



MIGRANTS AND MIGRATION POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Building upon the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) will set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings among Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions. The GCM should make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on international migration. For the consideration of Member States, the “Thematic Papers” developed by IOM, outline core topics and suggestions to inform actors involved in the 2017 consultation process that will lead to the inter-governmental negotiations and final adoption of the GCM.

INTRODUCTION

The nexus between migration, the environment and climate change has been increasingly recognized as a key global policy issue over the past decade, and issues related to climate and environmental migration are high on the global policy agenda, both from the perspective of climate change policy and of migration policy. Consequently, policy processes dedicated to migration on the one hand, and to climate change and environmental issues on the other hand, have integrated questions of migration, environment and climate change.

This was not the case even five years ago. There is improved understanding of the linkages between environmental and climate change and migration as evidence reveals that both slow changes in the environment and sudden-impact events directly and indirectly affect the movement of people.¹ Environmental and climate change factors play a significant role in shaping human mobility, with sudden-onset disasters and slow-onset processes leading to different migratory outcomes.

Environmental migration is already a reality. For instance, El Niño-driven drought in the Horn of Africa resulted in the increased displacement of people in 2015 and 2016;² whilst entire villages in Alaska³ threatened by coastal erosion are exploring voluntary relocation options to safer areas. Mangrove forest loss in Ecuador or deforestation in North-east Cambodia are examples of how the loss of ecosystems leads to unsustainable livelihoods and to human mobility responses.⁴ In addition, available data points to an increased vulnerability of populations to numerous environmental risks that are likely to influence future migration trends. One example is linked to rising global temperatures – it is estimated that by the end of the century, 30 to 60 million persons will be living in areas too hot for the human body to function if the average temperature rises by 1.5°C.⁵ This paper generally employs the term “migration, environment and climate change” and uses a working definition of “environmental migrants”.⁶



The “environment” terminology is used very broadly in this document to include sudden-onset disasters and slow-onset hazards and processes, which may or may not be related to climate change,⁷ without going into the detail of different types of environmental events. Environmental migration is understood as a multi-causal phenomenon, yet one in which environmental drivers play a significant and increasingly determinative role⁸.

EXISTING PRINCIPLES

The GCM has the opportunity to build upon the principles outlined in frameworks already established and promote complementarity and coordination.

Migration, environment and climate change in the New York Declaration

The New York Declaration addresses not only issues of migration linked to environmental and/or climate change factors but also refers to the environmental impacts of large population movements. It also acknowledges the importance of environment and climate change issues as a root cause of migration;⁹ makes the link between climate change, disasters, environmental degradation, migration and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;¹⁰ identifies the impacts of large population movements on the environment;¹¹ and reaffirms the relevance of the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), to migration policy.¹²

Migration, environment and climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation represent a serious threat to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially for developing countries most vulnerable to climate change. The SDG process presents the opportunity to “leverage (...) investments into activities that drive action on both sustainable development and climate” and to ensure that “efforts to combat climate change, achieve sustainable development, provide humanitarian assistance, manage the flow of displaced people, and sustain peace” are interlinked.¹³

Migration, environment and climate change in the climate change negotiations

Migration issues were first included in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework,¹⁴ before being mentioned again in a subsequent Decision on Loss and Damage adopted in Doha in 2012.¹⁵

Migration, environment and climate change issues were firmly anchored to the long-term work programme of the UNFCCC when the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 during the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21), referred to the rights of migrants in the Preamble to the Agreement.¹⁶ In addition, the COP21 Decision on Loss and Damage¹⁷ made provision for the establishment of a Task Force on Displacement, under the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage.¹⁸ Thus, the climate negotiations, under the aegis of the WIM, represent a key forum to address climate and environmental migration issues at global but also regional and national levels.¹⁹

Migration, environment and climate change in other fora

IOM’s policy dialogues, such as the IOM Council, the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance and the International Dialogue on Migration, have examined the issue of migration, environmental and



climate change since 2007 on a yearly basis.^{20,21} A dedicated Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division was created to address the migration, environment and climate nexus in 2015, at the request of Member States.

The Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) initiative also recognizes the importance of natural disasters and environmental factors in acute crises. The Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster provide “concrete and practical guidance to stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and international levels on how to prepare for and respond to crises in ways that protect and empower migrants, leverage their capacities, and help migrants and communities recover from crises.”²² The Nansen Initiative and its successor, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), seek, *inter-alia*, to analyze and fill gaps in existing legal frameworks to support people affected by cross-border displacement due to disasters.²³ The Agenda for the Protection of Cross-border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate change²⁴ recognizes that disaster displacement is multi-causal, with climate change being an important, but not the only factor.²⁵ The above-mentioned Protection Agenda seeks to assist States and other actors in improving their preparedness and response capacity to address cross-border disaster displacement.

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD),²⁶ the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (Samoa, 2014), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) or the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action, and various regional bodies and processes have dealt with issues of migration, the environment and climate change. Interagency fora have also included work on climate and environmental migration, for instance the Global Migration Group (GMG).²⁷

ISSUES

Understanding migration, environment and climate change

Four salient points should be taken into account when developing policies to address the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation on the migration of people:

- First, to acknowledge that migration is a multicausal and multidimensional phenomenon. Environmental and climate factors are both drivers and pull factors, often acting in conjunction with economic, social, political and demographic aspects.²⁸ All these different dimensions together define a community’s and an individual’s resilience and vulnerability to hazards and to the adverse impacts of climate change. Therefore, policy interventions should cross policy silos and focus on developing a comprehensive whole-of-government approach.
- Second, the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change on migratory movements are felt in all regions of world; yet it is important to acknowledge the differentiated impacts depending on contextual factors such as economic, social, political, environmental and personal circumstances.²⁹ Also of critical importance is that the impacts are felt differently by women and men according to



their social context and the gendered dimension of migration³⁰ should be taken into account when developing policy interventions.

- Third, a key issue relates to the normative framework³¹ to protect those displaced by the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Presently, there is no internationally accepted legal definition of environmental and climate migrants and no single specific legal instrument that governs their protection. However, considering the difficulty in establishing clear legal categories and the political sensitivities linked to this debate, it is critically important that the development of legal solutions is based on the identification of relevant individuals' rights and States' corresponding obligations. This entails making use of existing legal frameworks that are applicable to the situations of environmental migrants such as human rights law, environmental law, international humanitarian law, international disaster response law, nationality law and regional and national instruments, as well as soft law approaches. Migrants moving because of climate and environmental change are protected by international human rights law, like all other categories of migrants, but the non-respect and non-application of these rights create specific vulnerabilities and challenges.
- Fourth, it is important to acknowledge that well-managed migration in the context of climate change and environmental degradation can contribute to both development and climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.³² For instance, the development of bilateral and multilateral migration agreements can promote migrants' and diasporas' involvement in climate change adaptation activities and provide opportunities for safe and regular labour migration in the context of deteriorating environmental conditions.³³

SUGGESTED ACTION

The GCM provides a historic opportunity for States and other migration stakeholders to reflect on how existing practices and policies relating to climate change, environmental degradation, slow-onset processes and natural disasters can be improved. Furthermore, it offers a unique opportunity for States to define actionable commitments, means of implementation and a framework for follow up that can formally recognize the environmental and climate change drivers of migration, as well as the impacts of migratory movements on the environment. Several recommendations and actions that should be considered in the context of the GCM in order to address climate and environmental migration include:

- 1) Recognize the importance of environmental and climatic factors in the set of common principles and understandings that Member States will develop regarding international migration.
- 2) Consider how available evidence on the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters³⁴ on global migration trends can be integrated in the global governance of international migration.
- 3) Encourage the inclusion of environmental and climate change dimensions in national migration policies across different migration management areas, such as border management, return and



reintegration, integration, consular services, protection, migrants' health, and in national laws regarding natural disaster related displacement, labour migration, diaspora inclusion, and in bilateral and regional migration agreements.

