



KEY MESSAGES

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION AND PROTECTION

Working Group on Environmental
Migration and Protection

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- **Climate change, environmental degradation and disasters are reshaping migration patterns and contributing to displacement globally¹.** The protection needs of populations trapped in areas at risk of disasters are equally concerning. Urgent action is required to reduce the risk of displacement and address immobility through prevention, preparedness, and adaptation. Such action is critical to minimizing the negative impacts of climate change on human rights, particularly for migrants. Inaction is not an option.
- More frequent and intense weather events, including floods, droughts, storms, and heatwaves, have devastating impacts on communities, livelihoods, and habitats. However, not everyone is affected equally. **Migrants, women, children and other groups in vulnerable situations² are disproportionately impacted.** They are also more likely to be compelled to move to high-risk areas exposed to weather-related hazards, notably because of physical inaccessibility, socio-cultural choices, and high costs of land and housing in safer places. Furthermore, as climate change, environmental degradation and disasters exert pressure on habitats and livelihoods, and as hazards become more frequent and severe, more people might move and could be at risk of trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. Climate change can also contribute to conflict by exacerbating competition over land and scarce resources, which can lead to further rights violations. **Climate Action, therefore, is in its essence Protection Action.**
- Migrants compelled to move due to disasters and the adverse effects of climate change often lack the ability to make informed choices about when and how they move, or to develop alternative solutions. Consequently, they are more likely to be displaced under conditions that fail to uphold human dignity and integrity. This underscores the urgent need for expanding international cooperation and assistance. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration explicitly commits to regular migration pathways for people affected by environmental factors. Several States are taking promising steps in this direction by establishing accessible and flexible pathways that are rights-based and cater to the specific needs of migrants.
- **Climate and Protection actions are a standing priority on IOM's agenda.** As a global protection actor and a leading agency in Climate Mobility with a solid background of over three decades of active work in the field of environmental migration, IOM develops solutions for people to stay, for people on the move, and for people to move because of the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. IOM's work is centered on ensuring that climate-vulnerable persons can make informed and dignified mobility decisions.
- IOM works to identify **solutions for people to stay** by focusing on **prevention** through anticipatory action, early warning, preparedness, and adaptation. Working on prevention is the most effective and efficient protection investment for a safer future, as it reduces factors contributing to increased risks and vulnerabilities, leverages/mobilizes individual and community capacities and resources, and creates alternatives to displacement.

¹ IOM recognizes that displacement, including pre-emptively moving, is a proactive life-saving measure.

² Persons with disabilities, older people, indigenous people, minorities, and people in situations of poverty.

- To avert, minimize and address displacement, States must plan and prepare for slow and sudden-onset disasters. IOM works to develop capacities for disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, **supporting efforts to scale up forecasting, risk-analysis, and early-warning capabilities for strengthened anticipatory action**. These efforts are critical for – and should be integrated with – anticipating protection risks, identifying vulnerable communities, and taking preventive action.

In Burundi, for example, IOM implemented a project to strengthen resilience to disaster risks, through multi-hazard assessments and risk mapping across 18 provinces. In Sudan, IOM provided technical and capacity-building support to local communities on disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness to minimize vulnerability to floods and droughts. In crisis-affected Somalia, Yemen, and South Sudan, IOM assisted local authorities in the construction, rehabilitation, and management of critical water infrastructure.

- Climate impacts are felt disproportionately in urban communities. Rapid urban growth continues to advance with limited planning, infrastructure and local governance structures. **Uncontrolled urban expansion increases protection gaps and further marginalizes vulnerable groups**, making mobility outcomes unsafe and risking new forms of forced mobility that erode urban populations' right to stay. As such, urban areas require special focus in adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts.
- IOM's climate action seeks to develop **solutions for people on the move** by addressing the assistance and protection needs of migrants and displaced persons. IOM is a frontline actor in disaster contexts, with around 70 per cent of its budget in 2023 dedicated to addressing the mobility dimensions of crises. The Organization leverages its extensive field presence, data capacities, and co-lead role in the Global CCCM Cluster for fast mobilization in disaster emergencies

to deliver life-saving aid and specialized protection services in line with 'Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Guidelines'. IOM strives to advance solution-oriented early responses to pave the way towards durable solutions through inclusive policies that support the integration of migrants within host communities. Support to migrants and displaced persons to realize and access their Housing Land and Property (HLP) rights in the context of climate change and disaster, including through direct legal assistance and support to national and local systems to address HLP issues, is pivotal.

