



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

**First session of the International Dialogue on Migration 2021**  
***Accelerating integrated action on sustainable development: migration, the environment and climate change***

**25-27 May 2021**

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**Summary of Conclusions**

The first session of IOM's International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) in 2021, held from 25 to 27 May, was dedicated to the topic of "Accelerating integrated action on sustainable development: migration, the environment and climate change", and was exceptionally conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions.

This year's edition marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IDM and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IOM. As migration challenges evolve, IDM continues to offer a key forum for global policy dialogue for IOM's Member States, Observers, partner intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental stakeholders on a wide range of pressing migration issues. Ten years after the first session of IDM devoted to the emerging nexus between migration, environment and climate change in 2011, IOM brought this crucial topic back on the agenda at a time of increasing political urgency, and in view of the profound impacts of the COVID-19 global health crisis linking climate and migration to current and future development concerns.

This first session of the 2021 IDM offered a space to take stock of the progress made in terms of the state of knowledge, policy development and effective practices addressing key challenges around migration in the context of climate change and environmental degradation; to discuss specific challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic; and to highlight opportunities for joint action and for the implementation of relevant international, regional and national frameworks.

The session was framed around the recognition of the interconnectedness of migration, climate change, health and human security challenges, and the need to address these challenges through holistic, inclusive and collaborative approaches at national, regional and global levels to progress towards sustainable development and peace. As the world is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the international community has an opportunity to build back better and promote a more sustainable, climate-resilient and migrant-inclusive society and economy. Conversely, failure to act in a timely and preventive manner to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration and address displacement, and to strengthen health systems will undermine the progress made so far towards attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ministers, Ambassadors, and other representatives of States, the European Union and the United Nations, including the President of the seventy-fifth United Nations General Assembly and the Deputy Director General of the United Nations, youth delegates, members of diaspora, academic experts, representatives of the private sector, and international and civil society organizations participated in this year's dialogue, exchanged their views and shared their experiences and examples of effective practices.

The meeting was opened by the IOM Director General, Mr. António Vitorino, and featured keynote addresses by the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji, Rear Admiral (Retired) Mr. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama; Mr. Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans living abroad of the Kingdom of Morocco; Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th session of the General Assembly; Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations; and Ms. Runa Kahn, Founder and Executive Director of Friendship NGO.

The session was structured around five panels led by 30 speakers, including national and local government officials, policy-makers and practitioners from countries of origin, transit and destination, representatives of regional organizations, of partner United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, academic experts, youth delegates and private sector representatives. Throughout the panels, a geographical, gender and sectoral balance was ensured.

The panels addressed the following themes:

- **Panel 1:** The Road to COP 26- Accelerating action to address migration and displacement in the context of climate and environmental change
- **Panel 2:** Understanding the linkages between migration, environment and climate change (MECC) and migration health in the context of COVID-19, and promoting the inclusion of MECC dimensions in COVID-19 recovery efforts
- **Panel 3:** Examining the linkage between Migration, Environment and Climate Change and the Humanitarian, Development, Peace Nexus (HDPN)
- **Panel 4:** Developing multi-stakeholder approaches to leverage opportunities and support the inclusion of migrants and internally displaced people to build a sustainable future
- **Panel 5:** Promoting and supporting regional, national and local action on migration, environment and climate change

In addition, in place of the traditional Migrant's Voice segment which couldn't be organized for this Dialogue because of the reduced online format, the session featured two videos related to IOM's global campaigns on migration, environment and climate change, *Find a Way* and *Do the Right Thing*. The videos highlighted some of the challenges that migrants and vulnerable communities face in the context of climate change, along with a portrayal of young generations growing up in Small Island Developing States affected by sea level rise. At the same time, these stories conveyed a message of hope that it is still not too late to act, although time is of the essence.

IOM Deputy Director General, Ms. Laura Thompson offered closing remarks summarizing key messages and conclusions from the three days of meeting.

## **A timely and urgent discussion**

In his opening remarks, IOM Director General Mr. António Vitorino observed that climate change and environmental degradation constitute a defining issue of our time, and that the impacts of these changes on migration and displacement are already evident in all regions of the world. As vulnerable populations increasingly experience the adverse effects of climate change, particularly in least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS), leading some communities to consider relocating to safer areas; as more and more frequent and destructive disasters result in the displacement of millions of people globally every year; and as slow onset environmental degradation and ecosystem loss undermine livelihoods and exacerbate tensions in many parts of the world, it is imperative that the international community accelerates action to address these critical concerns.

