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**1. CONTEXT**

Both climate change and migration have moved squarely into the centre of political debates at Member State, European Union, and global levels; these two issues also play an important role in broader societal debates. At the same time, both phenomena are mostly discussed independently from each other in international fora, despite the increasing impact of climate change on migration, which is often referred to as the climate change– migration nexus.

Climate change influences mobility patterns along the various migratory routes, in particular within and between developing countries. However, in the situation of mixed migratory flows, individuals' propensity to migrate usually stems from multiple social and economic factors, and it is therefore difficult to determine the impact of climate change on individuals' motives to leave their country of origin. This is an evolving challenge in the field of migration.

In this context, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), taking place between 31 October and 12 November in Glasgow (UK), will undoubtedly contribute to bringing global attention to the nexus between climate change and migration.

## 2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION<sup>1</sup>

Climate change interacts with, and influences other causes of migration (political, demographic, economic, social and environmental, etc.) and may have a more or less direct impact on individuals' decision to move.<sup>2</sup> While sudden onset events (such as floods and storms) are known to lead to displacement, slow onset events and gradual changes (like sea level rise or desertification or fish stocks depletion) might also be a factor of displacement. For instance, environmental factors may affect the decision to migrate indirectly, due to their impact on income, agricultural productivity, livelihood opportunities, or food security. Even in the case of natural disasters, there can be considerable indirect effects. A range of elements influence whether a person decides to stay or to leave in the face of a disaster, including those related to demography, economy, history, politics, and society.<sup>3</sup> Given the variety of contexts, environmental change can exacerbate migratory aspirations, resulting in different forms of migration: more or less voluntary, temporary or long-term, internal or cross-border. Whether in combination with other factors (lack of security, conflicts and persecutions) or independently, climate change will shape the flow of migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, including irregular arrivals.

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<sup>1</sup> Further details on certain elements discussed hereunder can be found in Kraler, Katsiaficas & Wagner (2020), [\*Climate Change and Migration: Legal and policy challenges and responses to environmentally induced migration\*](#), European Parliament. October 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2021), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-impacts-drivers-migration>

<sup>3</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2021), [\*GRID 2021: Internal displacement in a changing climate\*](#), p. 88.

Additionally, climate change can act as a cause of mobility, but can also cause immobility, especially for vulnerable groups. A lack of resources or insufficient access to information, for example, can keep people in areas where they are vulnerable to climate change. Of course, some might choose to stay despite the challenges. Moreover, while some people must leave their homes, others may decide to migrate as an adaptation response to climate change. For example, migration can offer opportunities for better livelihoods elsewhere, provide remittances supporting those left behind, and serve as a strategy to manage risks related to climate change. Indeed, among the efforts to prevent future risks and foster resilience to climate change and disasters, migration can play a role. Planned relocation in particular has become increasingly salient for those facing certain environmental challenges.<sup>4</sup> Thus, displacement can create protection needs, but migration can also serve as an adaptation strategy.

It is difficult to estimate how many people will move because of climate change and hazards due to the complex relationship between climate change and migration and the multi-causal nature of migration.

Recently, the World Bank released its Groundswell Part 2 report, which estimated that, in the absence of concrete climate and development progress, over 216 million people across the Bank's six regions<sup>5</sup> could move within national borders by 2050. This analysis also predicts that different places will be hotspots for in- and out-migration, and that movements could be decreased by as much as 80% if sufficient action is taken.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Weerasinghe (2021), [What We Know About Climate Change and Migration](#), Center for Migration Studies.

<sup>5</sup> The six regions are: Latin America; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; South Asia; and East Asia and the Pacific

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Group (2021), [Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration](#).

