

# **Environmental and Conflict Displacement: Pathways to Sustainable Peace in East Asia and Incheon**

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## **Abstract**

East Asia faces simultaneous pressures from environmental degradation and conflict-driven displacement, both of which have become defining challenges for long-term regional stability. Rising sea levels, intensifying typhoons, and floods are contributing to the rapid growth of environmentally displaced populations, while unresolved geopolitical tensions continue to drive conflict-induced migration. Incheon, a coastal city mainly built on reclaimed tidal flats, exemplifies both the risks associated with climate change and the potential for leadership in regional resilience policy. This study analyzes the structural and human security implications of displacement in East Asia and argues that integrated governance, climate adaptation, and inclusive peacebuilding strategies are essential to mitigating humanitarian risks. By examining theoretical frameworks, regional case studies, and Incheon's institutional capacity, this paper identifies recommendations to enhance long-term resilience and contribute to sustainable peace.

Keywords: Environmental Displacement; Conflict-Induced Displacement; Peacebuilding; Human Security; Incheon; Songdo; East Asia; Resilience

## **Introduction**

East Asia is confronting an increasingly complex landscape in which environmental degradation and conflict-driven displacement intersect to produce unprecedented human security challenges.<sup>1</sup> Accelerating climate hazards, including sea-level rise, intensifying typhoons, flooding, and long-term ecological deterioration, are reshaping patterns of human mobility across the region. At the same time, unresolved geopolitical tensions and structural inequalities continue to generate conflict-induced migration. These pressures reinforce one another, creating overlapping vulnerabilities that demand integrated, multi-dimensional approaches rather than isolated policy responses. Taken together, these dynamics show that displacement in East Asia is not an isolated emergency but a

systemic transformation of how people live, move, and negotiate security in their everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>

Like many major cities across Asia, Incheon sits along the littorals, where the concentration of populations, critical infrastructure, and economic activity is matched by extreme exposure to climate-related threats. Littoral zones are among the most vulnerable areas to sea-level rise, storm surges, typhoon intensification, and other natural or human-made disasters. Incheon's extensive reclaimed coastal terrain and low elevation amplify these risks and underscore the urgent need for long-term resilience planning. Concurrently, the city's smart infrastructure, international institutions, and growing research networks position it as a strategic hub capable of contributing meaningfully to regional solutions. In this sense, Incheon functions simultaneously as a frontline site of climate vulnerability and a laboratory where new models of climate governance, human security, and peacebuilding can be tested, refined, and scaled.

The analysis, therefore, situates displacement not as a temporary disruption to an otherwise stable order but as a long-term structural condition that will increasingly shape how states, cities, and communities understand security, justice, and regional cooperation.

### **Background and Significance**

The dual crises of climate change and conflict have made displacement one of the most urgent regional issues of the twenty-first century. East Asia is particularly exposed because of its high population density, rapid urbanization, and extensive coastal development. Many of the region's major cities, including Incheon, Busan, Shanghai, and Tokyo, sit along littoral zones where economic opportunity has historically outweighed environmental risk. These coastal cities now face increasing threats from sea-level rise, storm surges, typhoons, and flooding, all of which disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized communities with limited adaptive capacity. At the same time, unresolved historical tensions, territorial disputes, and political instability continue to generate internal and cross-border displacement. These conflict-related pressures often overlap with environmental vulnerabilities, compounding risks that strain public services, weaken governance, and heighten social and economic fragility. In practice, this means that the same communities facing precarious housing, limited political voice, and fragile livelihoods

are also the ones most likely to be displaced first and to struggle most with recovery and relocation.

Recent developments in global climate governance further emphasize the importance of addressing these interconnected challenges. At COP28 in 2023, the international community renewed its commitments to climate mitigation and adaptation, highlighting the growing importance of resilience planning for regions most affected by climate hazards.<sup>3</sup> The deliberations underscored that climate-related displacement is no longer a peripheral issue but a central concern for global security and sustainable development. These themes align closely with key Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 13, Climate Action, which calls for strengthening adaptive capacity and integrating climate considerations into national planning, and Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, which stresses the need to make urban environments inclusive, safe, and resilient.<sup>4</sup> Together, these frameworks reinforce the need to understand displacement not merely as a humanitarian issue but as a structural challenge at the intersection of environmental change, urbanization, and human security. By linking East Asia's experience to these global frameworks, the study shows that responses to displacement must be embedded within long-term development strategies rather than treated as short-term emergency relief.

