling the individuals themselves. This terminology aligns with human rights considerations and aims to promote a more nuanced understanding of migration issues, focusing on improving legal and policy frameworks to manage migration flows effectively.
- 14 Anastasia N. Nadunja and Tunde Ahmed Afolabi, “Investigating the Impact of Border Security Measures in Mitigating Smuggling: A Case Study of the Namibia-Angola Border”, 2024, *Journal of Scientific Reports*, Volume 7, Issue 1, pp. 40–59, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/aif/report/v7y2024i1p40-59.html>
- 15 “Evolution of the Angolan and Namibian conflicts”, 1990, *The Adelphi Papers*, Volume 30, Issue 253, <https://doi.org/10.1080/05679329008448989>, pp. 5–16
- 16 Kletus Likuwa and Napandulwe Shiwea, “Okaholo: Contract labour system and lessons for post colonial Namibia”, *Mgbakoigba: Journal of African Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 2, February 2017, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/mjas/article/view/151770>, pp. 26–47; Tapiwa Victor Warikandwa, “Decolonising labour laws and repossessing subaltern epistemologies: A review of South African and Namibian mineworkers' fight for labour rights”, 2024, *Obiter*, Volume 45, Issue 1, pp. 15–37, https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S1682-58532024000100002&script=sci_arttext (accessed 4 August 2026).
- 17 Allan Cain, “Conflict and Collaboration for Water Resources in Angola's Post-War Cities” in Erika Weinthal, Jessica Troell and Mikiyasu Nakayama (editors), *Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, October 2014, pp. 63–83, available at <https://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org/assets/documents/1786822d3aa8.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2026).
- 18 Aimee-Noel Mbiyozo, “The Role of Colonialism in Creating and Perpetuating Statelessness in Southern Africa”, 27 January 2023, *African Human Mobility Review*, Volume 8, Issue 3, pp. 20–38, <https://epubs.ac.za/index.php/ahmr/article/view/1129>

3.3 Recent bilateral border-zone mobility initiatives

Namibia and Angola have taken steps to bilaterally regulate and facilitate cross-border movement for communities living along their shared border. In 1996, the two countries signed an agreement that led to the introduction of a border resident card system, which facilitated movement of residents living within 30km of the border. In 2013, the border resident card system was updated to allow access within 60km of the border, for a limited period, without a passport.¹⁹

The border card is designed to facilitate limited local movement and trade by border residents, not to provide long-term residence, employment authorization or protection for drought-displaced people. Those holding a “border pass” are required to cross at designated points, and their movement remains restricted to the border zone and is limited in duration.²⁰ Thus, these arrangements appear not to confer full freedom of movement or access to national territory, but instead operate as limited, border-zone mobility mechanisms.

Border policies seem to overlook the protection and other needs of the communities that reside along the borders. The Namibia-Angola border enforcement authorities have concentrated on security responses to smuggling networks, overlooking rights-based responses for the informal cross-border trade and drought-driven movements.²¹ Recent reporting shows Namibians crossing into Angola, particularly through Oshikango/Santa Clara, to buy cheaper goods for household use and resale, with some also using ungazetted crossing points along the porous border.²²



An Angolan family travelling back towards Angola across the Namibia-Angola border. Border communities have long moved between the two countries for family, trade and other everyday needs. © Amnesty International, 2025

- 19 Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams, Namibia Labour Migration Review, June 2024, International Labour Organization (ILO) and Southern Africa Migration Management Project, available at <https://www.sammproject.org/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/Namibia-Labour-Migration-Review-Final.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2026).
- 20 International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Namibia to introduce border resident cards”, 31 May 2013, <https://www.iom.int/news/namibia-introduce-border-resident-cards>. Researchers at the Oshikango crossing found that “border passes” typically were valid for only 3 days: Selma M.H. Nangulah and Ndeyapo Nickanor, *Northern Gateway: Cross-Border Migration Between Namibia and Angola*, 2005, Southern African Migration Project, available at <https://samponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Acrobat38.pdf> (accessed 28 May 2026).
- 21 Anastasia Nadunja and Tunde Afolabi, “Investigating the Impact of Border Security Measures in Mitigating Smuggling: A Case Study of the Namibia-Angola Border”, 2024, *Journal of Scientific Reports*, Volume 7, Issue 1, pp. 40-59, available at <https://ideas.repec.org/a/aif/report/v7y2024i1p40-59.html> (accessed 4 August 2026).
- 22 Marx Itamalo, “Things are cheaper here’: Namibians cross border to do Christmas shopping in Angola”, News24, 16 December 2025, <https://www.news24.com/southafrica/news/things-are-cheaper-here-namibians-cross-border-to-do-christmas-shopping-in-angola-20251216-1099>

ANGOLA: CLIMATE VULNERABILITY & DROUGHT INTENSIFICATION

4.1 Angola's climate vulnerability

Angola's geography, economy and development profile shape its exposure and vulnerability to climate change. The country spans diverse climatic zones, ranging from the humid tropical north to the semi-arid and arid southern provinces, where livelihoods depend heavily on rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism.²³ Although Angola is Africa's second-largest oil producer and its economy remains heavily dependent on fossil fuel exports, agriculture continues to employ a significant proportion of the population and is highly sensitive to climate variability.²⁴

Despite contributing only a negligible share of global historical and cumulative greenhouse gas emissions, Angola faces disproportionately severe impacts from human-induced climate change.²⁵ These are compounded by limited adaptive capacity, underinvestment in climate-resilient

infrastructure, and long-standing constraints in meteorological observation networks and weather data collection, which undermine early warning systems, climate modelling and adaptation planning.²⁶ The ND-GAIN Index²⁷ classifies Angola as highly climate-vulnerable and low in readiness, with vulnerabilities in food systems, water resources, health, infrastructure and governance readiness.²⁸ Angola is also reported to be highly vulnerable to climate-related events, ranking 71st globally in the Germanwatch Climate Risk Index for extreme weather impacts in 2024 and 90th over the 1995-2024 period.²⁹

Climate hazards and natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and epidemics, have been prevalent over the past four decades,³⁰ but have worsened over recent years and are predicted to worsen further in the future.³¹

- 23 Brian J. Huntley, 'Angola in outline: Physiography, climate and patterns of biodiversity', in *Biodiversity of Angola*, 2019, available at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-03083-4_2
- 24 World Bank Group, *Angola: Country Climate and Development Report*, 2022, available at <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099150012022242096> Also see World Bank Group, *Angola: Country Climate and Development Report*, 2022, available at <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099150012022242096> also see U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Angola Country Analysis Brief*, 26 February 2025, available at <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/AGO>
- 25 World Bank, *Angola: Country Climate and Development Report*, 24 November 2022, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099150012022242096> (accessed 4 August 2026); Government of Angola, *Nationally Determined Contribution of Angola* (Angola NDC), 3rd Update, 13 September 2025, UNFCCC, available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/497219> (accessed 4 August 2026); World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *State of the Climate in Africa 2023*, 2 September 2024, <https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/state-of-climate-africa/state-of-climate-africa-2023>; FAO, *National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: Angola*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7104en>
- 26 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) – Angola*, 2011, available at <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/napa/ago01.pdf>
- 27 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative.
- 28 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index, "Angola", <https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/country/angola>
- 29 Lina Adil, David Eckstein, Vera Künzel and Laura Schäfer, *Climate Risk Index 2026: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events?*, Germanwatch, November 2025, available at <https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/CRI%2026%20full%20report.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2026).
- 30 Othoring & Belonging Institute, *Climate Crisis, Displacement, and the Right to Stay: Angola Case Study*, 2023, Climate Displacement and Resilience Database, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climatedisplacement/case-studies/angola>
- 31 See, for example, Pedro M.M. Soares, João A.M. Careto and Daniela C.A. Lima, "Future extreme and compound events in Angola: CORDEX-Africa regional climate modelling projections", September 2024, *Weather and Climate Extremes*, Volume 45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2024.100691>, which finds that, under a high-emissions scenario, future warming may reach maximum values of about 7°C for maximum temperature in south-eastern Angola. See further, S.C.P. Carvalho, F.D. Santos and M. Pulquério, "Climate change scenarios for Angola: An analysis of precipitation and temperature projections using four RCMs", 25 November 2016, *International Journal of Climatology*, Volume 37, Issue 8, <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.4925>. The July 2023 climate projections from CORDEX and CMIP confirmed that temperature increases between 1-3°C are expected in the near- to mid-term future, with a significant rise in the number of days exceeding 30°C, particularly in southern Angola. CORDEX is Coordinated Regional Climate Downscaling Experiment, an international program sponsored by the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), which focuses on regional climate modelling. CMIP is the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project is a collaborative climate modelling project under the auspices of the World Climate Research Programme. CMIP coordinates the climate modelling community to improve the understanding and prediction of climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed in its Sixth Assessment Report that climate change has increased drought in Africa; it projects that above 1.5°C of global warming, drought frequency and duration will increase over large parts of Southern Africa.³² It has also projected that at higher warming levels, drought duration in parts of Southern Africa may double, while growing seasons shorten and water stress increases, creating serious risks for rain-fed farming and pastoral livelihoods.³³

Higher temperatures and more frequent droughts are expected to impact most of Angola by 2060.³⁴ The southern region of Angola, already vulnerable due to its reliance on rain-fed agriculture and limited water infrastructure, is particularly at risk.³⁵ Recent projections suggest that by the end of the century, south-eastern Angola could experience warming of up to 7°C, with southern areas facing more extreme heat, longer heatwaves, droughts and compound heat-drought events. These changes are expected to further destabilize agricultural productivity,³⁶ threatening the lives and livelihoods of about 11.1 million rural Angolans.³⁷

4.2 Droughts in southern Angola

Droughts are a recurring part of southern Africa's climate. In recent years, the region has been experiencing severe recurrent droughts.³⁸ Southern Angola, particularly Cunene Province, has been among the hardest affected,³⁹ with repeated drought cycles eroding people's capacity to recover between seasons.⁴⁰ These prolonged dry spells have caused a sharp decline in water availability, disrupted agricultural production, and deepened food insecurity across the region. Even when rainfall does arrive, it is often erratic or insufficient to replenish grazing lands or restore depleted water sources, leaving communities trapped in a pattern of declining resilience.⁴¹

According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the rainy season in Angola usually runs from October to April; the dry season, when pasture declines, runs from July to September.⁴² Over the last four years, this cycle has become less reliable. The increasingly long and frequent dry seasons have led to more severe droughts that have been more difficult to recover from.⁴³

In 2021/22 southern Angola experienced below average rainfall, causing reduced harvest.⁴⁴ In 2022/23, rainfall improved in parts of Huíla and Cunene, allowing some households to replant

32 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Africa", 2023, in *Climate Change 2022 – Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, pp. 1285–1456, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844.011>

33 IPCC, "Africa", 2023 (previously cited).

34 Angola NDC, September 2025 (previously cited).

35 Angola NDC, September 2025 (previously cited).

36 The World Bank confirms these concerns, highlighting that Angola is already grappling with severe climate hazards, including prolonged droughts in the South, with temperatures expected to rise by 1–1.5°C between 2020 and 2040: World Bank, *Angola – Country Climate and Development Report*, 2022 (previously cited). Further research from April 2024 predicted a potential 7% reduction in agricultural productivity by 2050 due to rising temperatures and decreasing precipitation: Adaptation Fund, "Proposal for Angola", 16 March 2026, AFB/PPRC.37/Inf.17, available at https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/AFB.PPRC_37.Inf_17.-Proposal-for-Angola-1.pdf (accessed 4 August 2026)

37 Soares and others, "Future extreme and compound events in Angola" (previously cited).

38 See World Bank Group, *Angola: Country Climate and Development Report*, 2022, available at <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099150012022242096>

39 Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), *Climate and Mobility Case Study: Cunene Province, Angola: Cahama*, 8 February 2023, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/angola/climate-and-mobility-case-study-january-2023-cunene-province-angola-cahama> (accessed 4 August 2026)

40 Amnesty International, *The End of Cattle's Paradise*, 2021 (previously cited).

41 FAO, *Angola: El Niño Impact Assessment Highlights*, May 2024, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cd3954en> (accessed 4 August 2026)

42 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), "Poor Harvest Prospects in the South and East Following El Niño-Induced Drought", *Angola: Remote Monitoring Report*, June 2024, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/remote-monitoring-report/june-2024>

43 FEWS NET, "Southern Angola Faces Crisis (IPC Phase 3) Outcomes Following Consecutive Poor Seasons", *Angola: Remote Monitoring Report: June 2022*, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/remote-monitoring-report/june-2022>

44 FEWS NET, "Southern Angola Faces Crisis (IPC Phase 3) Outcomes Following Consecutive Poor Seasons", *Angola: Remote Monitoring Report: June 2022*, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/remote-monitoring-report/june-2022>

sorghum, millet and maize.⁴⁵ But in 2023/24, El Niño brought very poor rainfall, intensifying already-arid environments and damaging crops, livestock and grazing condition,⁴⁶ making it one of the harshest drought years on record.⁴⁷ FEWS NET reported below average harvests of maize, millet or sorghum in southern Angola in March 2024, further exacerbating the region's severe conditions.⁴⁸

The Government of Angola has stated that climate change is driving the recurrent drought risk in southern Angola.⁴⁹ Droughts have led to water scarcity, food insecurity, and economic losses, particularly in the provinces of Huíla, Namibe, and Cunene. The government confirmed that between 2015 and 2016, over one million people were affected, causing damages of US\$286 million and economic losses of approximately US\$437 million.⁵⁰ The 2021 southern Angola drought left 3.81 million people food insecure, and over 1.2 million people in six southern provinces of Angola faced water shortages.⁵¹ The economic impact of the 2021 drought was severe, with the World Bank estimating losses exceeding US\$749 million in 2022,⁵² primarily affecting agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, but also encompassing broader economic and non-economic damages to local communities. In 2024, UNDP estimated that drought has affected 1.32 million people.

The recurrent droughts must also be understood in relation to El Niño, which causes significant disruptions in rainfall patterns and prolonged dry conditions in Southern Africa.⁵³ While El Niño is a naturally occurring event, its impacts are increasingly unfolding within a broader context of anthropogenic (human-induced) climate change. Various climate models indicate that as global temperatures rise, the frequency and severity of such droughts are likely to increase, compounding the already dire situation.⁵⁴

The combination of El Niño and anthropogenic climate change is pushing more and more people out of their homes.⁵⁵ In recent years, the drought, late and failed rains, and poor pasture recovery have contributed to increased movement within Angola and across the border into Namibia. In Angola's southern border provinces, particularly Cunene and Huíla, persistent food and water shortages have undermined livelihoods and left many households with few options but to move. Since 2021, there has been a significant influx of Angolans into Namibia, driven by the need for food, water, medical services, and employment opportunities.⁵⁶ According to the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI), in the absence of strong adaptation measures, the Cunene region could face immediate and widespread displacement due to extreme climate stressors including long-term drought, water scarcity, crop failure, food insecurity.⁵⁷

45 FEWS NET, "With the Season Underway, Rainfall Has Improved in Parts of Southern Angola", *Angola: Remote Monitoring Report*, February 2023, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/remote-monitoring-report/february-2023>

46 FEWS NET, "Poor Harvest Prospects in the South and East Following El Niño-Induced Drought", *Angola: Remote Monitoring Report*, June 2024, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/remote-monitoring-report/june-2024/print>

47 Joyce Kimutai and others, *El Niño key driver of drought in highly vulnerable Southern African countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://doi.org/10.25561/110770> (Note this study was conducted in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique and Botswana as they were the most affected areas).

48 FEWS NET, "Dry season conditions place pressure on acutely food insecure households", *Angola: Key Message Update*, August 2024, <https://fews.net/southern-africa/angola/key-message-update/august-2024>

49 Statement by H.E. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, to the Twenty-Eighth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP28), Dubai, 2 December 2023, available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/ANGOLA_cop28cmp18cma5_HLS_ENG.pdf (accessed 4 August 2026). Angola's 2025 NDC (previously cited) also confirmed that southern Angola has been severely affected by prolonged droughts, which have intensified over the past decade due to climate change

50 National Commission for Civil Protection, Government of Angola, *Droughts in Angola 2012–2016 Post Disaster Needs Assessment*, 2016, available at https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-05/pdna_-_angola_2016_-_report_1.pdf (accessed 4 August 2026)

51 Soares and others, "Future extreme and compound events in Angola" (previously cited).

52 World Bank, *Towards improved water and food security: Angola's potential as a future agriculture powerhouse of Africa*, 7 September 2022, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/african/towards-improved-water-and-food-security-angolas-potential-future-agriculture-powerhouse>

53 El Niño is a climate phenomenon characterized by the warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, which disrupts global weather patterns. This warming affects atmospheric circulation, leading to various weather anomalies, such as increased rainfall and flooding in some regions, and droughts and higher temperatures in others. El Niño events typically occur every 2 to 7 years and can last several months to over a year, significantly impacting agriculture, water resources, and ecosystems worldwide.

54 IPCC, "Africa", 2021 (previously cited); Chris C. Funk, "Climate Change Made the 2015–2016 El Niño More Extreme", in *Drought, Flood, Fire: How Climate Change Contributes to Catastrophes*, 1 June 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108885348, pp. 186-211>

55 See Chapters 5–8 below and MMC, "Angola: climate and mobility case study" (previously cited).

56 Othering & Belonging Institute, *Climate Displacement Case Study: Angola* (previously cited).

57 The Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) outlined several scenarios for the Cunene region, projecting the potential impacts of a changing climate on migration. Current climate trends are projected to result in more frequent droughts and floods, potentially driving increased migration (baseline scenario). Efforts to reduce emissions could help ease migration pressures (moderate mitigation scenario). Significant global emission reductions could greatly reduce migration driven by climate factors (high mitigation scenario), while extreme climate events could lead to immediate and widespread displacement (climate stress scenario). ACMI, *African Shifts: The Africa Climate Mobility Report: Addressing Climate-Forced Migration and Displacement*, 2022, available at <https://bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2026-05/African%20Shifts%20Report.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2026); MMC, "Angola: climate and mobility case study" (previously cited).



4.3 Drivers of displacement in Namibia

Since at least 2020, sustained numbers of Angolan nationals have crossed into Namibia's Kunene and Omusati regions, with arrivals intensifying during periods of acute drought.

Amnesty International spoke to a young climate activist in the capital city, Windhoek, who emphasized that drought-induced displacement is not a simple story of people “running from drought”, but a rational response to collapsing systems. He explained that people leave when the balance of survival tips, when collecting water consumes more energy than the benefits it delivers and when the state safety net is so thin that staying becomes a greater risk than crossing a border. As he aptly put it:

“ The drier it gets, the deeper you have to dig.”⁵⁸

In southern Angola, drought is compounded by a web of interconnected challenges that have significantly impacted communities, particularly in the Huíla and Cunene provinces. The encroachment of commercial ranching into communal pasturelands and the loss of grazing lands dramatically heightened the vulnerability of these communities.⁵⁹ Formerly rich areas such as the Chimbolelo Valley – historically known as “the birthplace of cattle” – and the Tunda dos Gambos have been overtaken by commercial farmers.⁶⁰ Over the past decade, this shift has led to the loss of approximately 67% of grazing land in Gambos municipality.

In addition, approximately 30% of land in Angola's southern provinces has been degraded due to desertification,⁶¹ significantly undermining soil fertility, grazing potential, and long-term livelihood sustainability for pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. These lands, crucial for agricultural and pastoral communities, were traditionally used to support livestock, a vital source of food and income, especially during droughts.

⁵⁸ Interview in person with climate activist, Windhoek, May 2024.

⁵⁹ Amnesty International, *The End of Cattle's Paradise*, 2019 (previously cited).

⁶⁰ This displacement of pastoralists to make way for commercial agriculture occurred with minimal regard for legal protections and was often met with indifference or tacit approval from government authorities: Amnesty International, *The End of Cattle's Paradise*, 2019 (previously cited).

⁶¹ Government of Angola, “Angola: Impacts of drought and desertification discussed”, 17 June 2009, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/angola/angola-impacts-drought-and-desertification-discussed> (accessed 4 August 2026).

Between 2018 and 2019, Amnesty International visits to agricultural and pastoralist communities in Huíla province revealed serious challenges in accessing adequate food and water. The situation deteriorated further during 2020 and 2021, as Amnesty International, in partnership with local Angolan human rights organizations, Associação Construindo Comunidades and Associação Ame Naame Omuu, observed the ongoing devastation of livelihoods caused by the drought.⁶² Severe food insecurity and malnutrition particularly impacted older adults and children, leaving many in a state of desperation. An 80-year-old man shared with Amnesty International that his family, once self-sufficient, had lost everything and had been forced to send some family members to Namibia to survive.⁶³

“ All of us here in the village have to pay for the hunger and thirst we experience daily. People are leaving our village, crossing the border to go to Namibia every day, not because they want to, but because they are running away from hunger, to fight to survive.”⁶⁴

- A resident of Eva community, Gambos, Huíla Province, July 2021

In May 2021, Amnesty International and Associação Ame Naame Omuu visited the village of Caluheque in the Angolan Ombandja municipality, Cunene Province, where they found a makeshift camp housing displaced people from various villages in Cunene and Huíla. The individuals, living in precarious conditions, were working on nearby farms while preparing to cross into Namibia, just a few kilometres away. Similar conditions were observed in the community of Heva in Gambos municipality, Huíla province, where residents described the worsening impacts of drought and hunger. By the end of 2022, Angolan civil society organizations reported that the number of people arriving at the border continued to rise. They were fleeing the cumulative impacts of repeated droughts and the deepening scarcity of resources in southern Angola.

4.4 Angola's failure to invest in adaptation and preparedness

Despite long-standing recognition of recurrent drought risk in southern Angola,⁶⁵ particularly in Cunene, Huíla, and Namibe provinces, state investment in climate adaptation, drought preparedness, and livelihood protection has remained uneven because of limited finance, weak institutional capacity, inadequate climate-monitoring infrastructure and continued dependence on donor-supported emergency and resilience programmes.⁶⁶ The absence of sustained early warning systems, water infrastructure, veterinary support, and social protection mechanisms has contributed to the

progressive erosion of pastoral and subsistence farming systems.⁶⁷ Where environmental degradation and livelihood collapse reach a point at which survival is no longer possible, the state's failure to act engages responsibility for violations of the rights to life, food, water, health, a healthy environment and an adequate standard of living.⁶⁸ Under international human rights law, the Government of Angola bears the primary obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of populations affected by drought-related harm within its territory.

⁶² Amnesty International, *The End of Cattle's Paradise*, 2019 (previously cited).

⁶³ Interview in person with Shilongo, Huíla, 2021.

⁶⁴ Interview in person with a resident of Eva community, Gambos, Huíla Province, July 2021.