- 4) Promote rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to policy development, taking into account differentiated vulnerabilities and promoting a participatory approach to affected populations, in line with available protection focused processes such as the aforementioned MICIC Guidelines and the Nansen Protection Agenda.
- 5) Sustain the development of a whole-of-government approach to develop policy frameworks and implement action. Climate and environmental migration is a multi-causal phenomenon that requires comprehensive responses from different policy areas.³⁵ Institutions working on development, humanitarian response and aid, migration, climate change, land, oceans, environment, disaster risk reduction, *inter alia*, need to work together to propose comprehensive and targeted policy and action frameworks. Such an inclusive approach would also contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by promoting a larger vision across policy areas.
- 6) Develop policies that address the whole migration cycle with activities before, during and after migration.³⁶ Some actions could be targeted at reducing forced migration due to climate change and environmental degradation, others could focus supporting people on the move because of those drivers, while others still could focus on offering legal avenues for migration, where evidence shows that climate change and environmental degradation are drivers of migration.
- 7) Enhance the capacity of national and local-level institutions and policymakers to address climate and environmental migration. Capacities building workshops³⁷ can bring together all ministries and institutions with a stake in climate and environmental migration, fostering collaboration and assisting in the development of formal processes.
- 8) Ensure complementarity with existing policy frameworks. Climate and environmental migration issues are being examined in other fora, notably in the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),³⁸ the main vehicle for climate policy. A coherent, coordinated approach would seek to avoid duplication and build synergies across policy areas and fora. The development of frameworks specific to climate and environmental migration should also take into account the objectives outlined in the SDGs in order to contribute to global progress towards sustainable development.
- 9) Support the development of inclusive and strategic partnerships. Addressing the multi-causal nature of climate and environmental migration requires the expertise of different UN agencies, academia, other non-governmental partners and the migrant communities themselves. The promotion of collaborative efforts would allow maximizing limited resources and ensuring that relevant technical expertise is leveraged.



- 10) Encourage financing for long-term action. As few long-term financing opportunities devoted to migration, environment and climate change exist,³⁹ it is critical to support access to climate and environment-related funds, on the one hand, and to migration funds, on the other hand, to support innovative actions in this pioneering programme of work.
- 11) Acknowledge the potential positive contributions of well-managed migration in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Well-managed migration has the potential to bring benefits to areas of origin, areas of destination and the migrants themselves. The GCM can provide a space for positive dialogue on how effective and collaborative migration governance⁴⁰ can contribute to sustainable development and climate change adaptation at national, regional and global levels.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- IOM, *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy (MECLEP)*, Glossary (2014)
- IOM (*Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change* (2014)
- IOM *International Dialogue on Migration 18 (IDM) Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration* (2012)
- Ionesco, D. Mokhnacheva, D. Gemenne, F. *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*, (Routledge, London, 2017)
- Melde, S. Laczko, F. and Gemenne F. (eds.), *Making mobility work for adaptation to environmental changes: Results from the MECLEP global research* (IOM, 2017)
- Traore Chazalnoël, M. and Ionesco, D. The Role of the International Organization for Migration in the International Governance of Environmental Migration in *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration*, (Routledge, London, 2016)
- Piguet, E. and Laczko F. (eds.) *People on the Move in a Changing Climate: the Regional Impacts of Environmental change and Migration*, Dordrecht Springer (2014)

¹ Ionesco, D. Mokhnacheva, D. Gemenne, F. *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*, (Routledge London, 2017).

² In Ethiopia, drought linked to El Niño resulted in a marked increase in the numbers of newly-displaced persons in the first quarter of 2016, in comparison to displacement data collected within the same time-frame during the previous three years (2015, 2014, 2013) - as evidenced by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM Internal Displacement Monitoring Report, January – March 2016).

³ 12 villages in Alaska affected by land erosion and stronger storm surges linked to reduced sea-ice, thawing, permafrost and sea level rise are exploring options for relocation to other areas less affected by environmental degradation (Ionesco, D. Mokhnacheva, D. Gemenne, F. *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*, (London, 2017) and Mathis et al. Ocean acidification risk assessment for Alaska Fishery sector; progress in oceanography (2015).

