

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

Issues pertaining to migration, environment and climate change remain underdiscussed in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic and in the ongoing global recovery efforts. Building on the discussions and findings from the 2020 IDM session dedicated to “COVID-19 crisis: reimagining the role of migrants and human mobility in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”, this panel aims to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on migrants and internally displaced persons in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. It will invite an exchange on how climate-migration dimensions can be leveraged in the COVID-19 recovery plans, as well as discuss the linkages between migration health in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The panel will explore the connections between SDG 10.7 “facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” and SDG 3.8 “achieve universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”. Questions proposed to guide the discussion:

- How can we use lessons learned from this pandemic in relation to migration health and the environment to prevent future pandemics and to contain future outbreaks?
- How can we mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health of migrants and internally displaced persons in the context of climate change and environmental degradation?

- • How can the global COVID-19 pandemic experience contribute to furthering migration governance regarding migration and displacement in the context of the adverse effects of climate change, disasters and environmental degradation?
- • How can COVID-19 recovery efforts address migration, environment, and climate change and migrant health, considering adequate gender focus?

Moderator: **Ms. Monica Goracci**, Director, Department of Migration Management, IOM

Speakers:

- • **Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab**, Deputy Director-General, WHO
- • **Dr. Ibrahim Abubakar**, Chair, Lancet Migration, and Climate Change and Migration Lead, Director, Institute for Global Health, University College London
- • **Mr. Kristof Tamas**, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Justice, Division for Migration and Asylum Policy, Sweden
- • **Dr. Elizabeth Ferris**, Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University
- • **Ms. Verena Knaus**, Global Lead, Migration and Displacement, UNICEF

Speaking points

Thank you for inviting me and for the opportunity to address the IDM today.

Climate-induced migration and displacement is on the increase and needs to be addressed with active measures and **enhanced international cooperation**. It needs to be linked to the implementation of the SDGs. I will first discuss the complex interlinkages between climate change, migration, health and the Covid-19 pandemic. Then I will give some examples of what the donor community, including Sweden, can do - both in the short term and the long term.

A. Complex interlinkages between climate change, migration, health and the Covid-19 pandemic

The ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic and its negative impacts on the provision of health services and on economies and labour markets around the world, has put additional burdens on those already affected by climate change and the environment. In both cases, **the hardest hit are the most vulnerable**, including migrants in both developing and developed countries.

Millions are displaced annually as a result of floods, droughts, desertification, sea level rise and more. According to IOM's Migration Data Portal, in the first half of 2020 alone, almost 10 million people were displaced due to environmental disasters. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) recorded an average of almost 23 million people newly displaced annually each year during the period 2009-2019. This adds up to almost three times the number of people displaced by conflict and violence. Currently, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, China and Somalia are among the most affected.

Measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic through travel restrictions and border controls led to reduced cross-border travel, reduced numbers of asylum applications, and reduced resettlement and repatriation of refugees. In parallel, such measures might have contributed to more internal displacement. In some countries there has been an increase in conflict- and violence-driven internal displacement during this period, e.g. within Cameroon, Mozambique, the Niger and Somalia. The Covid-19 pandemic has also complicated the management of sudden displacement, including evacuations during disasters where it is hard to follow advise and regulations on physical distancing and quarantine. Also when restrictions on mobility were not a major issue, forcibly displaced people lived in overcrowded conditions, e.g. on the island of Lesbos in Greece and in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. **This contributes to higher risks among displaced people contracting the virus.**

There has also been new displacement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, e.g. in Yemen where 10,000 people moved away from Covid-19 hotspots both to avoid infection and to leave behind the negative impacts on services and the economy. Already limited capacity in general health care is also negatively affected by Covid-19 patients which in a South-South perspective can lead to tensions and add to already strained relations to migrants among the native population. In this context, it is also important that the **Covid vaccine can reach developing countries and the most vulnerable.**

Another aspect concerning general health care, is that **many of the migrant workers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic** as they worked in sectors which the pandemic hit harder and where protections were minimal. This both led to increased vulnerabilities, and in some cases, that migrant workers lost their jobs to a larger extent than natives. Also, migrants were contracting Covid-

19 to a larger extent, e.g. migrant workers who normally abound in the health sector. Also, those in sectors characterized by temporary, unprotected work (e.g. domestic and agricultural workers in the informal economy) often lack access to social safety nets and health care.

The SDG goal nr. 3 on health has been affected more broadly by the pandemic e.g. as childhood immunization programmes in about 70 countries had to be interrupted. Covid-19 has also led to health care interruptions that reverse decades of work to enhance healthy lives among the vulnerable. For instance, there is an expectation that we will see hundreds of thousands of additional under-5 deaths during 2020 as well as a 100% increase in malaria deaths in sub-Saharan Africa.