⁶⁵ Pedro Lombe, Elsa Carvalho and Paulo Rosa-Santos, "Drought Characterization in Southern Angola Using SPI and SPEI: Implications for Impacts and Adaptation", 2026, *Land*, Volume 15, Issue 5, p. 728, <https://doi.org/10.3390/land15050728>

⁶⁶ Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), "Enhancing Angola's Access to Climate Finance for Sustainable Transport and Sustainable Landscape (AFOLU) Sectors", 26 March 2024, available at <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/enhancing-angola-s-access-climate-finance-sustainable-transport-and-sustainable-landscape> (accessed 4 August 2026).

⁶⁷ Aleix Serrat-Capdevila, Natalia Limones, Javier Marzo-Artigas, Marcus Wijnen and Bruno Petrucci, *Water Security and Drought Resilience in the South of Angola*, *World Bank*, 2022, available at: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099100003102224427>

⁶⁸ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment 12 on the right to adequate food*, 12 May 1999 (UN Doc. E/C.12/1999/5), <https://docs.un.org/en/E/C.12/1999/5>; CESCR, *General Comment 15 on the right to water*, 20 January 2003 (UN Doc. E/C.12/2002/11), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/486454>

NAMIBIA: DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS & RESPONSES

5.1 Recurrent droughts and food insecurity in Namibia

Namibia has also been grappling with increasingly long and difficult dry seasons over the past several years, and 2024 marked one of the most critical periods yet.⁶⁹

On 22 May 2024, the Namibian government declared a state of emergency following exceptionally low rainfall across the country.⁷⁰ Estimates indicated that roughly one in five Namibians was facing food insecurity at the time. In response, more than 331,000 households registered for the national drought relief programme.⁷¹ Although the initiative carried a budget of EUR 40 million, it was operating with a funding gap of EUR 25 million. At a Southern African Development Community (SADC) Extraordinary Summit on 20 May 2024, held to address the region's El Niño-linked drought and flooding, President Nangolo Mbumba appealed to neighbouring states and the international community for financial and humanitarian assistance to bridge this shortfall.⁷² The government subsequently expanded food distributions, water provision, livestock support and seed programmes, while the UN and humanitarian partners provided technical and humanitarian

assistance to support the national response. However, available resources remained insufficient to meet growing humanitarian needs, and the funding gap persisted throughout much of 2024.⁷³

Between April and September 2024, 1.15-1.2 million people, around 38-40% of the population analyzed, were projected to experience acute food insecurity, requiring urgent support to protect lives and livelihoods.⁷⁴ Revised expectations tempered initial forecasts, but Namibia's food insecurity continues to be driven by the impacts of El Niño on crop and livestock production, as well as rising prices, economic stagnation, and unemployment.⁷⁵

69 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), "Namibia: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, July 2024-June 2025", 6 September 2024, available at [https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Namibia_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Jul2024_Jun2025_report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Namibia_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Jul2024_Jun2025_report%20(1).pdf) (accessed 4 August 2026), pp. 1-6.

70 Government of the Republic of Namibia, Proclamation 18 of 2024: Declaration of State of Emergency: National Disaster (Drought), 22 May 2024, <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/2024/8370.pdf>

71 Government of the Republic of Namibia, Namibia's Combined First Biennial Transparency Report and Fifth National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, December 2024, available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Namibia%27s%20BTR1_NC5%20Consolidated%20FINAL.pdf (accessed 29 May 2026). Only citizens and permanent residents are eligible for the programme.

72 European Commission Emergency Response Coordination Centre, "Namibia – Drought", 29 May 2024, ECHO Daily Flash, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/namibia/namibia-drought-dg-echo-national-authorities-media-echo-daily-flash-29-may-2024> (accessed 4 August 2026).

73 World Food Programme (WFP), *WFP Global Operational Response Plan 2024: Update #10*, February 2024, available at: <https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document/download/WFP-0000156751> also see European Commission, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Namibia: Drought, 29 May 2024, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2024-000094-nam>

74 The groups most affected included the unemployed, marginalised communities, those without national identification who are unable to access social protection schemes, children under five, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and older persons in both rural and urban settings. All regions of Namibia at the time were classified as being in "crisis", highlighting the rapid decline in household food security and the pressing need for expanded assistance and long-term climate resilience measures: IPC, "Namibia: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis" (previously cited).

75 IPC, "Namibia: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis" (previously cited).

5.2 Drought relief, climate adaptation and social protection

While recurrent droughts have affected both Angola and Namibia, Namibia has implemented comparatively stronger drought relief measures and invested in climate adaptation initiatives. In contrast, southern Angola has historically received significantly lower levels of public investment in water infrastructure, social protection and climate resilience.

Namibia – supported by the European Union – has invested significantly in climate adaptation, particularly in the livestock sector, as well as in longer-term drought resilience. However, Angolan nationals displaced by prolonged droughts are not systematically included in these initiatives as they are only available to Namibian citizens and permanent residents.⁷⁶ Namibia has also benefited from substantial international investment in climate adaptation and resilience building, including support from the Green Climate Fund,⁷⁷ the Adaptation Fund,⁷⁸ and the European Union, for drought resilience, sustainable rangeland management, water security and climate finance readiness.⁷⁹ These initiatives have strengthened water management, climate-smart agriculture and community resilience, although they are primarily targeted at resident communities rather than cross-border climate-displaced populations.

In Namibia, social protection programmes are generally available only to Namibian citizens and permanent residents. These include old-age pensions, disability grants, child grants and drought relief assistance.⁸⁰ Namibia also operates a contributory employment-based social security scheme administered by the Social Security Commission, which may extend to migrant workers who are formally employed and registered.⁸¹ The Namibian

Constitution guarantees the right to life (Article 6), equality and freedom from discrimination (Article 10), and provides that the state shall adopt policies aimed at ensuring that all Namibians have access to public health services (Article 95).⁸² In practice, public health facilities generally provide subsidized healthcare to citizens and permanent residents; non-citizens may access services but are often required to pay higher fees depending on the level of care.⁸³ Access to public housing programmes is generally restricted to Namibian citizens. Basic education is guaranteed under Article 20 of the Constitution and is available irrespective of nationality, although undocumented migrant children may face practical barriers to enrolment because of documentation requirements.

During the 2024 state of emergency, the government announced a national drought relief programme for registered drought-affected households. Registration was undertaken through regional and local authorities, and the programme primarily targeted Namibian citizens and permanent residents,⁸⁴ supported by WFP food vouchers⁸⁵ and community soup kitchens. In 2024, the Office of the Prime Minister in Namibia told Amnesty International of a nationwide relief programme coordinated in response to the minimal rainfall in Namibia and Angola, with the Kunene Region being one of the most severely affected. Officials explained that while the programme sought to provide food assistance, boreholes, livestock support and climate-resilient agricultural practices to drought-affected communities, the arrival of increasing numbers of displaced Angolans placed additional pressure on already overstretched food supplies, water infrastructure, health services and local administrative capacity in the Kunene Region.⁸⁶

76 European Union External Action Service (EEAS), “EU supports climate-resilient livestock production in Northern Namibia”, 5 July 2017, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/29325>. See also, Government of the Republic of Namibia, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform, *Northern Communal Areas Livestock Development Programmes*, various policy and programme documents (accessed 2024).

77 See further <https://www.greenclimate.fund/countries/namibia>

78 Adaptation Fund, *Resilience Building as Climate Change Adaptation in Drought-Struck South-Western African Communities (Angola, Namibia)*, <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/project/angola-and-namibia-resilience-building-as-climate-change-adaptation-in-drought-struck-south-western-african-communities/>

79 See further, The Commonwealth Secretariat’s Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH), “Case Study: Building capacity for sustainable access to climate finance – A case of Namibia’s readiness for Green Climate Fund”, 16 May 2023, <https://thecommonwealth.org/case-study/case-study-building-capacity-sustainable-access-climate-finance-case-namibias-readiness>

80 Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, National Social Protection Policy 2021–2030, 2022, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/NATIONAL%20SOCIAL%20PROTECTION%20POLICY--pdf> also see Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, *Disability Grant*, available at: <https://mgecw.gov.na/en/disability-grant>

81 Government of the Republic of Namibia, Social Security Act 34 of 1994, Sections 1 and 20, <https://www.ssc.org.na/downloads/documents/social-security-act-34-of-1994.pdf>

82 See, for example: Hospitals and Health Facilities Act 36 of 1994; National Health Act 2 of 2015; Public and Environmental Health Act 1 of 2015.

83 IOM, *Migration Governance Indicators: Republic of Namibia*, 2022, <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/MGI-Namibia-2022.pdf>

84 Republic of Namibia, Proclamation 18 of 2024: Declaration of State of Emergency: National Disaster (Drought) (previously cited).

85 World Food Programme (WFP), “WFP launches commodity voucher programme in Namibia with support from the Government of Japan”, 5 December 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-launches-commodity-voucher-programme-namibia-support-government-japan-0>

86 Interview in person with official from the Office of the Deputy President, in Windhoek, May 2024.

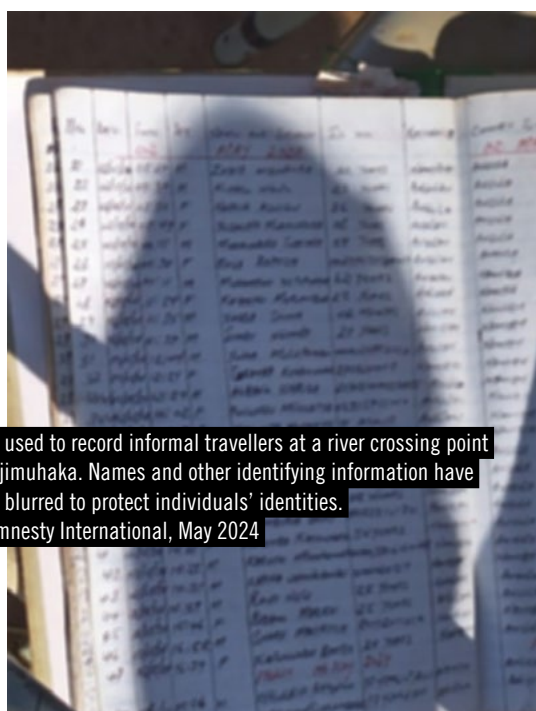
5.3 Namibian response to Angolan displacement

During the research period, Amnesty International observed inconsistencies in the responses of local Namibian authorities to the increasing numbers of Angolans crossing into northern Namibia. Some local authorities and front line officials appeared to take into account the long-standing social, cultural and family ties that exist across the Angola-Namibia border when responding to cross-border movements. In several instances, officials exercised discretion, recognizing that many people were moving out of necessity – crossing the border in search of food, water and healthcare – rather than with the intention of circumventing immigration laws. Meanwhile, in some cases, immigration laws continued to be enforced without considering protection needs, including through arrests and deportations. This resulted in inconsistent protection for people displaced by drought, with humanitarian considerations often depending on local practice rather than a clear legal or policy framework (see further Chapter 6).⁸⁷

This complex reality is reflected in the different pathways through which border crossings occur. Amnesty International observed three primary types of movement. First, some movement takes place through formal, gazetted border posts, where passports are required and standard

border procedures apply, including immigration control, customs, and phytosanitary checks. Second, border crossings also occur through informal but locally recognized crossing points, often along rivers or traditional routes where there is often a limited state presence, typically involving a police or immigration officer who records basic details of travellers in a logbook (see photo below). Amnesty International was unable to verify how this information is subsequently used within the immigration system as these crossings appeared to lack formal immigration processing, documentation requirements, or systematic screening mechanisms. Third, some people cross through entirely unofficial routes, including unmarked footpaths and other crossings that fall outside any routine government presence and are generally regarded by authorities as irregular border crossings.

The coexistence of these formal, informal, and irregular routes, combined with the absence of comprehensive reception, screening, registration, and data collection systems, makes it difficult to ascertain the full number of Angolans displaced by climate-related events or natural disasters currently present in Namibia.⁸⁸



Book used to record informal travellers at a river crossing point in Otjimuhaka. Names and other identifying information have been blurred to protect individuals' identities.
© Amnesty International, May 2024



Informal river crossing at Otjimuhaka, © Amnesty International, May 2024

⁸⁷ Interview in person with Immigration officer, Opuwo, 2024.

⁸⁸ Interview in person with officials from the Office of the Vice President, Windhoek, May 2024.

5.4 The 2021/2022 arrivals of displaced Angolans into Namibia

Between January and July 2021, following consecutive years of limited rainfall culminating in one of the worst droughts experienced in southern Angola in decades, more than 7,000 people – predominantly women (including pregnant and lactating women), children and older persons – crossed into northern Namibia from Angola.⁸⁹ This movement was driven by extreme drought conditions in Angola, resulting in acute food insecurity, widespread livestock losses and rising levels of acute malnutrition, particularly among children.⁹⁰

A joint assessment by the IOM, the Office of the Prime Minister of Namibia and humanitarian partners, described the situation as “multi-faceted and complex”:

“ While mobility along the Angola-Namibia border fluctuates according to drought and other factors, the influx of migrants from Angola to Namibia since January 2021 has been notable in its magnitude and rapidity... [T]he current drought ... not only contributes to these noticeable migratory movements, but also stresses potential host communities of these people on the move, which can lead to integration tensions.”⁹¹

The arrival of people from Angola, concentrated in Namibia’s Omusati and Kunene regions, placed immense strain on local resources and highlighted critical human rights concerns. Unlike established seasonal or livelihood-related cross-border mobility, the scale and demographic profile of the 2021 arrivals, including large numbers of women, children and older persons, led humanitarian actors to characterize the movement as a humanitarian displacement crisis. An IOM staff member told Amnesty International that it was particularly concerning that the 2021 arrivals also included an unusually high number of older people, emphasizing the harshness of the conditions that prompted their displacement:

“ [T]his was very strange because in our region, you don’t see old people move.”⁹²

Many displaced people relied on makeshift shelters or integrated into host communities that were already under pressure from the drought. A social worker in the area told Amnesty International that the lack of adequate food, water, sanitation, and healthcare exacerbated the heightened risks of these populations.⁹³ Conditions in these areas were dire, with many living in mud and stick huts or outdoors, lacking basic necessities such as handwashing facilities and safe drinking water.⁹⁴ Open defecation was common, and the health services available were minimal, often requiring a fee (N\$4) that many could not afford.⁹⁵ The lack of adequate sanitation disproportionately affected women and girls, increasing risks to their privacy, dignity and health, including sexual and reproductive health.

⁸⁹ Meeting in person with IOM representatives, May 2024.

⁹⁰ UN Namibia and Namibia Office of the Prime Minister, Rapid Assessment Report: *Angola migrants influx in Omusati and Kunene region*, May 2021.

⁹¹ UN Namibia, *Rapid Assessment Report*, 2021 (previously cited).

⁹² Thus distinguishing this from seasonal migration patterns: Meeting in person with IOM representatives, May 2024.

⁹³ Interview in person with social worker, Opuwo, 2025.

⁹⁴ UN Namibia, *Rapid Assessment Report*, 2021 (previously cited).

⁹⁵ UNICEF Namibia, “Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)”, <https://www.unicef.org/namibia/water-sanitation-hygiene-wash>

The Office of the Prime Minister confirmed to Amnesty International that bilateral engagements between Angola and Namibia were established to respond to these 2021 drought-induced displacements,⁹⁶ focusing on relief efforts and potential repatriation. UN agencies called for increased humanitarian assistance to support the Namibian government's response and to prevent further deterioration in the health and well-being of displaced people.⁹⁷ They stressed the need for targeted support, especially in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at the time, which had already

stretched local healthcare services thin. Population estimates from various locations, such as Opuwo Town and Otuzemba, revealed a lack of detailed and disaggregated data on the total number of arrivals, households, and groups at heightened risk of adverse impact: this made it difficult to identify and respond to the needs of groups facing heightened risks, including pregnant women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. However, it was evident that the basic needs of these populations were not being met, with food, shelter, and health services being critically inadequate.⁹⁸

5.5 Government-facilitated returns of displaced Angolans including children

By 2024, many of those who had arrived during the 2021 displacement had returned to Angola through organized return arrangements facilitated by the Namibian and Angolan authorities. Amnesty International was unable to determine the extent to which these returns were voluntary.⁹⁹ However, it was reported that some people refused to board busses,¹⁰⁰ choosing instead to integrate into local communities, particularly as support at the official sites had ceased.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, during focus group discussions in 2024, displaced people from Angola told Amnesty International that many of those who had returned subsequently crossed back into Namibia after drought conditions, food insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities in southern Angola persisted.¹⁰² Media also reported that those who were returned to Angola re-entered Namibia within weeks.¹⁰³

The governments of Namibia and Angola were also engaged in bilateral arrangements concerning the return of Angolan children and, in some cases, their

mothers. In February 2024, Namibia's Ministry of International Relations reportedly declared that 18 Angolan children had been returned on 12 June 2023 and a further six Angolan children were returned in October 2023,¹⁰⁴ while four Angolan children were being housed at the Namibian Children's Home in Windhoek as part of ongoing efforts by both governments to carry out small-scale child-focused returns.¹⁰⁵ Publicly available information does not indicate whether the children were returned to their parents or other family members in Angola, or the procedures followed to determine their best interests. A few months later, the Government of Namibia acknowledged officially that Namibia facilitated the "safe return" of Angolan children and their mothers.¹⁰⁶

The Namibian government also continued to return Angolan nationals found to be in the country without regular immigration status, and in 2026 the Ministry of Home Affairs immigration control programme

96 Meeting in person with officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, Windhoek, May 2024.

97 UN Namibia, *Rapid Assessment Report*, 2021 (previously cited).

98 UN Namibia, *Rapid Assessment Report*, 2021 (previously cited). The report concluded with recommendations for enhanced data collection, continued monitoring, and the implementation of sustainable solutions to address the root causes of this migration.

99 Meeting with Immigration Official in Opuwo in May 2024. Several media outlets also reported about the repatriation of more than 4,000 Angolans, including men, women and children, who had lived in Namibia for about 11 months. See, for example, Informanté, "More than 4 000 Angolan guests going home", 6 January 2022, <https://informante.web.na/?p=312490>; New Era, "Namibia or starvation... returning migrants speak of Angola crisis", 3 June 2022, <https://neweralive.na/namibia-or-starvation-returning-migrants-speak-of-angola-crisis/>.

100 Meeting with Immigration Official in Opuwo in May 2024.

101 *Namibian Sun*, "Namibia Sends Returned Angolan Refugees Packing," 11 February 2022, archived at <https://namibian21.rssing.com/chan-44586264/article36152.html> (accessed 9 August 2026).

102 Focus groups with men and women, Opuwo, May 2024.

103 Informanté, "More than 4 000 Angolan guests going home", 6 January 2022, <https://informante.web.na/?p=312490>.

104 The Informanté, "18 Angolan street children repatriated so far", 10 February 2024, <https://informante.web.na/?p=354341&utm>.

105 The Namibian, "Namibia clarifies efforts to address Angolan street children", 14 February 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/namibia-clarifies-efforts-to-address-angolan-street-children/>.

106 Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security, "The Government of the Republic of Namibia facilitates a safe return of Angolan minor children and their mothers", 28 May 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/MHAINamibia/posts/the-government-of-the-republic-of-namibia-facilitates-a-safe-return-of-angolan-m/866715145496542/>.

announced that more than 1,000 Angolan nationals had been returned to Angola after being found in the country without regular immigration status.¹⁰⁷ Yet despite these returns, the arrivals continued: the government-owned media outlet New Era

reported that more than 6,000 Angolans crossed into Namibia between 2022 and 2023, linking this movement to prolonged severe drought, poverty and food insecurity in southern Angola.¹⁰⁸

5.6 Unavailability of regularization opportunities

Angolans who live in rural areas along the border and who cross the border irregularly do not have opportunities to regularize their stay in Namibia. There are also no realistic, human rights-based, humanitarian, or temporary protection mechanisms that they could easily access to regularize their cross-border movement.

Angolans are effectively pushed into irregular status because the available formal processes do not match the realities of climate and natural disaster movements. These movements are urgent, practical, and sometimes may be temporary. People cross in search of food, water, grazing land, medical care, family support, or casual work, especially after drought has devastated crops, livestock, and rural livelihoods. Further, many Angolans living along the border find it too expensive and impractical to travel to official crossing points. For example, the nearest formal border post at Oshikango is roughly 300km away.¹⁰⁹ As a result, border residents often choose informal crossings, which are more realistic for their daily needs.

Namibia's Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993 requires that any ordinary traveller should enter through an official border post and present valid travel documentation to immigration officials.¹¹⁰

While ordinary Angolan passport holders are normally exempt from visa requirements for entry into Namibia, visa-free entry for Angolans does not entail the right to work. Namibia's new reciprocal visa regime, which came into effect on 1 April 2025,¹¹¹ maintained

this visa-free entry, entitling Angolans to enter for holiday/tourism purposes for a maximum stay of three months within one calendar year; however, this is only possible for passport holders at official border entries.

For those living in border areas, Border Pass cards are only a facilitation tool for short local cross-border movement, trade, family links and border-community circulation. They do not resolve issues regarding longer-term stays, access to services, employment, or protection needs. Ultimately, any entry into Namibia without a passport or resident Border Pass will be considered irregular entry.

For any Angolan who is interested in work, Namibia has a work/employment permit regime narrowly designed around formal, employer-sponsored employment.¹¹² This structurally excludes many Angolans living in poverty who crossed the border irregularly into Namibia because of the adverse effects of climate change and/or disasters.

For Angolan nationals, the absence of accessible labour pathways or humanitarian pathways effectively forces irregular entry and stay, rendering irregularity a consequence of policy design rather than individual choice.¹¹³ The net effect is that southern Angolans who have suffered from the adverse effects of intensifying drought are being channelled into informal labour, domestic work, herding, street trading or exploitation because regular status is inaccessible or the law does not appreciate the unique lived realities of the local community.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Over 1 000 Angolan migrants deported ... but influx remains <https://newera.live/na/over-1-000-angolan-migrants-deported-but-influx-remains/>

¹⁰⁸ New Era, "Over 1,000 Angolan migrants deported but influx remains", 16 February 2026, <https://newera.live/na/over-1-000-angolan-migrants-deported-but-influx-remains/>

¹⁰⁹ The Namibian, "Ministry Takes Closer Look at Ohangwena-Angola Border", 17 July 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/ministry-takes-closer-look-at-ohangwena-angola-border/>

¹¹⁰ Available at <https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/1993/7/eng%401993-08-19>. Under the Act, a person seeking to enter Namibia is to present themselves to an immigration officer at a port of entry before entering, to acquire necessary documentation.

¹¹¹ Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHA/ISS), "Fact Sheet: Implementation Modalities of Visa Requirements to Namibia", Version 4, 28 May 2025, available at <https://eservices.mhaiss.gov.na/form/FactSheetVisaRequirementsToNamibia.pdf>

¹¹² Republic of Namibia, Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993, 19 August 1993, <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/annoSTAT/Immigration%20Control%20Act%207%20of%201993.pdf> and its regulations.

