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9 MIGRATION AND THE SLOW-ONSET IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE: TAKING STOCK AND TAKING ACTION¹

Introduction

The relationship between climate change and migration has clearly gained increasing visibility on the policy agenda over the last decade and there is now much more awareness of the need to address this complex topic.² This growing political interest is evidenced by the development of global principles, such as those articulated under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration³ and in the Recommendations developed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)⁴ through its Task Force on Displacement.⁵ In parallel with global discussions, regional policy dialogues – both on climate change and migration – are also exploring how to develop solutions that can support States to manage migration in a changing climate in ways that benefit affected populations.⁶

We now find ourselves at a crossroads – policy principles need to be translated into actionable activities on the ground, especially at national and local levels. Some countries have already developed national policies and frameworks that seek to address the challenges linked to the adverse impacts of climate change on migration,⁷ even if such efforts remain relatively limited. One major difficulty in developing policies on climate and migration is the complex nature of the issues involved. Migration in the context of adverse climate impacts is mostly multicausal, as the decision to migrate is often shaped by a combination of different factors, including climate drivers. At the same time, a wide range of environmental and climate factors can influence the decision or necessity to migrate, from sudden-onset disasters such as typhoons and floods, to slow-onset processes like sea-level rise and land degradation.⁸

Another intricacy relates to the many forms that migration can take in the context of environmental change, with people moving near or far, internally or across borders, for a limited period of time or permanently. The 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework, the first major climate policy document to include migration issues, refers to the notion of climate change-induced displacement, migration and planned relocation to outline the continuum from forced forms to voluntary forms of migration.⁹ In addition, the impacts of climate change on immobile and

1 Mariam Traore Chazalnoël, Senior Policy Officer, IOM; Alex Randall, Programme Manager, Climate and Migration Coalition.

2 Traore Chazalnoël and Ionesco, 2018a.

3 UNGA, 2018.

4 UNFCCC, 2019.

5 The Task Force on Displacement comprises 14 members, including IOM, from both within and outside the UNFCCC, chosen for their complementarity of expertise. See <https://unfccc.int/> for more information on the Task Force.

6 Traore Chazalnoël and Ionesco, 2018b.

7 IOM, 2018a.

8 Ionesco et al., 2017.

9 UNFCCC, 2010.

“trapped” populations left behind, which do not have the means to migrate out of degraded areas, should also be further researched and considered in relevant policies.¹⁰

In the last decade, a vast amount of knowledge has been produced on the climate change and migration nexus. A recent meta-analysis of available literature concludes that “slow-onset climatic changes, in particular extremely high temperatures and drying conditions (i.e. extreme precipitation decrease or droughts), are more likely to increase migration than sudden-onset events.”¹¹ Migrants moving to adapt to slow-onset impacts might have more time to gather the resources needed to migrate, while sudden-onset events reduce the ability to move by rapidly depleting resources.¹²

Migrants’ testimony: the multicausal nature of climate migration

“And since there was the war, we did not receive any support from the government. Therefore, there are combined factors that made us suffer: droughts and war. If war did not exist, then we might have been able to stay, but now that the land is looted, there is no way for us to claim it.”

Climate-related events most frequently create patterns of internal mobility, however when the changes are combined with other factors such as armed conflict more complex patterns of mobility can result. In this testimony we can see someone crossing an international border as a result of a complex combination of altered rainfall, armed conflict and a failure of government institutions and support.

Context:

This testimony was collected by researchers working for UNHCR and the United Nations University as part of an investigation into the experiences of refugee and internally displaced persons in East Africa.

Sources: Afifi et al., 2012; Brzoska and Fröhlich, 2016.

This chapter focuses on migration in the context of the slow-onset impacts of climate change, an area where policy and knowledge gaps remain.¹³ It presents some of the key challenges associated with understanding and taking action on slow-onset climate impacts and migration issues, and will explore how migration policy and practice can play a role in responding to some of the most pressing challenges. Throughout the chapter, migrants’ testimonies vividly illustrate how people are impacted on the ground and what the realities are that policymakers need to consider when translating principles into practices.

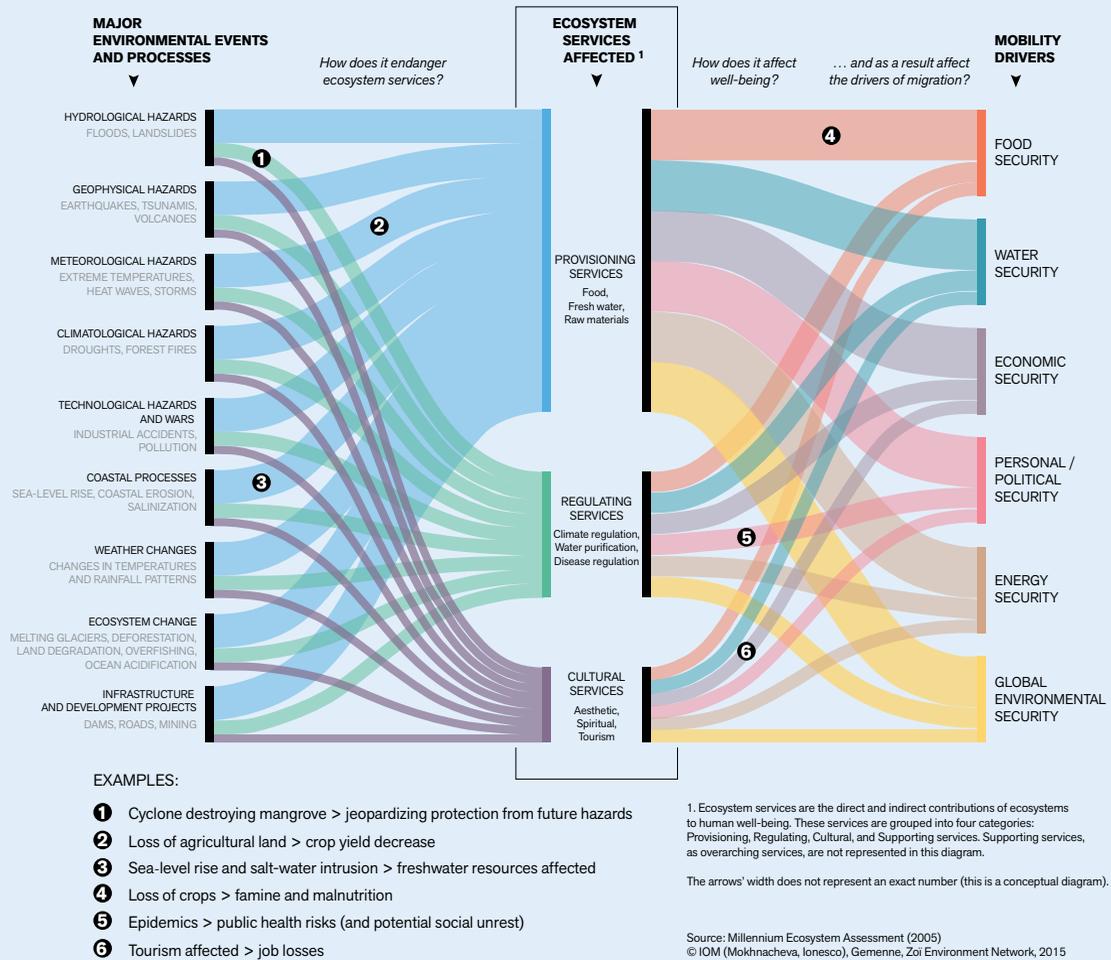
10 Heslin et al., 2019.