For South Korea, and Incheon in particular, these concerns carry specific urgency. Incheon's international airport, logistics infrastructure, and coastal urban expansion have increased its exposure to climate hazards and positioned the city as a potential leader in shaping regional governance for climate and conflict displacement. The city's advanced smart systems, global institutional presence, and academic networks offer opportunities to pilot resilience initiatives and strengthen policy coordination across East Asia. This combination of vulnerability and institutional capability makes Incheon an essential site for analyzing broader regional dynamics and for understanding how cities can respond to complex patterns of displacement. Incheon thus becomes a microcosm of broader East Asian tensions: a space where economic globalization, technological innovation, and environmental risk converge, and where policy choices will have disproportionate influence on regional trajectories.

Moreover, the consequences of displacement extend beyond immediate physical movement. The loss of housing, livelihoods, and community networks produces long-term social and economic disruptions for displaced populations. Host communities often experience pressure on

public services, heightened social tensions, and increased resource scarcity, especially when displacement occurs at scale or in areas already facing economic inequality. These dynamics illustrate how displacement operates both as a symptom and a driver of insecurity, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability that can undermine regional stability if not addressed through comprehensive policy frameworks. These feedback loops mean that poorly managed displacement can fuel new grievances, deepen perceptions of injustice, and create conditions that make future conflicts more likely, thereby linking displacement directly to the prospects for sustainable peace.

The significance of this study lies in demonstrating how environmental and conflict displacement collectively reshape human security in East Asia and in evaluating how Incheon can contribute to regional resilience and sustainable peace. By situating Incheon within global policy developments such as the COP28 outcomes and the SDGs, and by examining its position within the broader system of East Asian littoral cities, this study highlights the need for integrated governance, climate adaptation, and inclusive peacebuilding strategies. Understanding these interconnected dynamics is essential for designing policy solutions that protect displaced populations, strengthen urban resilience, and contribute to a more stable and peaceful regional order. In doing so, the study also argues for a shift in perspective: from viewing displacement as an inevitable cost of development and climate change to recognizing it as a critical lens for evaluating the legitimacy, effectiveness, and justice of regional governance arrangements.

### **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to develop an integrated analysis of environmental and conflict-induced displacement in East Asia and to assess Incheon's potential role as a leader in regional resilience and human security governance. The study seeks to bridge conceptual, empirical, and policy-oriented perspectives to deepen understanding of the complex drivers of displacement and explore how cities and states can respond to these challenges through coordinated, multi-level strategies. By situating Incheon within the broader context of East Asian climate vulnerability and geopolitical dynamics, the study aims to contribute to emerging scholarly debates on sustainable development, urban resilience, climate governance, and conflict resolution.

The scope of the analysis encompasses several interconnected components. First, it examines definitions and theoretical frameworks related to environmental displacement and conflict-induced migration, drawing upon concepts such as vulnerability, structural violence, intersectionality, and human security. These frameworks provide the foundation for understanding how environmental stress, political instability, and social inequality interact to shape patterns of displacement across the region. Second, the study analyzes regional case studies from South Korea, Japan, China, and Pacific Island states to illustrate the diverse ways in which displacement manifests across different political, geographic, and socio-economic contexts. These comparative examples highlight both common regional challenges and the differentiated vulnerabilities experienced by various communities. The comparative orientation allows the study to identify recurring patterns of risk and resilience while also recognizing that displacement governance must be tailored to specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Third, the study offers a focused examination of Incheon's specific geographic exposures, infrastructural development, and institutional assets. Incheon's position as a major littoral city with advanced smart-city infrastructure, global governance organizations, and academic networks makes it an informative case for understanding the opportunities and constraints associated with urban leadership in climate and displacement governance. The analysis evaluates how these strengths and vulnerabilities position Incheon as a potential regional hub for policy coordination, knowledge exchange, and resilience-building. By centering Incheon, the study also seeks to move beyond abstract discussions of "vulnerable cities" and instead explore what concrete forms of leadership, partnership, and experimentation might look like in a real urban setting.