¹¹³ United States (US) Department of State, "Namibia", in 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report, 29 September 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

¹¹⁴ Crush and Williams, Namibia Labour Migration Review, 2024 (previously cited). See also US Department of Labor, "Namibia", in 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, September 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/namibia>

CROSS-CUTTING HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS & IMPACTS

The lack of formal reception, registration, or protection screening at both formal and informal border crossings leaves people displaced by climate-related and/or disaster-related hardship legally invisible. As a result, they are susceptible to arrest and deportation rather than being offered human rights-based solutions and safeguards. This exposes individuals displaced by worsening drought to removal and conditions that threaten their survival, dignity, and well-being.

During field visits, Amnesty International found that Angolan nationals living in northern Namibia

faced persistent risk of arrest, detention, and deportation, particularly due to their irregular status. While Namibia has at times adopted more lenient approaches, Amnesty International observed that enforcement actions can occur suddenly and with serious consequences for affected individuals.

Further, the exclusion of undocumented Angolans from accessible healthcare has contributed to prolonged suffering, avoidable deterioration of health, and deep psychological distress among populations already at risk.

6.1 The displaced population: People at risk

“ I came with my wife and five children. Our journey was the same as many others. We walked long distances from deep in Angola towards the Namibian border. Sometimes we were lucky to get a lift, but most of the time we walked. Even when there was no transport, we continued moving because we had no other choice. Hunger pushed us forward.”¹¹⁵

- Mureko (not their real name), Onyungurura April 2026

During field visits, Amnesty International found that those most affected by the movement from southern Angola into Namibia are people already living at the margins of survival: women travelling with infants, children arriving without parents, older people who can no longer endure repeated cycles of drought, and families who have crossed the border with no documents, no food and nowhere to go.

These people on the move primarily consisted of members of the OvaHakaona and muMwila communities, along with several smaller sub-groups. They came from villages close to the Namibian border, including Ovihang, Ombwa, Etaka, Kahama and Ondjokua.

¹¹⁵ Focus group, Onyungurura April 2026

Despite these varied points of origin, focus group participants described remarkably similar experiences of environmental hardship and displacement driven by an urgent need to survive. Many people told Amnesty International that they had left their homes not out of choice, but because:

“ [T]here was nothing left to stay for, no harvest, no water, no animals, and no support.”¹¹⁶

As one man explained bluntly:

“ We have no means to live at home, we have nothing there – everything is dead and we have not received any rains for many years.”¹¹⁷

Journeys to Namibia were rarely linear, instead, they were defined by long distances on foot, uncertainty, and prolonged exposure to hunger and exhaustion. One focus group participant described travelling in stages across the border:

“ I walked a long distance before I could find a lift. I got a lift until the border and then another lift from the crossing point to Opuwo. The journey involved a lot of walking, waiting, and struggling to find transport.”¹¹⁸

Others described moving in groups, relying on collective endurance rather than resources:

“ We walked from our village to Okaluheke and then hiked to Opuwo. We came with siblings, aunties, uncles, and children. Some came in different ways but the journey is always the same – long walking distances and trying to find lifts. If we were lucky, we got a ride; if not, we kept walking.”¹¹⁹

For many, the journey itself was marked by acute suffering, particularly where illness or caregiving responsibilities were involved:

“ I carried my ill child during the journey. We walked long distances and only got lifts when we were lucky. The journey was painful because I had to carry a sick child while also dealing with hunger.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025

¹¹⁷ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025.

¹¹⁸ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025

¹¹⁹ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025

¹²⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025

These testimonies reflect a pattern of movement defined not only by distance, but by persistence in the face of extreme hardship.

Many described walking several days before they crossed the border, before travelling the remaining distance to Opuwo, the capital of Kunene Region, about 100-180km from the border:

“ My journey here was a hiking journey. We walked long distances from our village towards the border posts. The fact that we didn’t have transport did not stop us. We kept moving, looking for any vehicle that could give us a lift. Sometimes we would go days without proper food. ”¹²¹

Focus group participants described walking for days in extreme heat, carrying small children or older relatives, and arriving in Namibia exhausted, dehydrated, and unsure of where they could seek help. Without documentation, many reported feeling invisible to the authorities and fearful of approaching clinics, schools, or government offices. Amnesty International was informed that many newly arrived Angolans were living in conditions that fall far below any acceptable standard of dignity.

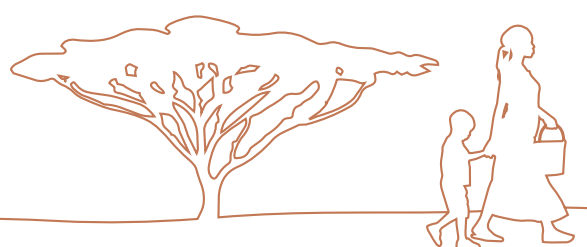
Women – particularly single mothers and those who were pregnant or lactating – told Amnesty International that they faced constant anxiety about feeding their children, finding safe shelter, and avoiding exploitation. Focus group participants also reported that children were sleeping in open spaces, selling wood items on the streets, or accompanying adults in search of food or work.

Older people were among the most distressed. Several shared that they had never imagined crossing a border in their lifetime, but worsening droughts, failed crops and the loss of livestock had left them with no means to survive in Angola.¹²² Many spoke of being separated from family members on the journey and of the humiliation of depending on strangers for basic needs. As one focus group participant recounted, even upon arrival, stability remained uncertain:

“ I walked from my village to the Namibia-Angola border and then I hiked to Opuwo. When I arrived, I had nowhere to stay. I asked for permission to stay in a shack temporarily... when the owner comes back I have to move out right away. Besides this, I have no place to stay. ”¹²³

These groups – women, children, older people and those living in extreme poverty – face the sharpest consequences of displacement, as described in the sections below.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025
¹²² Focus group, Opuwo, 2025
¹²³ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025
¹²⁴ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025



6.2 Lack of identity documents and registration

Access to legal identity documents, effective asylum procedures and proper registration is essential for the protection of all displaced people, yet many Angolan nationals arriving in Namibia face significant barriers in securing even the most basic forms of documentation. Without proper documents, such as fully stamped passports allowing for a longer stay in Namibia, individuals cannot enrol children in school nor access healthcare.

Despite the Namibia-Angola border-resident agreement (see Chapter 3.3 above), none of the Angolans interviewed by Amnesty International during the research period had any documentation akin to border resident cards. This was because the majority crossed into Namibia through informal, unmanned border entries. This lack of documentation after crossing informal borders leaves people in a state of legal invisibility, heightening the risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, deportation and other human rights abuses.

6.3 Lack of protection from forcible return

For many focus group participants, return to southern Angola was described as neither safe nor viable. Women spoke of areas of origin where there was no access to water, food, healthcare, or humanitarian assistance, and where previous attempts to remain or return had failed due to repeated drought and loss of livelihoods. Several parents and guardians stated that returning would expose their children to hunger, illness, and lack of access to essential services.¹²⁵

Yet, as an immigration official in Opuwo described to Amnesty International, Namibian authorities reject the idea that Angolan nationals who fled drought and hunger may be eligible for asylum.¹²⁶ He claimed the option to seek asylum was not available for the Angolans who were detained before deportation, citing lack of awareness of the core relation between drought and the option to seek asylum.¹²⁷ This appears to be a widespread

government practice, as Namibia's Commissioner for Refugees was reported saying in 2021 that "Angolans are immigrants and not refugees."¹²⁸ In May 2026, Namibia's Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security ruled out refugee status for Angolan nationals, including children living on the streets.¹²⁹ The Minister stated that they did not qualify for recognition or registration as refugees because available information suggested they had left Angola primarily in search of better socio-economic opportunities rather than fleeing persecution.¹³⁰

Although the right to seek asylum and the right to be protected from refoulement are guaranteed under international and regional law, including the UN Refugee Convention,¹³¹ its Protocol,¹³² and the OAU Convention,¹³³ these protections are not effectively accessible to most Angolan people arriving from drought-affected regions.

¹²⁵ Focus group, Opuwo, 2025.

¹²⁶ Interview in person with immigration official, Opuwo, 2025.

¹²⁷ Interview in person with immigration official, Opuwo, 2025.

¹²⁸ New Era, "Hungry, destitute and in limbo... Okakarara's Ovazemba told to go home", 22 October 2021, <https://neweralive.na/hungry-destitute-and-in-limbo-okakararas-ovazemba-told-to-go-home/>

¹²⁹ New Era, "No refugee status for Angolan 'street kids'", 19 May 2026, <https://neweralive.na/no-refugee-status-for-angolan-street-kids/>

¹³⁰ New Era, "No refugee status for Angolan 'street kids'" (previously cited).

¹³¹ UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN Refugee Convention), adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954.

¹³² Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967.

¹³³ Organization of African Unity (OAU), Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, adopted 10 September 1969, entered into force 20 June 1974.

Despite the fact Angolan nationals in Namibia have been legally entitled to seek asylum since 1999 under Namibia's Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act,¹³⁴ including after entering Namibia irregularly, the government does not consider Angolans as persons who may need protection from human rights harm linked to the drought and hunger they faced in Angola.¹³⁵ Namibia's asylum system, while formally available, is not designed to address large-scale drought-induced movement, and many people

displaced from Angola report limited information, lack of legal assistance and practical barriers to initiating asylum claims.

The absence of a functioning mechanism for Angolans displaced by worsening droughts and affected by climate-related events and natural disasters to claim protection means that many remain unregistered and undocumented for prolonged periods, leaving them at constant risk of detention and deportation.

6.4 Risk of deportation and refoulement

Fear of deportation shapes daily life for many Angolans displaced by drought in Namibia. Interviewees consistently described avoiding contact with authorities, including police, health facilities, and local officials, out of concern that seeking assistance could lead to arrest and removal. This fear was particularly acute among undocumented women with children, older persons, and those living in informal settlements areas near towns such as Opuwo, Outapi, and Etunda.

During its field visit in 2025, Amnesty International witnessed a large-scale deportation of Angolan nationals following enforcement operations in northern Namibia, effectively amounting to a prohibited collective expulsion (see below).¹³⁶ The operation exposed the absence of safeguards to identify people who may face serious harm if returned and the vulnerability of undocumented Angolans to removal without prior screening, individualized assessment, or consideration of protection needs. Individuals were not granted the opportunity to explain why return was unsafe, nor

were they informed of any procedures to seek protection or regularization. While pregnant women and children were released, several women reported being separated from family members during the process, while others expressed fear and confusion about where they were being taken and what would happen to their children.¹³⁷

These experiences are at odds with Namibia's Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993, which requires that a "prohibited immigrant" who is arrested and detained should receive written reasons for detention.¹³⁸ Where the state is considering removal from Namibia, then the matter should proceed through an immigration tribunal with notice and the possibility of legal representation.

¹³⁴ Republic of Namibia, Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act 2 of 1999, 1 June 1999, <https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/1999/2>

¹³⁵ New Era, "Over 1,000 Angolan migrants deported ... but influx remains", 16 February 2026, <https://neweralive.na/over-1-000-angolan-migrants-deported-but-influx-remains/>

¹³⁶ Incident happened on the 4th June 2025.

¹³⁷ Interview in person with Ndahafa (not their real name) Opuwo, June 2025

¹³⁸ Republic of Namibia, Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993 (previously cited). The Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993 notes that the initial detention period is up to 14 days, with possible further 14-day extensions by the Minister. The person must be given written notice of the grounds of detention and the place of detention, and constitutional detention safeguards still apply. If an immigration officer decides that the person is a prohibited immigrant, the person must be notified in writing and told that an application will be made to an immigration tribunal for authorization of removal if they do not leave Namibia within the stated period; that period must not be less than 48 hours. The Act creates immigration tribunals to authorize removals. Where a prohibited immigrant is to be removed from Namibia, an application must be made to the tribunal, and the application must set out the reasons for removal. The person must receive written notice of the hearing at least three days before it takes place and may be represented by counsel or an attorney. The notice may also specify the route and place through which the person must leave.

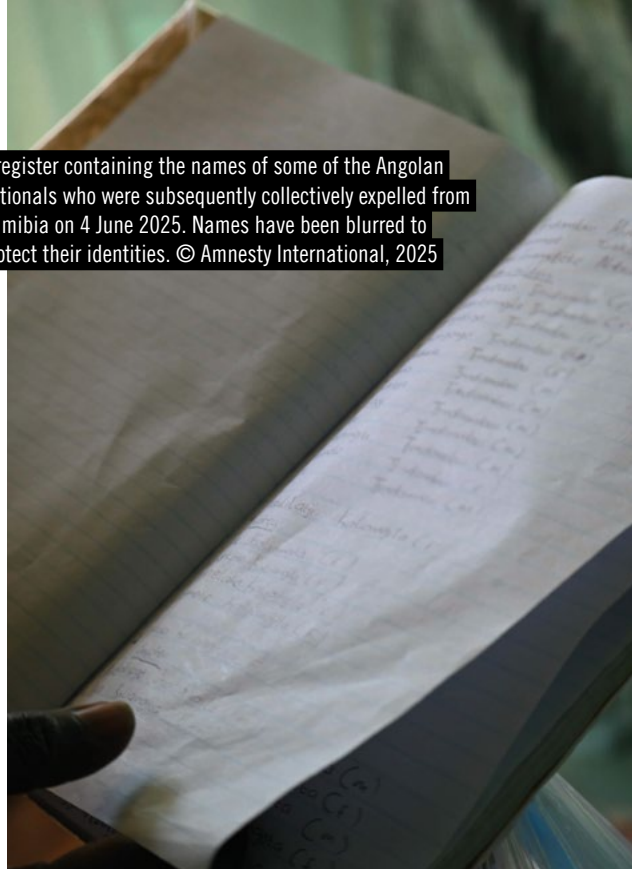
6.5 Collective expulsions

On 04 June 2025, Amnesty International witnessed the rounding up of about 40 Angolan nationals, including women and children, who had gathered at the community centre in Opuwo. Witnesses described the operation as intimidating and heavily policed, creating fear among both the Angolan migrants and those assisting them.¹³⁹ Following the arrests, Amnesty International delegates proceeded to the police station and thereafter to immigration office, to clarify whether the individuals were under arrest, whether they would be detained, and whether removal proceedings would follow the procedure required by law.

Amnesty International delegates were told by an immigration official that the operation formed part of a wider enforcement response to the growing number of Angolans in Namibia. He indicated that the individuals detained would be issued notices and transported to the Ruacana border (over 100km away) and then handed over to the Angolan authorities. Amnesty International confirmed that the detained Angolans were driven to the border that day and handed over to the Angola authorities.¹⁴⁰ The immigration official indicated they would not offer alternative options to those detained, including the option of applying for asylum.¹⁴¹

Under international law and standards, a state-organized transfer to Angola is a removal in substance and should trigger full safeguards, including individualized screening, information on asylum and protection options, access to interpretation and legal advice, assessment of children, pregnant women and other vulnerable persons, and right to appeal any repatriation decision with suspensive effect.

A register containing the names of some of the Angolan nationals who were subsequently collectively expelled from Namibia on 4 June 2025. Names have been blurred to protect their identities. © Amnesty International, 2025



6.6 Barriers to healthcare

“ Sometimes we get assistance when we find kind people at the hospital and sometimes, they turn us away especially when we don’t have money. Some hospital staff are really good but others are quite rude. ”¹⁴²

- *Albertina* (not their real name), Opuwo, April 2026

¹³⁹ Interview by phone with witness, June 2025.

¹⁴⁰ Interview by phone with the community centre’s owner, June 2025.

¹⁴¹ Interview in person with Immigration official, Opuwo, June 2025.

¹⁴² Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

International human rights law requires states to ensure that immigration status does not prevent access to essential healthcare.¹⁴³ Under Namibian law, public healthcare is available to citizens, permanent residents and, to a more limited extent, non-nationals. While emergency care, maternal health services and other essential health services should generally be available irrespective of immigration status, non-citizens are typically charged higher user fees than Namibian citizens, and undocumented migrants often face practical barriers in accessing care.

Access to healthcare remains a significant challenge for many Angolans displaced in northern Namibia. Amnesty International found barriers stemmed from a combination of factors, including irregular immigration status, the higher fees charged to non-nationals, lack of documentation, and fear of immigration enforcement. Experiences were not uniform across all research locations. While some focus group participants, particularly pregnant women, reported being able to access maternity services, others, especially in Opuwo and surrounding settlements, described being refused treatment, charged fees they could not afford, or avoiding health facilities altogether because they feared being reported to immigration authorities.

Focus group participants repeatedly reported being asked to pay higher fees than Namibian nationals in order to access treatment, amounts that were entirely out of reach given their economic circumstances. Several women explained that even when children or older family members were seriously ill, they delayed or avoided seeking medical care because they could not afford the costs. Others said they only sought healthcare as a last resort, often after their condition had significantly deteriorated. One woman caring for an elderly family member told Amnesty International:

“ We only go when the pain is too much. Otherwise, we just lie down and wait.”¹⁴⁴

Pregnant and lactating women reported mixed experiences. While some were able to access maternity services, they described receiving little or no follow-up care or nutritional support after giving birth. Several women noted that they were discharged without milk, porridge, or supplements for newborns, despite being unable to afford food themselves (see further, Chapter 7.4 on maternal health).

Families with children faced additional barriers because they were often asked to produce identification documents that they did not possess in order to access follow-up healthcare or other services for their children, resulting in delays and, in some cases, denial of treatment.¹⁴⁵

Fear of detection also played a significant role: Many of those interviewed described avoiding clinics altogether because they believed health facilities were linked to immigration enforcement. This perception, whether accurate or not, created a deterrent effect, particularly for undocumented women and older persons.

As a consequence, many displaced people described delaying treatment until illnesses had become severe. They reported untreated infections, chronic pain, pregnancy-related complications and childhood illnesses, which they attributed to the financial, administrative and practical barriers they faced in accessing healthcare.

These challenges also occurred against the backdrop of wider public health pressures, including the 2025 cholera outbreak in Namibia,¹⁴⁶ underscoring the importance of equitable access to healthcare, safe water and sanitation for all communities, including people displaced across borders.¹⁴⁷

Namibia's Health, Climate and Environment Strategy (June 2024) recognizes population movement as a health risk associated with climate change. However,

¹⁴³ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2)*, 2 July 2009, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/20, para. 30; CESCR, *General Comment No. 19: The right to social security (art. 9)*, 4 February 2008, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/19, para. 37.

¹⁴⁴ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

¹⁴⁵ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

¹⁴⁶ BEACON, “Cholera: Namibia”, 14 January 2026, Disease Events Reports, available at <https://beaconbio.org/en/event/?eventid=6a16daed-c49c-4510-8efb-fefba5114132> (accessed 2 June 2026).

¹⁴⁷ World Health Organization (WHO), “Refugee and migrant health”, 25 March 2026, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>

it does not establish a specific legal or policy framework guaranteeing access to healthcare for Angolan nationals displaced across the border in the context of climate-related disasters.¹⁴⁸

These findings raise concerns regarding the right to health, protected by Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Namibia is a State Party. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has made clear that states must refrain

from denying or limiting equal access to preventive, curative and palliative health services for all persons, including undocumented migrants, and must ensure that access to essential healthcare is not conditioned on nationality or immigration status.¹⁴⁹ While states may distinguish between citizens and non-citizens in certain aspects of healthcare financing, such distinctions must pursue a legitimate aim, be proportionate, and must never deny access to essential healthcare or expose individuals to foreseeable harm.¹⁵⁰

6.7 Inadequate housing, food, water and sanitation

During its field research, Amnesty International found that many of the Angolan nationals interviewed who had been displaced by recurrent droughts were living in conditions that fall short of the rights to adequate housing, water and sanitation. Many were living in precarious conditions in peri-urban settlements and surrounding communities in northern Namibia, particularly around Opuwo and Outapi.

Families slept in makeshift structures constructed from plastic, cardboard, and branches, in overcrowded shacks, or in open areas without protection from heat, cold, or rain. In some cases, individuals and families had no shelter at all:

“ I live out in the open, I have no shelter. As you can see, there are my blankets hanging and when it’s time to sleep, I lay them out and sleep in the open. When it rains, it just falls on us, there is nothing I can do about it. I sleep until it stops. My children sleep there with me and they are also exposed to the rain. There is nothing that I can do at all.”¹⁵¹

Others described how they constructed fragile makeshift homes from whatever materials were available:

“ I put together a makeshift home made from boxes and plastic, with wooden sticks around...”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Republic of Namibia, *Tripartite One Health National Strategy 2024–2028*, June 2025, available at <https://onehealthobservatory.org/resources/tripartite-one-health-national-strategy-2024-2028> (accessed 2 June 2026).

¹⁴⁹ CESCR has clarified that ICESCR rights apply to everyone within a state’s territory or jurisdiction, including refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, and that nationality should not constitute a barrier to affordable healthcare. See UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *Duties of States towards refugees and migrants under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 13 March 2017, UN Doc. E/C.12/2017/1, paras 3 and 6, available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1484074/files/E_C-12_2017_1-EN.pdf

¹⁵⁰ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, April 2026.

¹⁵¹ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, April 2026.

¹⁵² Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

A focus group participant explained that when employed on farms they were given small amounts of land to cultivate:

“ Oumpeteka: that’s what our shelters are called. It’s a house made of tree branches, in a round shape. They are covered with plastic and cardboard boxes. We have no area to cultivate our food. Sometimes when some of us are employed at farms we may be given a small portion of land to work on for ourselves as a form of pay.”¹⁵³

In many cases, overcrowding compounded these risks. Focus group participants described living in extremely congested conditions:

“ We live in a shack, 20 of us, many youth from Angola all in one house. There is no water and we have no food sometimes. We don’t cook, we buy fast food from the open markets, so there are no pots where we stay.”¹⁵⁴

Another expanded on challenges in accessing food:

“ Sometimes when we are lucky we can have a meal but on bad days we don’t eat and I have to give everything to the children so they don’t starve. We have to prioritize the children when there is no food. I sleep hungry on many days.”¹⁵⁵

These fragile and overcrowded living conditions increased exposure to communicable diseases, extreme weather, gender-based violence and other protection risks. Displaced people also described insecurity at night, lack of privacy, and difficulties maintaining hygiene, particularly where access to water and sanitation was limited. Women and girls explained that the absence of private sanitation facilities increased feelings of insecurity and compromised their dignity, while overcrowding heightened health risks for children and older persons.¹⁵⁶



Typical shelter or “Oumpeteka” for family in Onyungurura,
© Amnesty International, April 2026

¹⁵³ Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

¹⁵⁴ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

¹⁵⁵ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

¹⁵⁶ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

Access to water remained one of the most urgent challenges. Many displaced people reported having to leave their settlements to collect water from communal boreholes or other unprotected water sources, some of which were shared with livestock, raising concerns about water quality and waterborne disease. Even where water was available, it was frequently unaffordable or insufficient, requiring families to prioritize between basic needs.