Furthermore, a report recently produced by JRC<sup>7</sup> shows that according to the most impactful scenarios, by 2070, up to 15% of the population in Western Africa would be exposed to declines in agricultural productivity by 20% or more. In the same region, considerable shares of the population live in rural areas, have a low level of education and live in poverty. The report indicates that it is unlikely that the large numbers of vulnerable populations in large parts of Africa will have the means to adapt to climate change by migrating to other countries. This conclusion highlights the importance of orienting the focus of the policy discourse from a possible threat of an incoming exodus induced by climate change to the needs for adaptation. In addition, it stresses the need for a joint effort in migration, climate adaptation and development policies to cater for the needs of those who will be trapped in conditions of extreme environmental degradation, without having necessarily the means to revert to migration as an adaptation strategy.

Climate events (floods, storms, etc.) cause increased internal displacement. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 30.7 million people were displaced worldwide as a result of disasters in 2020, the majority of which in developing countries. Many people return after the consequences of disaster are eliminated. The Global Climate Risk Index 2021 places Afghanistan, South Sudan and Niger among the 10 top countries most affected by climate change in 2019. Pakistan is in 8<sup>th</sup> place on the Long-Term Climate Risk Index scale, taking into account data from 2000-2019.

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<sup>7</sup> JRC 2021. Population Exposure and Migrations Linked to Climate Change in Africa  
<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC126594>

Despite this data uncertainty, previous experience from global trends suggest that:

- There is an indirect relationship between climate change and displacement. Climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme events, which in turn impact causes of migration, displacement and will exacerbate vulnerabilities, including the risk of an increase of trafficking in human beings.
- The impacts are largely felt nationally and regionally. The majority of climate change-related displacements occur within national borders. Meanwhile, the majority of cross-border, disaster-related displacement occurs within world regions.
- The effects of climate change are unevenly distributed globally, and are most heavily felt in lower-income countries and Small Island Developing States, due to a range of factors influencing their exposure, vulnerability, and resilience. The resilience to the effects of climate change depends on the level of the development of a certain country. The risk of displacement is often higher in urban areas, as many large cities are in at-risk areas, and people displaced to these cities often live in poor-quality housing in parts of the city that are particularly exposed.<sup>8</sup> Among affected populations, the impacts on individuals differ by gender, age, disability, and other factors; being part of an indigenous or minority group or having a lower income may also influence the degree of impact.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> IDMC, *GRID 2021*, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> IDMC, *GRID 2021*, p. 79.

### 3. EXISTING FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND MIGRATION

Efforts to address the issue through global platforms have gained momentum and the climate change-migration nexus is an increasingly visible topic in global policy discussions and initiatives, including in the areas of migration and displacement (notably the [Nansen Initiative](#) and [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#)), climate change and disasters (including the [Paris Agreement](#), in particular the [Task Force on Displacement of the Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage in the Climate Sphere](#), and [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#)), and humanitarian and development aid (such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and Platform on Disaster Displacement).

Additionally, because most cross-border displacement occurs within world regions, regions and sub-regions have a particularly important role to play in strengthening protection responses and have been quite active in this regard, particularly in Africa (the [Kampala Convention](#), which focusses on IDP protection, and the [Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in the IGAD Region](#)) and Latin America (the [Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action](#), Guide to Effective Practices for Regional Conference on Migration Countries, [Regional guidelines regarding protection and assistance for persons displaced across borders and migrants in countries affected by natural disasters](#), and Brazil's humanitarian visa). National-level efforts are also particularly critical given the amount of internal movement, notably efforts in the Pacific ([Vanuatu's National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](#), [Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines](#), Kiribati's Migration with Dignity Policy). Much of the regional and national initiatives have focused on multilateral cooperation, legal changes, guidance, and national policies and strategies.

Despite the range of international, regional and national initiatives addressing the climate change – migration nexus, these initiatives are highly fragmented, leading to opportunities for flexibility but also to challenges in developing a comprehensive response. There is no (academic or political) consensus on whether climate change migrants should be considered a legally distinct group. Initiatives have largely taken the form of guidelines or toolboxes that aim to collect and share good practices. Beyond information sharing and practical guidance, cooperation and capacity building have also been commonly used tools.

Contemporary momentum has spurred progress to fill gaps and has highlighted the importance of addressing the climate change-migration nexus. However, the largely voluntary and targeted nature of initiatives and the need to effectively implement them remain key challenges – amid expectations that climate change will continue.

