

Climate Refugees and Climate Migration

Working paper
June 2019

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¹ This terminology reflects the position of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament (2013). As outlined in this paper, the term 'climate refugee' is highly debated as it does not exist as category in international law. Relevant literature refers to the subject as environmental migration or mobility as well as environmental displacement. The following working paper will mostly use the terminology as used by the academic literature but will use concepts such as 'climate refugee' interchangeable without any assumptions on the legal status of those people affected.

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
GEF	Green European Foundation
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDD	Platform on Disaster Displacement
TFD	Task Force on Displacement
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



Introduction

The last years have seen an unprecedented number of displaced persons and refugees around the world following armed conflicts, with the ongoing Syrian civil war being described as the biggest human-made catastrophe since the end of the Second World War. An increased number of people seeking asylum in EU member states has revealed the flaws of the EU's asylum and migration policies and the rise of anti-migration rhetoric is threatening European values.

It is clear however that even bigger challenges lie ahead, as the UNHCR highlights that “an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a disaster, with an average of 22.5 million people displaced by climate- or weather-related events since 2008”.² As the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)³ and the Norwegian Refugee Council point out, natural disasters are already the main cause for “internal or international displacement of individual migrants or diasporas”,⁴ which is why a response to this global challenge and a clear legal framework to recognise and protect climate refugees on an international, regional, and national level are of utmost importance.

Following increasing calls for attention by NGOs, UN bodies, and scientists⁵, the topic of climate-related displacement was put on the agenda of the EU institutions a few years ago, but they are yet to formulate an adequate, humane, and sustainable response. At the same time, the topic has also garnered scrutiny from the wider European public as general awareness about climate change is increasing and climate disasters such as floods and wildfires are occurring regularly in Europe⁶, hence making the phenomenon much more relatable.

The Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular Migration⁷, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in late 2018, can be considered a benchmark document as it is the first international agreement to recognise climate refugees – or here rather migrants who move due to natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation. However, concrete policy recommendations and ideas on how to make the Global Compact operational on the EU level are lacking – including from the Green political family.

To help foster a more constructive public debate and increase awareness on the policy-level, this working paper by the Green European Foundation (GEF) has mapped the state of discourse on the international and European levels, in particular within the most relevant institutions, and outlines the most relevant milestones in terms of frameworks and instruments tackling climate displacement and migration.

The environment and migration are both complex subjects and deserve a nuanced discussion and approach. It is clear that climate displacement and migration can only be tackled in the broader context of migration, while taking climate action and sustainable development seriously and consequently developing coherent policies.

The paper at hand therefore attempts, in a non-exhaustive manner, to highlight some controversies around and difficulties in pinpointing the phenomenon which are helpful in understanding how to move forward

² <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

³ The IDMC is structurally part of the Norwegian Refugee Council and was established in 1998.

⁴ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 2.

⁵ Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/02/climate-change-will-create-worlds-biggest-refugee-crisis>

⁶ Climate displacement is also a phenomenon occurring more and more in the USA: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/24/climate-refugees-new-orleans-houston-hurricane-katrina-hurricane-harvey>

⁷ Cf. <https://www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/07/migration.pdf>, p. 8-9.



with the discourse and seriously tackle the phenomenon on a broader – whether international or regional – scale. As the following paragraphs will highlight, the political will to both effectively approach climate adaptation and mitigation policies as well as acknowledge the reality of climate displacement through adequate migration and asylum policies is lacking. But there have been hopeful initiatives within both the research and political realm and, with an increased awareness about the reality of climate change in our societies, the time is right to talk about those who are currently, and will be in the future, most affected by its impacts. This working paper can hopefully serve as a basis for debate and exchange on this important subject.

A phenomenon with many names

Before the discourse on the international and EU level on this phenomenon is outlined, it is necessary to discuss definition and conceptualisation difficulties that are prevalent in the existing literature, and in particular are reflected in the broader debate in mainstream media and politics. We will firstly look at why environmental migration, at the intersection of two very comprehensive research fields, can be looked at from two angles. Secondly, existing terminology and legal framework on different governance levels will be laid out, before finally examining the environment-migration nexus in more detail.

Two perspectives on climate-induced migration

One perspective, primarily upheld by environmental scholars and NGOs, views migration as an unavoidable by-product of climate change and is hence calling for a new category of refugees and/or migrants.⁸ “Meanwhile, migration scholars usually adopted a more sceptical perspective, insisting that migration was always multi-causal and there was no reason to create a new category of ‘environmental migration.’”^{9 10} They argue that although protection instruments are urgently needed, environmental factors have always played a role in migration and trying to isolate climate change from other drivers of migration will be counter-productive. Similarly, there exists different notions of migration and human mobility regarding those affected. As will be outlined below, we are looking at internal as well as cross-border displacement and migration with different gradations of forced to voluntary mobility, as well as immobility of certain vulnerable groups. Migration can be seen as an opportunity and adaptation strategy in the face of climate change, a humanitarian cause or as a security threat.

Although this dichotomy is giving way to a more nuanced and common view within the scientific community itself, the two contrasting views nevertheless have consequences for political agenda-setting and the tools considered to deal with the phenomenon. It has led to a variety of framings that are being used to talk about the topic as well as the people affected, which has huge implications for their protection status on the international, regional, and national level.

⁸ This group is referred to as alarmists or maximalists.

⁹ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge, p. 6.

¹⁰ This group is referred to as sceptics or minimalists.



Terminology and legal framework

“The ambiguity that persists between the notions of forced and voluntary migration prevents the creation of an internationally recognised legal term to designate environmental migrants.”¹¹ This is reflected in the variety of wording used, such as climate refugee, climate migrant, environmental migrant, climate- or environmentally displaced person, as well as the complete lack of a consensual definition. Additionally, different qualificatives are used to coin the terminology, such as ‘environmental’, ‘climate’ or ‘ecological’.¹² This lack of terminological clarity might also stem from the fact that “most of the published research was carried out by researchers and NGOs not historically engaged in migration research, resulting in the emergence and populari[s]ation of terms like ‘environmental refugees’”.¹³

As a consequence, the individuals affected lack international protection and there is no binding framework to this date that recognises the phenomenon (as the Compact on Migration is not legally binding). In other words, there are no binding legal instruments specifically addressing the rights of environmental migrants and hence no commitments from the international community on how to tackle the consequences. While environmental migration and displacement is an international phenomenon, it is also primarily one that happens internally, which poses the question of what an adequate response from the international community should look like.