“ We have no access to water where we live, we buy 25 litres after selling our firewood. We don’t overthink it; it’s all we have, considering where we are coming from, this is much better for us.”¹⁵⁷

Others described how the lack of water directly affected hygiene and dignity:

“ We are living under very harsh conditions, we have no water, no means for hygiene so we barely bathe, we have no blankets or clothes. This is really impacting us negatively.”¹⁵⁸

A participant explained that although a communal borehole was available, it did not provide sufficient water for daily needs and was located away from where the family lived:

“ We have no water, no sanitation, or blankets. But water is accessible at the community borehole. It’s a positive thing but we need water at home too.”¹⁵⁹

In several locations, Amnesty International observed queues forming before dawn at communal boreholes and other informal collection points, including shallow hand-dug wells and unprotected water sources used by nearby communities. Focus group participants explained that limited water availability frequently led to disputes over access.¹⁶⁰ Participants told Amnesty International that they believed they could not freely access some communal water points because they lacked documentation or feared being questioned by local authorities.¹⁶¹ Others said they relied on neighbours or host communities to collect water on their behalf.¹⁶²

Sanitation conditions were similarly inadequate. In informal settlements visited by Amnesty International, including those in Opuwo, Onyungurura and Otjimuhaka, many of those interviewed reported having no access to toilets or bathing facilities, forcing families to use bushes or open areas. Women told Amnesty International that the lack of private, safe sanitation facilities increased their vulnerability to harassment and sexual violence, particularly at night because they were forced to use open areas after dark and lacked privacy. Focus group participants expressed concern that inadequate sanitation increased children’s exposure to diarrhoeal disease and other preventable illnesses associated with poor hygiene and unsafe water.

¹⁵⁷ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2026.

¹⁵⁸ Focus group, Onyungurura, May 2026.

¹⁵⁹ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

¹⁶¹ Amnesty International was unable to verify whether formal restrictions applied at any/all locations.

¹⁶² Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

“ We have no pots to cook, no water, our houses are made from tree branches, boxes and plastic.”¹⁶³

These findings must also be understood within the broader context of northern Namibia, where many rural communities experience inadequate housing, water and sanitation infrastructure. While Namibia has recognized the need to invest in expanding rural water supply, sanitation and drought resilience programmes, the government has acknowledged significant service delivery gaps, particularly in remote settlements such as Kunene and Omusati.¹⁶⁴ Although these challenges affect both host communities and displaced people, Amnesty International found that Angolans displaced by drought experienced additional barriers because they generally lacked documentation, were ineligible for many forms of government assistance available to citizens and permanent residents, and often lived in informal settlements with limited security of tenure and services.

International human rights law recognizes the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing, food, water and sanitation.¹⁶⁵ Article 11 of the ICESCR recognizes the right to adequate housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, while the CESCR has clarified that adequate housing extends beyond the mere provision of shelter and must guarantee security, habitability, access to services, affordability and protection from the elements.¹⁶⁶ The rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are likewise indispensable for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other human rights such as the right to health (Article 12),¹⁶⁷ and must be guaranteed without discrimination.¹⁶⁸ Where displaced persons are unable to access clean water, sanitation facilities, hygiene services or adequate shelter, their rights under Articles 11 and 12 of the ICESCR are compromised. Such conditions increase vulnerability to disease, undermine physical and mental well-being, and impede the enjoyment of a range of interconnected human rights.

¹⁶³ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

¹⁶⁴ UNICEF Namibia, “Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)”, <https://www.unicef.org/namibia/water-sanitation-hygiene-wash>

¹⁶⁵ ICESCR, Article 11.

¹⁶⁶ CESCR, General Comment 4 on the right to adequate housing, 13 December 1991 (UN Doc. E/1992/23), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/ec1219995-general-comment-no-12-right-adequate-food>

¹⁶⁷ CESCR, General Comment 14 on the highest attainable standard of health, 11 August 2000 (UN Doc. E/C.12/2000/4), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/ec1220004-general-comment-no-14-highest-attainable>

¹⁶⁸ CESCR, General Comment 15 on the right to water, 2003 (previously cited).



GENDERED IMPACTS: THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

The UN estimates that, globally, women and girls comprise up to 80% of people displaced by climate change.¹⁶⁹ Displacement in the context of prolonged drought and environmental stress disproportionately affects women and girls, because it amplifies pre-existing gender inequalities. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work, together with women's more limited access to economic resources and livelihoods, means that they often have fewer options for coping with environmental shocks and displacement. Once displaced, women faced heightened risks to their rights to health, food, water, education, a healthy environment and protection, particularly where displacement occurs in the absence of formal reception, documentation, or social support systems. They experience structural marginalization arising from irregular immigration status, limited access to essential services and social protection, restricted livelihood opportunities and unequal care responsibilities. These intersecting factors leave many women navigating prolonged displacement with few pathways towards security, stability or durable solutions.¹⁷⁰

Amnesty International's findings highlight the gendered nature of the adverse impacts of climate change and/or disasters: the research in northern Namibia confirmed that displaced Angolan women bear the heaviest burden of intensifying droughts. In many of the affected agro-pastoralist communities researched, women were already primarily responsible for securing water, fetching firewood, preparing food, caring for children and older family members, and managing the

household, while men were more commonly responsible for herding livestock and other income-generating activities. As prolonged drought destroyed crops, killed livestock and depleted water sources, women were required to carry out these responsibilities under increasingly difficult conditions, often travelling further to collect water and struggling to feed their families with diminishing resources. Many of the women encountered were lactating mothers or caring for multiple young children, with insufficient access to maternal healthcare. Older women faced additional barriers, including health complications, mobility challenges, and heightened exposure to exploitation.¹⁷¹

Drought-induced displacement also increased women's exposure to violence, exploitation and deprivation. Women interviewed by Amnesty International described feeling unsafe while collecting firewood or water, sleeping in overcrowded informal settlements and undertaking informal work to secure food for their children. Some described relying on strangers for transport or temporary shelter because they had no alternative means of reaching safety. Others spoke of verbal harassment and persistent insecurity when using isolated water points or sanitation facilities after dark. Older women, many of whom said they had never previously crossed into Namibia, explained that worsening drought and food insecurity had left them with no alternative but to leave their homes, often travelling without documentation or family support.

169 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Climate change exacerbates violence against women and girls", 12 July 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2022/07/climate-change-exacerbates-violence-against-women-and-girls>; UNDP, "Overview of linkages between gender and climate change", <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20Linkages%20Gender%20and%20CC%20Policy%20Brief%201-WEB.pdf>

170 General sentiments across 3 research trips in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

171 General sentiments across 3 research trips in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

International legal standards on women and climate-related displacement

International human rights law requires states to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of women affected by climate change, environmental degradation and displacement. These obligations apply irrespective of nationality or immigration status and require states to ensure that laws, policies and responses to climate-related and/or disaster-related displacement do not directly or indirectly discriminate against women.

The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW) requires states to eliminate discrimination against women in all spheres of life and to guarantee equality in access to healthcare, education, employment, social protection, housing, land and legal identity (Articles 2, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15).¹⁷²

In **General Recommendation 32** on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness, the CEDAW Committee clarifies that states must ensure that displaced, refugee, asylum-seeking, stateless and undocumented women are able to enjoy their rights without discrimination.¹⁷³ This includes ensuring:

- Equal access to asylum procedures, documentation and legal remedies;
- Access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, without discrimination;
- Protection from gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation during displacement.

In **General Recommendation 37** on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, the CEDAW Committee further recognizes that climate change exacerbates existing structural inequalities affecting women and requires states to:¹⁷⁴

- Integrate gender-responsive approaches into climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian responses;
- Address women's disproportionate unpaid care and subsistence responsibilities during climate-related crises;
- Ensure women's meaningful participation in climate governance and decision-making;
- Protect women's access to land, food, water, housing, livelihoods and social protection before, during and after climate-related disasters and displacement.

At the regional level, the **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)** requires states to:¹⁷⁵

- Protect women from the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change;
- Safeguard women's rights to health, food security, sustainable development, dignity and economic resources;
- Prevent violence, exploitation and other human rights abuses affecting women during crises and displacement.

These standards require that immigration, humanitarian and social protection measures are implemented in a manner that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of women without discrimination.

¹⁷² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

¹⁷³ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, 14 November 2014 (UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/32), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/807254?ln=en&v=pdf>

¹⁷⁴ CEDAW, General Recommendation 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate, 13 March 2018 (UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/37), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no37-2018-gender-related>

¹⁷⁵ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted on 11 July 2003, entry into force 25 November 2005, <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

7.1 Characteristics of displaced Angolan women in Namibia

“ I packed everything including pots and blankets. I am a single mother and I stayed alone in my little homestead before leaving. I left one of my children behind at first and later the child joined me in Namibia. We walked long distances and caught hikes along the way. Sometimes we had no transport but we still continued. When we managed to sell some firewood, we used that money to pay for a small fee to travel further. The journey was very difficult, with no food and no proper rest.”¹⁷⁶

- *Tjiposa* (not her real name), Opuwo, April 2026



A diverse group of Angolan women participating in a focus group discussion with Amnesty International about their experiences of displacement and living conditions in northern Namibia, © Amnesty International, 2025

Across Amnesty International's research, the characteristics of displaced Angolan women in northern Namibia reflected a predominantly young to middle-aged population, with a notable presence of older women and adolescent girls. Women interviewed ranged from as young as 18 to over 60 years old, with the majority being between 20 and 45.¹⁷⁷ Some women had arrived in Namibia more recently following the prolonged droughts affecting southern Angola since 2023, while others described first crossing into Namibia during earlier periods of severe drought, between approximately 2016 and 2021, and remaining in Namibia because environmental conditions and livelihood opportunities in their communities of origin had not recovered.¹⁷⁸ A smaller number reported living in Namibia for more than 15 years.

Household composition data revealed a striking pattern: a significant proportion of women were either single mothers or effectively acting as such. While some women reported being married or in long-term partnerships, many described living apart from their husbands or partners. In some cases, families became separated as displacement occurred at different times in response to worsening drought and economic hardship. In others, families travelled to Namibia together but later separated as men moved to commercial farms or urban areas in

¹⁷⁶ Interview in person with Tjiposa (not her real name), Opuwo, April 2026.

¹⁷⁷ Many do not know their ages, Amnesty International had to rely on approximations.

¹⁷⁸ World Bank, "In Southern Angola, a Race to Manage Scarce Water While Promoting Economic Growth", 17 August 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2023/08/01/in-southern-angola-a-race-to-manage-scarce-water-while-promoting-economic-growth>

search of seasonal work, leaving women with primary responsibility for caring for children and older relatives. As a result, women frequently bore primary responsibility for large households, often caring for between one and five children, and in some cases more. Amnesty International also observed multi-generational households, with women supporting elderly parents alongside children, further increasing their caregiving burden.

The data also highlighted diverse living arrangements shaped by displacement. While some women resided in family units, others lived in overcrowded shared group settings with unrelated women and children, particularly in informal settlements. Representatives of local NGOs told Amnesty International that young women and adolescent girls, including some unaccompanied minors, were among those that faced the greatest protection risks, often living without direct parental care and relying on community networks for survival.¹⁷⁹

Despite differences in household structures, several common characteristics emerged: most women originated from drought-affected regions of southern Angola, particularly Cunene Province, and reported displacement driven by hunger, lack of livelihoods, and environmental stress. As one woman explained:

**“ There was nothing: no green pasture,
no food, just salt and starvation.”¹⁸⁰**

Displaced people consistently described the collapse of their livelihoods as a direct consequence of prolonged drought and food insecurity.

“ The drought killed everything – crops, animals.”¹⁸¹

Although focus group participants most commonly explained that they left because of “hunger”, Amnesty International found that this term was used to describe a broader condition of deprivation arising from prolonged drought, including the loss of livelihoods, income, livestock, water and access to food, rather than simply the absence of food itself.

Focus group participants also expressed a sense of abandonment, with several stating that their (Angolan) government “doesn’t know them”. Whereas they had previously relied on small-scale agriculture and livestock, these coping mechanisms had largely collapsed because government support in remote southern provinces was either absent or insufficient to prevent displacement.

Interviewees described walking for up to 10 days without rest or as long as 20 days when forced to stop along the way, often travelling with children and limited supplies. The journey itself was marked by extreme hardship and difficult choices.

**“ We left the grandmothers behind – tired,
they just stayed by the bushes to die.”¹⁸²**

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Red Cross, June 2024

¹⁸⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

¹⁸¹ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, April 2026.

¹⁸² Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

Women described sleeping along roadsides or in the bush, making impossible choices between exposure to the elements and the risk of violence or harassment from other people.

Many have since spent several years in Namibia navigating precarious living conditions, continuing to face persistent barriers to documentation, employment, healthcare, and education for themselves and their children. The pressures of survival are reflected in daily responsibilities, where women must balance caregiving with income generation under extremely constrained conditions. As one participant explained:

“ I have serious health problems. I walked long distances before I got a lift to come to Namibia... I am a widow and a single mom. I need to watch and take care of my kids and still collect firewood. Two of my kids are working as house help somewhere in the Himba villages.”¹⁸³

For many, displacement became prolonged rather than temporary, with few opportunities to regularize their status or rebuild sustainable livelihoods despite living in Namibia for many years.¹⁸⁴

7.2 Women's roles, care responsibilities and disrupted community/family structures

Women occupy a central role in sustaining households throughout displacement: they are caregivers, income earners and community anchors, often carrying responsibility not only for children but also for older relatives during displacement and after arrival in Namibia. Their responsibilities extend beyond maintaining family and household stability; they are central to the preservation of cultural practices and the provision of essential care and support in times of adversity. Women's roles become even more pivotal during crises, where they often shoulder the burden of ensuring their families' survival amidst deteriorating conditions.¹⁸⁵ In southern Angola, prolonged droughts, environmental degradation and deepening poverty have intensified these responsibilities. Both before and after displacement, women are further impacted by the limited availability of healthcare, education, water infrastructure and other basic services.

Many of the women interviewed by Amnesty International described an erosion of community structures that would traditionally provide support and leadership. Many explained that there was a leadership vacuum, noting that:

“ There were elders and leaders, but they are gone now – no one to speak for us.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

¹⁸⁴ Length of stay in Namibia did not necessarily translate into improved living conditions: Focus group, Opuwo, 2026.

¹⁸⁵ CEDAW's General Recommendation 37 recognizes that climate change and disasters exacerbate women's disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities. States are required to adopt gender-responsive measures that reduce rather than reinforce these burdens. CEDAW, General Recommendation 37 (previously cited).

¹⁸⁶ Focus group, Onyungurura, May 2025.

In the absence of these collective support structures, many women reported feeling increasingly isolated:

“ People can’t help each other... we just try to survive.”¹⁸⁷

Many of the women Amnesty International interviewed also described a significant disruption of traditional family structures following displacement. While many had previously lived in stable, extended family units with clearly defined roles and support systems, these arrangements had largely broken down. Women reported being separated from their husbands or partners during forced migration or shortly after arriving in Namibia, with some men leaving to seek work and others no longer present in the household. One woman told Amnesty International:

“ As a single mother, I struggle to take care of my children; those with partners are better off.”¹⁸⁸

Despite these challenges, women highlighted the emergence of new forms of mutual support and shared responsibility within displaced communities. In the absence of formal systems and traditional household structures, women actively reorganized social roles and care practices around survival.

“ We help each other collect firewood to go and sell. We cook together and share daily chores and taking care of the kids.”¹⁸⁹

“ We share our roles as we are all women living here... we struggle with hunger and to find work. We have no land to cultivate our food, so we help each other.”¹⁹⁰

While these systems remain fragile and shaped by scarcity, they demonstrate how women collectively sustain households and preserve forms of care, cooperation, and cultural continuity in the face of disruption, reconfiguring social and cultural norms under conditions of displacement.

Some women described receiving limited but meaningful support from host communities, neighbours and local NGOs, which contributed to these emerging systems of resilience:

“ I am okay within this community... they treat me well... we just need shelter, food, clothing, and blankets.”¹⁹¹

These testimonies illustrate that even where formal structures have broken down, women are not passive victims of crisis but active agents in reconstructing systems of care, solidarity, and survival.

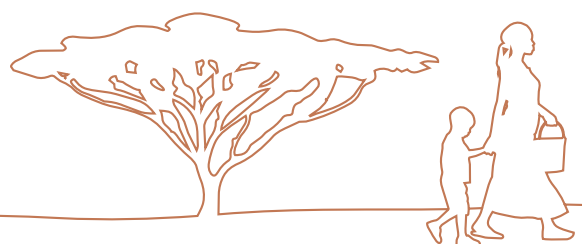
187 Focus group, Onyungurura, May 2025.

188 Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

189 Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

190 Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

191 Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.





Older Angolan women participating in a focus group discussion with Amnesty International about their experiences of displacement and living conditions in northern Namibia, © Amnesty International, 2025

7.3 Older women on the move

“ As an older woman, I face mobility challenges and limited access to healthcare. Limited support systems make me highly vulnerable, and I can only rely on assistance from neighbours.”¹⁹²

- *Nangula* (not her real name), Opuwo, April 2026

One of the most striking findings of Amnesty International's research was the number of older women among those displaced from southern Angola. Community members and humanitarian actors consistently told Amnesty International that, historically, older people in these agro-pastoralist communities rarely undertook cross-border movement themselves, with younger family members more commonly moving seasonally in search of work or pasture. Older women are among the groups most vulnerable to marginalization because age, declining health, limited livelihood opportunities, dependency on family support and irregular immigration status intersect to restrict their access to income, healthcare and social protection. Many older women explained that they left only after repeated droughts had exhausted household coping mechanisms, including the sale of livestock, reliance on relatives and reductions in food consumption.

Focus group participants described leaving older relatives behind during the journey because they were physically unable to continue walking. Others spoke of older women who had crossed into Namibia but were now living without adequate shelter, income, or sufficient access to healthcare.

“ The grandmothers are tired. Some stayed behind in the bush. Some came, but they cannot work. They just sit and wait.”¹⁹³

Even after arrival, older women continue to face acute hardship. The experience of Kandjimi (not her real name), aged 65, reflects the protracted nature of this vulnerability.¹⁹⁴ She has lived in Namibia for several years but remains without regular immigration documentation or legal residence status. As a single mother of five, she described ongoing challenges in accessing affordable healthcare and social assistance. Her household lives in poor conditions, with inadequate housing and sanitation, while her school-aged children continued to face barriers to education and older children struggled to access stable employment.

¹⁹² Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

¹⁹³ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

¹⁹⁴ Focus group, Opuwo, 2026.

Despite age and declining health, many older women had little option but to engage in physically demanding survival activities, including collecting and selling firewood. However, those no longer physically able to do so often depended entirely on younger female relatives for survival, yet those relatives were themselves struggling to secure food, water, and income. Because they were generally not eligible for Namibian social protection programmes available to citizens and permanent residents, and had limited opportunities to earn an income, displaced Angolan older women were exposed to hunger, illness, and neglect.

Several focus group participants explained that older women were often reluctant to seek assistance

because they feared immigration enforcement, could not afford transport or healthcare costs, or worried about placing additional burdens on already struggling relatives. Others described older women becoming increasingly isolated because of reduced mobility and dependence on neighbours for daily support.¹⁹⁵

International human rights law recognizes that older women may experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on age, gender and other factors. States are therefore required to take particular measures to ensure that older women are able to access healthcare, social protection and an adequate standard of living, without discrimination.¹⁹⁶

7.4 Limited access to maternal and reproductive health

Under Namibian law, essential and emergency maternal healthcare should be available to everyone, including non-nationals, although undocumented women may be charged higher fees than citizens and permanent residents for certain services. International human rights law further requires states to ensure that pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care are accessible without discrimination, irrespective of immigration status.¹⁹⁷

Access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for displaced Angolan women in northern Namibia is limited and uneven. While some women reported receiving assistance, particularly during pregnancy and childbirth, this support was often inconsistent, incomplete, and insufficient to meet broader reproductive health needs.

“ We struggle with hunger but we at least get medical care, and we get help during our pregnancies from the Namibian government.”¹⁹⁸

However, these points of contact do not reflect a functioning or accessible system. While some mentioned support, there were others who spoke of giving birth without adequate support, either in the open or in makeshift shelters. Others described being turned away or shamed when attempting to access hospital services. One woman recounted a nurse asking her:

“ Why don’t you give birth in the bushes.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Focus group, Opuwo, 2026.

¹⁹⁶ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), *General Recommendation No. 27 on older women and protection of their human rights*, 16 December 2010, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/27, paras 13–16, 21, 33–45, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-27-older-women-and-recommendations>

¹⁹⁷ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 22 (2016) on the right to sexual and reproductive health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, 2 May 2016, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/22, paras 7, 13, 21 and 30, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-22-2016-right-sexual-and-reproductive-health> also see CESCR, *Duties of States towards refugees and migrants under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 13 March 2017, UN Doc. E/C.12/2017/1, paras 3 and 6, available at: <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=dv57xHe7yibWENbTlmm8HTQ9eZTUIEWBLAJ0pt%2Fkzmn8CVMtCcFRqhBNTKlp5YDQt%2FQnY5rvl3eSlitdxUZhig%3D%3D>

¹⁹⁸ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

¹⁹⁹ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

Even when women managed to deliver in health facilities, women reported consistently that post-partum support was minimal. Mothers reported receiving no food, nutritional support, or follow-up care, and were often forced to return immediately to survival activities.

**“ After you give birth, nothing. No milk, no food.
You go back to fetch firewood.”**²⁰⁰

However, another focus group participant noted that even where births occur outside formal facilities, some level of support may still be accessed:

**“ My child is born at home but we do receive
support from the hospital.”**²⁰¹

Beyond pregnancy and childbirth, access to broader sexual and reproductive health services – including contraception, family planning information, and reproductive health counselling – remains extremely limited. During an all-women focus group, most interviewees stated they had never been offered contraceptives, either in Angola or after displacement. These gaps exist within a wider context of deprivation, where daily life is dominated by the need to secure food and income, leaving little space for informed or autonomous reproductive decision-making.

Women expressed complex and often conflicting feelings about childbearing. While some noted that having many children remains culturally valued, many also described fear, distress, and a sense of powerlessness linked to their inability to provide for them.

**“ You want children, but you cannot protect them.
That is what hurts.”**²⁰²

**“ When you cannot feed them, people take them
to work. That breaks us.”**²⁰³

Maternal labour extends far beyond childbirth. Women described collecting and selling firewood while heavily pregnant, walking long distances to collect water, carrying heavy loads, and continuing to care for children and older family members, despite exhaustion.²⁰⁴ These activities exposed pregnant women to increased risks of dehydration, physical exhaustion, falls, premature labour and other pregnancy-related complications, while the responsibility of caring for the broader family often left little opportunity for rest or recovery.

200 Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

201 Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026. The participant did not specify the nature of the support received, although her testimony suggests that some women were able to access limited postnatal services even where childbirth itself took place outside a health facility.

202 Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

203 Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

204 Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

Thus, although some women reported receiving limited pregnancy-related assistance and described supportive community networks, these coping mechanisms cannot compensate for the absence of consistently accessible and comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare. Amnesty International's findings suggest that the principal barriers were not the absence or poor quality of maternal health services in Namibia, but the practical obstacles faced by displaced women, including poverty, irregular immigration status, higher fees charged to non-nationals, inconsistent implementation of policy and fear of seeking care. These barriers placed women at increased risk of preventable maternal health complications and undermined their ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive health and rights without discrimination.