11 Šedová et al., 2021:3.

12 Ibid.

13 IDMC, 2019.

Links between environmental change, ecosystems and human mobility



Ecosystems are increasingly endangered by slow-onset environmental events and processes. For instance, heat waves might lead to loss of agricultural land and decrease in productivity, while Sea-level rise and saltwater intrusion might threaten freshwater resources. The depletion of ecosystem services due to slow-onset processes might impact human security directly, for example through the reduction of essential resources such as food and water; and indirectly, such as when conflicts erupt over scarce natural resources. Threats to human security might in turn drive people to migrate in search of alternative income and ways to meet their basic needs.

Adapted from IOM, 2015a.

Slow-onset climate-change impacts and migration: key concepts and current state of knowledge

This chapter uses the word “migration” as an umbrella term to refer to forced and voluntary forms of movement that can occur in the context of climate and environmental change. This terminology is aligned with the ongoing contribution of IOM, which has developed comprehensive working definitions of key terms relevant to the migration and climate-change nexus (see Appendix A). These definitions are not normative, nor are they internationally agreed upon – they seek to provide a broad framing of the topic for working purposes. This is particularly useful when discussing migration in the context of slow-onset climate impacts, as such migration can take many forms and be linked to multiple drivers.

Migrants’ testimony: migration in the context of slow-onset events can take different forms...

“My grandfather, father and I have worked these lands. But times have changed ...

“The rain is coming later now, so that we produce less. The only solution is to go away, at least for a while. Each year I’m working for 3 to 5 months in Wyoming. That’s my main source of income. But leaving my village forever? No. I was raised here and here I will stay.”

When people move as a way of coping the livelihood consequences of altered rainfall, they often engage in a pattern of circular or seasonal migration, moving repeatedly between different locations rather than making one permanent move. The goal of this pattern of migration is to replace lost income during periods of rainfall irregularity, but to maintain connections with family and community who have stayed behind.

Context:

This testimony was collected by the EACH-FOR research programme. The interviewee is describing the situation in rural Mexico and his migration to the United States.

Sources: Afifi et al., 2012; Brzoska and Fröhlich, 2016.

...and result in different outcomes:

“I moved to a nearby market town to sell products. The town was five hours away [walking].. I also worked as a carpenter in the town. When the rain came, I would return to farm... But because of my absence, my wife wasn’t able to sustain the farming work by herself. So at one point, when it hadn’t rained for a long time, the whole family decided to move to the market town.”

When people move in order to cope with lost income they rarely cross international borders. People often move the shortest distance possible to find alternative work.

In this case we can see that the family did not initially move together. One family member moved first, but as the situation deteriorated the whole family moved to the new location.

Context:

This testimony was recorded as part of the research project carried out by UNHCR and the United Nations University. Researchers spoke to refugees and IDPs living in camps across East Africa about the causes of their displacement.

Sources: Afifi et al., 2012; Brzoska and Fröhlich, 2016.

Very closely linked with the question of how to define people migrating in the context of climate impacts is the question of data. Defining what climate migration is shapes what kinds of data are collected and analysed. In the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition, no single set of data is fully applicable to climate migration as defined by IOM. However, different data sources enable the creation of a general picture of how slow-onset events currently influence migration patterns and of what emerging future key trends are. Three types of data are especially useful in this context: existing data on people moving in the context of adverse climate and environmental impacts; projections related to the number of people potentially migrating in the future; and data on populations at risk. Taken together, these different sources can help policymakers to make changes that can shape future trends, particularly at the national level.

Data on current migration linked to climate and environmental impacts

In recent years, the production of knowledge and evidence on the linkages between migration, the environment and climate change has increased substantially,¹⁴ allowing for a better understanding of how environmental impacts – including slow-onset events and disasters – influence migration patterns globally, regionally, nationally and locally. Drought and desertification, both slow-onset events, are the most-studied hazards in the case studies related to climate migration collected in the CliMig Database.¹⁵ Significant knowledge gaps nevertheless remain, such as the lack of long-term longitudinal data on migration that would better accommodate the slow timescales of environmental change,¹⁶ and the absence of harmonized data sets and of disaggregated data.¹⁷

One of the most-cited and widely recognized data sources is the annual report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) on disaster displacement, which compiles information on displacement related to disasters at the country level.¹⁸ In 2020, 30.7 million new displacements were triggered by disasters in 145 countries and territories.¹⁹ Important to note is that these numbers mostly focus on new displacements in reaction to a sudden-onset disaster and within their own countries – the data regarding slow-onset events and disasters, and data on cross-border movements remain incomplete. IDMC also releases limited data related to slow-onset disasters, with an estimated 46,000 new displacements due to extreme temperatures, and 32,000 new displacements due to droughts in 2020.²⁰ Over the period 2008–2020, over 2.4 million new displacements were caused by droughts and over 1.1 million by extreme temperatures.²¹ However, these data only paint a partial picture, as small-scale events that lead to displacement occur more frequently than larger-scale disasters, but are usually underreported and not all countries report displacement triggered by slow-onset events.²²

However, such data are useful when discussing slow-onset impacts and migration, notably to identify “hotspots” where repeated disaster displacement occurs. Slow-onset events can contribute to sudden-onset disasters; for instance, sea-level rise can trigger flooding and rising temperatures may result in heat waves.²³ People who live in

14 For instance, the CliMig Database on Migration, Climate Change and the Environment, produced by the Université de Neuchâtel, records a sharp increase in the number of yearly publications from 2008 onwards (Université de Neuchâtel, 2018). See also Ionesco et al., 2017.

15 Pigué et al., 2018.

16 Flavell et al., 2020.

17 Some of the key gaps related to displacement and slow-onset data are identified in IDMC, 2018a.

18 IDMC, 2021.

19 Ibid.

20 IDMC, 2020.

21 IDMC, 2021.

22 IDMC, 2019.

23 IDMC, 2018a.

areas with high levels of disaster displacement might progressively become unable to cope with the impacts of slow-onset events on environmentally based livelihoods, such as fishing or agriculture.²⁴ In such contexts, like the coastal areas of West Africa, a combination of slow-onset processes and sudden-onset hazards might influence the decision to migrate.²⁵

Other types of data also help inform policy responses, such as IOM operational data providing a snapshot of current trends in specific countries. In Madagascar, for example, monitoring of drought impacts revealed that the prolonged drought experienced in the south of the country since 2013 resulted in increasing migration movements from the south to other regions of the country, with some villages experiencing a 30 per cent decrease in their populations.²⁶ In Mongolia, operational data clearly reveal that *Dzuds* (a cyclical, slow-onset phenomenon specific to Mongolia characterized by a summer drought followed by harsh winter weather and deterioration of pasture and shortages of water in spring) were linked to the migration of hundreds of thousands of people from rural areas within the same provinces, towards the cities, including the capital Ulaanbaatar.²⁷ In Somalia in 2019, data collected in displacement sites revealed that 67 per cent of the almost 700,000 internally displaced persons had moved because of drought.²⁸

Data collected during the implementation of specific projects can also be useful, such as the information collected by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Morocco, which highlighted how environmental changes intertwined with other migration drivers shaped the decision to migrate. In this specific survey, most respondents indicated that lack of employment was their primary reason to migrate. However, respondents also highlighted that environmental changes, such as drought and declining agricultural productivity, played a major or partial role in their decision to migrate.²⁹

Operational data can provide a valuable resource for national policymakers, who need a broad understanding of how and where current climate impacts affect migration at the national level. However, this kind of data only offers a partial snapshot: information related to slow-onset hazards other than drought is very limited and the ad hoc nature of operational data, collected within the framework of time-bound projects that generally have a restricted geographical coverage, does not necessarily result in a long-term understanding of the patterns of recorded movements.