International law

As the 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967 additional Protocol) does not cover displacement through climate-related events, such individuals lack clear protection within the international system. The Convention focuses on people seeking protection from persecution, the definition of which “is not applicable to people displaced for reasons related to the environment, as it would be difficult to consider environmental degradation as ‘persecution’ in the sense in which it is used in the Refugee Convention.”¹⁴ This can mean in reality that individuals are fleeing armed conflicts fuelled by climate-related events, but people displaced ‘merely’ by extreme weather events and natural disasters lack protection status as “there is still no explicit right to a healthy environment under international law”.¹⁵ The UNCHR itself is opposed to the idea of including climate refugees in the 1951 Refugee Convention in fear of the document being watered down, and states that “those displaced as a result of environmental change could, in theory, still rely on the protection of their national governments, while traditional refugees could not, as states are often the source of persecution”.¹⁶ Within the broader expert community it is also generally seen as problematic to include climate-displaced persons under the Geneva Convention as many of them are moving internally and, even if they are crossing borders in permeable borderlands such as the Sahel for example, their needs are generally different from those forcibly displaced through conflict and persecution.

Regional legal frameworks

As mentioned earlier, because climate migration is in most cases an internal phenomenon or happening between bordering states, regional instruments are widely seen as the most useful tool to provide a minimum of protection for climate refugees.

Some regional documents, such as the Charter of the League of Arab States, mention the right to a healthy environment and could be used to impose

¹¹ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 18.

¹² Cf. Mayer, Benoît (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 323.

¹³ McLeman, Robert and François Gemenne (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 4.

¹⁴ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p.2.

¹⁵ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 6

¹⁶ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p.5



duties on the respective member states to grant protection, but these are by no means legally binding.¹⁷ Only the African Union, with its Kampala Convention, adopted a ground-breaking document in 2009 as it constitutes the first legally binding instrument to ensure that its member states protect and assist those persons internally displaced due to climate change and environmental events. While the document was widely welcomed and celebrated among its signatories, it still lacks the necessary implementation in most AU member states through the translation into national law. It also does not provide for protection of those who cross state borders.

Protection within the European Union

“The European Union [meanwhile] supports seven regional migration dialogues; it initially focused on the environmental impact of migration flows towards Europe, before considering also the realities of environmental mobility within Europe itself. Since 2008, the European approach has recognised environmental migration as a topic in its own right, which is the subject of political consultations, technical documents, and funding for specific programmes.”¹⁸ As will be outlined further in this paper, the EU’s position on environmental migration is however not yet completely consolidated and, particularly in light of the so-called migration crisis of 2015, this issue has lost priority. In many instances, climate-induced migration is viewed by EU institutions as a security threat, with claims that mass migration would lead to competition for natural resources. Furthermore, as will be explored later in more detail, environmental considerations can contribute to the decision to migrate if livelihoods are threatened but might not always be as evident.

As outlined in the 2013 position paper by the Greens/EFA¹⁹, there are some EU policy instruments that could potentially be extended to include climate-induced migration to grant subsidiary protection status. A few EU member states grant subsidiary protection to climate refugees, or previously had such mechanisms in place before repealing them in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and adopting much stricter asylum and migration policies.²⁰ Denmark, for example, does not refer to environmental migrants in its official asylum policy, but it has adopted a pragmatic approach as there have been cases where refugees were granted asylum on these grounds.²¹

Although the introduction of an EU-wide protection regime is urgently needed, and several EU actors have acknowledged that and are currently looking for answers²², the political will to tackle this issue seems broadly lacking. “Environmental migration is in essence the subject of a dual political interest, both migratory and environmental, but it also touches upon a number of other fields, making political action in this sphere both extremely comprehensive and highly complex.”²³

The environment-migration nexus

While it is clear that climate change has consequences on patterns of human mobility, migration, and displacement, there is no consensus on how the affected individuals should be defined, which leads to the aforementioned difficulties in protecting them but also to difficulties in quantifying the phenomenon properly. As mentioned, both environment and migration are highly complex, multi-layered subjects. Several drivers – among them environmental ones – can stimulate the need and/or desire to migrate (internally or across a border) and have done so already in the past.

¹⁷ Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge., p. 110-111.

¹⁸ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge., p. 115

¹⁹ See more in-depth analysis of the position paper later in this document.

²⁰ Cf. Hush, Emily (2018). *Developing a European Model of International Protection for Environmentally Displaced Persons: Lessons from Finland and Sweden*. In: *Columbia Journal of European Law*. <http://cjel.law.columbia.edu/preliminary-reference/2017/developing-a-european-model-of-international-protection-for-environmentally-displaced-persons-lessons-from-finland-and-sweden/>

²¹ <https://www.unric.org/en/latest-news/buzz/28883-the-invisible-climate-refugees>

²² See S&D group in the EP conference in May 2018: <https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/sd-conference-climate-environmental-refugees-towards-possible-international-definition>

²³ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 94.



Further, voluntary versus forced migration is not a dichotomy but rather a continuum, as it is difficult to determine exact motives and feelings of individuals migrating.²⁴ Because it is in practice very difficult to clearly distinguish between forced and voluntary migration, the implementation of appropriate political responses is difficult. On top of that, the discourse often overlooks the fact that not all affected individuals who wish to migrate also have the capacity to do so – on the contrary, many are trapped in the face of environmental disruptions.²⁵ What is more is that the migration can be short-term, for instance only a few days, or permanent if livelihoods are entirely destroyed through environmental or climate events. This combination of factors that lead to climate displacement or climate-induced migration are what makes it so challenging to reach a consensus on the terminology and thus legal framework that can adequately protect those ‘climate refugees’, as already highlighted in the section above.

²⁴ Cf. Mayer, Benoît (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 324.

²⁵ Cf. section below on most vulnerable persons.

Dun and Gemenne (2008) then also state that “[t]he main reason for the lack of definition relating to migration caused by environmental degradation or change is linked to the difficulty of isolating environmental factors from other drivers of migration.”²⁶ In the following section, this difficulty of attributing the decision to migrate to one single cause, isolated from other drivers, shall be illustrated.

²⁶ Dun Olivia and François Gemenne (2008). *Defining ‘environmental migration’*. In: *Forced Migration Review*. 31. p. 10.

Environment or climate?

Not only is the terminology of ‘refugee’, ‘migrant’ or ‘displaced person’ disputed in the public discourse, but also whether to call the phenomenon environmentally- or climate change- induced. It must be noted that academic research and leading organisations working on the topic, such as IOM, do not make such a distinction but more broadly tackle the issue of environmental migration – and at times add the word displacement. This is due to the difficulty in clearly identifying and quantifying those affected with reliable data, not only in regard to what motivates, or forces, people to migrate but also in light of the fact that the effects of climate change can only be poorly discerned from other environmental phenomena. At the same time, the literature emphasises the steep exacerbation of environmental threats and disasters throughout humankind.