7.5 Risks of sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking

The gendered survival strategies adopted by women displaced from southern Angola exposed them to constant and escalating risks of violence and exploitation.

Amnesty International found that collecting and selling firewood had become one of the principal means of survival for many displaced women, including women who were pregnant, older, or caring for young children. Firewood was commonly sold to purchase small amounts of food or water, making it an essential, but often dangerous, livelihood activity. Women described walking long distances into isolated areas, often alone or in small groups, to collect wood. These journeys exposed them to both environmental and human threats: several women spoke of being chased by wildlife, while others described confrontations with local residents when collecting firewood.

205 Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.



A lactating Angolan mother interviewed by Amnesty International described the sexual and reproductive health challenges she experienced during displacement, including barriers to accessing maternal and postnatal healthcare. © Amnesty International, 2025

“ You go because you must eat. Even when you are scared, you go.”²⁰⁵

The necessity of this work means that women were regularly moving through remote and unprotected spaces, often early in the morning or late in the evening. In such conditions, risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including harassment, assault, and coercion, were significantly heightened. These risks were further compounded by the absence of policing, safe infrastructure, or reporting mechanisms in some areas.



An 18-year-old Angolan woman interviewed by Amnesty International described the harsh conditions she faced in Namibia, including harassment while collecting water and the confiscation of firewood on which she relied for survival. © Amnesty International, 2025

Women also reported harassment, discrimination and, in some cases, the confiscation of collected firewood by local residents and authorities. Focus group participants explained that access to firewood collection areas was sometimes controlled through informal local power structures rather than formal rules, meaning women often depended on the permission or tolerance of those exercising influence over particular areas.²⁰⁶

International research has shown that where access to essential resources depends on unequal power relationships, women may face increased risks of coercion, sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse. Although Amnesty International's research did not document cases of sexual exploitation or trafficking, the conditions experienced by displaced women closely mirror internationally recognized risk factors for sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour and trafficking.²⁰⁷

These conditions are consistent with those documented in the US Department of State's 2025 "Trafficking in Persons Report" on Angola.²⁰⁸

The report documents how traffickers exploit Angolan women and girls, including those as young as 12, in both forced labour and sex trafficking. It notes that persistent drought, food insecurity, and displacement in southern Angola have significantly increased vulnerability to trafficking, with recruiters targeting those who have lost livelihoods and are forced to migrate. The report further documents that women and children from Angola are trafficked into Namibia for exploitation in agriculture, domestic work and other informal sectors.

Irregular immigration status, the absence of regular residence documentation, fear of deportation and exclusion from many formal services reduce women's willingness and ability to seek protection or report abuse. These factors increase perpetrators' ability to exploit women with little risk of accountability.

Amnesty International's findings demonstrate that the risks facing displaced women are not incidental but arise from the interaction of prolonged drought, poverty, displacement, irregular migration status and limited access to protection.

²⁰⁶ Focus group, Opuwo, 2024.

²⁰⁷ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), *General Recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration*, 20 November 2020, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/38, paras 30–35 and 65–67, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no38-2020-trafficking-women>

²⁰⁸ US Department of State, "Angola", in *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/angola/>

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN: RIGHTS VIOLATIONS & PROTECTION GAPS

“

Eastern and Southern Africa is among the regions of the world most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and children are already bearing the brunt of these impacts. Between 2017 and 2023, weather-related disasters displaced an estimated 8.8 million children across the region – an average of 1.26 million in any given year.²⁰⁹

- UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate*, 2023

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Amnesty International found that children displaced from southern Angola because of worsening drought are exposed to multiple and overlapping protection risks.
© Amnesty International, 2025

According to UNICEF, children displaced by climate-related events, including droughts, face heightened risks to their rights. Displacement can separate children from parents or caregivers, disrupt access to education, healthcare, water and sanitation, and increase exposure to malnutrition, disease, exploitation and trafficking. These risks are particularly acute where displacement is prolonged and children live in informal settlements or without regular legal status.²¹⁰

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), all children within a state's jurisdiction are entitled to enjoy their rights without discrimination, irrespective of their nationality or immigration status.²¹¹ This requires states to ensure that displaced children have equal and effective access to protection, including protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and family separation as well as access to safe water, food, healthcare, education and other essential services.

Amnesty International found that children displaced from southern Angola because of worsening drought are exposed to multiple and overlapping protection risks. These risks arise not only from displacement itself, but also from poverty, irregular migration status, limited documentation and residence in informal settlements.

²⁰⁹ UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Preparing For a Future That's Already Underway*, October 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/children-displaced-changing-climate>

²¹⁰ UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate* (previously cited). See also UNICEF, UNICEF's Action Against Child Trafficking, July 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/unicefs-action-against-child-trafficking>; UNICEF, *The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*, August 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>

²¹¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No 6: Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*, UN Doc CRC/GC/2005/6, 1 September 2005, para 12.



The US Department of State's 2024 "Trafficking in Persons Report" on Namibia notes that an international organization estimated that more than 1,250 Angolan children were living in informal settlements in Namibia. Although this figure is not limited to children displaced by drought, it illustrates the scale of the protection concerns affecting Angolan children in Namibia.²¹²

The situation of Angolan children in Namibia has become an important public policy concern. The government was questioned about the situation of Angolan children, including whether Namibia had

engaged with Angola and whether a coordinated plan existed for their protection and care.²¹³

Parliamentarians raised concerns about the growing number of Angolan children reportedly living or working on the streets of Oshakati, Swakopmund, Windhoek and other towns, including selling cooking sticks and begging for food or money.²¹⁴

Parliamentary discussions recognized that these children required protection irrespective of their nationality or immigration status, and called for improved data collection, greater bilateral engagement with Angola, child protection measures, and coordinated cross-border responses.²¹⁵

International legal standards on children, climate-related displacement and statelessness

Children displaced in the context of climate-related events and disasters are protected under international and African human rights law. Under the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC), states must ensure that every child within their jurisdiction enjoys all rights guaranteed by the Convention without discrimination, including on the basis of nationality, immigration status or other status. These rights include:

- The right to life, survival and development (Article 6);
- The highest attainable standard of health including access to safe drinking water and adequate nutrition (Article 24);
- The right to education (Article 28);
- Protection from economic exploitation, trafficking and all forms of abuse (Articles 32–36);
- The right to birth registration, a name and nationality (Article 7).

In **General Comment 26** on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, the Committee on the Rights of the Child affirms that:²¹⁶

- Climate change poses a serious threat to children's rights;
- States have obligations to prevent environmental harm that interferes with children's rights;
- Decisions affecting children displaced in the context of climate-related events must be guided by the best interests of the child;
- States must respect the principle of non-refoulement where return would expose a child to a real risk of irreparable harm, including where climate-related conditions contribute to that risk.

²¹² US Department of State, "Namibia", in *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/namibia/>

²¹³ Selma Iyambo, "Namibia clarifies efforts to address Angolan street children", *The Namibian*, 14 February 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/namibia-clarifies-efforts-to-address-angolan-street-children/>

²¹⁴ Rudolf Gaiseb, "Lutuhez: Destitute minors raise alarm", *New Era Live*, 3 October 2025, <https://neweralive.na/lutuhez-destitute-minors-raise-alarm/>

²¹⁵ The position of undocumented Angolan migrant workers in Namibia's charcoal industry was also raised, with parliamentarians alleging exploitation, poor working conditions, child labour, health and safety risks, lack of social security and the need for collaboration with the Angolan Embassy and Home Affairs to regularize workers and hold exploitative landowners accountable: National Assembly of Namibia, Questions 187, 188, 202 and 256, 19 February 2026, available at <https://www.parliament.na/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Questions-for-19-February-26.pdf>

²¹⁶ CRC Committee, *General Comment 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change*, 22 August 2023 (UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/26), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crcgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights>

At the regional level, the **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** (ACRWC) reinforces these obligations, including:²¹⁷

- The right to education (Article 11);
- Protection from child labour, trafficking and exploitation (Articles 15 and 29);
- The right to acquire a nationality and protection against statelessness (Article 6).

Collectively, these standards require states to remove legal, administrative and practical barriers that prevent displaced children from accessing identity documents, healthcare, water and sanitation, food and nutrition, education and protection, irrespective of their nationality or immigration status.

8.1 Lack of birth registration and risk of statelessness

Across all focus groups, families consistently described living in a state of near-total administrative invisibility. Almost no child possessed a birth certificate, whether born in Angola or in Namibia. Focus group participants explained that many births in southern Angola occurred at home or in remote communities with limited access to civil registration services. Several parents also stated that they themselves had never been registered, making it difficult to register their children later. Parents spoke of giving birth at home, in the bush, or on the roadside during long journeys; others described accessing health facilities but leaving without any form of legal documentation for their children:

“ At the hospital we are only provided with healthcare, not birth registration certificates.”²¹⁸

Even where births occurred in formal health settings, documentation remained absent or incomplete. One woman stated:

“ During my pregnancy I received help from the Namibian government. I gave birth at the hospital but we only got a health card and no birth certificate.”²¹⁹

²¹⁷ OAU, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), adopted 11 June 1990, entered into force 29 November 1999, <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>

²¹⁸ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

²¹⁹ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

Others described similar experiences following home births:

“My children are born at home and we later took them to the hospital. They get a health card but not a birth certificate.”²²⁰

“My child was born in Namibia but at home. He is not registered but he has a health passport from the hospital.”²²¹

The lack of birth registration compounds the challenges already faced by displaced Angolan children. Alongside their irregular immigration status, the absence of legal identity documents creates additional practical barriers when families attempt to access healthcare, education and other public services. One parent explained that their children “probably have diseases we don’t know about”²²² because they cannot navigate a healthcare system that requires paperwork they do not have.

The absence of documentation is not merely an administrative inconvenience; it places children at real risk of de facto statelessness, which exposes them to an increased risk of further human rights violations. Many have no legal record of their existence in either Angola or Namibia. Some children have never lived in Angola and have no family connections there; yet they also lack recognition in Namibia, making them vulnerable to unlawful removal, exclusion from services, and lifelong marginalization.

The testimonies also revealed the intergenerational nature of this crisis. Parents who themselves were never registered in Angola cannot register their children in Namibia, creating a cycle of invisibility that deepens over time. In several households, older children had already aged out of school eligibility without ever having accessed formal education. Others expressed concern that undocumented children are more vulnerable to labour exploitation and trafficking because they remain outside formal protection systems, echoing testimonies that “children are taken as labourers”²²³ or disappear into informal work.



Health card issued to an Angolan boy for healthcare purposes in Namibia, in the absence of a birth certificate. His parent shared the card with Amnesty International. © Amnesty International, 2025

Under the CRC and the ACRWC, every child has the right to immediate birth registration, to a name and nationality, and states are required to take all necessary measures to prevent statelessness. The current situation – where displaced Angolan children fall through every legal and administrative gap – reflects systemic failure to uphold these obligations, placing many children at risk of statelessness and exclusion from essential services.

²²⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

²²¹ Focus group, Opuwo, April 2026.

²²² Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

²²³ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

8.2 Health of children including mental health

For some displaced Angolan families, the need to obtain healthcare for sick children influenced their decision to cross into or remain in Namibia, alongside prolonged drought, hunger and deteriorating living conditions. Parents and guardians described travelling long distances with sick children, often without food, transport, or certainty that treatment would be available upon arrival.

“ My journey here was a hiking journey, we walked long distances... I carried an ill child and came to seek medical support. I brought my child to the hospital only to find there is serious hunger at home. So I decided to stay in Namibia. The child is still ill... we have to go back and forth to the hospital... he was supposed to be transferred but they just gave him medicine.”²²⁴

“ I carried my ill child during the journey. We walked long distances and only got lifts when we were lucky. The journey was painful because I had to carry a sick child while also dealing with hunger.”²²⁵

The health of displaced Angolan children in northern Namibia reflects a situation of cumulative deprivation, where structural barriers, poverty, and displacement intersect to undermine both physical and mental well-being. Across focus groups, parents repeatedly described children as frequently ill, undernourished, and unable to access consistent or adequate healthcare.

The right to health also extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as access to safe and potable water, adequate nutrition, sanitation, housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and access to health-related education and information, including on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Many displaced Angolan children live without adequate shelter, clean water, or sanitation, increasing exposure to preventable diseases. Caregivers described children sleeping in the open, lacking blankets, and going for extended periods without food.

“ We don’t eat... we survive on selling firewood. If not sold, we sleep with hunger.”²²⁶

“ My children and I are sleeping ‘outside’, no blanket, no water... sleep in boxes, plastics... nothing on the ground.”²²⁷

²²⁴ Focus group, Onyungurura, May 2024.

²²⁵ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

²²⁶ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

²²⁷ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

In such contexts, malnutrition, inadequate shelter and exposure to the elements significantly increase children's vulnerability to disease, transforming otherwise treatable illnesses into life-threatening conditions.

Focus group participants reported that access to healthcare, while sometimes available, was inconsistent. Some caregivers reported receiving treatment regardless of their ability to pay, while others described being charged higher fees or facing delays in care. They described facilities in rural areas as more flexible regarding documentation and payment requirements than those in peri-urban areas, where these requirements were more strictly applied.

“ My child is sick... always weak, but she is going to hospital.”²²⁸

Beyond physical health, testimonies reveal significant but often unarticulated mental and emotional distress among children. Displacement, hunger, and instability have profound psychological impacts.²²⁹ Caregivers described children as withdrawn, fearful, and emotionally affected by their circumstances:

“ My child is always silent, withdrawn, and afraid.”²³⁰

A parent explained the broader impact on children's well-being:

“ If someone is sick, they just lie down and suffer. They don't go to school.”²³¹

The psychological burden is compounded by chronic insecurity and survival pressures. Many children take on adult responsibilities, including collecting firewood, caring for siblings, or contributing to household income. Others are unable to attend school due to hunger or lack of documentation.

“ Only one of mine goes to school. The rest can't.”²³²

Under international human rights law, these conditions raise serious concerns regarding the enjoyment of children's rights. Article 24 of the CRC recognizes the right of every child to the highest attainable standard of health, including access to healthcare services, adequate nutrition, and safe drinking water. Articles 6 and 27 further require states to ensure children's survival and development and an adequate standard of living. Similarly, the ACRWC guarantees children's rights to health, survival, and development, and requires states to take appropriate measures to protect and promote the well-being of all children without discrimination. These obligations apply equally to children affected by displacement. The CESCR has clarified that undocumented status cannot be a basis for denying children access to human rights, including adequate food and affordable healthcare.²³³

The realities documented in northern Namibia indicate that these rights are not being realized. While some access to healthcare exists, it remains fragmented and insufficient to address the scale and complexity of children's needs.

²²⁸ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

²²⁹ WHO, "Mental health in emergencies", 6 May 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-in-emergencies>

²³⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, June 2026.

²³¹ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

²³² Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

²³³ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *Duties of States towards refugees and migrants under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 13 March 2017, UN Doc. E/C.12/2017/1, para. 6, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1484074?ln=en>

8.3 Education out of reach: Survival, exclusion and structural barriers

For many Angolan children living in northern Namibia, education is one of the first rights to disappear in the displacement journey. Parents and guardians consistently described a difficult and often painful trade-off between education and survival. While many expressed a clear desire for their children to attend school, the realities of hunger, poverty, and household responsibilities make this impossible in practice. As one parent explained:

“ We want our children to go to school but our situation forces us to make decisions such as two must go to school and two must stay home to help with household chores. The government of Namibia does not allow children who are undocumented to go to school here. We see the benefits of education and we feel we can improve our lives through it but we are not in a position to let all our children go to school because we all need each other to survive. We understand that once a child is educated they can contribute better to their family and as a people we can feel acknowledged and part of society.”²³⁴

In many households, children's labour is essential to daily survival. Caregivers described how children are required to collect firewood, care for younger siblings, or contribute to income generation.

“ My children don't go to school, I never took them to school. If my child goes to school I will have no one to help me collect firewood, to collect and sell and buy some food. I have been told at the hospital not to carry heavy things. If she goes to school we won't survive.”²³⁵

Another focus group participant echoed this tension between aspiration and necessity:

“ My children don't go to school, they have to help out at home. I have never tried accessing school for the kids. I have no hope for access to those services. I want the children to go to school – if they go to school it would be good, I see the benefits in taking them to school.”²³⁶

²³⁴ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

²³⁵ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

²³⁶ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

These testimonies demonstrate that education is not rejected, but structurally out of reach. Focus group participants linked exclusion directly to systemic barriers rather than personal choice:

“ My children have struggled with access to education and employment opportunities.”²³⁷

In some cases, lack of access is compounded by limited awareness, itself shaped by conditions of deprivation. As one parent explained:

“ I never tried to access education for the kids – I am not aware of the benefits of school especially if we have no place to stay, no water or clothes or even blankets. I do want education for my kids.”²³⁸

Even when families attempt to enrol their children, schools require documents that most Angolan children do not possess. This structural barrier was consistently reported by participants:

“ My children experience barriers to education, including lack of documentation and language challenges.”²³⁹

Parents and guardians described being turned away or told to return once they could provide documentation required for enrolment, including birth certificates. As discussed above, many children born in Angola had never been registered or lacked documentation when they arrived in Namibia. Children born in Namibia also faced barriers to obtaining birth certificates, particularly when their parents also lacked identification documents. Participants reported that even where children were born in Namibian health facilities or later taken to health facilities following home births, they sometimes received only a health card or health passport rather than a birth certificate. The resulting lack of documentation had a direct impact on their ability to enrol in school.²⁴⁰

Language adds another layer of exclusion. Families noted that children who speak OshiHakaona or Portuguese struggle to adapt to an English- and Oshiwambo-dominated curriculum. Without targeted language support, displaced children rapidly fall behind, and many drop out within weeks. In some communities, parents described classrooms as hostile spaces where displaced children are mocked or told they “don’t belong”, reinforcing the sense of alienation that already shapes their daily lives.

²³⁷ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

²³⁸ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

²³⁹ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2025.

²⁴⁰ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

Amnesty International documented at least one community-based initiative through which some children were able to access informal early learning without Namibian documentation:

“ Sometimes the kids go to school at a local day care which is run and managed by a community well-wisher. They don’t really need Namibian documents because the day care has made provision for them to go to school at least sometimes.”²⁴¹

The combined effect of hunger, documentation barriers, discrimination, and curricular mismatch has produced near-total exclusion. Many parents interviewed could not name a single child in their wider settlement/community who attended school consistently. Some had given up trying. Others referred to anticipated “meetings to bring kids to school”, although participants did not specify who would convene these meetings or what process would follow, reflecting uncertainty about how their children could access education.

Under the CRC and the ACRWC, states must ensure that free and compulsory primary education is available and accessible to every child without

discrimination.²⁴² Angolan children who live in Namibia should, in principle, be able to access basic education, since Namibia’s Constitution guarantees free and compulsory primary education for every resident within Namibia, and the Education Act makes school attendance compulsory for children of school-going age. However, drought-displaced or irregularly present Angolan children face many practical barriers. The current situation, in which climate-related displacement, poverty, and administrative barriers prevent many children from accessing education, reflects a failure to ensure children’s rights to education and is likely to have long-term consequences for their development and the enjoyment of other human rights.



An Angolan child outside a community centre in Opuwo that provides support to orphaned and vulnerable children, including children from displaced Angolan families, © Amnesty International, 2025

²⁴¹ Focus group, Onyungurura, April 2026.

²⁴² CESCR, General Comment 13 on the right to education, 8 December 1999 (UN Doc. E/C.12/1999/10), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/d-general-comment-no-13-right-education-article-13-1999>

8.4 Child labour, exploitation and trafficking

“ Extreme poverty, particularly present in Angola, can lead not only to child trafficking, but also to child labour.”²⁴³

- Committee on the Rights of the Child, concluding observations on the report submitted by Angola, 2018

Not all work undertaken by children constitutes prohibited child labour. However, work that is excessive, hazardous, exploitative, or interferes with a child's education, health and development may constitute child labour prohibited under international law. Amnesty International documented circumstances in which children undertook physically demanding work, missed education, worked without pay, or were exposed to exploitative conditions. Poverty, displacement, lack of documentation and exclusion from education also increased children's vulnerability to child labour, exploitation, forced labour and trafficking.

The US State Department's 2023 "Trafficking in Persons Report" on Namibia highlighted a troubling trend following the arrival of over 7,000 Angolan people escaping severe drought in south-eastern Angola: a noticeable rise in the exploitation of

Angolan children within Namibia. Many of these children were employed as domestic workers and cattle herders, exposing them to heightened risks of exploitation.²⁴⁴ The report further stated that traffickers exploited the displacement crisis, transporting children from Angola and neighbouring regions to subject them to severe forms of exploitation. These children were often coerced into sex trafficking and forced labour in sectors such as agriculture, cattle herding, fishing, domestic service, and street vending in urban areas like Windhoek.²⁴⁵

These broader patterns were reflected in testimonies collected by Amnesty International. Across focus groups, participants described children undertaking work as part of household survival strategies, including collecting and selling firewood, working on farms and helping with household responsibilities.

“ Some children help out in the farms and some have to work at home to collect firewood. As long as the kids are strong enough to help then they are required to help at home and where they can find work.”²⁴⁶

Parents and guardians described children undertaking physically demanding work that was essential to household survival:

“ I don't work, I cannot work because of my health. So my child has to do everything: she fetches firewood and has to sell it in town all by herself... she is hungry and thirsty.”²⁴⁷

²⁴³ CRC Committee, Concluding observations on the report submitted by Angola, 29 June 2018 (UN Doc. CRC/C/OPSC/AGO/CO/1), https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/OPSC/AGO/CO/1&Lang=En, p. 5.

²⁴⁴ US Department of State, "Namibia", in 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/namibia/>

²⁴⁵ US Department of State, "Namibia", in 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report (previously cited).

²⁴⁶ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, May 2025.

²⁴⁷ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

Such accounts illustrate how children, some as young as 8 to 12 years old, were exposed to physically demanding labour and unsafe environments, often without adult supervision.

In some instances, children were not only supporting themselves but were expected to contribute to family survival across borders:

“ There are children without parents here to make money and support their parents back in Angola. In Angola, some elders have some livestock but most have nothing and Namibia creates opportunities for the children to sell their crafts so they can take some money back home.”²⁴⁸

This reflects a broader pattern in which displacement reshaped traditional family roles, placing economic responsibility on children and blurring the boundaries between coping strategies and exploitation.