#### **4. THE EU'S RESPONSE**

Over the past 20 years, the EU repeatedly addressed the climate change – migration nexus in communications related mainly to the external dimension of migration. More prominently, the EU's [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#) acknowledged the regional relevance of climate-related migration, proposing development and humanitarian aid politics as the EU's main focus.

2013 Commission Staff Working Document 'Climate change, environmental degradation, and migration' was produced as a response to a request by the European Council in the Stockholm Programme with regards to potential effects on migration to the EU and concluded that:

*'given the strong evidence that most migration which is primarily driven by environmental change is likely to occur within the Global South, much of the analysis of the paper and many of its recommendations are of specific relevance for EU policies with an external focus, including on development, foreign policy and humanitarian aid.'*

More recently, [the Commission Communication on the European Green Deal](#) recognises that ‘the global climate and environmental challenges are a significant threat multiplier and a source of instability’ and commits the EU to ‘work with all partners to increase climate and environmental resilience to prevent these challenges from becoming sources of conflict, food insecurity, population displacement and forced migration, and support a just transition globally’.

While other instruments like the Joint [Valletta Action Plan](#) mention environmental trends as one of several root causes of forced displacement, the [Commission's communication on “Lives in dignity”](#) addresses climate change as an aggravating factor forcing people to flee. The new “Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles” also acknowledges climate and disasters among the root causes of displacement and brings in important elements on prevention, preparedness and responses.

One of the stated objectives is ‘mainstreaming climate change impacts and environmental factors into humanitarian aid policy and practice, and strengthen coordination with development, security and climate/environment actors to build resilience of vulnerable communities.’

The [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) proposes to address migration not in isolation but together with other policies, including climate change.

In addition, the EU has played an active role in important global platforms such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement, which the EU will chair as of June 2022.



## 5. POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

Responses and solutions need to acknowledge the diversity of environmental causes of migration and displacement, including their scope, intensity, and duration. This demands a multi-sectoral approach that works across silos to address root causes and consequences – in other words, an approach that not only responds to and mitigates crises but that is also forward looking and preventative. This includes addressing climate change through climate, development, trade and other policies, and more broadly mainstreaming environmental considerations across policies and programmes

The external dimension of the EU's development policy and humanitarian assistance and food aid is poised to play a particularly important role given the disproportionate impact of environmental change on other parts of the world.

The EU could strengthen various forms of assistance to countries particularly affected by climate change, to answer the needs for local adaptation measures, including humanitarian assistance and food aid as well as development aid to anticipate, respond to and protect against natural disasters and climate change.

In a similar vein, the EU could support national strategies, whether these are whole-of-government approaches (e.g. Vanuatu) or targeted policies (e.g. Fiji's planned relocation guidelines). It could also support local governments in assessing displacement risks in cities and devising a strategy to address them,<sup>10</sup> including community-based prevention.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> IDMC, *GRID 2021*, p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, *Shining a Light on Internal Displacement*, p. 44.

More robust data collection and analysis is essential for building the knowledge on the effects of environmental change on migration and displacement:

To improve our knowledge of the issue, we need to better understand how climate change alters migration decision-making, and people's lives more broadly.<sup>12</sup>

There is much to be learned regarding the different types of disaster-related movements, including planned relocation, proactive evacuations, and flight in response to events.<sup>13</sup> More information is also needed regarding the numbers of people unable to return. The JRC would be well placed to continue and expand their ongoing research<sup>14</sup> on these questions.

## 6. GUIDING QUESTIONS

Member States are invited to reflect on the following questions:

1. What are the main challenges that the Member States see in connection with migration policy making and climate change?
2. Could Member States share examples of their initiatives/ projects aimed at addressing the climate change – migration nexus?

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<sup>12</sup> Weerasinghe (2021), What We Know About Climate Change and Migration.

<sup>13</sup> IDMC, *GRID 2021*, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> JRC 2021. Population Exposure and Migrations Linked to Climate Change in Africa  
<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC126594>