In terms of environmental hazards that can lead to internal or cross-border displacement – or at the very least pose a threat to livelihoods – we can use the following categories:

- ▶ Sudden-onset events through internal geological processes; for example, avalanches, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, tsunamis, and more. They very often cause massive damage to urban settlements and infrastructure and result in very high death tolls.
- ▶ Global and local weather and climate patterns through oceanic and atmospheric processes, resulting in a variety of meteorological, hydrological and climatological phenomena:
 - ▶ Meteorological phenomena, depending on the part of the world, are for instance typhoons, hurricanes, snow or sand storms.
 - ▶ Hydrological phenomena are changes in rainfall patterns, i.e. decrease or increase, which are usually sudden and cause massive flooding with land- or mudslides. But hydrological processes can also be slow-onset, for example changes in ice cover or sea-level rise.



- ▶ Climatological phenomena are for example sudden-onset extreme cold or hot temperatures, but could also be human-made wildfires accelerated by natural dry periods, and slow-onset processes such as desertification.²⁷

The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction classifies these as “natural processes or phenomena that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.”²⁸ Additionally, human-made hazards pose an enormous risk to lives and livelihoods. They can be slow-onset processes, such as land degradation through the use of fertilizers and more generally unsustainable agriculture, drilling, or extraction, leading to the erosion of environment and ecosystems as well as the pollution of soil, water, and air. Sudden-onset disasters are understood as, for example, nuclear or industrial accidents, or sudden water release from dams.²⁹

Depending on which of the phenomena and/or processes are occurring, the mobility patterns can differ. More recently, however, research has evolved towards focussing on the protection needs rather than analysing causalities.³⁰ So while it is clear that human impact on global warming is making many of the above-mentioned hazards more likely to occur and is increasing the pressure on our climate and weather systems, the research suggests considering environmental factors of migration in a holistic way while implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.

Relation with other drivers of migration

As suggested earlier, it is hardly possible to distinctly pinpoint environmental or climate events as the sole reason for migration; they must instead to be viewed in conjunction with a whole set of other drivers of migration. The environment as such is integral to human survival and livelihood, more so for communities around the globe that depend on the environment for their economic prosperity than for societies of the Global North that base livelihoods much more on income, for instance from the tertiary sector. This means that in many cases, it might not even be possible to distinguish between different drivers, and what looks like ‘economic migration’ might have underlying environmental causes.

Only in cases of sudden disasters are environmental impacts directly leading to displacement and/or migration, but environmental stress can add to other considerations motivating migration in multiple cases as highlighted in the graphic display below. And vice versa, environmental disasters or the gradual degradation of vital resources can in fact lead to the circumstances that might aggravate migration.^{31 32}

“Environmental change and events can be associated with different mobility outcomes, forced or voluntary, short term or long term, depending on the specific context and characteristics of the environment, country, locality or household.”³³

²⁷ Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 34-35.

²⁸ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 35.

²⁹ Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 34-35.

³⁰ For an in-depth analysis of different scenarios, cf. Kälin, Walter (2010). *Conceptualizing Climate-Induced Migration*. In: McAdam, Jane (Ed.), *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 81-104.

³¹ Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 34-37.

³² Cf. Figure 1 for overview of drivers of migration

³³ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 36.

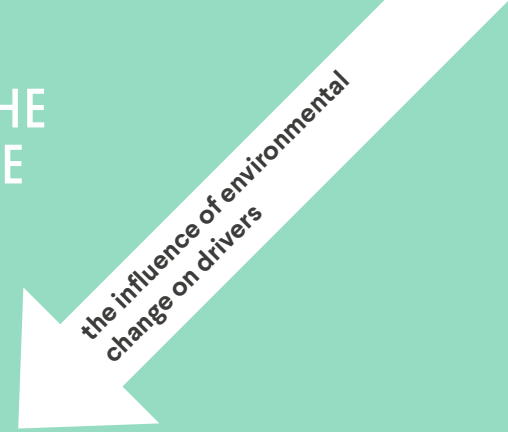


FIGURE 1: DRIVERS OF MIGRATION AND THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Macro

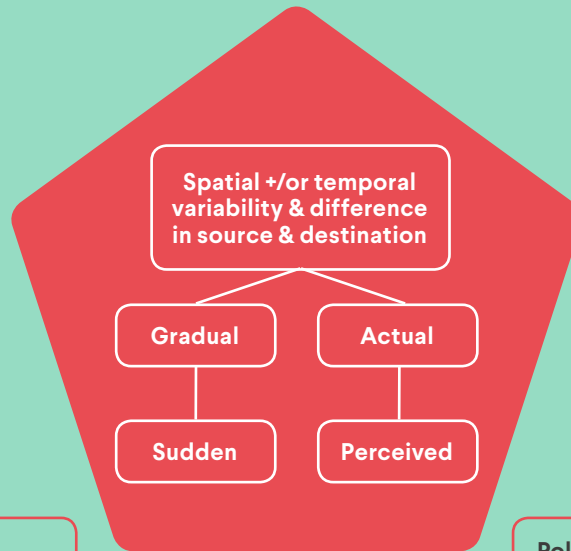
Environmental

- ▶ Exposure to hazard
- ▶ Ecosystem services, including
 - ▶ land productivity
 - ▶ habitability
 - ▶ food/energy/water security



Social

- ▶ Seeking education
- ▶ Family/kin obligations



Economic

- ▶ Employment opportunities
- ▶ Income/wages/well-being
- ▶ Producer prices (e.g. Agriculture)
- ▶ Consumer prices

Demographic

- ▶ Population size/density
- ▶ Population structure
- ▶ Disease prevalence

Political

- ▶ Discrimination/persecution
- ▶ Governance/freedom
- ▶ Conflict/insecurity
- ▶ Policy incentives
- ▶ Direct coercion

Meso

Intervening obstacles and facilitators

- ▶ Political/legal framework
- ▶ Cost of moving
- ▶ Social networks
- ▶ Diasporic links
- ▶ Recruitment agencies
- ▶ Technology

Micro

Personal/household characteristics

- ▶ Age, Sex, Education, Wealth, Marital Status, Preferences, Ethnicity, Religion, Language

