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The OAU Refugee Convention

The OAU Refugee Convention was adopted in Addis Ababa on 10 September 1969 and entered into force on 20 June 1974. It was developed specifically to address the realities of forced displacement in Africa.

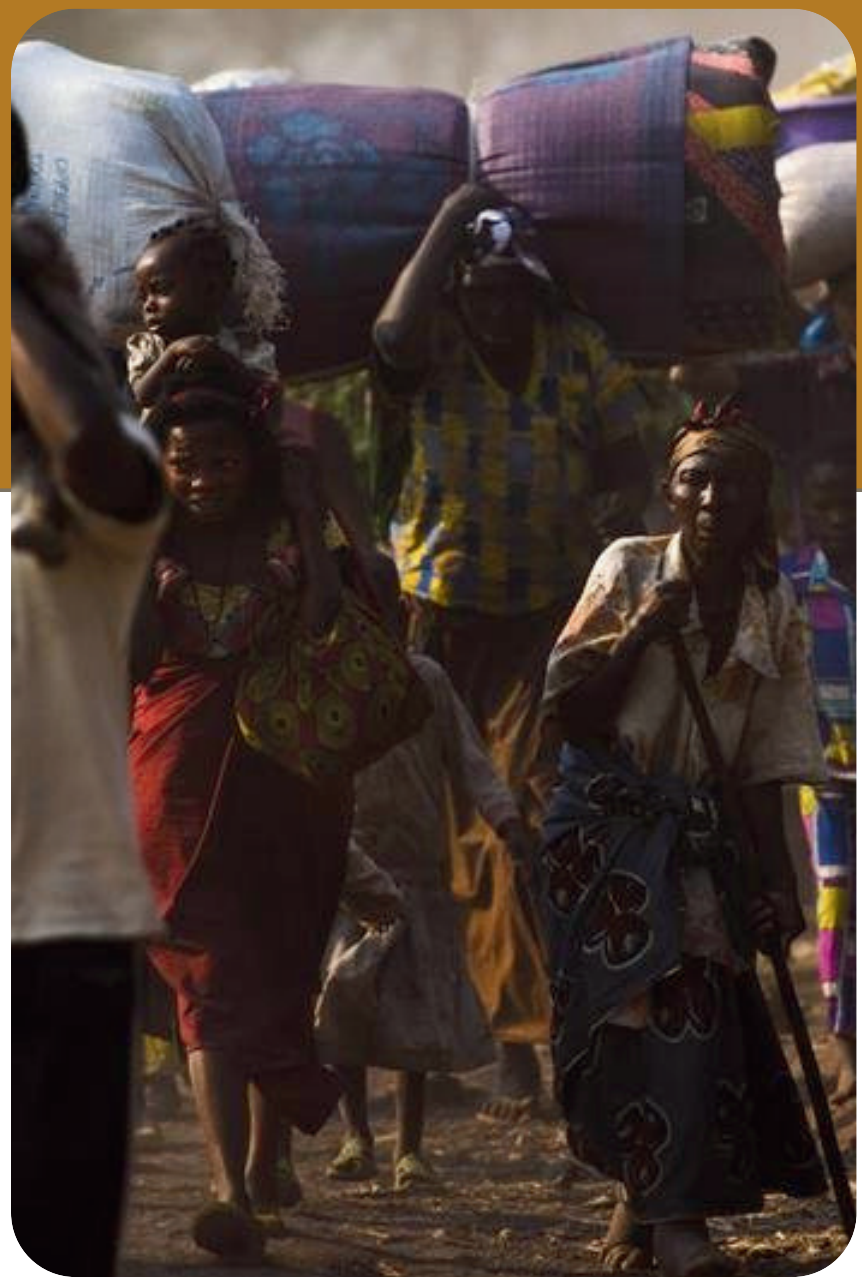
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Relationship with the UN Refugee Convention

The UN Refugee Convention adopted in 1951 is the principal global treaty establishing who qualifies as a refugee and the standards for their protection. The OAU Convention is the regional complement in Africa to the UN Convention.

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What makes the OAU Convention distinct?

Different from the UN Convention which only protects a person fleeing due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on specific individual grounds, the OAU Convention expands this definition to include persons compelled to flee because of external aggression, foreign domination and events seriously disturbing public order.

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What of “climate refugees”?

International law does not currently recognise a formal legal status of “climate refugee.” Whether the wider African definition may include them remains debated. In 2025, the African Commission adopted Resolution 628 to study on whether Africa needs a specific legal framework for people forcibly displaced by climate change.