Finally, the study proposes a set of recommendations designed to support multi-level governance and peacebuilding. These recommendations emphasize the need for integrated disaster preparedness, legal frameworks for displacement, ESG-driven private sector engagement, and enhanced cooperation among local, national, and regional stakeholders. Together, these elements reflect a holistic approach that recognizes the multi-dimensional nature of displacement and the importance of coordinated responses. The recommendations are not intended as rigid prescriptions, but as adaptable frameworks that can be refined through local consultation, regional dialogue, and ongoing empirical research.

By maintaining a broad regional perspective while highlighting Incheon as a central node for future coordination, this study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on human security, sustainable development, and climate and conflict governance in East Asia. Its findings offer insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand and address the challenges posed by displacement amid environmental and geopolitical uncertainty. In particular, the study aspires to inform future regional dialogues, policy experiments, and research collaborations that place displaced communities and at-risk littoral cities at the center of peace and security planning.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in interdisciplinary inquiry, reflecting the complexity of environmental and conflict displacement in East Asia. The research draws upon a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, government policy papers, United Nations and other intergovernmental publications, NGO reports, and climate risk assessments. These sources provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing displacement as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of environmental change, human security, urban planning, and regional governance. Special attention is given to works that address the vulnerabilities of coastal and littoral cities, the dynamics of forced migration, and the institutional capacities required for sustainable adaptation. This combination of sources makes it possible to compare formal policy commitments with on-the-ground realities, revealing both best practices and persistent implementation gaps across the region.

The selection of regional case studies is guided by three criteria: vulnerability to climate and conflict displacement, demographic and economic significance, and relevance to ongoing geopolitical and environmental trends. Cases from South Korea, Japan, China, and Pacific Island states illustrate a spectrum of displacement drivers and governance responses across East Asia. These cases provide empirical grounding for understanding how regional variations in political systems, economic development, and social structures influence the experience and management of displacement. By using these criteria, the methodology ensures that the analysis captures both high-profile examples and less visible, slow-onset forms of displacement that might otherwise be overlooked.

Incheon is examined as a special case due to its unique combination of geographic exposure, infrastructure development, and institutional capacity. As a coastal city built extensively on reclaimed tidal flats, particularly in the Songdo areas, Incheon embodies the physical vulnerabilities characteristic of many East Asian littoral cities. At the same time, its international airport, smart eco-city district in Songdo, global governance institutions, and university networks provide a distinctive institutional environment for assessing potential leadership roles in regional resilience and displacement governance.<sup>5</sup> The case study of Incheon, therefore, serves as a focal point for linking local vulnerabilities to broader regional dynamics. In methodological terms, this allows the study to move back and forth between macro-level regional analysis and micro-level urban dynamics, showing how decisions made in a single city can influence, and be influenced by, regional patterns of risk and cooperation.

The research follows four analytic stages designed to provide both conceptual clarity and practical insight. The first stage establishes theoretical foundations by examining key concepts such as environmental displacement, conflict-induced migration, intersectionality, and human security. The second stage presents regional case studies that highlight diverse patterns of vulnerability and adaptation across East Asia. The third stage offers a focused assessment of Incheon's geographic, infrastructural, and institutional characteristics, evaluating its potential role as a regional hub for resilience and displacement governance. The final stage synthesizes these insights into a set of policy recommendations intended to support sustainable peace, climate adaptation, and human security. This staged design makes the argument more transparent: readers can trace how conceptual frameworks inform empirical analysis and how empirical findings, in turn, shape concrete policy guidance.

This multi-stage approach enables a systematic examination of displacement while acknowledging the interconnectedness of climate risks, conflict dynamics, and governance structures. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical examples and policy-oriented analysis, the methodology provides a framework that is both analytically rigorous and practically applicable. Ultimately, the methodological choices reflect a commitment to producing research that not only advances academic debates but also provides actionable knowledge for local officials, regional organizations, and community actors already grappling with the realities of environmental and conflict-induced displacement.

## **Theoretical Frameworks of Displacement**

### ***Environmental Displacement***

Environmental displacement refers to the movement of people caused by ecological changes, such as sea-level rise, floods, droughts, and extreme weather events.<sup>6</sup> The vulnerability and resilience framework provides a valuable lens by highlighting how exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity shape the likelihood and severity of displacement. Communities in coastal and low-lying areas, especially those with limited economic resources, face disproportionate risks.