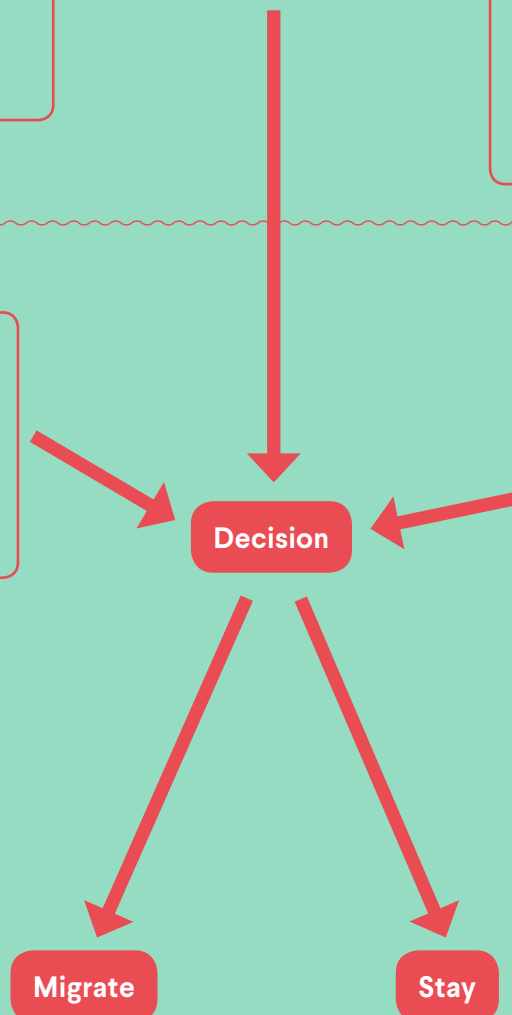


Figure as shown in:
 Foresight (2011). Migration and Global Environmental Change. Final Project Report. London: Government Office for Science. p.12.
 Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). The Atlas of Environmental Migration. New York: Routledge. p. 37

The British Government Office for Science stated in its Foresight report from 2011: “There are a number of existing estimates of the ‘numbers of environmental/climate migrants’, yet this report argues that these estimates are methodologically unsound, as migration is a multi-causal phenomenon and it is problematic to assign a proportion of the actual or predicted number of migrants as moving as a direct result of environmental change. A deterministic approach that assumes that all or a proportion of people living in an ‘at-risk’ zone in a low-income country will migrate neglects the pivotal role that humans take in dealing with environmental change, and also ignores other constraining factors which influence migration outcomes. This is not to say that the interaction of migration and global environmental change is not important: global environmental change does have real impacts on migration, but in more complex ways than previous cause–effect hypotheses have indicated.”³⁴

34 Foresight (2011). Migration and Global Environmental Change. Final Project Report. London: Government Office for Science. p.11.

Environmental migration as an opportunity

Environmental migration is at times also portrayed in a more positive light and seen as a successful adaptation to climate change rather than a last resort. The Cancún Adaptation Framework from 2010 formally acknowledged environmental migration as an adaptation strategy.³⁵

35 Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). The Atlas of Environmental Migration. New York: Routledge. p. 6.

Gemenne et al. (2018) argue that migration and adaptation to environmental and climate change are closely linked and reinforce each other and that the debates and research on the migration and development nexus can be taken as a guide for the way forward: “Initially, discussions on migration and development at the international level and associated policies at the national level considered migration as a failure of development, but have since advanced to consider mobility a factor for development. This is illustrated by the ground-breaking inclusion of migration in several of the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 of the United Nations in 2015”.³⁶

36 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_comparative_report.pdf, p. 93-94.

Following Gemenne et al. (2018), important steps have been made at the global policy level in recent years, in frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Nansen Protection Agenda on Cross-Border Displacement and more, but migration must be considered as part of adaptation strategies to environmental and climate change at sub-regional, regional, and national levels.³⁷ They state: “Human mobility is not necessarily undermining adaptation to environmental and climate change in communities that are resilient; it can potentially lead to increased resilience. Migration can be an adaptation choice, among others. The challenge is to ensure that it does not become a necessity or increase vulnerability. Human mobility thus needs to be recognized as a potential benefit for adaptation; at the same time, policies need to prevent and address displacement, as well as the challenges of planned relocation and those who cannot move. It is time to move from evidence to policy.”³⁸

37 It must be noted that most affected communities and countries, such as Small Islands Developing States, are more cautious and try to push the discourse to focus on mitigation rather than to adaptation strategies.

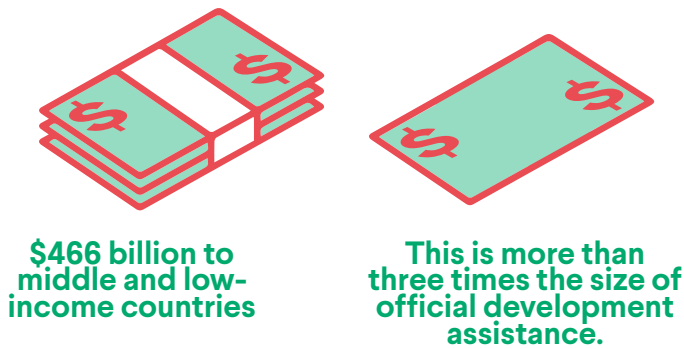
38 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/meclep_comparative_report.pdf, p. 94.

Firstly, contributions of diasporas to their countries of origins, mostly in form of remittances but also through skills and know-how or transfer of investments and technologies, can have positive effects on development. Consequently, this can strengthen the resilience of local communities in the face of climate change and environmental disasters.³⁹ However, this is not to say that the sole responsibility should be borne by the migrants themselves; the main contributors to adaptation and mitigation strategies as well as to development policies should of course still be governments.

39 This potential is being increasingly acknowledged on the political level, as shown by programmes such as ‘Return of Qualified Nationals’ by the UN Development Programme or ‘Migration for Development in Africa’ by IOM.



FIGURE 2: REMITTANCES IN 2017



Source: International Organization for Migration (2018). Global Migration Indicators. Insights from the Global Migration Data Portal. Berlin: Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) International Organization for Migration. p. 18.

Secondly, circular migration can be a successful adaptation strategy, moving away from those areas exposed to environmental risks or natural disasters. Circular migration can mean “internal seasonal migration, periodic migration between rural areas or from rural areas to urban zones and vice versa”⁴⁰ as well as refer to “people who work abroad during a given period, or international circular labour migration, which is organized through international agreements”.⁴¹ However, migrant workers – whether moving internally or internationally – are often highly marginalised and exposed to human rights violations.⁴² Circular migration can hence only work as an adaption strategy if both country of origin and destination are aware of the connection between environmental degradation and migration and are putting in place policies to anticipate this kind of mobility, including safe and regular ways to migrate.⁴³ As will be highlighted later on in this paper, this view on (environmental) migration is still far from being reflected in the policy discourse currently held on the EU level.

40 Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 74

41 Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 74.

42 Furthermore, circular migration is a highly gendered process with labour migrants being oftentimes male. This leads to a ‘feminisation’ of the domestic agriculture which is being discussed in Gender and Development research, in particular in relation to land rights and land grabbing issues. Cf. Gioli, Giovanna and Andrea Milan (2018). Gender, migration and (global) environmental change. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 141.