Focus group participants also reported experiences of exploitation within informal labour markets, where both adults and children were vulnerable to abuse:

“ Yes, there are children who look for work and sometimes find the work but they are exploited: sometimes they are paid and sometimes they are just used without pay. This is unfair.”²⁴⁹

A migrant charity organization in Opuwo reported cases of child exploitation, with children forced to work on farms and sell wood on the streets.²⁵⁰

Media and other reporting further illustrate the broader trafficking risks faced by Angolan children in Namibia. In November 2023, it was reported that Namibia’s High Court had convicted four people in connection with the trafficking of two girls, including one from Angola. While it is not established that the children were from the drought-displaced communities covered by this research, the case illustrates documented

risks of trafficking affecting Angolan children in Namibia.²⁵¹ In March 2026, a 16-year-old Angolan girl was rescued in the Oshikoto region after being subjected to unpaid domestic labour, physical abuse, and severe neglect. The child had reportedly been lured from Angola with the promise of paid work, only to endure months of exploitation without wages, adequate food, or protection. She described being unable to leave due to lack of resources, stating, “I want to go home, but I can’t afford to.” Authorities confirmed that the employer was arrested after the girl was found living in abusive conditions.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

²⁴⁹ Focus group, Onyungurura, May 2024.

²⁵⁰ Interview in person with a nurse who works in Opuwo, May 2024.

²⁵¹ Carmel Rickard, “Successful human trafficking prosecution could see Namibia’s ratings improve”, AfricanLII, 24 November 2023, <https://africanlii.org/articles/2023-11-24/carmel-rickard/successful-human-trafficking-prosecution-could-see-namibias-ratings-improve>

²⁵² The Namibian, “Trapped and beaten: Angolan teen (16) escapes unpaid domestic work in Namibia’s Oshikoto region”, 16 March 2026, <https://www.namibian.com.na/trapped-and-beaten-angolan-teen-16-escapes-unpaid-domestic-work-in-namibias-oshikoto-region>

Both governments are aware of the situation. In May 2024, during a bilateral meeting between Namibia and Angola, the head of the Namibian delegation, Penda Naanda, expressed his concerns about the ongoing issues affecting Angolan people. He emphasized the need to protect vulnerable Angolans and criticized the handling of the situation:

“ We hope this common interest includes addressing the plight of Angolans, who continue to be shuffled from pillar to post, while the problem of human trafficking and sex slavery persists.”²⁵³

Under international law, including the CRC²⁵⁴ and the ACRWC,²⁵⁵ children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with their education, health, or development. These obligations are reinforced through Namibia's legislative and policy framework, including anti-trafficking laws and child protection provisions that prohibit the exploitation of children in labour and criminalize trafficking for purposes of

forced labour and sexual exploitation.²⁵⁶ Namibia's legal framework places a duty on the state to identify, protect, and support children in vulnerable situations, including those who are undocumented or displaced. However, the testimonies documented in northern Namibia suggest that these protections are not being effectively realized in practice, leaving displaced children exposed to heightened risks of poverty, exploitation, and trafficking.

8.5 Unaccompanied and separated Angolan children in urban areas

“ These two kids came alone (two girls between ages 8-10). Their parents sent them with people who were headed here. They thought it would be their best chance at survival. Two young girls came alone and have no parents here. The person who came with them left them here and we have no idea where they went. They are now being cared and watched by other families in the area. These children are completely vulnerable and they are not even related.”²⁵⁷

Esperança (not their real name), Opuwo, April 2026

²⁵³ The Namibian, “Diffuse Angola-Namibia time bomb”, 31 May 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/diffuse-angola-namibia-time-bomb/>

²⁵⁴ CRC, Article 32.

²⁵⁵ ACRWC, Article 15.

²⁵⁶ Republic of Namibia, *Submission of information to the Note Verbale dated 15 April 2024, received from the Secretary General of the United Nations, requesting Member States to provide progress made in the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 77/194 on Trafficking in Women and Girls for the period 1 August 2022 to date, 2004*, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/a-79-322-submission-namibia-en.pdf>. See also, Republic of Namibia, Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 1 of 2018, available at <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/108604/NAM108604.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2026).

²⁵⁷ Focus group, Otjimuhaka, April 2026.

The presence of unaccompanied and separated Angolan children in Namibia raises urgent child protection concerns. Testimonies collected during Amnesty International's research reveal that some children arrive alone or become separated during displacement, while others are sent by their families as a survival strategy in the context of extreme poverty and drought.

Focus group participants described a landscape in which children move, work, and live with limited or no adult protection. While some are absorbed into informal community care systems, these arrangements are fragile and inconsistent.

“ Some kids are with their parents and some are not – we work together, we take care of each other and we work as a tight community.”²⁵⁸

However, such support networks operate under conditions of shared scarcity and cannot guarantee safety or stability.

Focus group participants reflected a deep sense of anxiety about children's well-being in these environments:

“ I worry because my child is alone, hungry and thirsty. It worries me so much. Sometimes I worry that she might be taken back to Angola without me knowing. We see people being exploited – sometimes they work without pay.”²⁵⁹

Others described the visible presence of children at risk in urban areas and the uncertainty surrounding their safety:

“ Yes, I see those kids in Opuwo, and it's a difficult sight to see. I worry that my children may be deported when out in Opuwo and we end up being separated. Maybe those children are being beaten or exposed to violence. One never knows.”²⁶⁰

During its May 2024 field visit, Amnesty International identified significant concerns regarding the welfare of Angolan children in Namibia, particularly those who had become increasingly visible in urban areas such as Windhoek.²⁶¹ These children were often found engaging in informal economic activities, such as selling wood, and many were not enrolled in school. There were indications that some of these children may have been unaccompanied or separated from their families, raising serious child protection issues. Stakeholders and civil society actors expressed concerns to Amnesty International that these children were vulnerable to exploitative labour practices, which could result in significant mental, social, and physical harm.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

²⁵⁹ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2024.

²⁶⁰ Focus group, Opuwo, May 2026.

²⁶¹ Observed by Amnesty International researchers in Windhoek, May 2024 and May 2025.

²⁶² Interviews in person with representatives from Redress and IOM, May 2024.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety, and Security confirmed the relocation of approximately 200 of these children to the Ondangwa National Youth Service Center in May 2024. That month, Amnesty International visited the Ondangwa National Youth Service Center and observed a small group of children aged 5 to 10 playing a soccer game.²⁶³ According to the Ministry, this relocation aimed to provide care and facilitate family reunification for these children.²⁶⁴ However,

subsequent reports raised serious concerns about the nature of this relocation with indications that some children may have been placed in the facility against their will, leading to protests and disturbances within the centre. The children may have been detained pending their return to Angola, raising significant concerns regarding their rights and well-being. In June 2024, Amnesty International wrote to the Government of Namibia raising concerns about the situation: as of July 2026 there was no response.

8.6 Unlawful returns and risk of refoulement of children

Amnesty International is significantly concerned about the possibility of Angolan children being subjected to unlawful return to Angola without due process. Returns without due process, including an individualized assessment of risks upon return, violate the principle of non-refoulement,²⁶⁵ which prohibits states from returning individuals to countries where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations.

On 29 May 2024, a well-known Namibian newspaper reported that the governments of Namibia and Angola had “successfully” facilitated the return of 73 Angolan children and their mothers to Angola.²⁶⁶ In June 2024, Human Rights Watch (HRW) raised concerns about this repatriation of Angolan children from Namibia, which included

many unaccompanied minors.²⁶⁷ The organization criticized Namibia for not adequately protecting these children, many of whom had been living on the streets of Windhoek without shelter or identification papers. HRW further noted that despite ongoing efforts by Angolan authorities to find solutions for the dignified reintegration of these children, both countries’ efforts had been insufficient.²⁶⁸

HRW reported that Angola accommodated some repatriated children in a government-managed camp in Cunene Province,²⁶⁹ in challenging conditions, with inadequate shelter and food contributing to reported deaths.²⁷⁰ The drought in Angola and the lack of government support for returned children and their families, led many to return to Namibia.²⁷¹

²⁶³ Observational visit in Ondangwa, May 2024.

²⁶⁴ The Namibian, “Home Affairs Ministry Takes 200 Children off the Streets,” 22 May 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/home-affairs-ministry-takes-200-children-off-the-streets/>

²⁶⁵ Non-refoulement is a key principle in international law that prevents countries from returning individuals to a place where they would face serious harm, such as persecution or torture. This principle is central to both the UN Refugee Convention and the OAU Refugee Convention. The OAU Refugee Convention extends protection to those fleeing situations that seriously disturb public order, like environmental disasters.

²⁶⁶ Windhoek Observer, “Namibia and Angola collaborate in repatriation of semi-nomadic people”, 29 May 2024, <https://www.observer24.com.na/namibia-and-angola-collaborate-in-repatriation-of-semi-nomadic-people/>; Informanté, “Government facilitates successful repatriation of 73 Angolan nationals”, 30 May 2024, <https://informante.web.na/?p=358417>

²⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Repatriated Angolan children face precarious conditions: Returnees from Namibia need adequate services”, 10 June 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/10/repatriated-angolan-children-face-precarious-conditions>

²⁶⁸ HRW urged that effective services be provided for returned children, including adequate shelter, education, healthcare, and means of subsistence, before any additional repatriations take place. The organization also emphasized that Namibia should continue to protect and care for unaccompanied children until Angola can ensure appropriate conditions for their return.

²⁶⁹ HRW, “Repatriated Angolan children face precarious conditions” (previously cited). See also, Jornal de Angola, “Garantido apoio à população saída do Curoca e da Cahama” [“Cunene guarantees support to the displaced population of Curoca and Cahama”], 7 April 2021, available at <https://www.pressreader.com/angola/jornal-de-angola/20210407/281530818829749> (in Portuguese).

²⁷⁰ VOA Português, “Repatriados da Namíbia morrem no Cunene devido a péssimas condições de acolhimento” [“Returnees from Namibia die in Cunene due to terrible reception conditions”], 31 August 2021, <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/repatriados-da-nam%C3%ADbia-morrem-no-cunene/6080574.html> (in Portuguese).

²⁷¹ VOA Português, “Crianças angolanas na Namíbia entre ficar e serem repatriadas” [“Angolan children in Namibia: torn between staying and being repatriated”], 21 February 2024, <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/criancas-angolanas-na-nam%C3%ADbia-entre-ficar-e-serem-repatriadas/7496696.html> (in Portuguese).

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS RELEVANT TO DISPLACEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE & NATURAL DISASTERS

Displacement in the context of disasters and the adverse impacts of climate change engages multiple, overlapping branches of international law, including international human rights law, refugee law, environmental law, disaster law, and the law of state responsibility. While international law has not created a formal legal category explicitly dedicated to the protection of people displaced in the context of climate change and disasters, protection obligations already arise through the prohibition on refoulement, the right to life, the right to personal integrity (both physical and psychological), and the right to health. The combination of climate-related and/or disaster-related impacts on the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to housing, the right to food and water, the right to sanitation, the right to education and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, can also threaten the

right to a life with dignity, raising non-refoulement obligations. These obligations require states not only to respond after displacement has occurred, but also to take preventive, regulatory and remedial measures to reduce foreseeable climate-related and disaster-related harm that threatens human survival and leads to forced displacement.

These legal standards apply regardless of a person's nationality, migration status, or documentation and create binding duties for both Angola and Namibia under international and African human rights law. These obligations are heightened in relation to people who are disproportionately exposed to the risk of being displaced in the context of climate-related events and other disasters, such as women and children, and who are entitled to specific protections under international law, including the CEDAW, CRC, and ACRWC.

9.1 Natural disasters, climate change and cross-border displacement

The international community increasingly recognizes – and the IPCC has documented²⁷² – that climate-related hazards, including prolonged droughts and other extreme weather events, are important drivers of displacement, particularly where environmental stress intersects with poverty, inequality, conflict and weak service provision.

As the IPCC has observed: “Climate hazards associated with extreme events and variability act as direct drivers of involuntary migration and displacement and as indirect drivers through deteriorating climate-sensitive livelihoods”.²⁷³ These risks are not experienced equally (see Chapters 4, 7-8).

²⁷² IPCC, “Africa”, 2023 (previously cited).
²⁷³ IPCC, “Africa”, 2023 (previously cited).

The UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNHCR and multiple UN Special Procedures have affirmed that climate-related displacement engages the full protection framework of international human rights law. In particular, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment has noted that “natural disasters and other types of environmental harm often cause internal displacement and transboundary migration, which can exacerbate vulnerabilities and lead to additional human rights violations and abuses.”²⁷⁴

Where environmental conditions remove the material foundations of survival – for example, through prolonged drought, desertification, water scarcity or ecosystem collapse – people may be compelled to

move because they can no longer secure food, water, healthcare, shelter or other basic necessities. In such circumstances, movement can engage existing international protection frameworks, depending on the facts of the individual case.²⁷⁵ UNHCR has confirmed that climate change and disasters interact with existing drivers of displacement and has issued guidance advising that existing protection frameworks should be interpreted in light of these realities.²⁷⁶

States therefore have a range of obligations in responding to displacement in the context of climate change and disasters. These include obligations to reduce climate-related risks through mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction, as well as duties to protect people whose rights are affected by climate-related displacement.²⁷⁷

9.2 Non-refoulement in the context of climate change and natural disasters

The principle of non-refoulement lies at the heart of international protection. It prohibits states from returning any person, in any manner whatsoever, to a place where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk of serious human rights violations. This includes threats to life, exposure to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, or conditions incompatible with human dignity. Non-refoulement is established in international human rights law, codified in Article 33 of the UN Refugee Convention, Articles

6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),²⁷⁸ Article 3 of the Convention against Torture,²⁷⁹ and part of customary international law, binding on all states.²⁸⁰

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its 2025 Advisory Opinion, confirmed that the principle of non-refoulement may apply where the adverse effects of climate change create conditions that expose individuals to a real risk of irreparable harm upon return.²⁸¹ The court stated:

²⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, 24 January 2018 (UN Doc. A/HRC/37/59), <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/59>, para. 41(h).

²⁷⁵ Amnesty International, *Amicus Curiae Brief submitted by Amnesty International to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on its Advisory Opinion on the obligations of states with respect to the climate change crisis*, 2026, Index: AFR 01/0915/2026, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr01/0915/2026/en/>

²⁷⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters”, 1 October 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2020/en/123356>

²⁷⁷ CESCR, General Comment 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health (previously cited). See also UNHCR, “Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters” (previously cited).

²⁷⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted on 16 December 1966, entered into force on 23 March 1976, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

²⁷⁹ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted on 10 December 1984, entered into force on 26 June 1987, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading> (Convention Against Torture).

²⁸⁰ UNHCR, “Advisory opinion on the extraterritorial application of non-refoulement obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol”, 26 January 2007, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2007/40854>

²⁸¹ International Court of Justice (ICJ), *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change*, 23 July 2025, <https://www.icj-cij.org/index.php/case/187>

“ Conditions resulting from climate change which are likely to endanger the lives of individuals may lead them to seek safety in another country or prevent them from returning to their own. In the view of the Court, states have obligations under the principle of non-refoulement where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm to the right to life in breach of Article 6 of the ICCPR if individuals are returned to their country of origin.”²⁸²

This legal clarification is significant: It confirms that climate-related human rights harm can, in certain circumstances, engage absolute protection from return, particularly where environmental conditions create a real risk of irreparable human rights harm. It further establishes that such risk does not need to arise from human rights risks directly imputable to acts or omissions by state actors, recognizing that environmental or structural factors – such as environmental degradation or climate impacts – can be sufficient. Crucially, it affirms that environmental collapse may meet the threshold required to trigger protection, when it fundamentally undermines conditions necessary for life and human dignity. The Human Rights Committee²⁸³ and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights²⁸⁴ (IACtHR) have similarly affirmed that environmental degradation may violate rights, including the rights to life, the right to live with dignity, and the right to personal integrity, therefore triggering non-refoulement obligations. The scope of protection extends to threats arising from food insecurity, lack of safe water, heat exposure, disease outbreaks and collapse of medical services, which concomitantly may represent a threat to people’s rights to live with dignity and free from inhuman or degrading conditions.

States have binding obligations in responding to climate-related and disaster-related protection needs. They must ensure fair and individualized assessments of protection claims, including those linked to climate and environmental factors. In

addition, states are required to establish effective mechanisms to ensure humanitarian protection to people displaced across borders due to climate change or disasters.²⁸⁵ As confirmed by the IACtHR, this should be done “by establishing appropriate migration categories such as humanitarian visas, temporary residence permits, and/or protection under refugee status or similar status, which can provide them with protection against refoulement.”²⁸⁶ This should include facilitating access to registration and regularization mechanisms for people already displaced across borders, enabling individuals to obtain access to protection or similar status, affording them legal recognition and access to essential rights. Crucially, States must refrain from practices such as collective expulsion or summary deportation, which are incompatible with fundamental principles of international protection.

Namibia is bound by the principle of non-refoulement under customary international human rights law, as well as treaty obligations under the ICCPR, the UN Refugee Convention, and the OAU Refugee Convention. Namibia therefore has specific obligations in this context: it must accept and properly assess each individual’s claims, including those linked to climate-related harm and natural disasters, ensuring that individuals are not excluded from protection frameworks simply because their displacement is driven by environmental factors. It is also required to guarantee access to asylum

²⁸² ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* (previously cited).

²⁸³ UN Human Rights Committee, *Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand*, 7 January 2020, Communication 2728/2016 (UN Doc. CCPR/C/127/D/2728/2016), <https://www.refworld.org/cases/HRC/5e26f7134.html>

²⁸⁴ Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), *Advisory Opinion OC-23/17: The environment and human rights*, 15 November 2017, https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_23_ing.pdf

²⁸⁵ UN Human Rights Committee, *Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand* (previously cited). The Human Rights Committee’s decision in *Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand* confirmed that climate-related environmental degradation may trigger protection under the ICCPR where return exposes a person to real risk to life, human dignity and personal integrity. This establishes that climate risks can generate complementary forms of protection even where the requirements to obtain refugee status under conventional persecution grounds are not met.

²⁸⁶ IACtHR, *Advisory Opinion OC-32/25: Climate Emergency and Human Rights*, 29 May 2025, https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_32_en.pdf, para. 433.

procedures without discrimination, including for those lacking documentation. Crucially, Namibia must provide protection from return in situations where irreparable harm is reasonably foreseeable, in line with its obligations under international human rights and refugee law.

These protections must be applied in a manner that responds to differentiated protection needs. This includes ensuring child-sensitive asylum procedures, protection from family separation, and safeguards against gender-based violence, as well as recognizing forms of harm that disproportionately affect adult women and girls.

9.2.1 The UN Refugee Convention and climate-related and disaster-related displacement

The UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees²⁸⁷ and its Protocol²⁸⁸ remain the cornerstone of international refugee protection.²⁸⁹ While the Convention does not expressly recognize climate change or disasters as grounds for refugee status, its protections may apply where people displaced in the context of climate-related events or natural disasters also have a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason. In addition, the Convention

establishes important procedural and substantive protection standards for those recognized as refugees. Most importantly, the Convention entrenches the prohibition of refoulement and establishes minimum standards of treatment for recognized refugees, including access to identity documents, education, work, health services and social security.

9.2.2 The OAU Refugee Convention and “events seriously disturbing public order”

The OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU Refugee Convention) remains one of the most progressive refugee protection instruments globally. It broadens the refugee definition to include persons compelled to leave their habitual residence owing to “events seriously disturbing public order”.²⁹⁰ This formulation allows for dynamic interpretation in light of contemporary displacement drivers, including environmental degradation, prolonged drought, desertification and collapse of subsistence livelihoods.²⁹¹

This broader definition is particularly relevant for populations whose displacement is driven by the collapse of subsistence livelihoods, food systems and

access to water. In such contexts, the resulting harm is not only economic but directly affects survival and human rights, bringing these situations within the type of circumstances that may engage the broader protection framework of the OAU Refugee Convention.

In the Angola-Namibia context, this provision may provide a legal basis for considering whether people displaced by prolonged drought and environmental degradation fall within the OAU Refugee Convention’s broader refugee definition, particularly where the cumulative effects of these conditions seriously disturb public order and undermine access to livelihoods, food and water.

287 UN Refugee Convention, adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954.

288 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967.

289 Namibia acceded to the UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol, incorporating their provisions into the Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act of 1999, supported by regulations promulgated in 2000: Republic of Namibia, Namibia Refugees (Recognition and Control) Regulations, Government Notice 236 of 2000, 22 September 2000, as amended by Government Notice 156 of 2021, available at <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/annoREG/Namibia%20Refugees%20%28Recognition%20and%20Control%29%20Act%20of%201999-Regulations%202000-236.pdf>. Namibia maintains a reservation to Article 26 of the UN Refugee Convention, limiting the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum seekers under its long-standing encampment policy. Under this policy, refugees and asylum seekers are generally required to reside in designated refugee settlements, with freedom of movement outside those settlements subject to official authorization. The main refugee camp in Namibia is the Osire Refugee Settlement, located in the Otjozondjupa Region, approximately 200–240km north of the capital city, Windhoek, and about 120km from Otjiwarongo.

290 OAU Refugee Convention, Article 1.2.

291 The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has consistently emphasised that the OAU Refugee Convention must be interpreted in a manner that maximises protection and aligns with the Banjul Charter’s human rights objectives.

For Angolans moving into Namibia in the context of drought, hunger, water scarcity, loss of livestock and collapse of local coping systems, this approach supports a rights-based screening obligation: Namibia

should assess in each individual case whether return would violate refugee law, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter), and/or other human rights non-refoulement protections.

9.3 States' obligations to tackle the climate crisis

9.3.1 States' duty to avert and minimize the adverse impacts of climate change

Under international environmental law, states have obligations to address climate change through mitigation, adaptation and international cooperation. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) establishes the overarching framework for international climate action, requiring states to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system while recognizing that climate change poses significant risks to human societies and ecosystems.²⁹² In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation), states must strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate impacts (adaptation).

These obligations are particularly relevant in regions such as Southern Africa, where climate change is projected to increase the frequency and severity of droughts and other extreme weather events, heightening existing risks of displacement and human rights violations. In drought-prone regions, this requires a shift from reactive crisis management towards long-term drought preparedness, resilience building and sustainable land management. This is in line with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which requires states to adopt measures to prevent and mitigate drought, restore degraded land and strengthen the resilience of affected communities.²⁹³

The 2015 Paris Agreement builds on the UNFCCC by providing the principal framework for global cooperation on climate change.²⁹⁴ It seeks to strengthen the global response to climate change by limiting global temperature rise, enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change. The agreement also recognizes the importance of supporting developing countries through finance, technology transfer and capacity-building to avert and minimize the adverse impacts of climate change.

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), established under the UNFCCC and reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement, recognizes that states have shared responsibilities to address climate change, while acknowledging their different historical contributions to greenhouse gas emissions, respective capabilities and national circumstances.²⁹⁵ The principle also underpins the obligation of higher-income and historically high-emitting states to support lower-income countries through climate finance, technology transfer and capacity-building for mitigation and adaptation.²⁹⁶

²⁹² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted 9 May 1992, entered into force 21 March 1994, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

²⁹³ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), adopted 17 June 1994, entered into force 26 December 1996, <https://www.unccd.int/resource/convention-text>. Angola and Namibia became parties in 1997.