One lesson learnt from all this is that we need to distinguish between the short term and long term perspectives. Post-covid recovery plans need to incorporate the long-term implications, that we can start preparing for already now. For the remainder of my intervention, I will focus mainly on climate-induced migration.

Firstly, climate change and natural disasters can have several short-term consequences on migration and displacement. High-intensity and sudden natural disasters can result in short-term migration. Secondly, long-term consequences of climate change may also affect migration. The World Bank has forecasted around 143 million internal migrants by 2050 if nothing is done already today. It reports that extreme heat, drought and variation in precipitation will have a growing impact on migration patterns, especially affecting communities where agriculture is a major source of livelihood and income. **This is why vulnerable regions and developing countries are hit hardest by climate change.**

However, the relationship between climate change, migration and disaster displacement is **very complex**. Of course, the interlinkages become even more complex if we add the pandemic and health care systems as dimensions. Many different factors affect migration, and there are both economic, social and political drivers. Research in this area has come a long way, but it is not clear yet exactly to what extent and how climate change affects migration. It is, nevertheless, clear that **climate-induced migration so far mainly takes place in the form of internal migration** and, in the case of cross-border migration, to nearby regions.

B. Measures within the donor community in cooperation with affected countries

The negative impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable persons, including migrants, should be part of the increasing attention both nationally, regionally and internationally, to **climate-induced migration and displacement**. Sweden welcomes the work of international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR and that both Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees respectively address this issue. The SDGs goal 3 regarding health could be explored to work on interlinkages between climate-induced migration, post-Covid recovery plans and health-care provisions.

The major active measures against climate-induced migration and displacement include **prevention, preparedness, adaptation, resilience and planned relocation**. The Platform on Disaster Displacement recommends measures to **reduce hazards, reduce exposure and reduce vulnerability**. The capacity of actors in developing countries and regions, e.g. in terms of operational preparedness, should be reinforced through international cooperation. **Post-**

Covid recovery plans should take the longer term implications and lessons learnt into account.

The Global Compact on Refugees notes that climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements. Furthermore, internally displaced in the context of disasters have many similar protection and assistance needs as IDPs in conflict situations. These include the need for durable solutions. As we all know, however, there is no international legal framework in place for climate-induced displacement across borders.

Climate-induced migration and disaster displacement, therefore, often needs to be considered as **a development and humanitarian issue** rather than one of international protection. **Strengthening preparedness is crucial.** Donor countries can have an impact through development cooperation and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the pressure on affected communities. Through our development cooperation, Sweden for example works to strengthen the resilience in affected societies. A concrete example relates to access to water, which is necessary for people to be able to remain in their places of usual residence. The **humanitarian-development nexus** should be strengthened through enhanced international cooperation, including through innovative financing mechanisms.

Implementation of Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs plays a key role. Livelihood diversification, sustainable land management, urban development, gender equality and inclusive societies and institutions are examples of interventions that could strengthen vulnerable regions and alleviate peoples' needs to leave their communities in the future. **A more resilient community will also have better conditions to welcome new people to their societies.**

For more effective interventions, we need **improved data** on climate-induced migration, although this is challenging. Firstly, there is a lack of quantitative data on both internal and cross-border climate-induced migration and displacement. Secondly, there are often multiple drivers as to why people migrate relating to the climate, such as e.g. declining access to water which may result in political instability in some countries and regions. Consequently, it is hard to identify situations where the climate is the main or sole factor triggering migration. However, data collection and research within the field is expanding and improving.

Sweden pursues a **wide-encompassing climate policy** aimed at preventing climate change, which to a certain extent may include measures to address climate-induced migration and displacement. Sweden acknowledges and prioritizes the vulnerability of women and children who are disproportionately affected by climate change and its consequences.

Sweden incorporates the climate aspect in its humanitarian and development work and is the main donor per capita to several multilateral climate funds. Sweden gives considerable financial support to climate-related projects and organisations, through for example UNDP and UNISDR. Sweden increased its overall ODA by 17% between 2019 and 2020 due to contributions to the Green Climate Fund. The Fund was set up to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions in developing countries, and to help vulnerable societies adapt to climate change.

Sweden is thus a leading actor in advocating and taking measures to combat climate change. **Climate-related security risks** are a priority as climate change can indirectly increase the risk of violent conflicts by intensifying factors that cause conflicts, such as economic and political instability. We provide extensive

support for relevant organisations such as the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, whose work contributes to increasing resilience and competence to face crises.

In conclusion, increased cooperation bringing together humanitarian aid and long-term development aid is crucial for creating **sustainable solutions**. This IDM-session also demonstrates how complex challenges we are facing and that we need evidence-based policies as the basis of international cooperation.

Thank you.