Environmental displacement in East Asia is accelerated by rapid urbanization, industrial development, and land reclamation, all of which increase exposure to climate hazards. Migration in this context is not merely a physical movement but a structural response to the erosion of livelihoods, safety, and long-term habitability.

### ***Conflict-Induced Displacement***

Conflict-induced displacement results from violence, persecution, or insecurity generated by geopolitical or internal conflicts. Research on peacebuilding and development demonstrates how systemic inequalities and political repression generate conflict-induced displacement pressures long before open violence occurs.<sup>7</sup> Others highlight how unmet needs, such as identity, security, dignity, and recognition, elevate the risk of conflict escalation and forced migration.<sup>8</sup>

In East Asia, unresolved historical disputes, divided governance structures, and contested borders contribute to displacement patterns. Such conflicts disrupt social systems, undermine trust in institutions, and create long-term humanitarian vulnerabilities that persist even after active hostilities subside.

### ***Intersectionality and Human Security***

Displacement cannot be fully understood without examining intersecting identities such as class, gender, age, and ethnicity. Intersectional analysis reveals how these social categories produce differentiated vulnerabilities, shaping who is displaced first, who faces the greatest barriers to recovery, and who remains marginalized in post-displacement settings.

The human security framework complements this approach by expanding the focus from state-centered security to the well-being of individuals across multiple dimensions, including economic, environmental, health, and political security.<sup>9</sup> Within the human security framework, displacement simultaneously undermines environmental security through habitat loss, economic security through livelihood disruption, and political security through exclusion and weakened rights protections. This multi-layered impact highlights the need for inclusive governance responses anchored in long-term resilience rather than short-term containment.

Together, these frameworks clarify how displacement operates both as a symptom of structural insecurity and as a catalyst for further instability. They also underscore the importance of inclusive governance, legal recognition, and community-based adaptation strategies to address the root causes of displacement and prevent cycles of recurrent vulnerability.

## **Regional Dynamics and Case Studies**

### ***South Korea***

South Korea is experiencing a steady rise in climate-related hazards, particularly in coastal cities such as Incheon and Busan, where sea-level rise, storm surges, and typhoon intensification pose growing threats to densely populated littoral zones and displacement.<sup>10</sup> The national government has made significant investments in seawalls, advanced drainage infrastructure, coastal reinforcement projects, and disaster response mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> These measures demonstrate a strong commitment to immediate risk mitigation. However, long-term planning for environmentally displaced communities remains insufficient. South Korea does not yet have a comprehensive legal or policy framework recognizing climate-induced displacement, nor does it provide clear guidelines for relocation, compensation, or long-term resettlement. This gap reflects broader uncertainty about how climate migration and even refugees should be classified under national law and underscores the need for coordinated policies that link climate adaptation, social protection, and human security.<sup>12</sup> The absence of such frameworks risks exacerbating existing inequalities, since vulnerable groups living in low-lying areas may face disproportionate exposure without adequate support.

### *Japan*

Japan, and its Bosia Culture is widely regarded as having one of the most sophisticated disaster management systems in the world, shaped by centuries of exposure to earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and volcanic activity. The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster tested the limits of this system.<sup>13</sup> While Japan's emergency response, early warning systems, and evacuation protocols demonstrated remarkable institutional capacity, the long-term recovery process revealed more complex challenges. Resettlement efforts highlighted uneven access to housing, employment, and psychological services, particularly for elderly residents and low-income families. Many affected communities experienced protracted displacement, social fragmentation, and mental health impacts that extended far beyond the initial disaster period. These dynamics illustrate how even highly developed states face structural limitations when responding to large-scale displacement, and they underscore the need for long-term psychosocial support, equitable reconstruction policies, and community-centered recovery strategies.