43 Cf. New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme, which is in place since 2007 and entails agreements with nine countries of the Pacific: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme>

The state of policy at the international and EU levels

Discussion and actions within the United Nations system and on the international level

For years, NGOs have demanded more concrete action from the international community⁴⁴ but as the European Parliamentary Research Service states in its latest briefing from January 2019, “the national and international response to this challenge has been limited and protection for the people affected remains inadequate.”⁴⁵ This is not surprising as the issue falls within two very comprehensive and highly complex policy areas – environment and migration. The following section lays out, in chronological order, several attempts have been made under the UN umbrella to provide at the very least a framework for the issue and its various facets.⁴⁶ Largely due to the fact that nation states wish to keep their sovereignty when it comes to migration policies, most advances have remained non-binding.

44 Cf. <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/ngos-urge-stronger-measures-for-protection-of-climate-refugees/>

45 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 1

46 This is a non-exhaustive list that only references the most pertinent UN documents regarding the issue. Other relevant documents include for instance the Sustainable Development Goals.



Most people affected by climate and environmental events will become internally displaced persons (IDPs). The 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement⁴⁷ provide a framework for victims of natural disasters who do not cross an international border and offers a valuable set of legal standards for protection. It is not, however, a legally binding instrument. Its principles were used to draft the above-mentioned Kampala Convention⁴⁸, adopted by the African Union in 2009, which is the first legally binding instrument to ensure states protect and assist IDPs.⁴⁹

Because of the lack of global governance when it comes to migration, there have been several examples where the topic of human mobility has been addressed in climate negotiations on the international stage. Some experts have suggested addressing the challenge of climate-induced displacement by covering recognition, protection, and resettlement of climate refugees through a protocol to be added to the UNFCCC.⁵⁰ And while many of those experts underline that the climate negotiations framework alone will not be able to address the challenges at hand, there has been some progress on the UNFCCC level through the set-up of different bodies and their respective funding.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), due to its binding and institutionalised character, has been seen by many as the most effective and adequate forum to tackle the issue. Human mobility is therefore addressed in the Cancún Adaptation Framework of 2010⁵¹ as well as the 2011 framework of the Loss and Damage Programme⁵². The Paris Agreement, reached at COP21 in 2015, called for a task force to address displacement related to climate change through the development of “recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.”⁵³

This Taskforce on Displacement (TFD)⁵⁴, established by the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, WIM Excom,⁵⁵ started its work in 2017. During COP23, presided by the Fiji Islands, where the protection of climate refugees was one of the most debated issues due to the nature of the hosting country, the TFD met for the second time and finally its recommendations to the WIM Excom were presented at COP24 in Katowice in December 2018.⁵⁶

The Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility is another dialogue forum and important body tackling this thematic within the UNFCCC framework. Anchored in Paragraph 14 (f) of the Cancun Adaptation Platform from 2010, it acts separately for the TFD but some of the stakeholders represented are the same. The Advisory Group is composed of the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Norwegian Refugee Council and its Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), Refugees International, the Hugo Observatory (ULG)⁵⁷, and the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED). Its task is to provide technical support to the UNFCCC Parties to ensure that human mobility questions are taken into consideration within global climate negotiations.

Also within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the topic is addressed in the Working Group on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. The IPCC has identified the reduction of available water, decreases in crop yields, risk of floods, storms and coastal flooding, as well as nega-

47 Cf. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html>

48 Cf. <https://www.unhcr.org/4ae9bede9.html>

49 Already in 2009, the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly proposed in its recommendation “Environmentally induced migration and displacement: a 21st-century challenge” (Recommendation 1862 (2009)) to urge all UN member states to not only incorporate the Guiding Principles in their national legislation but to also extend them to include those displaced by gradual environmental degradation as well as those externally displaced.

50 Cf. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/Join/2011/462422/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2011\)462422_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/Join/2011/462422/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2011)462422_EN.pdf), p. 45

51 Cf. <https://unfccc.int/adaptation/items/4159.php>

52 Cf. <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/approaches-to-address-loss-and-damage-associated-with-climate-change-impacts-in-developing-countries>

53 <https://unfccc.int/news/human-mobility-and-the-paris-agreement>

54 Cf. <https://unfccc.int/node/285#eq-2>

55 Cf. <https://unfccc.int/wim-excom>, constituted body of the UNFCCC.

56 Cf. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Concept%20Note%20TFD%20Side%20Event%20%28FINAL%29.pdf>

57 Cf. for projects and publications: <http://labos.ulg.ac.be/hugo/state-environmental-migration/>



tive overall impacts on health (especially for the poor, elderly, young, and marginalised) as the four key points relevant to population movement.⁵⁸

58 Cf. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 5

Following the 2011 Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement, the so-called Nansen Initiative was set up in 2012, chaired by Norway and Switzerland. It laid out 10 principles on climate change and cross-border displacement⁵⁹ developed through a state-led consultative process with multi-stakeholder involvement “with the aim of addressing potential legal and protection gaps for people displaced across borders owing to environmental change and extreme weather conditions.”⁶⁰ The idea was to develop a guiding framework or instrument for those crossing borders due to climate displacement with the involvement of states, the UNHCR, and other relevant stakeholders.

59 Cf. <https://www.unhcr.org/4ea969729.pdf>, p. 5

60 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 7

To feed the Nansen Initiative process with good practices and build a sound knowledge base, inter-governmental regional consultations and civil society meetings took place around the world until 2015.

The results of the regional consultations and civil society meetings were consolidated and discussed at a global inter-governmental consultation in 2015 and presented as The Nansen Protection Agenda on Cross-Border Displacement.⁶¹ At the same time, the initiative reiterated its non-legally binding character by stating that it “does not seek to develop new legal standards, but rather to build consensus among states on the elements of a protection agenda, which may include standards of treatment. Its outcomes may be taken up at domestic, regional and global levels and lead to new laws, soft law instruments or binding agreements.”⁶²

61 For the full text of the Nansen Protection Agenda cf. <https://nanseninitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PROTECTION-AGENDA-VOLUME-1.pdf>

62 <https://www.nanseninitiative.org/secretariat/>

After the endorsement of the Nansen Protection Agenda by 109 governmental delegations in late 2015, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)⁶³ was set up as the follow-up of the Nansen Initiative. Chair and Vice-Chair positions are held in rotation by different states.⁶⁴ The Steering Group contains between 15 and 20 states and the European Union, represented through their Permanent Missions or Delegations in Geneva, while reflecting a geographical balance. Both UNHCR and IOM are standing invitees to the Steering Group. The PDD also includes an Advisory Committee to the Chair and Steering Group with representatives from various NGOs, academia and research, the private sector, and other international and regional organisations working in fields related to disaster displacement. The main activities of the PDD are advocacy for the phenomenon of disaster displacement (slow as well as sudden-onset, internally as well as cross border) as well as responding to governments’ needs. In this capacity it was involved in the drafting process of the Global Compacts on migration and on refugees.