- IOM's climate action endeavors to develop **solutions for people to move**. Safe, orderly and regular migration can be an adaptation strategy to protect people, save lives, minimize suffering, and increase resilience. Establishing and expanding regular pathways for migration also serves as a critical protection action, particularly for 'immobile/trapped populations' and 'populations without safe return options' that are highly exposed to protection risks. IOM also stands ready to support states in devising and implementing rights-based planned relocation as a measure of last resort to protect communities living in unsafe and uninhabitable areas.
- **Data and research for solutions to displacement is a priority for IOM**. Timely and disaggregated data is critical in early warning, prevention, and preparedness efforts; in delivering effective humanitarian responses; and in devising sustainable solutions. IOM offers its extensive expertise in this area to governments and other key partners to support the development of data collection and analysis capacity for evidence-based responses.
- **IOM is the largest global collector of primary data on displaced populations through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)**. In 2023, IOM tracked the displacement status of close to 57 million persons across 33 countries affected by disasters and conflicts. This data informed 87

per cent of Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plans. It provided crucial insight in identifying and responding to the protection needs of populations on the move.

- Advances in Mitigation and Adaptation acceleration – as well as averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage related to displacement – require **adequate, predictable, and sustainable resources**. Access to climate finance with a clear prioritization of the most climate vulnerable populations is key for inclusive, rapid responses and effective solutions. IOM highlights that addressing displacement as a form of loss and damage is central to the global dialogue on upholding climate justice and the need to redress rights violations.
- The policy, financial and technical assistance to climate-vulnerable countries and communities to address their needs and protection gaps will be critical in saving lives by advancing adaptation, facilitating regular migration pathways and supporting planned relocation. Towards this end and recognizing the current challenges of the most vulnerable communities, states at COP28 decided to take a clear stance to ensure that climate finance and funds are accessible for addressing the needs of environmental migrants, displaced people and refugees, acknowledging their key role as actors of change and empowerment. This is a significant step towards the localization, effectiveness and acceleration of solutions related to climate mobility, which can help save lives and protect the most vulnerable.
- **IOM is committed to putting people at the center of its climate action**. Affected people are rights holders with insightful local knowledge and experience critical to effective responses. Communities must have avenues to participate in decisions directly impacting their lives and be part

of the solutions. Promoting the equal and inclusive participation of all migrants, with a focus on women, persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, indigenous people and disadvantaged groups, is now more critical than ever. IOM will continue to support locally led, context-based climate action, ensuring accountability to affected populations.

- IOM recognizes that international human rights law is the international legal framework that offers the best protection to people affected, given its scope, adaptability and flexibility necessary to address the challenges of migration in the context of climate change for all persons without discrimination. Human rights law addresses all the needs and vulnerable circumstances of migrants and local communities, in each case and at every stage. Human rights law integrates and promotes individual assessments to determine the needs of each individual in current mixed migration contexts and requires respect for key principles such as non-discrimination and the principle of non-refoulement, thereby also allowing for **admission and stay based on human rights and humanitarian grounds** in certain cases.
- **IOM invests in collective action and partnerships** to address the challenges of the climate crisis. Prevention, response and solution efforts to displacement should integrate all actors across humanitarian, development, peace and climate nexus. Climate action should be a collective endeavor based on the central role of the governments and involving international organizations, the private sector, civil society, academia and diaspora organizations. It should foster sharing good practices and innovative approaches across borders and sectors.



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