As noted by the keynote speakers in the opening session, including the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji, Rear Admiral (Retired) Mr. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Mr. Nasser Bourita, the President of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Volkan Bozkir, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and the Executive Director of Friendship NGO, Ms. Runa Kahn, the COVID-19 pandemic has added additional pressure and has disproportionately affected migrants and vulnerable populations. Yet, it is important that the recovery from the pandemic does not distract the attention of governments and other stakeholders from the urgency to tackle climate change and its impacts on migration, conflict and development, and to assist and protect vulnerable populations, including migrants and displaced persons. As several keynote speakers reminded, here are ample opportunities and tools available to support collective action as part of the implementation of key global commitments made under such instruments as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) and the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda (NIPA).

## **Main messages and conclusions of the discussion**

### **1. The impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters on migration and displacement are already manifest in all regions of the world, and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable countries and populations.**

- Migration, displacement and planned relocation in the context of environmental and climate change are already a reality in many parts of the world, affecting millions of people and livelihoods.
- The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates that in 2019, 24.9 million people were newly displaced by sudden-onset disasters – mainly storms and floods – in 140 countries and territories. This figure is almost three times higher than the number of people newly displaced by conflict and violence in the same year.
- In parallel, slow-onset environmental phenomena, including those associated with climate change, affect the livelihoods of millions more people, particularly in rural areas and in densely populated coastal cities, and increasingly define internal and cross-border migration patterns. The World Bank estimates that in the absence of climate and development action,

more than 143 million people could be forced to move internally by 2050 due to slow onset impacts of climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

- Significant progress has been made in the past few years in strengthening the evidence base and data on migration and displacement in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters, and the understanding of the underlying multiple, complex and interrelated drivers and of the related human security and human rights implications has improved.
- The impacts of environmental and climate change are not uniform: they disproportionately affect the most vulnerable countries, communities and individuals. Around the world, the poorest and most disadvantaged people are most at risk, particularly in LCDs, LLCDs and SIDS. Among those most vulnerable are migrants and displaced people, women and girls, youth and children, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTI community, the elderly, indigenous people. Existing inequalities are further exacerbated by disasters and the adverse effects of climate change, and affect displacement and forced migration patterns.
- More research is needed to better understand these differentiated impacts and their role in shaping population movements, and to inform policies and measures to address the needs and the complex challenges that the most vulnerable communities face.
- Context-specific, people-centered, human security and human rights-based approaches are central to understanding and addressing local level challenges and needs related to the migration, environment and climate change nexus.

## **2. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities, but post-pandemic recovery efforts offer an opportunity to build more resilient and inclusive societies.**

- Issues around migration, environment and climate change and health are deeply interconnected, and have profound implications for the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs).
- The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected migrants, who have faced income and job loss, have been unable to return to their countries or access employment abroad due to border closures, or have faced discrimination in the access to essential healthcare services. Women, children, irregular migrants and victims of trafficking have found themselves particularly at risk in this context. People displaced by disasters and conflict have also faced specific hardships in the context of the pandemic, in view of movement restrictions hindering the delivery of aid, and health risks in overcrowded camps or informal settlements. Many countries have seen a decline in remittances, which constitute an important source of income, particularly in lower income countries.
- Around the world, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, vulnerabilities and precarity, and undermined development gains as well as the capacity of individuals, communities and governments to cope with disasters and the effects of climate change.
- Yet, migrant workers have also greatly contributed to responses to the pandemic through their support to the functioning of essential sectors of the economy such as healthcare, food and services and domestic help. Through their skills and resources, migrants can make an important contribution to recovery efforts both in destination countries and in countries of origin through remittances.

- At the same time, post-pandemic recovery efforts offer a major opportunity to build back better and greener, by promoting a transition to a green economy and a more climate-resilient and inclusive society. Green jobs can offer employment opportunities for migrants and benefit from their extensive skills.
- It is important that the current focus on the post-pandemic recovery does not divert the international community from the urgency to address the effects of climate change. The causes and consequences of these two crises are interconnected, and should be addressed jointly: efforts to improve environmental and biodiversity management practices, mitigate climate change, strengthen health systems and to protect and include the most vulnerable, including migrants, can help to reduce future health crises, while also making societies more resilient, and contributing to address the drivers of forced migration and displacement. Vulnerabilities can only be reduced through multidimensional approaches recognizing the co-benefits of effective climate, health and migration management policies and measures.