63 Cf. <https://disasterdisplacement.org/>

64 In January 2018, Bangladesh took over the Chairmanship and France became Vice-Chair. France will assume the Chairmanship in July 2019.

The adoption of both Global Compacts within the United Nations framework can be seen as a response also to the above-mentioned developments on a global level and the general diagnosis of a lack of international framework for refugees and migration in line with the challenges of the 21st century. On 19 September 2016, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Declaration recognised a need for more cooperation between nations to manage migration effectively. The Declaration set off a process leading to the negotiation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Compact on Refugees. During the consultation phase, several thematic sessions and regional and stakeholder consultations were organised.⁶⁵ The EU member states gave input at all stages of the drafting process of both compacts.

65 Cf. For notes and information on sessions and consultations: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/consultation-phase>



The Global Compact on Refugees on the one hand aims to strengthen the international response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations. Its four key objectives are to ease the pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions as well as to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. It lays out the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), as agreed to by member states in Annex I of the New York Declaration, as well as a Programme of Action setting out concrete measures to help meet the objectives of the Compact. The Compact states: “While not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements. In the first instance, addressing root causes is the responsibility of countries at the origin of refugee movements.”⁶⁶

66 <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>, p. 4.

On the other hand, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration⁶⁷ gained far more public attention prior to its endorsement in Marrakech in December 2018. This first-ever negotiated global framework on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions, it was adopted by the UN General Assembly with 152 votes in favour, 12 abstentions, and five votes against, namely by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland, and the United States of America. An additional 24 member states were not present to take part in the vote. The compact sets out 23 objectives for safe, orderly and regular migration. Under Objective 2 it recognises climate migration by making commitment to “[m]inimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin”, including “[n]atural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation”.^{68 69} But while the compact proposes several actions, it lacks actionable commitments to control the human-made reasons for those forced migratory movements.

67 Cf. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/united-nations-migration-compact-climate-refugees/>

68 https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195, p. 9-10.

69 Additionally, Objective 5 calls for an enhancement of pathways for regular migration, including for migrants who leave because of disasters or environmental degradation where adaptation in or return to their country is impossible. Objective 23 sets out to strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in geographical areas systematically leading to irregular migration and mentions climate change and disasters as factors.

Both the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission support the Compact and use the same official statements. They state that “[t]he Compact, as an international cooperative framework, will also underpin the EU’s existing work with third countries and international organisations, such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). All these aspects correspond closely to the EU’s priorities and objectives.”^{70 71} Furthermore, the Compact was strongly supported by a majority of the European Parliament.⁷² In its resolution “On Progress on UN Global Compacts for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and on Refugees”⁷³ in 2018, the European Parliament calls upon all UN members but more specifically the EU countries to particularly focus on the drivers of irregular migration and forced displacement, including climate change or natural disasters.

70 https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/53761/questions-and-answers-what-global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration_en

71 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-6417_en.htm

72 Cf. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20181210IPR21430/meps-strongly-welcome-the-global-compact-on-migration>

73 Cf. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0118_EN.html?redirect

In terms of intergovernmental organisations, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is very active on the topic of environmental displacement and migration. In 2017, it released the “The Atlas of Environmental Migration”⁷⁴ which makes for a comprehensive and timely publication looking at environmental migration from different aspects, for instance what the factors are, what challenges and opportunities arise, and maps out the different governance and policy responses tried so far. Featuring many useful infographics and statistics, it presents the topic in a digestible manner. The World Bank Group has published the Groundswell report “Preparing for Internal Climate Migration” in 2018⁷⁵, where it highlights internal climate-induced migration as a key development issue. It points out the nexus between climate change, migration, and development in three regions: Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America and develops different scenarios and projections as well as four key recom-

74 See website for purchase here: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/projects/atlas-environmental-migration>

75 Cf. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29461>



mendations to take global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pursue far-sighted development planning.

Discussion and actions on the EU level

As it is the case within the UN system, the EU has yet to develop a framework or instrument to recognise and protect climate displaced people. Nevertheless, an increased interest in the issue can be observed over the past few years whereby the EU policy discourse is evolving around the potential – regardless if real or perceived – threat the phenomenon can pose to its own internal security.⁷⁶

The Stockholm Programme⁷⁷ was adopted by the European Council in December 2009 to provide a framework for EU action on the issues of citizenship, justice, security, asylum, immigration, and visa policy for the period 2010 to 2014. It called “for greater focus on climate changes as a driver of security-relevant migratory flows.”⁷⁸

Over the past decade, an increasing number of studies and policy papers on the subject have been commissioned and published by EU institutions as well. The study “Climate Refugees: Legal and Policy Responses to Environmentally Induced Migration”⁷⁹ from 2011 was commissioned by the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. It lays out different proposals to formally recognise climate refugees and formulates policy recommendations for concrete actions on the regional level. However, a staff working document of the European Commission on Climate change, environmental degradation, and migration⁸⁰ from 2013, accompanying the document “An EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change”⁸¹ shifted the focus back to the Global South, stating that migratory flows to Europe due to climate stress were unlikely and consequently the paper focuses on recommendations for EU policies with an external focus such as development, foreign policy, and humanitarian aid.⁸² Following this assessment and after pointing out that most migratory movements would happen internally, the document also came to the conclusion that there was no need for a ‘refugee-type protection’ in regard to climate-induced displacement.

In 2015, the European Commission’s Science for Environmental Policy series published “Migration in Response to environmental change”.⁸³ It gathered the latest research findings on the topic and included further reading from the Commission. While DG Environment acknowledged that migration patterns to the EU are affected by climate change, it also drew attention to EU citizens who might be moving among member states due to climate and environmental events. The insinuation that EU citizens moving within EU territory could also be ‘climate refugees’ is of course not substantiated in current international law. “[S]uch situations are mainly regulated by the provisions on the free movement of persons built into EU law, and to some extent by those set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The main challenge remains for those arriving to the EU from outside.”⁸⁴ The “European Agenda on Migration”⁸⁵ from 2015 by the European Commission identified climate change as feeding directly and immediately into irregular migration and forced displacement, and called for the “prevention and mitigation of these threats”.⁸⁶

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has addressed the topic of climate-induced human mobility most notably in his State of the Union address in 2015 in the context of security concerns:

⁷⁶ The following section does not present an exhaustive list of EU documents on the matter.

⁷⁷ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/the_stockholm_programme_-_an_open_and_secure_europe_en_0.pdf

⁷⁸ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 8.

⁷⁹ Cf. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/2011/462422/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2011\)462422_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/2011/462422/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2011)462422_EN.pdf)

⁸⁰ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/swd_2013_138_en.pdf

⁸¹ Cf. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0216&from=EN>

⁸² https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/swd_2013_138_en.pdf, p. 3.