Future projections

Another type of data that is often in the spotlight relates to future projections of the number of climate migrants. Projections can bring attention to the potential scale of future issues and instill a sense of urgency in policymakers. However, it is important to be careful when presenting projections, especially on a polarized topic such as migration.³⁰ Simplistic analyses of big numbers can trigger a fearmongering narrative that could negatively influence public perceptions and policymaking choices. Projections often highlight what could happen if nothing or too little is done by policymakers and other actors to mitigate climate impacts.

24 IDMC, 2018b.

25 IOM, 2020a.

26 IOM, 2017a.

27 IOM, 2020b.

28 Ibid.

29 IOM and UNCCD, 2019.

30 Gemenne, 2011.

In terms of global projections, one seminal 2018 report from the World Bank³¹ estimated that 143 million people could be moving within their own countries by 2050 because of adverse climate impacts in three regions of the world (sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America) in the absence of urgent global and national climate action. The report highlights that the poorest people might be forced to migrate due to slow-onset climate-change impacts, such as decreasing crop productivity, shortages of water and rising sea levels. Further, a UNCCD study indicates that the number of migrants in the context of droughts could increase by approximately 22 million in Africa, 12 million in South America and 10 million in Asia by 2059 when compared with the 2000–2015 period, with large distinctions between climate models and high uncertainty.³² Modelling of migration patterns at the national level also points towards an increase in migration linked to sea-level rise in the United States³³ and Bangladesh³⁴ by 2100, while some researchers highlight that an increase in temperatures could lead to growing asylum applications to the European Union.³⁵

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) expresses “low confidence in quantitative projections of changes in mobility, due to its complex, multi-causal nature”.³⁶ It does, however, note that there is medium confidence, but high agreement that “climate change over the 21st century is projected to increase displacement of people.”³⁷ Importantly, the IPCC highlights that changes in migration patterns can occur in response to slow-onset impacts such as longer-term climate variability and change, and indicates that migration can be an effective adaptation strategy in these contexts.³⁸ However, the IPCC also highlights that there is only “medium evidence and low agreement as to whether migration is adaptive, in relation to cost effectiveness and scalability concerns”.³⁹ Indeed, some researchers posit that migration is sometimes used as an adaptation strategy in response to governance voids, such as when communities rely on migrants’ remittances to finance climate resilience efforts.⁴⁰ At the time of finalizing this chapter, the IPCC had just released its latest output, as discussed in the text box below.

IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (as at August 2021)

The latest output by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) signals “a code red for humanity”, according to UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

The IPCC released the first part of the Sixth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Working Group I’s contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report) on 9 August 2021. This part, prepared by 234 scientists from 66 countries, highlights that human influence has warmed the climate at a unprecedented rate and emphasizes the urgency of the action needed on climate change, which is widespread, rapid, intensifying and even irreversible.

31 Rigaud et al., 2018.

32 Laurent-Lucchetti et al., 2019.

33 Robinson et al., 2020.

34 Bell et al., 2021.

35 Missirian and Schlenker, 2017.

36 IPCC, 2014:20.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 IPCC, 2018.

40 Vinke et al., 2020.

Along with the first part, the Sixth Assessment Report (to be finalized later in 2022) will include the three most recent IPCC Special Reports – Global Warming of 1.5°C, Climate Change and Land, and The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, as well as the contribution of other two Working Groups: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, and Mitigation of Climate Change. The report will provide policymakers with the most up-to-date scientific information related to climate change impacts.

Source: IPCC, 2021.

People at risk

Other critical sources of information focus on people residing in climate-vulnerable areas where adverse impacts of slow-onset events are expected to worsen. Data on people at risk are available for many parts of the world.⁴¹ Rising temperatures are a growing concern as exposure to high heat threatens habitability and can lead to loss of labour productivity. For instance, a 2017 report estimates that with a 1.5°C global temperature rise, 30 to 60 million people will live in hot areas where the average heat in the hottest month is likely to be too high for a human body to function well.⁴² A warmer world will put millions of people at threat of sea-level rise,⁴³ and a world warmer by 1°C could directly expose 2.2 per cent of the world's population to rising seas.⁴⁴

As with reporting the data on future projections, special care should be taken to present the caveats inherent to such numbers. While it is possible that many individuals and families will migrate to cope with climate impacts, it is also clear that not all people living in at-risk areas will want or have the opportunity to migrate. Scenarios arising where such projections become realities – leading to people at risk migrating out of affected areas – will only occur if appropriate and evidence-based policymaking decisions are not taken. It is therefore critical to remember that there is a window of opportunity to ensure that the worst predictions do not come to pass, and that policymakers need support to analyse existing knowledge, make appropriate connections and take decisions that address both the mobility and immobility dimensions of climate change.

The lack of comprehensive data on migration linked to slow-onset climate events remains a barrier in developing evidence-based policymaking. In many cases, it is difficult to isolate climate factors from other social, economic, political and security drivers that motivate the decision to migrate. This is especially true in relation to slow-onset events, as they do not usually lead to immediate large-scale movements. Therefore, it is possible for instance that many migrants who are understood to be migrating for economic reasons, also migrate in part because of climate impacts on their livelihoods.⁴⁵ Another example relates to conflict and security. When political, economic and social factors of instability intersect, population movements might exacerbate State fragility and contribute to increasing conflict. The Syrian civil war, where exceptional drought contributed to population movements towards urban areas that were not addressed by the political regime, is often cited as an illustration of these linkages.⁴⁶ However, existing evidence does not allow the firm conclusion that there exists a direct link between migration, climate change and conflict.⁴⁷ In terms of policymaking, it is however important to consider that climate change often acts as a threat multiplier in fragile contexts.

41 Ionesco et al., 2017.

42 IOM, 2017b.

43 McMichael et al., 2020.

44 Marzeion and Levermann, 2014.

45 Bendandi, 2020.

46 Maertens and Baillat, 2017.

47 Ionesco et al., 2017.

Even if this multicausal nature makes it impossible to offer a global overview of hard numbers of people migrating in the context of slow-onset climate impacts, there is enough information available to understand the scale of the issue. In this respect, researchers can best support policymakers by providing context-specific analyses of converging sources. However, policymakers will need to accept that there is no clear-cut way to obtain hard numbers and that policymaking decisions need to acknowledge this complexity. As described in the next section, multilateral United Nations policy dialogues are increasingly discussing policy stakes related to climate migration, including slow-onset dimensions. These global policy discussions are already impacting national- and regional-level policymaking, with several countries developing national policy frameworks that align with global discussions. However, better data and analysis would help operationalize national responses to migration linked to slow-onset climate impacts.