### *China*

China faces multidimensional socio-ecological challenges, and displacement pressures arising from environmental degradation, rapid industrialization, and development-driven relocation policies. Severe flooding in major river basins, such as the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, has displaced millions of people over the past two decades, often affecting rural communities with limited adaptive capacity.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams, hydroelectric facilities, and urban redevelopment initiatives, have led to planned relocations, sometimes accompanied by inadequate compensation and limited options for restoring livelihoods. These trends reflect more profound structural inequalities between rural and urban populations, as well as regional disparities in governance capacity.<sup>15</sup> China's experience emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental planning with social policy, ensuring that large development projects include robust resettlement frameworks, and adopting more participatory approaches to minimize the social and economic disruption caused by displacement.

### ***Pacific Island States***

Pacific Island nations such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands face existential threats from sea-level rise, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and extreme weather events.<sup>16</sup> Unlike many countries that experience episodic displacement, these states confront the possibility of permanent loss of habitable land and, in some cases, national sovereignty. Governments have begun planning for long-term relocation scenarios, both internally and internationally. They are developing legal strategies to preserve cultural identity, maritime boundaries, and political autonomy in the event that physical territory becomes uninhabitable. These cases highlight the profound human, cultural, and legal implications of climate change for small island states and expose the limitations of international law, which currently lacks formal protections for climate-displaced populations. The Pacific context, therefore, stands as a stark illustration of the gaps in global governance and the urgent need for international frameworks that address slow-onset climate displacement, cultural preservation, and the rights of communities facing irreversible environmental loss.

### ***Greater Region***

Beyond these cases, the broader region of East and Southeast Asia offers further examples illustrating the diverse drivers and consequences of displacement. In Myanmar, political upheaval, ethnic persecution, and armed conflict have displaced hundreds of thousands of people internally and across borders, creating one of the region's most protracted humanitarian crises. The situation of the Rohingya population, in particular, demonstrates how state violence, denial of citizenship, and structural discrimination can converge to force mass migration with profound regional implications. In the Philippines and Indonesia, exposure to increasingly severe typhoons, volcanic activity, and flooding has intensified internal displacement, placing significant pressure on local governments with limited resources. Vietnam's Mekong Delta is experiencing rapid land loss and salinization due to sea-level rise and upstream dam construction, threatening the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on agriculture and fisheries.

Together, these cases illustrate how environmental degradation, political conflict, and structural inequality intersect across the region to produce diverse yet interconnected displacement scenarios. They

underscore the necessity of coordinated regional approaches that account for varying governance capacities, cross-border interdependence, and long-term human security risks to address displacement across East and Southeast Asia.

## **Focus on Incheon and Songdo**

### ***Geographical Vulnerabilities***

Incheon's geographic location on reclaimed tidal flats and its low elevation make the city particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise, storm surges, and typhoon intensification. The concentration of critical infrastructure, including Incheon International Airport, port facilities, and logistics hubs, significantly amplifies the potential consequences of climate-related disruptions. Empirical studies on urban flood resilience and coastal inundation indicate that parts of Incheon are experiencing land subsidence due to long-term land reclamation, compounding the risks associated with rising sea levels and increasing the likelihood of flooding during extreme weather events.<sup>17</sup> The proximity of transportation and energy infrastructure to low-lying coastal zones further raises the risk of cascading failures, in which disruptions to one system trigger broader economic and social impacts across the metropolitan region.

These geographic characteristics position Incheon as a representative case of the structural vulnerabilities facing East Asian littoral cities. While coastal development has historically driven economic growth, it has also embedded long-term environmental risk into the urban fabric. As climate hazards intensify, these risks threaten not only physical assets but also mobility patterns, access to livelihoods, and the long-term habitability of coastal urban spaces.

### ***Smart City Infrastructure and Institutional Capacity***

Songdo International Business District is widely recognized as a model smart city that integrates digital governance systems, energy-efficient urban design, and real-time environmental monitoring technologies.<sup>18</sup> These systems enhance early-warning capabilities, monitor and coordinate disaster response, and support long-term sustainability planning. Smart infrastructure enables the collection and analysis of large-scale data on traffic flows, energy use, and environmental conditions, supporting more adaptive and responsive urban governance.<sup>19</sup> In the context of displacement risk, such capacities can improve

evacuation planning, resource allocation, and post-disaster recovery efforts.