⁴ Hamilton, S. and E and Collins S: (2013) Livelihood responses to Mangrove Deforestation in Northern provinces of Ecuador and IOM (2009) Mapping Vulnerability to Natural hazards in Mondulkiri.

⁵ IOM (2017) Extreme Heat and Migration - The Impacts of Threats to Habitability from Increasing and Extreme Heat Exposure due to Climate Change on Migration Movements

⁶ "Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad", International Organization for Migration (IOM), IOM Council Discussion note: Migration and



the Environment (Geneva, 2007) and IOM, Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy (MECLEP), Glossary (Geneva, 2014).

⁷ IOM, Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change, (Geneva, 2014)

⁸ IOM, International Dialogue on Migration 18 (IDM) Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration, (Geneva, 2012).

⁹ Paragraph 1: “Since earliest times, humanity has been on the move (...). Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons (...) which may be linked to climate change) or other environmental factors. Many move, indeed, for a combination of these reasons”.

¹⁰ Paragraph 43: “We commit to addressing the drivers that create or exacerbate large movements(...) We will take measures, inter alia, to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whose objectives include (...) combating environmental degradation and ensuring effective responses to natural disasters and the adverse impacts of climate change”.

¹¹ Paragraph 6: “States, in cooperation with multilateral donors and private-sector partners, as appropriate, would, in coordination with receiving States: [...] e) provide assistance to protect the environment and strengthen infrastructure affected by large movements of refugees in host countries”.

¹² Paragraph 18: “We recall the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and its recommendations concerning measures to mitigate risks associated with disasters. States that have signed and ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change welcome that agreement and are committed to its implementation”.

¹³ As stated by the President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, in his statement at the High Level SDG Action Event on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda (23 March 2017) <http://www.un.org/pga/71/2017/03/23/high-level-sdg-action-event-on-climate-change-and-the-sustainable-development-agenda/>

¹⁴ The Cancun Adaptation Framework encourages parties to enhance action on adaptation through measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation (...) at the national, regional and international levels; (1.CP/16 paragraph 14 (f)).

¹⁵ Decision 3.CP/18 paragraph 7 (a) (vi)).

¹⁶ “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on (...) the rights of migrants”.

¹⁷ Decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 49: “Also requests the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism to establish, (...) a task force (...) to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.”

¹⁸ IOM has been an Observer to the UNFCCC since 2007 and has provided technical support to Parties to the Convention, notably through the organization of the first ever technical meeting dedicated to climate migration, in collaboration with the WIM and the UNFCCC, in 2016 (<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/technical-meeting>). IOM is part of the “Task Force on Displacement”:

http://unfccc.int/adaptation/groups_committees/loss_and_damage_executive_committee/items/9978.php

¹⁹ Submission of the International Organization for Migration

http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/groups_committees/loss_and_damage_executive_committee/application/pdf/excom_wim_aa6_iom_submission_submitted_16_may_2016_1.pdf.

²⁰ <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/iom-and-migration-environment-and-climate-change-mecc>

²¹ Traore Chazalnoël, M. and Ionesco, D. The Role of the International Organization for Migration in the International Governance of Environmental Migration in Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration, (Routledge, London, 2016)

²² <https://micicinitiative.iom.int/guidelines>; More information on MICIC is available in IOM (2017) Addressing Situations of Migrants in Countries in Crisis; see IOM Thematic working Paper on Addressing the Situation of Migrants in Countries in Crisis (2017)

²³ <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/platform-disaster-displacement>

²⁴ <https://www.nanseninitiative.org/global-consultations/>

²⁵ See IOM Global Compact Thematic working paper (2017) Migration, Risk and Resilience in the context of sudden and slow-onset disaster.