Slow-onset climate impacts in global policy developments: where do we stand?

Global developments in climate policy and migration policy

The topic of migration and climate change has increasingly been included in global policy discussions conducted under United Nations frameworks and beyond.⁴⁸ Especially significant is the progress made in including migration dimensions within the climate change negotiations agenda and the implementation of the Paris Agreement by State parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).⁴⁹ In 2015, the Paris Climate Change Agreement mandated the creation of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement within the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM),⁵⁰ an expert body comprising members with complementary expertise. Through a consultative process,⁵¹ the Task Force developed recommendations on how to address displacement in the context of climate change.⁵² These recommendations are addressed to UNFCCC State parties, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders. These recommendations are applicable in the context of slow-onset events, as they seek to address all forms of human mobility linked to the adverse impacts of climate change, including slow-onset events.

Salient points formulated in these recommendations include: inviting States to formulate laws, policies and strategies that address all forms of migration linked to climate impacts, while taking into account States' human rights obligations; strengthening research and analysis on the topic; inviting States to facilitate orderly, safe and regular migration in the context of adverse climate impacts; and creating synergies with the work conducted under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. State parties to the UNFCCC endorsed these recommendations in 2018 and renewed the mandate of the Task Force on Displacement until 2021, a sign of political interest to keep migration discussions on the agenda of the climate negotiations. Furthermore, members of the Task Force on Displacement have been producing dedicated knowledge products⁵³ that seek to raise awareness on what forms of migration occur in the context of slow-onset events and to map current United Nations mandates to address displacement linked to climate impacts, including slow-onset processes.⁵⁴ This policy work is starting to influence policymaking at the national level. For instance, the Governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are reviewing the extent to which

48 IOM, 2018b.

49 Traore Chazalnoël and Ionesco, 2016.

50 See UNFCCC, n.d.e, Task Force on Displacement.

51 IOM, 2018c.

52 UNFCCC, 2021.

53 IOM, 2018b.

54 PDD, 2018.

their national policy frameworks are aligned with the recommendations of the Task Force on Displacement, with a view to identifying relevant mechanisms and gaps, and formulating specific recommendations to address migration and climate-change issues nationally.⁵⁵

It is important to note that the migration-related policy work conducted under the UNFCCC is connected institutionally to other strategic workstreams under the climate negotiations that are of great relevance to migration in the context of slow-onset events and processes. The human mobility strategic workstream is situated under the overall work programme on loss and damage,⁵⁶ alongside strategic workstreams dedicated to slow-onset events and non-economic losses.⁵⁷ Clearly, these dimensions are of great relevance when discussing migration in the context of slow-onset environmental degradation, as affected populations, including migrants, can suffer both economic losses such as loss of income, infrastructure and property,⁵⁸ and non-economic losses such as loss of cultural heritage⁵⁹ and traditional knowledge.⁶⁰ There is an increasing recognition that stronger connections between these work programmes need to be established.

Discussions on migration under the UNFCCC were originally related to the adaptation workstream,⁶¹ before being moved to the loss and damage workstream. This shift opened the possibility of an alternative framing of climate migration: migration can be a way to adapt to climate impacts and reduce loss and damage, but it can also be a source of loss and damage for the migrants and their host communities.⁶² Depending on the context, forms of mobility such as voluntary migration and planned relocation⁶³ can be both a form of loss and damage as well as an adaptation measure.⁶⁴ There is, however, the risk that an excessive focus on migration as a source of loss or damage, in particular for host communities, could be negatively politicized and lead to policies that seek to limit all migration, including when it can be a form of adaptation.⁶⁵

Looking forward, a better understanding of how loss and damage issues relate to migration may be critical in guiding the development of migration policies and practices that consider slow-onset climate impacts. However, it is important to acknowledge that this step could trigger politically difficult discussions, as questions of loss and damage are very much linked to issues of compensation, a sensitive topic for both developed and developing countries.⁶⁶ Indeed, at the request of a developed country,⁶⁷ the decision of the 2015 Paris Agreement that created the Task Force on Displacement under the loss and damage workstream explicitly stated that this exercise did not provide a basis for any liability or compensation.⁶⁸

55 IOM, 2021a; IOM, 2021b.

56 For more details, see UNFCCC, n.d.b.

57 Non-economic losses are additional to the loss of property, assets, infrastructure, agricultural production and/or revenue that can result from the adverse effects of climate change. It covers loss and damage that is not easily quantifiable in economic terms, such as loss of life, degraded health and losses induced by human mobility, as well as loss or degradation of territory, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge, societal/cultural identity, biodiversity and ecosystem services. For more details, see UNFCCC, n.d.c.

58 UNFCCC, 2020.

59 Heslin, 2019.

60 UNFCCC, 2013.

61 Mayer, 2016.

62 Ibid.

63 Hirsch, 2019.

64 UNFCCC, 2013.

65 Mayer, 2016. Also note that some researchers argue that the framing of climate migrants as potential security threats can lead to exclusionary and containment policies (Telford, 2018).

66 Hirsch, 2019.

67 Verchick, 2018.

68 UNFCCC, 2015.

In 2019, at the 24th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP24), a WIM review exercise offered State parties to the UNFCCC the opportunity to share their views on the work of the WIM to date, including the work of the Task Force on Displacement, and provide recommendations for future orientations.⁶⁹ There was wide acknowledgement that the Task Force on Displacement had not only successfully delivered on its mandate to develop recommendations, but had also achieved other positive impacts, such as offering a space to discuss “difficult and sensitive issues related to loss and damage”.⁷⁰ It was also highlighted that the involvement of external operational actors was instrumental to the success of the Task Force.⁷¹ As an outcome of the WIM review exercise, the Least-Developed Countries Group recommended the establishment of a displacement facility to support countries to address internal and cross-border displacement and migration related to climate-change impacts, and greater involvement of operational actors to build capacities at the national level to better exploit knowledge related to loss and damage.⁷² These recommendations are in line with the strong calls from developing countries to facilitate availability of and access to financing mechanisms and enhance the operationalization of the WIM at the national level.⁷³ On the other hand, European Union countries, for example, highlighted that the current structure of the WIM was adequate, and had enabled it to deliver its core functions.⁷⁴ It is too soon to determine precisely how the various State interests at stake will shape the future of migration-related work under the UNFCCC. However, the slow pace of the discussions conducted under the UNFCCC makes it unlikely that further operationalization of the WIM can occur rapidly. In terms of addressing slow-onset impacts on migration, one of the most effective ways forward may be to empower external operational actors to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Displacement at the national level.