Incheon also benefits from a unique concentration of international institutions, including the Green Climate Fund and UNESCAP-affiliated offices, which connect the city to global policy networks on climate finance, sustainable development, and resilience.<sup>20</sup> This institutional presence enhances Incheon's capacity to engage in knowledge exchange, pilot innovative policy initiatives, and attract international investment for climate adaptation projects. The alignment of smart-city technologies with global governance frameworks positions Incheon as a potential testbed for integrated approaches to climate adaptation, displacement governance, and human security.

### ***Role of Universities and Youth Engagement***

The Incheon Global Campus hosts several reputable international universities, including George Mason University Korea, and increasingly serves as a regional knowledge hub in Northeast Asia, advancing interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Within this environment, scholars and students engage in interdisciplinary fields that address critical policy and societal challenges, such as conflict analysis and resolution (CAR), environmental science, urban planning, and sustainable development, generating scholarship that tackles pressing regional and global issues. These institutions contribute to knowledge production on climate adaptation, displacement governance, and other social challenges while also preparing future professionals equipped to address complex cross-sectoral policy problems. University-led research initiatives, policy labs, and experiential learning programs further create platforms for collaboration among students, local governments, and international organizations.

Youth engagement plays a critical role in strengthening long-term resilience by fostering innovation, civic participation, and leadership capacity. Young scholars and practitioners are increasingly involved in climate advocacy, digital innovation, and community-based resilience projects, bringing new perspectives to displacement governance. By embedding youth participation within policy design and implementation processes, Incheon can help ensure that responses to displacement are forward-looking, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of future generations.

### ***Strategic Regional Leadership***

Taken together, Incheon's geographic exposure, technological infrastructure, and institutional networks position the city as a strong candidate for regional leadership in climate and displacement governance. By hosting international dialogues, piloting climate-resilient infrastructure projects, and coordinating research networks across East Asia, Incheon can contribute to developing shared standards, data platforms, and policy frameworks for managing displacement risks. Such initiatives would allow Incheon not only to address its own vulnerabilities but also to support regional cooperation on issues that transcend national borders.

Through these roles, Incheon has the potential to transform structural vulnerability into a source of policy innovation and normative leadership. By linking local adaptation efforts with regional and global governance processes, the city can help shape more just, coordinated, and sustainable responses to environmental and conflict-induced displacement across East Asia.

### **Recommendations**

- **Strengthening Disaster Preparedness.** East Asia should prioritize developing integrated early-warning systems, cooperative disaster-response mechanisms, and advanced climate-modeling tools to address the growing risks of environmental displacement.<sup>21</sup> Shared data platforms and interoperable monitoring systems can enhance situational awareness, reduce duplication, and enable rapid coordination among states during climate-related emergencies.<sup>22</sup> Artificial intelligence and predictive analytics can further support risk assessment by modeling extreme weather patterns, identifying high-risk populations, and informing evacuation and resource allocation strategies. Strengthening disaster preparedness at both national and regional levels is essential not only for minimizing immediate harm but also for preventing secondary displacement and long-term social disruption.
- **Creating Legal and Institutional Frameworks.** The region requires clearer legal and institutional frameworks to address both environmental and conflict-induced displacement. Existing refugee and migration regimes were designed primarily to

respond to persecution and armed conflict and remain poorly equipped to address slow-onset environmental changes such as sea-level rise, salinization, and land degradation. Revising legal standards to recognize climate-related displacement would provide a basis for planned relocation, compensation, and long-term resettlement, reducing uncertainty for affected populations and host communities. At the institutional level, greater coordination among ministries responsible for climate policy, urban planning, social welfare, and national security is necessary to ensure coherent and equitable responses. Legal recognition of displacement should therefore be integrated into broader climate adaptation and human security strategies rather than treated as a standalone humanitarian issue.