²⁹⁴ UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, adopted 12 December 2015, entered into force 4 November 2016, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

²⁹⁵ Paris Agreement, Article 2.2.

²⁹⁶ Paris Agreement, Articles 9(1) and (3), 10(6) and 11(1), 12 December 2015, available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

9.3.2 States' human rights obligations with regard to climate change

The relationship between climate change and human rights is now firmly established under international law. Climate change is no longer framed solely as an environmental, technical or developmental concern, but as a systemic and foreseeable threat to the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. These include the rights to life, human dignity, personal integrity, health, an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, water and housing, culture, as protected under the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the CRC, and the CEDAW.²⁹⁷ Importantly, climate change threatens the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, which is now established as a necessary precondition for the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.

Within this framework, women and children are recognized as requiring heightened protection in situations of environmental harm and displacement. Climate change exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities, increasing women's exposure to poverty, violence and exploitation, while children face heightened risks to survival, development and protection, particularly where access to food, water, healthcare and education is disrupted.

In the context of climate change, these obligations translate into a set of interrelated duties. States must refrain from conduct that directly contributes to foreseeable climate-related harm, including activities that drive environmental degradation and undermine the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including conditions necessary for the enjoyment of human rights. They are also required to regulate public and private

actors whose activities generate greenhouse gas emissions, damage ecosystems, or contribute to land and water degradation. In addition, states must take positive measures to protect individuals and communities from climate-related risks, including through effective adaptation strategies, disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and the establishment of social protection mechanisms to support those most vulnerable to climate impacts.²⁹⁸

Even in the absence of human-caused climate change, the precautionary principle dictates that states must take proactive measures to mitigate and adapt to environmental risks.²⁹⁹ This principle emphasizes the importance of preventive action in the face of potential harm, ensuring that vulnerable populations are protected regardless of the underlying causes of climatic events.

In its Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, the ICJ confirmed that states have binding legal obligations under both customary international law and international human rights law to prevent foreseeable climate harm that interferes with the enjoyment of human rights.³⁰⁰ The court made clear that omissions – including failures to regulate fossil fuel extraction, deforestation, extractive industries, large-scale commercial agriculture and land degradation – may constitute internationally wrongful acts, triggering duties of cessation, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition.³⁰¹ This finding is critical for climate displacement, as it establishes that state responsibility may arise not only from direct emissions but also from failures to take reasonable preventive measures against foreseeable harm.

²⁹⁷ See, for example, CESCR, General Comment 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health (previously cited); CESCR, General Comment 12 on the right to adequate food (previously cited).

²⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the environment, 2018 (previously cited).

²⁹⁹ The precautionary principle in international environmental law advocates for preventive action in the face of potential environmental harm, even when scientific evidence is not yet conclusive. It emphasizes that the lack of full scientific certainty should not be a reason to delay measures aimed at preventing or minimizing significant environmental or health risks. This principle shifts the burden of proof to those proposing actions that could cause harm, encouraging them to demonstrate that their actions will not result in significant adverse effects. It is reflected in key international agreements, such as Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the UNFCCC and aims to protect the environment and human health by taking anticipatory measures against potential threats.

³⁰⁰ ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* (previously cited).

³⁰¹ ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* (previously cited).

9.3.3 Climate finance

Climate finance is a legal obligation embedded in the international climate regime. Under the UNFCCC, developed countries committed to provide financial resources to assist developing countries in addressing climate change.³⁰² The Paris Agreement builds on these obligations by requiring developed countries to continue taking the lead in providing financial resources to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, while encouraging other states in a position to do so to contribute voluntarily. These obligations reflect the CBDR-RC principle, which recognizes the greater historical responsibility and capacity of higher-emitting states to respond to climate change.

Climate finance is therefore not simply a political commitment or an act of charity. It forms part of states' legal obligations under the international climate regime and is reinforced by international human rights law. Adequate and predictable financing for mitigation, adaptation and resilience building is essential to enable climate-vulnerable states to protect human rights and reduce the risk of climate-related displacement.

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund reflects growing international recognition that some climate impacts cannot be prevented through mitigation or adaptation alone and require dedicated financial support.³⁰³ In parallel, international human rights law reinforces states' duties of international cooperation and assistance.

9.3.4 States' duty to cooperate and provide international assistance

The principle of international cooperation and assistance is a cornerstone of both international human rights law and the international climate regime,³⁰⁴ emphasizing the need for collective action. States have a duty to work towards full realization of economic, social and cultural rights, and where they cannot meet minimum core obligations alone, they must seek international assistance.³⁰⁵ Articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter similarly require international cooperation to promote universal respect for human rights, including where climate change threatens rights to life, food, water, health, housing and an adequate standard of living.

These obligations require states to cooperate in addressing transboundary challenges that no state can resolve alone. In the context of climate change, this includes providing financial, technical and capacity-building support, particularly where lower-income countries lack the resources to implement effective mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures. States that require such support should also seek international assistance where necessary to fulfil their human rights obligations and strengthen resilience to climate-related hazards, including prolonged droughts.³⁰⁶

302 UNFCCC, Article 4.3

303 Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, established 2022, see further <https://www.frlid.org/>

304 For example, the UN Charter establishes the foundation for international cooperation and solidarity in maintaining peace and security: Charter of the United Nations (UN Charter), adopted 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articulates the universal commitment to human rights and encourages international cooperation for their protection: UDHR, 10 December 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) emphasizes the need for international cooperation to achieve economic, social, and cultural rights: ICESCR, adopted on 16 December 1966, entered into force on 3 January 1976, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>. The UNFCCC highlights the necessity for international cooperation to address climate change and its impacts. The Paris Agreement reinforces global solidarity and collective action to combat climate change and limit global warming. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for global partnerships and cooperative efforts to achieve sustainable development and address global challenges: SDGs, 21 October 2015, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter) promotes regional solidarity and cooperation for the protection and promotion of human rights in Africa: Banjul Charter, adopted on 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986, https://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/docs/African_Charter_Human_Peoples_Rights.pdf. The Declaration on the Right to Development highlights the need for international cooperation to support development and the realization of human rights: Declaration on the Right to Development, 4 December 1986, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development>. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration emphasizes international cooperation and solidarity in managing migration in a humane and orderly manner: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 19 December 2018, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/195>. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction calls for international collaboration to reduce disaster risks and build resilience: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 18 March 2015, <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>.

305 ICESCR, Article 2(1); CESCR, General Comment 3 on the nature of states parties' obligations, 14 December 1990 (UN Doc. E/1991/23), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/e199123-committee-economic-social-and-cultural>, para. 14.

306 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *Climate change and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Statement of the Committee*, 8 October 2018, UN Doc. E/C.12/2018/1, paras 8–10, available at: <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4qoKmdh8frDVSpYAZagDqtp4XhQrHXmVnmAyF1vhs1UDqzgYwC6FWpv%2BVVa2Q08de94iouDGJncpOWnW7X68w%3D%3D> also see Paris Agreement, Articles 7(6), 9(1), 10(6) and 11(1), 12 December 2015, available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

The ICJ reaffirmed these obligations in its 2025 Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, confirming that states must cooperate in good faith through information sharing, scientific cooperation and international assistance to prevent and minimize the adverse effects of climate change.³⁰⁷ These obligations reinforce

the legal basis for regional cooperation to address droughts, other climate-related hazards and their human rights impacts in Southern Africa, particularly as climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of such events.

9.4 The right to development, climate change and natural disasters

The right to development, articulated in Article 22 of the Banjul Charter and the UN Declaration on the Right to Development,³⁰⁸ requires states to ensure that all people can participate in, contribute to and benefit from development in a manner consistent with human dignity. This right encompasses equitable access to land, livelihoods, education, healthcare, and economic opportunity.

Climate change and natural disasters, leading to displacement, directly dismantle this right. Communities forced to abandon land, livestock and social networks lose their capacity for

self-reliance and long-term development. Repeated displacement entrenches structural poverty, weakens intergenerational resilience and undermines social cohesion.

Under international law, development must therefore be climate-resilient, inclusive and rights-based. Both Angola and Namibia are required to integrate displacement-sensitive measures into national development planning, climate adaptation strategies, disaster risk reduction frameworks and migration governance systems.

9.5 Namibia's obligations under domestic law

9.5.1 Constitutional rights and human dignity

The Namibian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all persons, including non-citizens.³⁰⁹ These include the rights to life, liberty, human dignity, equality before the law, and protection from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and forced labour, as well as the right to fair treatment under arrest or detention. Importantly, Article 11(4)–(5) of the Constitution provides that while irregular migrants may be detained, they must have access to legal counsel and cannot be deported without authorization from a tribunal empowered by law.³¹⁰ These constitutional guarantees are complemented by sectoral legislation governing access to healthcare, education, labour protections, anti-trafficking measures and immigration, which together shape the rights and practical situation of migrants, including those in irregular situations.

³⁰⁷ ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* (previously cited).

³⁰⁸ The Declaration on the Right to Development, 4 December 1986, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development>

³⁰⁹ Republic of Namibia, *The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia*, 1990, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Namibia_2014.pdf

³¹⁰ Constitution of Namibia, Article 11(4)–(5).

9.5.2 Immigration and refugee legislation

The Immigration Control Act of 1993 governs the detection, detention, and deportation of undocumented migrants, establishing the legal framework for immigration enforcement and related procedures.³¹¹ It does not provide a pathway to regularization for undocumented persons. The Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act of 1999 implements Namibia's obligations under the UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol.³¹² Under this Act, Angolan nationals fleeing persecution, conflict, or environmental disaster may apply for refugee status, and once recognized, are entitled to protection and legal residence in Namibia.

9.5.3 Labour and anti-trafficking protections

The Labour Act 11 of 2007 extends protection to all workers in Namibia, regardless of nationality or migration status.³¹³ It guarantees equal rights in employment contracts, fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection against discrimination and unfair dismissal. In addition, the Prevention of Organised Crime Act of 2004 criminalises trafficking in persons, forced labour, and exploitation.³¹⁴ Namibia also adopted a National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons.³¹⁵

9.5.4 Legislative proposals on regularization and statelessness

In 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security identified over 141,000 undocumented or stateless persons in Namibia.³¹⁶ In response, the government developed several legislative measures aimed at addressing statelessness and long-term undocumented residence.³¹⁷ As of July 2026, the Statelessness Determination and Protection Bill³¹⁸ has not yet been enacted.

9.5.5 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and National Adaptation Plans (NAP)

Namibia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), submitted under the Paris Agreement, sets out the country's overall commitments on mitigation and adaptation. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is a separate planning process that translates adaptation commitments into practical measures across sectors such as water,

311 Republic of Namibia, Immigration Control Act 7 of 1993 (previously cited).

312 Republic of Namibia, Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act 2 of 1999 (previously cited).

313 Republic of Namibia, Labour Act 11 of 2007, 21 December 2007, <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/annoSTAT/Labour%20Act%2011%20of%202007.pdf>

314 Republic of Namibia, Prevention of Organised Crime Act 29 of 2004 (GG 3363) as amended by Prevention of Organised Crime Amendment Act 10 of 2008 (GG 4191) and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 1 of 2018 (GG 6562), https://www.unodc.org/cld/uploads/res/document/nam/2004/prevention_of_organised_crime_act_2004.html/Prevention_of_Organised_Crime_Act_29_of_2004.pdf

315 Republic of Namibia, *Submission of information to the Note Verbale dated 15 April 2024, received from the Secretary General of the United Nations, requesting Member States to provide progress made in the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 77/194 on Trafficking in Women and Girls for the period 1 August 2022 to date*, 2004, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/a-79-322-submission-namibia-en.pdf>

316 The Namibian, "Over 141,000 people stateless, undocumented", 6 April 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/over-141-000-people-stateless-undocumented/>

317 These include the Regularisation of Status of Certain Residents of Namibia, their Descendants and Foreign Spouses Act, 2024 (Act 15 of 2024), which regularizes the status of holders of historical South West Africa (SWA) identification documents. <https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/15/eng@2024-12-30>

318 See, Informanté, "Ministry of Home Affairs drafts regulations for implementation of Stateless Determination and Protection Bill", 30 October 2025, <https://informante.web.na/?p=384303>; Informanté, "Home Affairs clarifies citizenship rules, warns against misinformation", 7 June 2026, <https://informante.web.na/?p=395466>

agriculture, food security, health and livelihoods. As Namibia develops its NAP, there is an opportunity to incorporate responses to cross-border displacement associated with drought and other environmental stressors.³¹⁹

Further, Namibia's commitments under the UNCCD complement the country's adaptation efforts and reinforce the importance of moving from crisis response towards longer-term drought preparedness and resilience.³²⁰ The UNFCCC's 2024 Technical Guide on Integrating Human Mobility and Climate Change calls on states to integrate human mobility into national climate planning.³²¹ This includes cross-border displacement, pastoralist mobility, labour migration and planned relocation. UNHCR and the Global Compact on Refugees further call for refugees, forcibly displaced and stateless people to be included in climate laws, policies and plans, including NAPs and NDCs.³²² The African Union has also recognised climate change as a driver of migration and displacement and called for strengthened cooperation, data collection, financing and adaptation.³²³

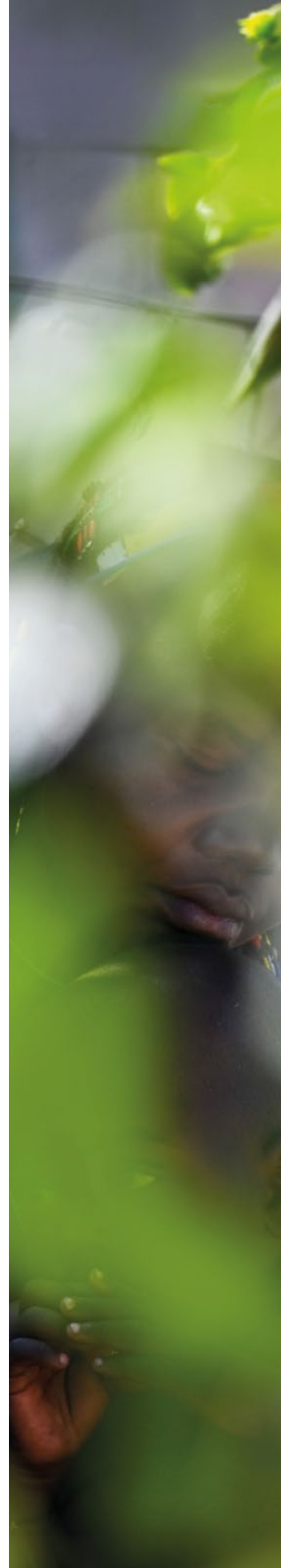
319 Namibia has not yet finalized its National Action Plan (NAP); it is developing this with support from the Green Climate Fund, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, the Namibia Nature Foundation and the NAP Global Network: see, for example, Namibia Nature Foundation, "Strengthening Climate Resilience Across Namibia: Highlights from the 2025 National Adaptation Planning Regional Stakeholder Consultations", 16 December 2025, <https://nnf.org.na/strengthening-climate-resilience-across-namibia-highlights-from-the-2025-national-adaptation-planning-regional-stakeholder-consultations/>. Because this process is still underway, it presents an opportunity to incorporate measures addressing cross-border mobility associated with drought, including documentation, access to services, child protection, labour safeguards and protection against unsafe return.

320 Republic of Namibia, *Namibia's First Nationally Determined Contribution: Second Update*, 2023, available at: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2024-01/FINAL%20UPDATED%20NAMIBIA%20NDC%202023.pdf> (accessed 9 May 2026).

321 UNFCCC, *Technical Guide on Integrating Human Mobility and Climate Change Linkages into Relevant National Climate Change Processes*, November 2024, <https://unfccc.int/technical-guide-on-integrating-human>

322 Global Compact on Refugees, *Multi-stakeholder Pledge: Climate Action*, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions/multi-stakeholder-pledges-2023/multi-stakeholder-pledge-climate-action>; SLYCAN Trust, *Climate-Related Human Mobility Across Different Levels of Adaptation Governance: Lessons from Adaptation Planning and Implementation in Costa Rica, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and Around the World*, 2025, https://napglobalnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Research-Report_Climate-Related-Human-Mobility-Across-Different-Levels-of-Adaptation-Governance-compressed.pdf

323 African Union, *The 7th Pan-African Forum on Migration (PAFoM-7): Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Human Mobility in Africa*, 18–21 October 2022, <https://au.int/fr/node/42263>



TOWARDS A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA

Regional frameworks offer underutilized but significant opportunities to respond to cross-border displacement due to climate change and natural disasters in a manner consistent with human rights obligations. Regional cooperation provides a pathway to shift from ad hoc, informal responses toward predictable, rights-respecting arrangements. By leveraging existing regional instruments, states can enhance protection, reduce exploitation, and manage cross-border movement in ways that recognize climate and other environmental factors as structural drivers rather than a temporary anomaly. This includes harmonizing migration governance, labour standards, civil registration systems, and social protection mechanisms across borders.

An African regional framework for cross-border displacement could operationalize the preventive, protective, and cooperative obligations articulated in the Banjul Charter and the Maputo Protocol (see further below), aligning them with recent developments such as the ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change³²⁴

and the pending request for an advisory opinion from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACtHPR) concerning states' obligations in addressing the climate crisis.³²⁵ The pending request for an advisory opinion from the ACtHPR on the climate crisis could catalyze the jurisprudential development of such a regime, clarifying the content of human rights obligations within Africa's evolving legal order, in line with what has already been established by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.³²⁶

Such a regional protection framework should affirm that people displaced in the context of drought, climate-related events and disasters remain rights holders whose rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled throughout displacement and place human rights at the centre of regional responses. It would also embody the African philosophy of Ubuntu,³²⁷ reinforcing the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility, and interdependence that underpin regional human rights law.

³²⁴ ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* (previously cited).

³²⁵ African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACtHPR), Request for an advisory opinion on States' obligations in addressing the climate crisis, 2025, <https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/request-for-an-advisory-opinion-on-the-human-rights-obligations-of-african-states-in-addressing-the-climate-crisis> 2579

³²⁶ IACtHR, *Advisory Opinion OC-32/25: Climate Emergency and Human Rights* (previously cited), para. 433.

³²⁷ Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasises human dignity, solidarity, mutual care and the interconnectedness of individuals and communities. It has increasingly been recognised in African constitutional and human rights jurisprudence as an important normative value underpinning rights, equality and social justice.

10.1 Existing African human rights architecture

The existing African human rights architecture, particularly the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Banjul Charter)³²⁸ and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol),³²⁹ provides the normative foundations for strengthening regional protection for people displaced in the context of climate change, drought and other disasters.

10.1.1 The Banjul Charter

The Banjul Charter articulates an expansive and interdependent vision of rights that bridges civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and collective dimensions. Unlike many international instruments, it recognizes both individual and collective rights, as well as corresponding duties, a framework particularly suited to addressing the systemic and transboundary nature of climate change and natural disasters.

Three provisions of the Banjul Charter are especially salient in relation to displacement due to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters:

1. Article 16 guarantees the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health, obliging states to take measures to protect the health of their populations.³³⁰ Environmental degradation, pollution, and the collapse of essential ecosystems that sustain livelihoods threaten the enjoyment of this right. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has repeatedly affirmed that the right to health includes underlying determinants such as access to safe water, clean air, adequate food, and a healthy environment.³³¹
2. Article 18(1) protects the family as the natural unit of society, mandating state protection of its physical and moral integrity.³³² Forced displacement resulting from drought, famine, or environmental degradation often leads to family separation and community disintegration, infringing upon this right. States that fail to prevent foreseeable environmental displacement, or that deport or arbitrarily detain affected communities, risk violating this duty.
3. Article 24 establishes the right of all peoples to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development.³³³ This is a collective right, reflecting the Banjul Charter's recognition that environmental integrity is essential for human survival and development. The ACHPR's landmark decision in the case brought by the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) held that the right to a satisfactory environment imposes on states both negative obligations (to prevent pollution and environmental degradation) and positive obligations (to protect communities from third-party harm, promote conservation, and ensure sustainable use of natural resources).³³⁴

328 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter), adopted 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986, <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>

329 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted on 11 July 2003, entry into force 25 November 2005, <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

330 Banjul Charter, Article 16.

331 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), General Comment 3 on the African Charter on the Right to Life, 12 December 2015, <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/851>

332 Banjul Charter, Article 18(1).

333 Banjul Charter, Article 24. In May 2026, the ACHPR launched a public call for submissions towards a General Comment on the right to a satisfactory environment under Article 24 of the Banjul Charter, demonstrating the continuing development of this jurisprudence.

334 ACHPR, *Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) v. Nigeria*, Communication 155/96, 27 October 2001, <https://achpr.au.int/en/decisions-communications/social-and-economic-rights-action-center-serac-and-center-economic-15596>

These provisions reinforce Angola's obligation to take reasonable adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures to reduce foreseeable drought-related harm and protect affected communities. They also reinforce Namibia's obligation to ensure that people displaced by drought are treated in accordance with the Banjul Charter, including by respecting the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment where return would expose them to serious human rights risks.³³⁵

At the time of writing, a request for an advisory opinion on states' obligations in addressing the climate crisis was pending before the ACtHPR.³³⁶ The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights had also initiated a study on the need for a specific regional legal framework for persons displaced by climate change across borders.³³⁷

10.1.2 The Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa

The Maputo Protocol expands the Banjul Charter's human rights framework by explicitly addressing the structural inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by women in contexts of crisis, displacement, and environmental stress. It provides a critical gender lens for understanding women's rights in the context of drought, environmental stress, displacement and disasters.

Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol guarantees women's rights to health, including sexual and reproductive health, while Article 15 protects the right to food security and adequate nutrition. Both are threatened in climate-sensitive settings where women, particularly in rural and pastoral communities, bear disproportionate responsibility for water collection, subsistence farming, and household survival.

Article 19 obliges states to ensure women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels, including in environmental management and the formulation of development policies.

The Maputo Protocol's transformative potential lies in its recognition of women not as passive victims but as active agents of adaptation and resilience. It supports women's participation in the design and implementation of adaptation, disaster risk reduction and displacement responses, while reinforcing states' obligations to ensure access to livelihoods, social protection and economic empowerment for displaced women, consistent with Article 19(c), and to safeguard women's inheritance and property rights under Article 21.

10.2 Regional migration governance initiatives

Although there are no initiatives dedicated to facilitating migration pathways for people affected by climate change and disasters, existing regional migration governance initiatives have demonstrated the potential for coordinated approaches to migration across Southern Africa. Although labour migration schemes are not a substitute to rights-based migration pathways dedicated to the people most

affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters, they may contribute to addressing the needs of people at risk of forced displacement.

The ILO-led Southern African Migration Management (SAMM) programme has supported states to strengthen labour migration frameworks, improve intergovernmental cooperation, and address

³³⁵ Banjul Charter, Article 5.

³³⁶ ACtHPR, Request for an advisory opinion on States' obligations in addressing the climate crisis, 2025 (previously cited).