Global migration policy discussions have increasingly acted in parallel to integrate climate and environmental dimensions, building upon the work conducted under the UNFCCC. In this respect, critical milestones were the adoption by United Nations Member States of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration),⁷⁵ followed by the 2018 adoption by States of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Global Compact for Migration includes several actions that States can implement to: (a) address environmental and climate drivers of migration, including slow-onset drivers (objective 2); and (b) to enhance the availability and flexibility of regular migration pathways, such as visa options for those affected by climate impacts, including slow-onset events (objective 5).

However, it is important to recall that the Global Compact for Migration is only concerned with international migration, while much migration in the context of slow-onset degradation takes place internally, from rural to urban areas for instance. From an implementation perspective, the focus on international migration gives a leading role to ministries of foreign affairs and/or home affairs, and it may prove difficult to ensure the coherent participation of governmental actors that are not traditionally involved with migration, yet are in charge of climate or disaster risk-reduction issues. Nonetheless, a sound implementation of the Global Compact for Migration’s objectives, especially those related to addressing drivers of migration and promoting adaptation and resilience in countries of origin, can have positive effects on both internal and international migration. The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, established to support the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, has started funding joint programmes related to climate migration.⁷⁶ While being too soon to evaluate operational results, it is encouraging

69 UNFCCC, n.d.d.

70 Government of Finland and EC, 2019.

71 Ibid; Government of Bhutan, 2019.

72 Ibid.

73 Government of Guatemala, 2019; Government of the Philippines, 2019; AOSIS, 2019.

74 Government of Finland and EC, 2019.

75 Martin and Weerasinghe, 2017.

76 MPTF, 2020.

that States have supported the funding of migration programmes. The International Migration Review Forum,⁷⁷ scheduled to take place in 2022 to review the status of implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, will offer important indicators on States' willingness, including through action, to implement the Compact's objectives related to climate migration.

The objectives outlined under the Global Compact for Migration are aligned with the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement Recommendations and echo many of its points, such as the need for better data and knowledge and the necessity to support populations to develop resilience strategies, including those for slow-onset events and processes. Both documents spell out global policy principles that could be instrumental in guiding policy development at the national level. Some countries such as Peru are already developing national plans that build upon the principles outlined in these global policy documents,⁷⁸ a sign that they can play a catalytic role in national policy development.

Other ongoing initiatives are relevant in supporting the development of policy on migration in the context of slow-onset events (see a summary of other relevant initiatives in the United Nations system in Appendix B). Slow-onset dimensions are therefore relatively well integrated into the main relevant global policy discussions, even if data and knowledge on this specific topic need to be strengthened. The various recommendations and principles articulated at the global level highlight the complex nature of migration linked to slow-onset climate impacts and the need for policymakers from different areas to work together to develop comprehensive solutions. In this respect, migration policymakers have a leading role to play in translating global principles into national- and regional-level policies that provide assistance and protection to affected migrants and communities. The following section will focus on how migration policy can be reshaped to respond to some of the identified issues, in line with global principles.

Migrants' testimony: the multicausal nature of climate migration

"Rains recently have been very intense – very intense. Without comparison, like nothing seen before. Years ago the rainy season lasted two months, November and December, and water levels reached 20 to 30 centimetres. Now, in the last six to seven months, they've reached over two metres. We've never seen this before. We don't want to leave our land: here are our past, our memories, our ancestors. We don't want to move to other parts, we don't know what to do there."

Even in the face of extremely difficult consequence of environmental change, many people wish to remain in their current location, rather than migrating to find alternative work. As we can see from this testimony, historic and cultural connections to locations are important to many and form a key part of someone's decision to stay or leave.

Context:

This testimony was recorded by NGO Refugees International. The interviewee is speaking as part of its video series reporting on the consequences of flooding in Colombia in 2012.

Sources: Adams, 2016; Refugees International, 2012.

77 UNNM, n.d.

78 Peru is in the process of preparing a specific Plan of Action on Climate Migration, as requested by the Climate Change law of 2018 and its 2019 Regulation Law. See Parliament of Peru, 2019 and Government of Peru, 2019.

Migration in the context of slow-onset climate impacts: moving from frameworks to migration policy action

Due to the multicausal nature of climate migration,⁷⁹ policymakers from different areas can help address various sides of the nexus. Climate and disaster risk-reduction specialists play a leading role in addressing adverse drivers of internal climate migration. For instance, migration issues have been included in national climate and disaster risk-reduction policies in several countries, such as Colombia and Togo.⁸⁰ This section focuses on examining how migration policymaking can help address some of the key challenges linked to climate migration. Migration policymakers seeking to adapt existing frameworks or develop new ones to respond to migration in the context of slow-onset events face a difficult task. They have to take into account a number of complex points that can influence how national and regional policy frameworks are developed. One key point outlined in global principles is the recognition that in some cases, it will not be possible for people to remain in areas devastated by slow-onset events, or to return to these areas; and that in such contexts, facilitating regular migration is a needed policy response. This dimension is one of the key areas of work in which migration policymakers can play an important role, for instance by negotiating bilateral labour migration agreements that can potentially offer regular migration options.

The notion that migration can be one of the available ways for individuals to adapt to climate impacts has been thoroughly discussed over the last decade, with diverging views.⁸¹ On the one hand, the “migration as adaptation” framing allows policymakers to consider how voluntary migration could help reduce exposure and vulnerability to physical risks associated with climate impacts, and boost the resilience both of migrants and the households left behind, through livelihood diversification and remittances, for instance.⁸² On the other hand, it has been argued that this framing could dilute the responsibility of political forces by shifting the focus to individual resilience and opportunities to move, weakening considerations linked to issues of inequality, injustice and reparations.⁸³ Whether migration results in mostly positive consequences will be context-specific, with additional factors such as gender dimensions⁸⁴ and age⁸⁵ influencing outcomes. Available literature usually emphasizes that migration linked to climate impacts takes place along a voluntary to forced continuum,⁸⁶ and in most cases, even so-called “voluntary” movements will be motivated by external pressures that shape and limit individuals’ migration options.⁸⁷ Likewise, there is increasing recognition that even in situations of “forced” migration, individuals and households can exert some agency in migration decisions, such as deciding when, where and how to move to a new location.⁸⁸

Beyond the debate on whether migration constitutes a reasonable and desirable adaptation option and whether migration is mostly forced or voluntary, it is important to acknowledge that movements are already taking place and will continue to occur and probably grow. What is at stake therefore is how to develop realistic policy approaches that acknowledge the fact that migration might be inevitable in certain contexts and that help reduce migrants’ vulnerabilities and enhance the positive impacts of migration for migrants and communities. Looking ahead, developing new safe and legal migration pathways to cope with adverse impacts of climate might be an immense but probably necessary challenge, likely to prompt difficult political discussions on the perils of offering

79 United Kingdom Government Office for Science, 2011.

80 IOM, 2018a.

81 Oakes et al., 2020.

82 IOM, 2015b; IOM, 2017c.

83 Bettini et al., 2017.

84 Gioli and Milan, 2018.

85 Ionesco and Pawliczko, 2014.

86 Flavell et al., 2020.

87 McAuliffe et al., 2017.

88 Akesson and Coupland, 2018; Oakes et al., 2020.

more migration pathways. Migration policymakers continue to assess how existing current approaches to migration management could be adjusted or expanded to address the specific challenges of people moving in connection with climate impacts.⁸⁹ Reviewing and expanding existing policies and practices has potential to lead to relatively fast positive changes for migrants, increasing their protection when moving in response to extreme climate impacts and providing alternative choices to those unable to remain in or return to areas devastated by slow-onset environmental impacts.