⁸³ Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/migration_in_response_to_environmental_change_51si_en.pdf

⁸⁴ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)621893_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf), p. 9.

⁸⁵ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf

⁸⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf, p. 7.



“Nature will foot us the bill soon enough. In some parts of the world, climate change is changing the sources of conflict – the control over a dam or a lake can be more strategic than an oil refinery. Climate change is even one the root causes of a new migration phenomenon. Climate refugees will become a new challenge – if we do not act swiftly.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm

In Juncker’s State of the Union speeches from 2016 and 2017, the topic of climate is less prominent. While the need for the EU to take leadership is mentioned, it is not mentioned in connection with migration or refugees. Due to the developments of 2015 and following years, migration and refugee issues are addressed by Juncker in the context of integration as well as decreasing the numbers of new people arriving in EU territory.

In the 2018 State of the Union, Juncker referred to climate change as a threat to the EU’s security, as well as affirming the EU’s global responsibility to tackle climate change, referring to the droughts of summer 2018 within Europe.

In its 2017 resolution “Addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU external action”, the European Parliament “stresses that EU development cooperation should continue to address and effectively tackle the root causes of forced displacement and migration”,⁸⁸ naming climate change as one of them. The resolution also calls upon member states to take up their global responsibility in the face of climate change by implementing the Paris Agreement and by taking “a leading role in recognising the impact of climate change on mass displacement, as the scale and frequency of displacements are likely to increase”.⁸⁹ Consequently, it demands the EU and its member states to put more financial resources at the disposal of countries most affected by climate change, and the resolution calls for a special international protection status for those displaced through climate events.

⁸⁸ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0124_EN.pdf, p.6-7.

⁸⁹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0124_EN.pdf, p. 11.

Also in 2017, the European Commission’s European Political Strategy Centre published “10 Trends Shaping Migration”.⁹⁰ As one of those ten trends, the in-house think tank of the European Commission identified that “[c]limate [c]hange [is] to dwarf all other drivers of migration” and that already now, “[m]any more people [are] internally displaced by ‘natural’ disasters than by violent conflicts and civil wars”.⁹¹ The paper calls for additional research on appropriate responses and predicts that the current global humanitarian system is fundamentally underfunded and unequipped to deal with future developments.

⁹⁰ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/epsc_-_10_trends_shaping_migration_-_web.pdf

⁹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/epsc_-_10_trends_shaping_migration_-_web.pdf, p. 6.

Financial means for environmental displacement and migration

“Financial mechanisms, either for adaptation or development, do not sufficiently take migration into account, despite the strong links that exist between these issues.”⁹² This insufficiency can of course also be explained through the aforementioned difficulties in clearly separating environmental migration from other forms of migration as well as from other issues such as sustainable development.

⁹² Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 102.

“Certain programmes to reduce forced migration or to provide support to migrants already benefit from traditional funding channels for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and development. Yet, more flexible mechanisms and innovative partnerships must be developed and implemented in order to better support and manage environmental migration.”⁹³

⁹³ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 102.



A hopeful sign is that the EU has announced that it will devote at least 20% of its budget until 2020 to climate action.⁹⁴ Increasingly, climate funding is integrated in development funding and oftentimes supported through national programmes which can also lead to a lack of transparency; generally there are still huge inequalities among countries in terms of access to funding. This can be explained by the complexity of the mechanisms, procedures, and required conditions.

⁹⁴ One EU fund related to adaptation is the Global Climate Change Alliance (European Commission): <http://www.gcca.eu/>

The position of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament

In 2013, the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament adopted a joint position “Climate Change, Refugees and Migration”⁹⁵, based on a paper drafted by the Members of European Parliament H el ene Flautre (France), Jean Lambert (United Kingdom), as well as Ska Keller and Barbara Lochbihler (Germany). Identifying the lack of coherent policies on both the EU and global level, the paper aims to give green answers to the issue on both an EU and an international level and addresses some of the expert proposals that were touched upon earlier in this paper.

⁹⁵ Cf. <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf>

The paper reflects firstly on the difficulties to define the scope of the topic, e.g. which factors are at play, which kind of movements are occurring and where, and addresses the difficult debate around the terminology. The Greens/EFA group takes the position to use the term ‘climate refugee’ to address those affected, as the word ‘refugee’ makes it clearer that “we are talking about (planned or un-planned) forced rather than voluntary movements, taking place due to (slow-onset or sudden) external factors.”⁹⁶ To describe the phenomenon, the group has agreed to use the terminology ‘climate migration’. The paper argues that both terms provide a straight-forward, easily understandable and translatable label for such a complex issue. Notably, the paper also underlines that the use of ‘climate refugee’ by the Greens/EFA group does not determine the legal status of those affected.

⁹⁶ <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf.p.4>.

The most important demands included in the position paper are summarised as follows:

- ▶ As climate-induced migration is cross-related to poverty and other drivers of migration, the EU as well as other countries of the Global North need to adapt their development policy strategies. Because most people affected are internally displaced, it is crucial to support governments on the ground. For instance, means for climate change adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building should be additional to official development assistance (ODA) quotas.
- ▶ In this regard, the paper sharply criticises the use of ODA to pay for refugee reception in EU member states or to prevent migration from African countries, among others. It should instead go towards developing preparedness and resilience in the countries affected. Furthermore, the paper highlights that migration can be a successful adaptation strategy, in particular in cases of slow-onset changes of the environment.⁹⁷
- ▶ In regard to legal pathways to tackle the phenomenon, the paper demands firstly a clearer commitment to the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement from relevant countries for the protection of IDPs and, secondly, more engagement by countries of the Global North to fulfil aid promises and increase their financial

⁹⁷ <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf.p.5>.



and technical support to third countries. For those who are fleeing across borders due to climate or environmental events, the Greens/EFA group also rejects the expansion of the Geneva Convention. Taking into account the lack of political will on the international level, it calls for a bottom-up approach drawing on local, national, and regional best practices⁹⁸ with the hope that these would ultimately translate into a legally binding framework on a global scale.⁹⁹ Inseparable from this process, the Greens/EFA group sees the need to have “[b]roader debates on an international level, leading to binding procedures and common institutions”,¹⁰⁰ whereby a re-negotiation of the Geneva Convention as well as solely tackling climate migration within the forum of the UNFCCC is rejected. While the Greens/EFA group still believes that bundling all competences within one organisation, such as the UN, could be a useful approach to create a legal status and sufficient protection for those affected, it calls upon the EU to take a lead role in this process, “to support the affected countries that raise the issue, to bring the debate forward on all relevant levels, to get a clearer overview of where progress is most realistic, and to foster such progress accordingly.”¹⁰¹