**3. The interconnectedness of climate change and disasters, migration and displacement, human security and conflict, and development must be recognized and addressed in an integrated manner.**

- The sudden and slow-onset effects of climate change undermine many aspects of human security and negatively affect the enjoyment of human rights. The impacts of climate change on livelihoods and economic security, resource availability, food and water security as well as physical safety in the context of disasters are likely to exacerbate tensions and contribute to the factors of violence and conflict dynamics.
- The root causes of poverty, conflict and displacement are closely intertwined and must be addressed in an integrated manner to support global and national commitments towards sustainable development and peace.
- Focus must be on early action, prevention and preparedness, as well as protection of the most vulnerable populations through human-rights based and gender-sensitive approaches, to help communities become more resilient and less prone to disaster risks, to the effects of climate change, and to conflict. Strengthening national institutions and local capacities, and promoting risk awareness among the population through awareness raising and education programmes are among key areas of intervention.
- Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus is key to ensure that humanitarian and development efforts and resources are better coordinated to adequately address immediate humanitarian challenges while strengthening long-term resilience and adaptation of vulnerable communities. Partnerships between humanitarian and development actors and across sectors of the society are essential to avoid working in silos and to address more effectively the complex challenges related to climate change and its impacts on migration and displacement.
- To support effective policies and action, more efforts should be invested in strengthening the knowledge base on root causes and on effective practices for disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, poverty reduction and resilience building. Risks and vulnerabilities should be mapped at the local level to support prevention and preparedness efforts.

- Funding gaps must be addressed to help mobilize the necessary resources for disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, early warning systems, as well as long-term development programmes.

#### **4. Migration and displacement in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation constitute a global challenge that requires global, collective, holistic and innovative action.**

- Climate change is a global phenomenon which knows no borders; in a highly interconnected world, the repercussions of climate change are felt across all sectors of society and economy, and can only be addressed through global, collective action and solidarity. Governments cannot act in isolation to address this global crisis and its effects on international migration, which requires cooperation between countries of origin, of transit and destination.
- Addressing this complex challenge requires multilateral efforts, recognizing the shared responsibility as well as the differentiated effects and differing capacities of countries to respond.
- To address the complex underlying root causes and vulnerabilities, holistic, multi-pronged approaches are needed, building on partnerships across different areas of expertise, levels of governance, and sectors of society.
- Several priority areas for action were identified during the IDM, which include:
  - climate change mitigation, for example through clean energy and transition to a green economy;
  - disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and vulnerability reduction, including through stronger institutions and infrastructures, public health systems and nature-based solutions;
  - poverty and inequality reduction and local development, including through well-managed migration-based solutions;
  - protection of the most vulnerable populations, including migrants and displacement people, women, children, indigenous groups, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups;
  - and support to building the resilience of vulnerable communities and individuals through their empowerment and inclusion in decision-making and action, and through the promotion of safe, orderly and regular migration pathways.

#### **5. Regional, national and local level action is key to addressing migration, environment and climate change concerns, and should be supported and strengthened.**

- Regional partnerships and dialogue are a key step towards the implementation of global frameworks and the development of regional instruments more adapted to the regional context. Examples of regional approaches highlighted in the IDM include efforts to promote cooperation between countries of origin, transit, destination in addressing regional migration dynamics in West and North Africa and in Central and South America; as well as regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response and mobility management in the context of climate change in East Africa.

- National and local level actors play a particularly important role in translating global commitments into action on the ground and in addressing local challenges, needs and vulnerabilities. Examples of national level effective practices in building stronger national institutions and frameworks, strengthening the evidence base, designing solutions for migrants and temporary protection mechanisms, and mobilizing partnerships to address the migration, environment and climate change nexus are multiplying, offering an opportunity for replication and experience sharing.
- Cities are at the forefront of climate change mitigation and adaptation and poverty reduction efforts through their capacity to address local needs, engage with communities and address structural challenges related to living standards, housing, access to water, sanitation, medical care, employment opportunities and education. At the same time cities directly experience the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, demographic change and migration, and have to develop capacity to quickly adapt and respond to challenges associated with population growth and urbanization and disaster risks.
- In their efforts to accelerate action on migration, environment and climate change, regional, national and local actors face major obstacles in terms of access to funding, technologies and expertise. More resources must be directed towards local level action, through dedicated funding and technical support.

**6. Whole-of-society, inclusive approaches are fundamental to ensure the success of our collective efforts, leveraging capacities and contributions of migrants, youth, and women as actors of change.**

- Alongside multilateral, regional and national governmental actors, it is essential to ensure the inclusion and participation of communities and individuals in efforts to address the complex challenges around the migration, environment and climate change nexus. Migrants, women, youth and children are directly, and often disproportionately, affected by changes in the environment, by conflicts, by economic and health crises, as well as by policies and measures implemented on the ground. At the community level, they are at the forefront of climate and development action, and are key agents of change, innovation and progress.
- While migrants, particularly in irregular situations, experience specific vulnerabilities, it is important to remember that they are key contributors to the economy and to cultural diversity and are powerful actors of change and innovation. Their rich experience, skills, resourcefulness and resilience can greatly contribute to climate action, to the transition to a green economy, to post-pandemic recovery efforts and to achieving sustainable development goals.
- Women are also particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, health crises and conflicts. Yet, they play a crucial role in local climate change adaptation and sustainable resource management, health care, education and well-being of their communities.
- Young people and children are the decision makers of tomorrow, and many youth organizations around the world are actively engaging in building a more sustainable future at local, national and global levels.
- It is important that the voices of migrants, women and youth are heard and promoted, that they are actively included in decision making processes, and that their contributions are

leveraged to support mitigation and adaptation efforts, to create decent employment opportunities, and to contribute to local development and resilience.