In terms of cross-border migration, one obvious response is to develop more visa options available to those who cannot remain in, or return to, areas of origin due to slow-onset impacts of climate change, as outlined under Global Compact for Migration objective 5h. Such visas could for instance be granted on humanitarian and compassionate grounds to those fleeing extreme environmental degradation, on the model of humanitarian visas offered by Brazil to Haitian migrants after the 2010 earthquake or temporary visas in Peru granted for humanitarian reasons.⁹⁰ Other migration management options could be applied to migrants who are already abroad, but are facing difficulties in returning due to slow-onset climate impacts, such as implementing broad regularization programmes, adjusting immigration enforcement activities or granting individuals residency permits. Existing practices can also be enhanced, such as using bilateral agreements on education, training or labour to offer alternative options to those most vulnerable to climate impacts,⁹¹ and using provisions under regional free-movement agreements to admit migrants affected by climate impacts.⁹² The specific challenges linked to voluntary return and reintegration policies and programmes are also of critical importance in cases where return is possible, but where areas of return are environmentally fragile. This includes providing options for returning migrants to work in the green or blue economy and in environmentally sustainable occupations.⁹³

In terms of facilitating internal migration, ensuring that migration policies consider urbanization issues is particularly important. Many regions of the world experience migration from rural areas – which might be affected by slow-onset events – towards urban centres,⁹⁴ where migrants might seek diverse livelihood opportunities or better access to essential services. However, cities can become hotspots of risks,⁹⁵ as many densely populated urban centres are exposed to slow-onset events and processes such as heat waves, coastal erosion, droughts and sea-level rise. Migration management policies therefore need to take these dimensions into account, such as in the Bangladesh-led initiative that encourages internal migrants not to move to major cities, but to instead move to secondary cities that are more climate-resilient and migrant-friendly.⁹⁶

Planned relocation policies could also be critical in facilitating safe and orderly migration. Planned relocations of entire communities living in areas that are irreversibly damaged due to slow-onset degradation, such as sea-level rise, are already taking place in over 60 countries and territories across all continents.⁹⁷ It is likely that more planned relocations will need to be managed in the future, even if they are usually considered to be a last-resort option. However, very few countries have developed domestic laws and policies focused solely on planned relocation.⁹⁸ Policies on planned relocation need to consider several complex factors to avoid worsening the vulnerabilities

89 IOM's definition of migration management reads as follows: "planned approaches to the implementation and operationalization of policy, legislative and administrative frameworks, developed by the institutions in charge of migration" (IOM, 2019:248).

90 Nansen Initiative, 2015b.

91 For example, Spain and New Zealand have expanded the use of pre-existing temporary work quotas to target migrants originating from areas affected by climate impacts. For more details, see Nansen Initiative, 2015b.

92 Foreigners affected by slow-onset disasters and environmental stress have relied on free-movement agreements between Nepal and India. See Nansen Initiative, 2015b.

93 IOM, 2020c.

94 FAO et al., 2018.

95 Schreiber et al., 2016.

96 Alam et al., 2018.

97 Bower and Weerasinghe, 2021.

98 Ibid.

of those relocated, such as the physical impacts of relocation on the landscape of receiving places, employment opportunities, access to essential services, and social cohesion between relocated communities and communities of destination.⁹⁹ Even if it is anticipated that most planned relocations will take place within countries, for instance in small island developing States threatened by sea-level rise, such relocations could potentially take place across borders. This could in turn trigger extremely complex international legal challenges. From the perspective of a loss and damage framing of climate migration, such policy choices can be a double-edged sword. Facilitating migration and planned relocation can potentially reduce loss and damage by reducing exposure to adverse climate impacts, but can also incur loss and damage for the migrants and/or the host communities.¹⁰⁰

Migration management policy and practice should strive to support in parallel migrants' efforts to mitigate and to adapt to slow-onset events, both in their areas of origin and destination. Such policy options could include reducing the cost of transferring remittances towards areas that experience serious environmental degradation, and incentivizing the skills and financial investments of migrants towards climate action in areas of origin. These policies would also contribute to addressing climate drivers of migration by reducing vulnerabilities in areas of origin. Furthermore, migrants' inputs could be actively sought and integrated within national- and local-level policy planning, to ensure that specific challenges experienced by mobile populations are reflected.

Countries could find it useful to undertake comprehensive review exercises to analyse how their existing migration management policies can be applied or modified to respond to new environmental challenges. Such reviews could also evaluate whether there is a need to develop new migration management tools to support populations moving in the context of slow-onset climate impacts.

Maximizing migrants' contributions to climate action

Financial remittances are often a lifeline for the poorest households, allowing them to meet their basic needs. Financial remittances are mostly used for poverty reduction as opposed to investment in longer-term adaptation.^a However, remittances have the potential in some contexts to constitute an alternative source of climate finance in developing countries, such as in Pacific small island developing States.^b Financial remittances can contribute to building resilience at both the individual and community level, for instance when migrants are able to build climate-resilient houses or invest in climate-proof community infrastructure. Social remittances might also play a key role in building resilience to climate shocks when migrants acquire new skills and education.^c In Tajikistan, for instance, a study highlights that migrants' remittances are increasingly used for business creation and community-based farming, creating opportunities for a more climate-resilient future.^d However, incentives need to be provided to encourage migrants' investments in national and community resilience to climate change, as migrants might not have the necessary information or the technical know-how to channel remittances into climate action.^e Examples of policy measures that support migrants' investments include the 3×1 Program for Migrants in Mexico, through which national authorities provide three dollars for every one dollar of remittances invested in community projects; or loans offered by the Senegalese Government to diasporas.^f

a IOM, 2017c:81; Musah-Surugu et al., 2018.

b Samuwai and Maxwell Hills, 2018.

c IOM, 2017c.

d Babagaliyeva et al., 2017.

e Bendandi and Pauw, 2016.

f Ibid; Villegas Rivera, 2014.

99 IOM et al., 2017; Brookings Institution et al., 2015.

100 Mayer, 2016.

Examples of existing practices

Relevant national and regional policy responses have been developed in recent years to address migration linked to climate impacts and environmental change.¹⁰¹ This development in policymaking at the national and regional levels could be partially linked to the greater visibility given to the topic in global agendas. It also indicates that there is increasing awareness of climate migration, as well as political will to address it. Existing policies do not generally distinguish between migration linked to slow-onset events and movements linked to sudden disasters. These policies can be stand-alone frameworks that specifically seek to address issues linked to climate change and migration. Other frameworks highlight climate and migration dimensions in other areas, such as migration and human mobility policies, climate adaptation and mitigation policies, and disaster risk-reduction policies. The scope of these policies also differs: some seek to address internal migration movements, while others look at how to manage migration flows originating from other countries.

