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IOM PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

Decoding the nexus: Understanding environmental migration

From IOM's perspective, most migration scenarios involve a range of factors, and it is sometimes difficult to isolate environmental and climate change triggers from political, social, economic and other aspects. Environmental and climate change drivers play a significant and increasingly determinative role in shaping human mobility:

- (a) Environmental factors have always been a cause of migration;
- (b) People flee to survive natural disasters or when faced with harsh and deteriorating environmental conditions;
- (c) Climate change is expected to intensify sudden- and slow-onset disasters and gradual environmental degradation;
- (d) Environmental migration involves cases of either forced or voluntary movements that are not easily distinguishable;
- (e) Migration is increasingly considered as an adaptation strategy, allowing populations to cope with environmental factors – for example, temporary migration and remittances can open up alternative sources of income and reduce reliance on the environment for subsistence.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

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How do environmental factors and climate change affect human mobility?

- (a) The increasing frequency and intensity of weather-related natural disasters entail a higher risk of humanitarian emergencies and related population movements;
- (b) The adverse consequences of climate change for livelihoods, public health, food security and water availability can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities and provoke migratory movements;
- (c) Rising sea levels may make low-lying coastal areas uninhabitable;
- (d) Competition over shrinking natural resources may lead to tensions and potentially to conflict and, in turn, to forced migration;
- (e) Migration can be a survival strategy, especially in case of natural disasters;
- (f) Migration can also be considered an adaptation strategy, as it helps people manage risks, diversify livelihoods and cope with environmental changes affecting their ways of life. For example, temporary migration and remittances can open up alternative sources of income and reduce reliance on the environment for subsistence;
- (g) Finally, environmental migration can involve cases of both forced and voluntary movement. In most instances, however, it is difficult to differentiate between the two types of movements.

IOM's working definition of *environmental migrants*

"Environmental migrants are 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 obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad."

– Ninety-fourth IOM Council Session (2007)

(The above definition attempts to capture the complexity of environmental migration without normative implications.)

Types of Environmental Migration

Evidence suggests that:

- (a) Environmental migration is mainly internal, with a smaller proportion moving cross-border, principally to neighbouring countries;
- (b) Smaller numbers of migrants move long distances;
- (c) Environmental migration may be temporary or permanent, depending on the type of environmental trigger.

Who are the most affected groups of population?

- (a) Marginalized sectors of society;
- (b) Groups dependent on agriculture;
- (c) Populations in least developed countries, low-lying islands and coastal areas;
- (d) The most severely affected groups are often the least able to move out of harm's way.

What is IOM's institutional approach to environmental migration?

IOM has been working on issues related to environmental migration since the early 1990s, and more than 750 projects have been funded as part of IOM's response to environmental migration. Some key institutional milestones in that respect are:

1992

First IOM publication on environmental migration

2011

Organization of the International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) workshop entitled "Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration"

2013

Worldwide IOM Missions' survey on environmental migration

2007, 2008, 2012 and 2014

High-level thematic discussions with IOM governing bodies

IOM Response to environmental migration: What do we do?

What are IOM's objectives in managing environmental migration?

- (a) To prevent forced migration that results from environmental factors to the extent possible;
- (b) To provide assistance and protection to affected populations when forced migration does occur, and to seek durable solutions to their situation;
- (c) To facilitate migration as a climate change adaptation strategy and enhance the resilience of affected communities.

Sustainable development is recognized as an integral part of this approach, implemented through disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures.

What are the impacts of IOM's operational activities?

- (a) Reduce the vulnerability of populations exposed to environmental risk factors;
- (b) Assist populations on the move as a result of disasters and climate and environmental change, and build the capacities of governments and other actors to face the challenges of environmental migration.

IOM's work encompasses operational, policy and research dimensions

Operations. IOM provides assistance and protection to populations affected by disasters and other environmental hazards and supports communities through disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and migration and development initiatives. This role is reinforced by IOM's participation in the international community's humanitarian response system.

Policy. IOM promotes policy dialogue and capacity-building to create coherent national, regional and international strategies in response to environmental migration, for example, through its International Dialogue on Migration, the Global Forum on Migration and Development or the United Nations' climate change negotiations. IOM also organizes capacity-building activities such as regional- and national-level training courses.

Research. IOM has pioneered research since the early 1990s to improve understanding of environmental migration, develop research capacities, strengthen exchanges between research and policy communities, develop understanding of international migration law and promote the collection of sound data.



Highlights of recent activities

IOM has a collection of **over 30 titles dedicated to migration, environment and climate change issues**. Recent publications include *The State of Environmental Migration*, published annually in partnership with the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) and Sciences Po; *IOM Compendium on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience* (2013); and *People on the Move in a Changing Climate*, in collaboration with the University of Neuchâtel, and Springer (2013).

IOM and a consortium of partners **implement Research for Policy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECLEP)**, a project funded by the European Commission, with research, policy and training activities in six countries and comprising map development and the establishment of a knowledge platform (2014–2016)

IOM and the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) **implement a project entitled**

“West Africa: Promoting Sustainable Land Management in Migration-Prone Areas through Innovative Financing Mechanisms,” funded by the Italian Government (2014–2016) in order to address the complex nexus between migration, desertification, land degradation and drought.

IOM develops MECC capacity-building material and **has organized capacity-building and training workshops** bringing together policymakers and practitioners across policy areas, at both regional and national levels in the Republic of Korea, the United Republic of Tanzania and Colombia.

IOM engages in enhanced **collaboration with human mobility and climate change key actors** through common initiatives at the level of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNCCD, Climate Vulnerable Forum, Global Migration Group, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Nansen Initiative, the World Meteorological Organization, and the Asia–Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum.

IOM produces a **biannual newsletter** on migration, environment and climate change, giving a voice to a wide range of actors: policymakers, researchers, migrants and artists. IOM and the Asian Development Bank have also launched the Asia–Pacific Migration and Environment Network (APMEN), an **online information-sharing platform** on climate change, environment and migration issues in the Asia–Pacific region, as a result of a capacity-building workshop organized in 2013 in Seoul, Republic of Korea (<http://www.apmen.iom.int/en/>).



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