- Finally, the private sector, in particular local community-level entrepreneurs, can drive innovation towards a more sustainable and greener economy and society, promoting agroecology, clean energy and nature-based solutions.
- To support the inclusion and participation of these key actors, some barriers to participation need to be overcome first, through transparency, capacity building, empowerment, opportunities for partnerships and creation of a forum for dialogue and exchange of experiences.

## **7. Global opportunities for enabling action and promoting cooperation on migration, environment and climate change are plentiful and must be seized.**

- Since the topic of migration, environment and climate change has been first addressed in international policy fora a decade ago, including at the 2011 IDM, significant progress has been made in terms of global policy development on this issue. Since 2015, many international policy instruments and frameworks explicitly recognize and make commitments of relevance to the migration, environment and climate change nexus. These include the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change under the UNFCCC, which led to the creation of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement; the Nansen Initiative Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Disaster Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (NIPA); the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR); and the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) adopted in 2018. Other global policy frameworks offer important entry points to address challenges associated with migration and displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
- These global policy developments have been mirrored and complemented at the regional level through discussions, actions and commitments under regional consultative processes on migration (RCPs), and global partnerships promoting regional cooperation such as the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) or the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).
- Instruments, tools and opportunities for action to address the migration, environment and climate change nexus abound, reflecting an increasing recognition of the importance of this pressing issue – yet, implementation of commitments made at the international level has been slow and insufficient.
- Several upcoming events, in particular the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in November 2021 in Glasgow and the International Migration Review Forum in May 2022 will constitute key milestones in measuring the progress made by the international community in these major policy areas. It is essential that governments and key stakeholders deliver on the pledges made under the Paris Agreement, the GCM and in the context of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, and demonstrate their commitment and readiness to engage in radical and transformative action and change.

## Recommendations for the way forward

The importance of accelerated, collective and integrated action to address climate change and its impacts on migration and displacement, as well as the root causes of vulnerability, was repeatedly emphasized by the speakers throughout this first session of the 2021 IDM.

Specific priority areas of action mentioned by participants included:

- Delivering on the pledges made under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5C, including through the submission of ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) ahead of COP26 in Glasgow;
- Stepping up mitigation efforts through green investments, transition to a green economy, clean energy and significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, including within the humanitarian and development sectors;
- Increasing climate finance and addressing funding gaps and silos, while ensuring access to resources for the most vulnerable countries and communities;
- Protecting and assisting the most vulnerable populations, particularly in LCDs, LLCs, SIDS, as well as migrants, displaced persons, women, youth and children, indigenous people, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups through human security and human rights-based approaches;
- Investing in climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience building efforts, particularly at the local level, prioritizing prevention and preparedness at community level;
- Recognizing the co-benefits of climate action, public health management and migration governance, and promoting integrated, holistic measures as part of the post-pandemic recovery efforts to transition towards a sustainable, climate-resilient and inclusive economy and society;
- Strengthening and operationalizing the humanitarian-development nexus, strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships and addressing silos to progress towards sustainable development and peace;
- Strengthening the evidence and capacities at the local level to support informed, context-specific and needs-based action on migration, environment and climate change;
- Promoting safe, orderly and regular migration pathways to support climate change adaptation and sustainable development, and ensuring cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination in managing complex migration dynamics in the context of climate change;
- Partnering with migrants, women and youth and other key stakeholders to leverage their contributions to climate change mitigation, adaptation and sustainable development; involving them in decision making processes and bringing their voices to key global fora;
- Supporting local, national and regional action and building local and national capacity to implement existing policies and tools through global and regional cooperation and solidarity-based approaches.

## **Concluding remarks**

As Ms. Laura Thompson, IOM Deputy Director General, noted in her closing remarks: “we need to enhance our collective action to address the impacts of climate change on migration patterns around the world”. As the interventions at this first session of the 2021 IDM demonstrated, there are numerous opportunities at the local, national, regional and international levels to do so, and to promote more resilient, sustainable, inclusive and peaceful societies.

The IDM highlighted key priority areas where action is urgently needed for climate change mitigation and adaptation, migration governance, public health management, and humanitarian and development cooperation. The outcomes and recommendations from this dialogue will provide important substantive input to key upcoming events and forums, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP26) in November 2021 and the International Migration Review Forum in May 2022.

This summary is not exhaustive. A more comprehensive report that will present the deliberations in more detail and highlight the experiences, good practices and recommendations shared during this session will be available in due course.