The section below presents some recent examples of migration policy initiatives that address climate impacts on migration, including slow-onset dimensions. Further examples can be found in the Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Policy Brief Series.¹⁰²

Vanuatu National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (2018)

Vanuatu developed a policy targeting all causes of displacement in the country, including movements linked to slow-onset impacts, such as coastal erosion, environmental degradation, sea-level rise and drought.¹⁰³ This policy seeks to facilitate a whole-of-government approach to minimize drivers of displacement; ensure that facilitated migration, such as planned relocation, takes place with dignity and in full respect of human rights; and develop durable solutions for populations on the move. This national policy also highlights that well-managed and safe internal migration can be an adaptation strategy to climate impacts. This national policy clearly aligns with global policy frameworks such as the Recommendations of the Task Force on Displacement and regional policy efforts ongoing in the Pacific.

Selected key measures:

- Strengthen institutional governance to address mobility linked to climate impacts;
- Develop evidence-based approaches through better data collection and monitoring measures, such as the creation of a displacement-tracking mechanism;
- Develop guidelines and standard operational procedures to ensure common standards for protection of all people affected by displacement;
- Incorporate displacement and migration considerations into land management, housing and environmental planning.

South America: non-binding regional instrument on the protection of people displaced across borders and on migrants in countries affected by disasters linked to natural hazards (2019)

Member countries of the South American Conference on Migration, a regional consultative process on migration, developed and adopted non-binding guidelines to protect persons displaced across borders due to disasters.¹⁰⁴ The guidelines mostly focus on sudden-onset events, but could potentially be applicable to movements connected to

¹⁰¹ IOM, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018.

¹⁰² See <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/policy-briefs>.

¹⁰³ Government of Vanuatu, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ CSM, 2018.

slow-onset disasters and processes. The guidelines build on existing practices that promote the use of regular and exceptional immigration law on humanitarian grounds. Even if non-binding, the guidelines represent an innovative policymaking example of how countries can cooperate at the regional level to minimize environmental drivers of migration and manage the admission and stay of affected people. These regional guidelines can also guide national policymaking efforts and contribute to the development of solid national frameworks across the region.

Selected key measures:

- Enhance institutional coordination and develop procedures in each country to anticipate and respond to movements linked to natural disasters;
- Identify protection needs of persons displaced across international borders and unable to return to their country of origin;
- Facilitate immigration procedures for regular entry, including the issuing of humanitarian visas and temporary agreements.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD): Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region (2020)

Regional free-movement policies can also be leveraged to address the specific concerns of people moving within a region in response to climate impacts, including slow-onset processes. A recent regional free-movement protocol adopted in East Africa exemplifies how this type of agreements can contribute to protecting those moving across borders because of environmental impacts.¹⁰⁵ IGAD, representing seven East African countries, in 2020 adopted a Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region. The protocol uses a broad definition of disasters, including both sudden events and slow-onset environmental damage. It highlights States' responsibility to facilitate entry, registration and stay of citizens of other Member States affected by disasters.

Key measures:

- Facilitate entry and registration of citizens of other Member States moving in anticipation of, during, or in the aftermath of disasters;
- Facilitate the extension of stay for these citizens.

Pacific climate change-related displacement and migration: a New Zealand action plan (2018)

This action plan was developed by the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and adopted by the New Zealand cabinet in 2018.¹⁰⁶ An update was provided in 2019.¹⁰⁷ The action plan recognizes that climate impacts in Pacific island countries have implications for New Zealand, including issues of migration. The plan acknowledges the wish expressed by Pacific island countries to focus first and foremost on addressing climate drivers of migration, so that people can remain and lead productive lives in their own countries. As a result, the plan emphasizes that New Zealand should provide financial support to these countries to advance effective climate action, as one way to anticipate and prepare for cross-border climate migration. In a long-term perspective, the plan recommends considering options for regular migration pathways, such as expanding labour mobility schemes and the use of humanitarian visas, once a clearer picture of Pacific needs and priorities emerges.

¹⁰⁵ IGAD, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Government of New Zealand, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Government of New Zealand, 2019.

Selected key measures:

- Using Official Development Assistance to support Pacific communities to avert climate-related displacement and prepare for climate migration, through investments in climate resilience and adaptation measures;
- Promoting regional dialogue and exploring potential regional approaches that outline a collective Pacific response to internal and cross-border climate migration;
- Strengthening international frameworks through multilateral action, including the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement and the Global Compact for Migration;
- Commission robust research and analysis of hazards and vulnerabilities to prepare for climate migration.

These selected policymaking examples present characteristics that are of wider relevance to States seeking to strengthen their migration policy frameworks to address international and cross-border climate migration.¹⁰⁸ These examples all align with the recommendations and practices adopted at the global level, while developing contextualized responses to address their specific needs. They demonstrate in different ways how global frameworks can be actioned at both regional and national levels. At the national level, policies mostly seek to address internal climate drivers of migration and manage internal movements. However, a successful implementation of these types of policies would not only support internal migrants, but would probably also reduce the environmental drivers that contribute to international migration. Developed countries increasingly seek to understand how climate change in developing countries could impact migration flows towards their territories.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the 2021 United States Executive Order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration requests the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to work with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development and the Director of National Intelligence to prepare and submit to the President a report on climate change and its impact on migration, including forced migration, internal displacement and planned relocation.¹¹⁰ The report is to identify security implications of climate-related movements and options to protect and resettle individuals displaced directly or indirectly by climate impacts. The report will also articulate proposals on how the use of foreign assistance from the United States can reduce the negative impacts of climate change. The production of this report, involving high-level national stakeholders across the policy spectrum, demonstrates a willingness to address the national implications of a major contemporary issue by working in close collaboration at both global and local levels with other countries, international and regional agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Policies originating from developed countries could potentially help enhance investments in national climate action and development measures in countries vulnerable to climate impacts, with a view to minimizing drivers of cross-border migration. Regional policy examples highlight that States can make use of regular and exceptional migration measures to manage mobility linked to disasters. These developments are promising. However, we do not yet have enough hindsight to evaluate the results of these policy efforts, especially as they mostly remain non-binding and/or have not yet been widely implemented.

108 Other examples of policy developments can be found in *Submission on Slow-Onset Internal Displacement* (for more details, see IOM, 2020d) and *Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, Volume II* (for more details, see Nansen Initiative, 2015b.)

109 IOM, 2017d.

110 United States White House Executive Order, 2021.

Key findings on migration in the context of slow-onset events relevant to policymaking

- Slow-onset events and processes may result in diverse migration outcomes: a continuum of voluntary to involuntary migration; short-term, circular, longer-term and permanent movements; internally or across borders; over short or long distances; migration of individuals, whole households and entire communities (planned relocation); and immobility of trapped populations.
- The choice to migrate in the context of slow-onset events and processes often involves complex decision-making and is shaped by multiple socioeconomic and environmental factors.
- Slow-onset processes affect more directly the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on local natural resources for their livelihoods and security (e.g. farmers, herders, fishers and indigenous peoples).
- Migration in the context of slow-onset impacts can be difficult to distinguish from other types of movements (e.g. labour migration, shorter-term circulation).
- Communities of origin, migrants' families left behind and trapped populations are also concerned with migration in the context of slow-onset events.
- Migration in the context of slow-onset processes often results in differentiated impacts for women, boys and girls, and the elderly, linked to a number of factors such as family separation, disempowerment and increased dependency on other household members.
- Slow-onset events and processes occur in some contexts with situations of intercommunal tensions and conflict. Their combined impacts can lead to population movements, which in turn further exacerbate environmental degradation and conflicts.
- Urban areas are often the main destinations for people moving in the context of slow-onset events. However, these urban areas can become hotspots of risk related to the impacts of environmental change.
- Data on migration in the context of slow-onset events are limited, but provide a broad picture of the issues at stakes and the scale of the phenomenon.
- Migrants can act as agents of change and contribute positively to climate action.