- **Promoting ESG-Based Private Sector Participation.** The private sector has a critical role to play in financing and implementing climate adaptation and resilience initiatives. Global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, such as those outlined by the UN PRI, can mobilize private capital toward sustainable infrastructure, resilient housing, and community-based adaptation projects that reduce displacement risks.<sup>23</sup> Public–private partnerships can leverage technological innovation and managerial expertise while aligning corporate incentives with long-term social and environmental outcomes. Mandatory climate-risk disclosure and ESG reporting standards can further encourage firms to internalize displacement-related risks and invest proactively in adaptation measures.<sup>24</sup> By embedding displacement considerations into ESG strategies, governments can expand the pool of resources available for resilience-building while promoting accountability and transparency in private-sector engagement.
- **Incheon as a Regional Hub.** Incheon is well-positioned to serve as a regional hub for cooperation on climate and displacement governance. By hosting cross-border policy dialogues, piloting climate-resilient housing and infrastructure projects, and coordinating research and data-sharing networks, the city can help establish shared standards and best practices across East Asia. A regional compact on disaster displacement, facilitated

through Incheon, could standardize definitions, data collection methods, and funding mechanisms, improving coordination among states and international organizations. Incheon could also host a multi-stakeholder resilience platform that brings together governments, private sector actors, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and international agencies to support evidence-based policy development and implementation.

Such leadership would allow Incheon not only to address its own vulnerabilities but also to contribute meaningfully to regional stability and sustainable peace. By linking local experimentation with regional governance frameworks, Incheon can help translate global commitments on climate action and human security into practical, scalable solutions for displacement across East Asia.

## **Conclusion**

Environmental and conflict-induced displacement in East Asia constitute mutually reinforcing forces that are reshaping the region's human security landscape. As demonstrated throughout this study, climate hazards, structural inequalities, and unresolved geopolitical tensions intersect to generate complex and enduring patterns of vulnerability. Displacement in this context is neither episodic nor exceptional; rather, it represents a long-term structural condition that increasingly shapes how individuals, communities, and states experience security, justice, and stability. Addressing displacement, therefore, requires moving beyond reactive humanitarian responses toward integrated strategies that simultaneously engage climate adaptation, governance reform, and peacebuilding.

The case studies examined across East Asia illustrate both shared regional challenges and differentiated national experiences. Coastal urbanization, development-driven relocation, and disaster exposure recur across contexts, yet the capacity to manage displacement varies widely depending on governance structures, institutional coordination, and social protection systems. Even in highly developed states with advanced disaster management capacities, long-term resettlement, livelihood restoration, and psychosocial recovery remain persistent challenges. These findings underscore that technical preparedness alone is insufficient; displacement governance must also address social equity, participation, and the long-term well-being of affected populations.

In this regional landscape, Incheon emerges as a particularly significant case. As a littoral city built extensively on reclaimed coastal terrain, Incheon embodies many of the vulnerabilities confronting East Asian coastal cities. At the same time, its smart-city infrastructure, concentration of international institutions, and strong academic networks position it as a potential leader in regional resilience and displacement governance. Incheon thus represents a critical test of whether structural exposure to climate risk can serve as a catalyst for policy innovation, institutional learning, and cooperative governance. By linking local adaptation initiatives with regional and global frameworks, the city can help bridge the gap between international commitments and on-the-ground implementation.

The recommendations advanced in this study, strengthening disaster preparedness, establishing legal recognition of displacement, mobilizing ESG-based private sector engagement, and positioning Incheon as a regional coordination hub, offer actionable pathways toward sustainable peace and long-term resilience. Taken together, these measures emphasize that displacement governance must be anticipatory rather than reactive, inclusive rather than technocratic, and coordinated rather than fragmented. Embedding displacement within broader human security and sustainable development strategies is essential to preventing cycles of recurrent vulnerability and conflict.

Nevertheless, important research gaps remain. Future studies should examine how regional governance mechanisms can be harmonized to address cross-border displacement, how emerging technologies can be deployed ethically to enhance early warning and adaptive capacity, and how socio-political inequalities shape differential exposure to climate risks. Additional attention is also needed on long-term livelihood outcomes, cultural identity preservation, and youth-driven approaches to resilience and peacebuilding. Addressing these gaps will require sustained collaboration among scholars, policymakers, international organizations, and affected communities, ensuring that future knowledge production remains grounded in lived experience as well as comparative and theoretical insight.

Ultimately, how East Asia responds to environmental and conflict-induced displacement in the coming decades will have profound implications not only for regional peace and stability but also for global governance in an era of accelerating environmental change. Littoral cities such as Incheon stand at the forefront of this challenge. Whether they

become sites of deepening vulnerability or engines of cooperative resilience will depend on the choices made today regarding governance, inclusion, and long-term investment in human security.

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