

Report

Climate change, migration and displacement

The need for a risk-informed
and coherent approach

Sarah Opitz Stapleton, Rebecca Nadin, Charlene Watson
and Jan Kellett

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Overseas Development Institute

203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399
E-mail: info@odi.org.uk

www.odi.org
www.odi.org/facebook
www.odi.org/twitter

United Nations Development Programme

One United Nations Plaza,
New York, NY 10017 USA

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Cover photo: Vast tracts of land in Pakistan's Sindh province are still submerged under water, six months on from the extreme monsoon rainfall that forced more than 20 million people from their homes. © Department for International Development / Russell Watkins 2010

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Acronyms

AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
COP	Conference of the Parties
HRC	Human Rights Council
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally displaced people
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
LDCs	Least developed countries
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDD	Platform on Disaster Displacement
PRISE	Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFDRR	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TFD	Task Force on Displacement
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)

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Terminology

There is a significant lexicon associated with human mobility,¹ with definitions not always shared between actors. Human mobility captures:

- **Migration:** the process of moving within or across borders, either temporarily, seasonally or permanently. Migration is commonly associated with an element of choice, and in this paper it is considered to be *voluntary* in nature.
- **Displacement:** refers most commonly to instances where there is no choice but to move, either temporarily or permanently, within or across borders. In this paper, displacement is considered to be *forced* in nature, for example in the case of a severe flood or political unrest forcing people from their homes.
- **Planned relocation:** a form of organised movement of people typically instigated, supervised and carried out by the state. Ideally, it is undertaken transparently with the informed consent of the community concerned, and with adequate provisions for re-establishing lives and livelihoods (McAdam and Ferris, 2015; Warner et al., 2015). It is most likely to be permanent and so singular, rather than seasonal, but can also occur where people or groups of people are moved from places of temporary residence. Planned relocation is undertaken to protect people from risks and impacts related to disasters and environmental change, including the effects of climate change. However, it is not without controversy, as other non-climate factors can motivate a state to relocate people, including land use change or natural resource extraction.

While the distinction between migration and displacement in this paper is the element of choice, we acknowledge a continuum along this forced–voluntary spectrum, and that, in many instances, choice and coercion will co-mingle (Hugo, 2010; IOM, 2009). As noted in the Nansen Initiative (2015: 17), ‘people, while not necessarily having the ability to decide in complete freedom, still possess the ability to choose between different realistic options’. Thus, it is important to recognise that those who migrate do not always do so completely voluntarily or in safety over the entirety of their journey.

¹ See, for example, IML (2004).

Executive summary

There is a lack of clarity as to the direct influence of climate change on human mobility. We know that some areas worldwide are becoming less habitable due to increasingly extreme climate-related hazards. We know that other areas could become more habitable, allowing new economic activities such as agriculture or tourism. International processes, particularly those on migration and displacement, climate change and disaster risk reduction, increasingly refer to the links between climate change and human mobility. However, these links are not always grounded in evidence, and this increased attention has not led to the coordinated, significant policy or legislative change that is required.

This paper responds to these challenges. It presents an overview of the current evidence base on the complex relationships between climate change and human mobility to support the development of an informed global discourse across the humanitarian, peace and sustainable development agendas and as a counter to some of the sensationalist claims often propagated by the media. In so doing, the paper illustrates that to adequately address human mobility in international and national policy responses, the links between climate change, displacement and migration need to be better understood.

Climate change will alter the frequency, intensity, duration, timing and location of sudden- and slow-onset climate-related hazards. In 2016, over 24 million people were newly displaced by sudden-onset climate-related hazards, such as typhoons and floods. But there is no means of tracking how many might have moved partially in response to slow-onset hazard events, such as drought or desertification. In addition, directly attributing human mobility to climate change is extremely difficult: people move for a wide variety of reasons, and even where hazards contribute to this decision, it is the underlying socioeconomic, cultural, political and environmental processes that either enable or constrain people's ability to cope where they are or result in them moving. Analysis is hampered by this complexity and the interrelatedness of drivers of migration, while significant data challenges make estimation of migration and displacement under a changing climate problematic. Multidisciplinary, robust investigations of climate change and human mobility are limited.

And yet, while the precise relationship between hazard and mobility is not easily tracked, it is clear that climate is influencing patterns of migration and

displacement. Decision-makers are therefore attempting to understand the influence of climate change on migration and displacement and what can be done about it. The distinct role of underlying **vulnerability and capacity** in driving human mobility and its impacts – including the policies and practices dictating formal and informal support – illustrate that the links between climate change and human mobility are not just for disaster risk management efforts or humanitarian assistance to address, but should be fundamentally ingrained in sustainable development processes.

National climate strategies and plans

Human mobility – both autonomous and planned – presents opportunities that may aid adaptation to climate change, and serve as an adaptation measure itself. Risk-informed development strategies and policies are paramount, and have the potential to reduce vulnerability and enhance the ability of an individual, community or country to cope with, respond to and acquire the necessary skills to deal with shocks and stressors, including those posed by climate change. Here, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and national adaptation and disaster management processes and plans can play an important role.

If carefully managed and with the necessary resources, adaptation and disaster management **processes and plans** have the potential to:

- Reduce vulnerability and ensure individuals, communities and countries have the necessary skills to cope with and respond to climate-related hazards;
- Determine the flows, conditions and impacts of human mobility; and
- Support migrant and displaced workers and communities.

This potential will be lost unless these strategies and policies are based on and account for the ways in which climate-related hazards affect people's needs, welfare, income, and subsequent decisions to move (or stay). Such plans must operate in both origin and destination communities, acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of those moving, and account for permanent, temporary and circular migration. To be able to effectively operate in this way, additional financing and technical support from the international community is required.

Global regimes

At the global level, the conceptual framework and organisational architecture around migration and displacement are embedded within an international response machinery developed over seven decades. But this machinery has not yet managed to integrate the complexity of 21st-century mobility into its politics or institutions. The links between climate change and human mobility have been recognised and are starting to be addressed to varying degrees within many global regimes. These include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) has an important role to play in supporting national governments to mainstream approaches to human mobility into broader policies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) includes Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets on both climate change and migration, though explicit links between the two are absent.

The Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees, to be finalised in 2018, offer scope for climate risk-informed action. For example, the former is likely to include a recognition of migration as an adaptation strategy. It remains to be seen what impact (if any) the Compacts will have on national policies. However, if the Compacts and NAPs could be better aligned, in terms of language and

approaches, links could plausibly be made between global and national ambitions, alongside a means to support people who want or need to move. This could start to shift the discourse, to seeing migration as an adaptation strategy rather than a failure to adapt to climate change. It could also help shift siloed approaches to ensure human mobility is integrated into socioeconomic development plans.

Such an approach would build on growing calls to better consider the rights, needs and protections available to people falling outside the scope of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a new international protection framework for people who have been forced to leave their own country and who may not qualify for refugee status under international law, including those displaced as a result of catastrophic environmental events (Zetter, 2017). A rights-based approach to climate change – that accounts for issues of justice, equity and accountability – is of fundamental importance to both the effectiveness of NAPs and progress towards global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda.

Patterns of human mobility are highly likely to shift as the climate continues to change. National and global policy must act to give people choice – the choice to stay or go, and the support to do so. Ultimately, countries must honour their international commitments to climate change mitigation to ensure communities are not left with no choice at all.

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