Note: This summary is drawn from IOM institutional submissions, available on the IOM Environmental Migration Portal at <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/>.

Conclusion

Looking ahead at a future in which slow-onset climate events are expected to worsen, appropriate migration management policies and practices can and should be part of the solution. Global policy discussions have identified some entry points where migration policymakers could be instrumental in promoting positive changes, notably in terms of facilitating migration in the context of slow-onset climate events. Attempting to develop legal pathways to enhance the protection of people migrating in the climate context might prove difficult in some countries where a growing hostility emerges towards hosting more migrants. Yet, at the same time, there has clearly been a growing political interest among both developed and developing States in discussing migration linked to climate impacts – and this growing awareness is already influencing how policies are developing at national and regional levels.

Therefore, there may not be a better time to intensify and expand initiatives designed to translate global frameworks into action and support the unique role that migration policymakers could play to address slow-onset drivers of migration. Looking ahead, some points that will need to be carefully considered include:

- Ensuring that knowledge providers better collect and analyse evidence specifically related to slow-onset events and processes, promoting an understanding of the uniqueness and complexity of the nexus, and making these data available to migration policymakers to support evidence-based policymaking.
- Facilitating effective regional policy dialogue to support the development and implementation of regional responses.
- Understanding how developed countries can best support countries most vulnerable to climate change and promote win–win policy solutions related to migration and slow-onset impacts.
- Ensuring that migration policy developments are complementary to other policy developments at the national level, notably policies related to climate-change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction.
- Setting up monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of existing policies and analyse lessons learned.

Appendix A. Key definitions

Environmental migration is the movement of persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence.

Climate migration is a subcategory of environmental migration; it defines a singular type of environmental migration, where the change in the environment is due to climate change. Migration in this context can be associated with greater vulnerability of affected people, particularly if it is forced. However, migration can also be a form of adaptation to environmental stressors, helping to build resilience of affected individuals and communities.

Trapped populations do not migrate, yet are situated in areas under threat ... at risk of becoming “trapped” or having to stay behind, where they will be more vulnerable to environmental shocks and impoverishment.

Planned relocation in the context of disasters or environmental degradation, including when due to the effects of climate change, is a planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or place of temporary residence, are settled in a new location and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives.

All definitions above are from the International Organization for Migration *Glossary on Migration* (IOM, 2019).

Slow-onset events: The impacts of climate change include slow-onset events and extreme weather events, both of which may result in loss and damage. Slow-onset events, as initially introduced by the Cancun Agreement (COP16), refer to the risks and impacts associated with increasing temperatures; desertification; loss of biodiversity; land and forest degradation; glacial retreat and related impacts; ocean acidification; sea-level rise; and salinization. See: <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/constituted-bodies/executive-committee-of-the-warsaw-international-mechanism-for-loss-and-damage-wim-excom/areas-of-work/slow-onset-events>.

Adaptation: Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities. See: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/glossary-of-climate-change-acronyms-and-terms#a>.

Mitigation: In the context of climate change, this is a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. Examples include using fossil fuels more efficiently for industrial processes or electricity generation, switching to solar energy or wind power, improving the insulation of buildings, and expanding forests and other “sinks” to remove greater amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. See: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/glossary-of-climate-change-acronyms-and-terms#m>.

Appendix B. Additional United Nations policy initiatives related to slow-onset events and migration

Ongoing initiatives are especially relevant to support the development of policy on migration in the context of slow-onset events. The summary below briefly outlines selected recent significant developments that could influence policymaking at national and regional levels.

Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) are increasingly discussing actions to be taken to address migration linked to specific slow-onset events: desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD).¹¹¹ Parties to the Convention committed to reduce forced migration linked to DLDD¹¹² and adopted decisions in 2017¹¹³ and 2019¹¹⁴ on the topic. These decisions outline specific solutions, such as promoting the restoration of degraded land to provide alternative opportunities to populations and supporting the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security in Africa (3S Initiative),¹¹⁵ which seeks to create green jobs for vulnerable groups, including youth in high outmigration areas, migrants, migrants in transit and returning migrants.

In July 2020, the United Nations General Assembly released a thematic report on internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change produced by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary.¹¹⁶ The report analyses how slow-onset impacts of climate change affect the enjoyment of human rights by internally displaced persons, including specific groups. The report provides recommendations to States, the international community, businesses and national human rights institutions to address internal displacement in the context of slow-onset events. These recommendations are aligned with the recommendations of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement and the commitments made under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. They highlight among other issues the need to integrate climate-related displacement in laws, policies and programmes on human mobility and to enhance climate mitigation efforts in order to reduce drivers of displacement linked to climate impacts.

In January 2020, a landmark decision from the United Nations Human Rights Committee¹¹⁷ recognized that States shall refrain from sending people back to situations where the impacts of climate change in the country of origin pose a risk to their life with dignity (principle of non-refoulement). This decision also highlights that the affected States need the support of the international community to address the immense challenges posed by climate change, including slow-onset events. The Committee's conclusions underscore the urgency for States to open new regular migration pathways and provide temporary and longer-term forms of protection to people who would face life-threatening climate risks, including those linked to slow-onset events, if they returned to their country of origin.¹¹⁸

111 IOM and UNCCD, 2019.

112 UNCCD, 2017a.

113 UNCCD, 2017b.

114 UNCCD, 2019.

115 For details, see 3S Initiative, n.d.

116 UNGA, 2020.

117 United Nations Human Rights Committee, 2020.

118 IOM, 2020e.

In March 2015, the United Nations Member States signed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR)¹¹⁹ to prevent and reduce disaster risk, including risks linked to slow-onset disasters. The Sendai Framework highlights the need to include migrants in disaster risk-reduction and management action and acknowledges that migrants should contribute to resilience building.¹²⁰ The 2015 Nansen Initiative¹²¹ takes into consideration how slow-onset disasters and environmental degradation, including the effects of climate change, impact human mobility. The Nansen Agenda highlights existing practices applied by States worldwide to provide protection and assistance to people displaced by disasters.¹²²

Other policy discussions focusing on slow-onset events and migration are taking place, for instance under the International Law Commission,¹²³ the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,¹²⁴ the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) thematic working group on environmental change and migration,¹²⁵ and the International Labour Organization.¹²⁶

119 UNDRR, 2015.

120 Guadagno, 2016.

121 Nansen Initiative, 2015a.

122 Nansen Initiative, 2015b. The implementation of the Nansen Agenda is spearheaded by a follow-up initiative, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).

123 Aurescu et al., 2018.

124 OHCHR, 2018.

125 KNOMAD, n.d.

126 ILO, n.d.

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