³³⁷ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Resolution on the need for a study on the development of a specific legal framework for the protection of forcibly displaced persons in Africa as a result of climate change, ACHPR/Res.628 (LXXXVII) 2025, Adopted 11 March 2025.

exploitation in informal and cross-border labour markets, including those prevalent in border regions of Namibia.³³⁸ Evaluations of the SAMM project in

2024/25 highlighted the importance of aligning labour, immigration, and social protection policies to reduce irregularity and vulnerability.³³⁹

10.2.1 The SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons,³⁴⁰ adopted in 2005, seeks to progressively facilitate the free movement of SADC nationals through measures including visa-free entry, residence and establishment.³⁴¹ Although the protocol has not entered into force because it has not yet received the required number of ratifications,³⁴² it reflects the region's long-term commitment to freer movement within Southern Africa. While the SADC Protocol was not designed specifically to address cross-border displacement in the context of drought and other disasters, its objectives demonstrate the potential for regional

cooperation to facilitate lawful cross-border movement and reduce barriers faced by people compelled to move within the region.

The SADC framework also complements the region's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2015–2030),³⁴³ which acknowledges the links between climate change, human security, and migration. As drought-related cross-border displacement becomes more frequent in the region, SADC could consider how existing free movement and regional cooperation frameworks might better respond to people moving for survival while remaining consistent with international human rights and refugee law.

10.2.2 AU Free Movement Protocol

At the continental level, the African Union Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment (2018) represents an important opportunity to strengthen regional responses to cross-border displacement in the context of drought and other disasters³⁴⁴.

The AU Free Movement Protocol promotes the free movement of persons as a driver of regional integration and affirms that its implementation should be consistent with human rights. While ratification remains limited, the protocol provides an important legal and policy framework for facilitating lawful cross-border movement within Africa.

As implementation of the AU Free Movement Protocol evolves, states could consider how its framework might better respond to people displaced in the context of drought and other disasters, including through temporary protection measures, humanitarian visas or other lawful stay arrangements consistent with international human rights and refugee law. The protocol also aligns with the African Union Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018–2030),³⁴⁵ which recognizes environmental change as one of the drivers of migration and calls for strengthened regional cooperation on migration governance.

338 ILO, Southern Africa Migration Management (SAMM) Programme, <https://www.sammproject.org/>

339 ILO, "Independent Mid-Term Evaluation of the Southern African Migration Management Project (SAMM)", 9 January 2024, <https://webapps.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/files/file/1157183>

340 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, adopted in 2005, https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/Protocol_on_Facilitation_of_Movement_of_Persons2005.pdf

341 Ottilia Anna Maunganidze, "Migration and migration policy in the Southern African Development Community", Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 31 January 2024, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/regionalprofile/english-version-country-profiles/543602/migration-and-migration-policy-in-the-southern-african-development-community/>

342 Neither Angola nor Namibia has ratified the SADC Protocol.

343 SADC, *SADC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2015–2030)*, 24 July 2015, https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SADC_Climate_Change_Strategy_and_Action_Plan-English.pdf

344 Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to free movement of persons, right of residence and right of establishment, adopted 29 January 2018, <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-treaty-establishing-african-economic-community-relating-free-movement-persons> (AEC Free Movement Protocol).

345 African Union, *Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018–2030)*, May 2018, available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35956-doc-2018_mppfa_english_version.pdf (accessed 4 August 2026).

Migration between Angola and Namibia is neither new nor anomalous; it is rooted in historical patterns of circular movement, shared ecosystems, and cross-border livelihoods. What is new is the scale, persistence, and heightened risks of human rights violations associated with displacement driven by prolonged drought and environmental degradation.

For younger populations, this disruption has lifelong consequences, including loss of education, impaired development and reduced future opportunities. For women, it reinforces cycles of economic dependency, exclusion and vulnerability to exploitation, particularly in displacement settings. On a daily basis, undocumented Angolan people continue to face detention and deportation, often under conditions that raise concerns about collective expulsions and violations of due process guarantees. Fear of detention and deportation discourages many from approaching authorities or accessing public services, including healthcare.

The displacement of communities due to prolonged drought and other environmental stressors in southern Angola, particularly in Cunene Province, underscores the urgent need for a robust human rights response. As this report demonstrates, justice requires more than emergency humanitarian assistance. It requires ensuring that displaced communities can access adequate healthcare, education, food, water and livelihoods, that women are not left carrying disproportionate care burdens, and that people can live with dignity, free from discrimination, fear of detention or deportation. At the same time, stronger adaptation, drought preparedness and resilience measures in Angola are essential to reduce the conditions that continue to force people to leave their homes.

Namibia should consider a rights-based approach to migration, ensuring that displaced Angolans who crossed into the country because of climate-related events and natural disasters have access to registration and documentation. This would effectively prevent them falling into irregular migration status and being detained and deported. State authorities should conduct individual assessments before deportations and consider the human risk associated with return. This requires that Namibia conduct screenings, provide access to information, and offer legal assistance where necessary. This should include child-friendly procedures that preserve family unity. When assessments show that return would expose displaced Angolans to serious harm, then Namibia should offer international protection.



Bechekama, an Angolan woman displaced by drought and living in northern Namibia, described the hardships she faced, including illness, collecting firewood each day and the lack of adequate shelter and access to education for her children.
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11.1 What justice looks like

“ My name is Bechekama. I’m somebody who doesn’t live the life I’m supposed to live. I suffer a lot. I’m sick and every day I have to collect firewood. I want shelter and school for my children. I don’t have a relative. ³⁴⁶ ”

- Bechekama, Opuwo, May 2025

Although life in northern Namibia is characterised by significant hardship, participants consistently described conditions in drought-affected areas of southern Angola as even more precarious. Many explained that repeated crop failures, livestock losses, food shortages and the absence of reliable access to water had made remaining in Angola increasingly untenable. Several participants also described moving repeatedly between the two countries in search of safety, food, work or family support. For many, crossing into Namibia was not viewed as a permanent solution but as a survival strategy undertaken despite the hardships and discrimination they expected to face.

Angolan communities displaced in northern Namibia due to worsening drought conditions consistently described justice not as charity, but as the ability to live with dignity, care for their families, and access essential rights. Across interviews and focus groups, participants framed justice in practical terms: access to shelter, food, water, healthcare, education, and legal recognition.

Living conditions reported by interviewees in northern Namibia reflected severe deprivation. Many families reside in makeshift structures or sleep outdoors without

adequate protection, bedding, or sanitation. Chronic food insecurity shapes daily life, forcing households to prioritize immediate survival over longer-term needs such as education. In this context, children’s schooling is often interrupted or deprioritized due to hunger and household responsibilities.

A recurring concern was the lack of legal recognition and visibility. Focus group participants and interviewees reported feeling excluded from both Angolan and Namibian systems, resulting in limited access to services, fear of arrest or detention, deportation, and barriers to education and healthcare. Rather than seeking preferential treatment, participants emphasized the need for equal access to essential rights and services.

Child protection risks emerged as a significant concern. Caregivers described how chronic poverty, food insecurity, disrupted education and insecure living conditions increased children’s vulnerability to exploitation, including child labour and trafficking. Focus group participants also expressed concern about the absence of effective child protection mechanisms and limited access to legal documentation and social services.

³⁴⁶ Interview in person with Bechekama, Opuwo, May 2025.

Access to healthcare was described as inconsistent and, in some cases, inaccessible. Focus group participants reported barriers including cost, documentation requirements, and discriminatory treatment. Maternal and child health needs were particularly affected, with limited access to adequate care, nutrition, and postnatal support.

Beyond immediate needs, interviewees highlighted the importance of livelihoods, secure income and opportunities to rebuild their lives. The ability to

secure income and sustain households was closely linked to dignity and long-term resilience.

Overall, accounts from those Amnesty International interviewed point to a clear gap between survival conditions and the realization of their human rights. Justice, in this context, is understood as recognition, protection and inclusion, underscoring the need for responses that move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance towards rights-based, durable solutions.

11.2 Government of Angola

International law requires Angola to ensure that displacement does not prevent people from obtaining the documentation necessary to access essential services and legal protection. The lack of effective civil registration systems in drought-affected rural areas of Angola, particularly for children, heightens the risk of de facto statelessness once families cross borders. Angola is therefore required to strengthen civil registration, birth registration and documentation systems, particularly in drought-affected areas.

Testimonies from displaced people also highlighted the importance of stronger drought preparedness, climate adaptation and resilience measures in Angola to reduce the conditions that force people to leave their homes in the first place and address displacement associated with drought and other climate-related hazards, consistent with its obligations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

In addition, Angola's obligations extend beyond its borders. Where inadequate adaptation, drought preparedness or disaster risk reduction measures contribute to foreseeable environmental harm and cross-border displacement, Angola should cooperate in good faith with neighbouring states.

Regional cooperation mechanisms such as the SAMM programme can strengthen information sharing, border coordination and protection for people moving across borders in the context of drought and other disasters. Similarly, if operationalised, elements of the SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons could support simplified entry procedures, temporary stay arrangements or bilateral border agreements that facilitate lawful movement while reducing protection risks. These mechanisms should complement, rather than replace, states' obligations under international human rights and refugee law.

11.3 Government of Namibia

The Government of Namibia has repeatedly maintained that there are "no Angolan refugees" within its territory, framing cross-border movements primarily as irregular migration rather than displacement requiring international protection. The absence of formal recognition of protection needs for Angolan people displaced by drought has practical consequences. Individuals remain undocumented,

unable to access durable legal status, including protection status, leaving them vulnerable to arrest, detention, deportation, exploitation, and barriers to essential services. International law requires that protection assessments be grounded in a case-by-case determination of individualized needs, rather than labels.

International obligations require Namibian authorities to assess whether individuals face real risks to life, dignity, or personal integrity upon return, including risks arising from climate change and/or natural disasters such as severe drought, food insecurity, and livelihood collapse. When such assessments show that return would expose individuals to serious harm, then Namibia should be able to offer international protection. International obligations also require Namibia to ensure access to registration, documentation and protection procedures for all persons who may be in need of international or complementary protection, irrespective of their mode of entry or migration status.

Namibia should include displaced Angolans in its National Adaptation Plan and ensure that national climate policies, including its NDC and drought preparedness and resilience initiatives, take account

of the needs of people displaced across borders by prolonged drought and other environmental stressors. This would make displaced communities visible in national planning and support more inclusive adaptation responses.

Namibia's constitutional framework provides strong guarantees of human dignity, equality before the law, and protection from inhuman or degrading treatment. These guarantees apply to all persons within its jurisdiction. In the context of drought-induced displacement, compliance with constitutional and international obligations requires Namibia to move beyond narrow refugee classifications by developing appropriate protection mechanisms for people in need of international or complementary protection, while also exploring lawful migration pathways where appropriate.

11.4 Historical emitters

Displacement in the context of climate change and natural disasters is inseparable from global inequality and historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions. Angola and Namibia are low-emitting countries yet face disproportionate exposure to climate harms they did not cause. The impacts of this inequality are both gendered and intergenerational. Those with the least access to resources, decision-making power and protection mechanisms bear the greatest burden of climate-related harm.

High-income, historically high-emitting countries have heightened obligations under international environmental law in relation to climate action. Under international human rights law, states that are able to do so also have obligations to provide international cooperation and assistance, including climate finance, according to their capacity, to support the realization of human rights in countries affected by climate change. This support should

include finance for climate adaptation, drought preparedness, resilience building and, where appropriate, funding for loss and damage. Climate finance should be accessible, adequate and responsive to the needs of countries disproportionately affected by climate change, including support for adaptation, livelihood restoration, social protection and protection measures for people displaced by drought and other environmental stressors.

Consistent with the principles of international cooperation and solidarity, high-income states that are able to do so should provide sustained financial, technical and capacity-building assistance to countries such as Angola and Namibia. Strengthened international cooperation is essential to enable affected states to reduce displacement risks, protect the rights of people affected by drought and other environmental stressors, and respond effectively where displacement occurs.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS



12.1 To the Government of Angola

Amnesty International calls on the Government of Angola to:

1. Prevent drought-induced displacement and protect affected communities:

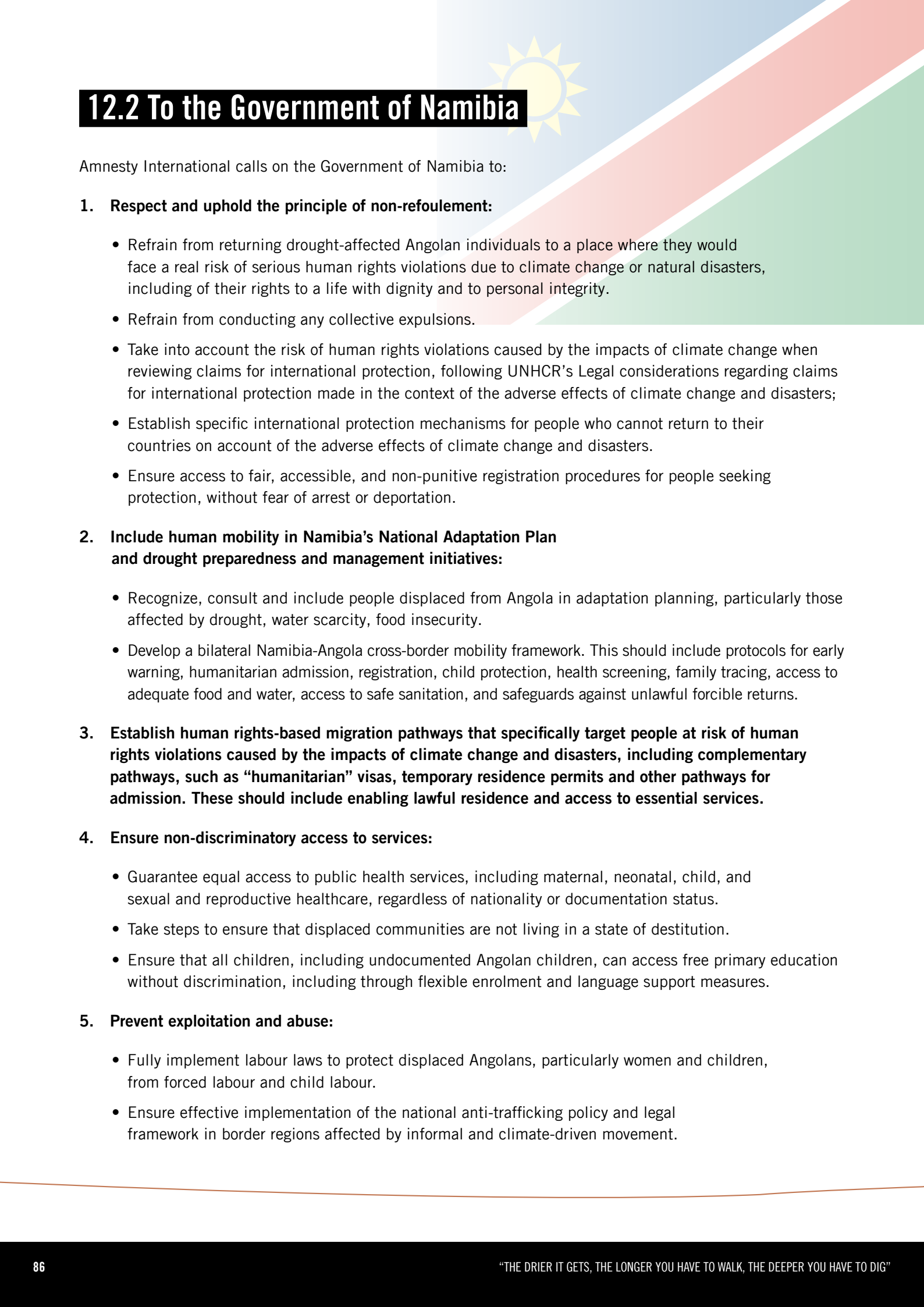
- Adopt and implement climate change adaptation measures in southern Angola, including drought-resilient water infrastructure, livelihood protection for pastoralist and farming communities, and social protection measures that will guarantee human rights, including in times of repeated drought and other extreme weather events.
- Ensure that national climate action, drought preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and development policies explicitly address displacement risks and include protection measures for populations at risk of forced displacement.

2. Guarantee access to essential services:

- Ensure access to adequate food, safe drinking water, healthcare, education, and social protection for communities affected by extreme weather events, including prolonged and severe droughts and environmental degradation, particularly individuals belonging to groups at risk of marginalization and discrimination.
- Ensure that access to healthcare includes access to maternal, child, and SRH services for all, including in drought-affected areas.

3. Protect displaced children:

- Develop child protection mechanisms to identify and support children at risk of trafficking, exploitation and family separation before, during and following displacement.
- Strengthen cross-border child protection cooperation with Namibia, including referral pathways and family tracing where appropriate.



12.2 To the Government of Namibia

Amnesty International calls on the Government of Namibia to:

1. Respect and uphold the principle of non-refoulement:

- Refrain from returning drought-affected Angolan individuals to a place where they would face a real risk of serious human rights violations due to climate change or natural disasters, including of their rights to a life with dignity and to personal integrity.
- Refrain from conducting any collective expulsions.
- Take into account the risk of human rights violations caused by the impacts of climate change when reviewing claims for international protection, following UNHCR's Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters;
- Establish specific international protection mechanisms for people who cannot return to their countries on account of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters.
- Ensure access to fair, accessible, and non-punitive registration procedures for people seeking protection, without fear of arrest or deportation.

2. Include human mobility in Namibia's National Adaptation Plan and drought preparedness and management initiatives:

- Recognize, consult and include people displaced from Angola in adaptation planning, particularly those affected by drought, water scarcity, food insecurity.
- Develop a bilateral Namibia-Angola cross-border mobility framework. This should include protocols for early warning, humanitarian admission, registration, child protection, health screening, family tracing, access to adequate food and water, access to safe sanitation, and safeguards against unlawful forcible returns.

3. Establish human rights-based migration pathways that specifically target people at risk of human rights violations caused by the impacts of climate change and disasters, including complementary pathways, such as “humanitarian” visas, temporary residence permits and other pathways for admission. These should include enabling lawful residence and access to essential services.

4. Ensure non-discriminatory access to services:

- Guarantee equal access to public health services, including maternal, neonatal, child, and sexual and reproductive healthcare, regardless of nationality or documentation status.
- Take steps to ensure that displaced communities are not living in a state of destitution.
- Ensure that all children, including undocumented Angolan children, can access free primary education without discrimination, including through flexible enrolment and language support measures.

5. Prevent exploitation and abuse:

- Fully implement labour laws to protect displaced Angolans, particularly women and children, from forced labour and child labour.
- Ensure effective implementation of the national anti-trafficking policy and legal framework in border regions affected by informal and climate-driven movement.

12.3 To high-income historically high-emitting countries and high-income fossil fuel-producing countries

Amnesty International calls on all high-income historically high-emitting countries and high-income fossil fuel-producing countries to:

- 1. Rapidly and equitably phase out all fossil fuel extraction, production and use, and shift towards renewable energy in a manner consistent with human rights and based on states' capacities and responsibility for emissions.**
- 2. Cease all new oil, gas, and coal exploration and development, and stop financing fossil fuel projects domestically and abroad.**
- 3. Rapidly provide adequate, new, additional and predictable finance – primarily in the form of grant-equivalent public finance – to support lower-income countries in reducing emissions, adapting to climate change, ensuring just transitions away from fossil fuels in all sectors, and addressing loss and damage.**
- 4. Massively scale up finance for adaptation, including through increased contributions to the multilateral climate funds to implement the COP29 call to triple outflows from the funds by 2035, recognizing that even this is insufficient to meet the scale of need, and work with Angola and Namibia to ensure that they receive adequate climate finance for drought preparedness and displacement from drought-stricken regions.**
- 5. Significantly increase funding for loss and damage funding arrangements, particularly the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage:**
 - Provide technical and financial assistance to support human rights-consistent responses to climate displacement, including housing, education, healthcare, and livelihood restoration.
 - Support regional initiatives that recognize migration as a legitimate climate adaptation strategy.

12.4 To the Southern African Development Community

Amnesty International calls on SADC to:

1. Facilitate safe and regular migration:

- Accelerate ratification and implementation of the SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, with specific consideration for climate-related displacement.
- Promote bilateral and regional arrangements between Angola and Namibia that allow for safe and voluntary movement in response to environmental factors.

2. Integrate displacement in the context of climate change and disasters into regional policy:

- Ensure that regional climate and migration frameworks explicitly address climate-change related and disaster-related displacement and cross-border protection.
- Treat migration as a resilience and adaptation strategy rather than solely a security concern.

12.5 To the African Union

Amnesty International calls on the African Union to:

1. Strengthen regional protection standards:

- Through the ACHPR Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Displaced Persons and Migrants in Africa, provide guidance on the interpretation of “events seriously disturbing public order” under the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention to explicitly encompass the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters.

2. Advance free movement:

- Encourage ratification and implementation of the AU Free Movement Protocol, including measures that facilitate movement in response to environmental stress.
- Integrate climate-related and disaster-related displacement explicitly into AU climate, migration, and development strategies.

12.6 To the international community

Amnesty International calls on the international community to:

1. Establish new – and increase the range of existing – human rights-consistent migration opportunities available to those affected by climate change impacts and disasters, including complementary pathways, such as “humanitarian” visas, temporary residence permits and other pathways for admission that specifically target people at risk of human rights violations caused by the impacts of climate change and disasters.
2. Develop durable solutions to the negative impacts of climate change and disasters that prioritize dignity, self-reliance, and inclusion.
3. Ensure the meaningful participation of displaced people, including women and older people, in decisions affecting climate adaptation, migration governance, and recovery.



“THE DRIER IT GETS THE LONGER YOU HAVE TO WALK, THE DEEPER YOU HAVE TO DIG”

THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF DROUGHT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT ON ANGOLAN WOMEN & CHILDREN IN NAMIBIA

This report examines the human rights impacts of drought-related displacement from southern Angola into northern Namibia. Drawing on research with displaced Angolan communities, government authorities, civil society and humanitarian actors, it explores how recurrent and increasingly severe droughts, exacerbated by El Niño and projected to become more severe in the context of anthropogenic climate change, interact with longstanding poverty, food insecurity, land dispossession and underinvestment in southern Angola to drive people across the border in search of food, water, livelihoods and essential services.

The report documents the particular impacts of displacement on women and children, including barriers to healthcare and education, inadequate housing, food and water, lack of documentation,

risks of exploitation and trafficking, and exposure to arrest, detention and return. It also examines gaps in existing immigration and protection frameworks, which provide few accessible pathways for people crossing borders in the context of drought and other disasters.

Amnesty International argues that responses to such displacement must move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance and immigration enforcement towards rights-based and durable solutions. The report calls on Angola and Namibia to strengthen protection, drought preparedness and climate resilience, while urging greater regional cooperation and adequate climate finance and international assistance from states with greater responsibility and capacity to respond to the climate crisis.



Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilises the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations. We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.

CONTACT US

 info@amnesty.org

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