²⁶ www.gfmd.org/chairs-note-climate-change-and-migration

²⁷ www.globalmigrationgroup.org/migration-and-climate-change



- ²⁸ Foresight, Migration and Global Environmental change. Final report, London Government Office for Science (2011); De Haas, H (2011) The Determinants of international migration: conceptualizing policy, origin and destination effect: IMI Working Paper No 32. Oxford International Migration Institute; Warner, K. et al (2012), Global Policy Report of Where the Rain Falls Project. Bonn, Care France, UNU; IOM, *Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change*, (Geneva, 2014). Available from http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mecc_outlook.pdf,
- ²⁹ Ionesco, D. Mokhnacheva, D. Gemenne, F. *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*, (London, 2017). Available from <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/projects/atlas-environmental-migration>
- ³⁰ Nasreen, M. (2012) Women and Girls: vulnerable or resilient? Dhaka, Shrabon Prokashani; Boyles, J. (2015) Male migration and decision making: are women finally being included? *Migration and development* 4 (2)
- ³¹ Mc Adam, J. and Limon, M. (2015) Human rights, Climate Change and Cross Border Displacement: the role if the international human rights community in contributing to effective and just solutions, Versoix, Universal Human Rights Group; Zetter, R. and Morrissey, J. (2014) Environmental Stress, displacement and the challenge of human rights protection. In: *Humanitarian Crisis and migration: causes, consequences and responses* (Martin, S., Weerasinghe, S., and Taylor A. Eds) London, Routledge; Mc Adam, J. (2011), *Climate Change Displacement and International Law: Complementary Protection standards*. Legal and Protection Policy Research Series, Geneva UNHCR ; see also documentation at <http://www.environmentalmigration.iom.int/human-rights>;
- ³² Warner K. et al, Integrating human mobility issues within national adaptation plans, United Nations University (UNU) and the Nansen Initiative (2014)
- ³³ Ionesco D. and Traore Chazalnoel M., “Migration as an Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change”, (Geneva, 2015). Available from <https://weblog.iom.int/migration-adaptation-strategy-climate-change>; Martin S. (2009) Managing environmentally induced migration. In: *Migration; Environmental and climate change: Assessing the Evidence* (Laczko F., and Aghazarm, C. eds) Geneva, IOM; ADB (2012) *Addressing Climate change and Migration in Asia and the Pacific*, Manila, Asian Development Bank
- ³⁴ IPCC, 2009, 2014.; IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (2016)
- ³⁵ Martin, S. (2010) *Climate Change, Migration and Governance*; Global Governance: a review of Multilateralism and International Organizations; Mc Adam, J. (2009) *Environmental Migration Governance*. University of New South Wales Faculty of Law research paper No 2009-1; IOM, *International Dialogue on Migration 18 (IDM) Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration*, (Geneva, 2012).
- ³⁶ IOM, *Compendium of IOM Activities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience* (2013)
- ³⁷ IOM, *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Training Manual (Facilitator’s Guide)*.2017, with support of the European Union
- ³⁸ Submission of the International Organization for Migration http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/groups_committees/loss_and_damage_executive_committee/application/pdf/excom_wim_aa6_iom_submission_submitted_16_may_2016_1.pdf; Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, (UNFCCC) Technical Meeting Action Area (6): Migration, Displacement and Human Mobility (July 2016) recommendations and three technical papers: <http://www.environmentalmigration.iom.int/technical-meeting>; Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change UNFCCC - Paris COP21 Recommendations from the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility (November 2015)
- ³⁹ See chapter on “Funding action” (p 102) in Ionesco, D., Mokhnacheva D. and Gemenne, F. *Atlas of Environmental Migration*(2017) Routledge
- ⁴⁰ For instance, the development of bilateral and multilateral migration agreements can promote migrants and diaspora’s involvement and provide opportunities for safe and regular labour migration in the context of degrading environmental conditions: see <http://www.unescap.org/subregional-office/pacific/pacific-climate-change-and-migration-project> Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu reports (2016); IOM, *Effects of Climate Change on Human Mobility in the Pacific and Possible Impact on Canada*, (2017) <http://www.environmentalmigration.iom.int/effects-climate-change-human-mobility-pacific-and-possible-impact-canada>