- ▶ The position paper by the Greens/EFA group laments the lack of coherent policy proposals on the EU level and lays out the policy instruments available where the EU could progress on this issue.¹⁰² Firstly, the Qualifications Directive 2011/95/EU, which not only covers refugees but also those with subsidiary protection status, could be translated by member states into national law in such a way that the climate change dimension is included in the protection status. Such a provision did not find a majority on the EU level when the initial Directive was adopted, and it is now in the competence of member states only to make respective amendments. Secondly, the Temporary Protection Directive 2011/55/EC was initially set up to grant temporary protection “in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons”.¹⁰³ The Greens/EFA group sees here the possibility to recast this Directive to also include climate refugees among those covered by the legislation and to lower the threshold required to trigger the mechanism in order to also take slow-onset changes into account. Moreover, the paper suggests that changes to the Returns Directive 2008/115/EC could be a starting point to halt returns to countries where slow-onset climate change events occur. Similarly, climate change phenomena should also be taken into account when re-admission agreements with third countries are negotiated by the EU. Overall, the position paper criticises that EU migration policies are focused on return and perceive migration as a short-term phenomenon rather than offering long-term solutions and upholding global solidarity.
- ▶ The paper also mentions the potential of the EU Joint Resettlement programme to reduce the stress on certain member states and provide additional legal migrations options, in particular an EU policy on circular migration or the idea of mobility partnership to open safe and legal ways for those affected by climate change to move to EU member states as a way to diversify their livelihoods. In this context, the position paper also calls for a closer examination of the effects of remittances to improve environmental resilience in third countries.
- ▶ Last but not least, the Greens/EFA group points towards using national legislation that includes some kind of provision on climate refugees as a blueprint for a future EU legislation.

98 Such as the Kampala Convention or national best practices. Progressive legislation on that matter, e.g. in Sweden and Finland, was however repealed in the wake of the 2015 migration and asylum policies crisis in the EU. Cf. Hush, Emily (2018). *Developing a European Model of International Protection for Environmentally Displaced Persons: Lessons from Finland and Sweden*. In: *Columbia Journal of European Law*. <http://cjel.law.columbia.edu/preliminary-reference/2017/developing-a-european-model-of-international-protection-for-environmentally-displaced-persons-lessons-from-finland-and-sweden/>

99 <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf>, p. 8.

100 <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf>, p. 8.

101 <https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Greens%20EFA%20-%20Position%20Paper%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Refugees%20and%20Migration.pdf>, p. 10.

102 It must be noted that the position paper dates back to 2013, i.e. before many EU member states adopted more restrictive migration and asylum policies in the wake of the arrival of many refugees and migrants as of 2014/2015 and the resulting solidarity crisis among the EU countries.

103 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:212:0012:0023:EN:PDF>



The developments of 2015 and the following years have made the limits of the EU policy instruments, solidarity among EU member states, and of the very upholding of humanitarian values very evident, and have created a general political climate where expressing the need for a more welcoming and long-term migration policy – particularly in regard to climate migrants – is likely to be challenging and highly politically unpopular. In that respect, it is unclear whether the incoming Green Members of the European Parliament will push for an update of the official position as well as for concrete steps to implement legislation on the EU level. The Global Compacts on Migration and on Refugees are another piece of the puzzle that would call for a revision of the Greens/EFA position paper, demanding concrete steps by the EU and its member states to translate them into hard law.

Increased awareness of the issue

Within academia, the field of environmental migration and displacement is generally well researched, and has seen an increase in particular in the past two decades.¹⁰⁴ Many studies have been published all over the world examining the multi-causality of environmental migration with a broad consensus that climate change and environmental hazards contribute to, if not lead to, migration. Particularly noteworthy as giving a fairly recent in-depth introduction to the topic is the 2018 Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration, edited by Robert McLeman and François Gemenne.¹⁰⁵ It provides readers with the current state of research on how the environment influences current and future global migration patterns and displacement. The publication gathers theoretical and empirical contributions by leading academics in the field, following a multidisciplinary approach linking environmental studies with migration research, development studies, and international public policy and law.

Beyond the scientific community, the issue has also gained broader attention within the public as “a threshold has been crossed in terms of societal awareness of the extent and scale of human degradation of the environment and of the worrying implications for human wellbeing, especially the risks posed by anthropogenic climate change”,¹⁰⁶ accompanied by increased media coverage on the topic. What is more, the fact that human mobility and migration patterns are influenced by environmental conditions is widely acknowledged.

As a consequence, various events, publications, and position papers on the topic of climate refugees and climate displacement have been published over the last years. Broadly, global migration and human displacement are acknowledged as one of the biggest issues for the 21st century, with nature and climate change commonly mentioned as aggravating factors. At the same time, long-term and holistic approaches to the matter are oftentimes lacking.

Some green, progressive and left political foundations on the EU and national levels have addressed the issue but are not systematically working on it.

¹⁰⁴ Not least due to increased funding for this research field in the early 2000s by, among others, the EU. Cf. McLeman, Robert and François Gemenne (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Environmental-Displacement-and-Migration/McLeman-Gemenne/p/book/9781138194465>

¹⁰⁶ McLeman, Robert and François Gemenne (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 3.



EU level NGOs working on migration and refugee policies or human rights are mainstreaming the topic when talking about migration or refugees in general, as well as about environmental justice without directly addressing it in most cases.¹⁰⁷ The complexity and multifaceted nature of any migratory movement, as highlighted earlier, consequently means that when working on issues of migration and asylum, climate and environmental impacts are in fact most often implicit in this work.

On a global level, NGOs are more engaged with the issue, in particular if they are working in countries of the Global South that are directly confronted with environmental displacement and migration. Key players, such as Refugees International,¹⁰⁸ are usually not EU-based. The EU institutions office of Amnesty International is not working specifically on the issue, whereas the organisation as a whole is keeping a more general human rights approach to climate change as well, i.e. not only looking at refugees but also indigenous and women rights: “Together with partners, we’re pressing governments and institutions like the UN to take concrete and urgent actions on climate change. This isn’t about charity or aid, it’s about human rights and justice.”¹⁰⁹

Green EU-level NGOs, such as European Environmental Bureau, Climate Action Network Europe, or Friends of the Earth, are most often not working on the specific topic of climate refugees and climate displacement but focus on the broader issues such as climate and sustainable development, climate justice, and climate adaptation/resilience.¹¹⁰ Greenpeace Germany commissioned the study “Climate Change, Migration and Displacement: The Underestimated Disaster”¹¹¹ in 2017 which analysed the framework and instruments available on the global level, for instance the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and examined concrete case studies mostly from the Global South. The study called for the inclusion of climate displacement in the Global Compacts to foster a global discourse on the phenomenon. However, the publication did not include a more in-depth EU policy analysis. Also in 2017, Oxfam International published its report “Uprooted by climate change: Responding to the growing risk of displacement”.¹¹² It describes the effects climate change already has on communities as well as the necessary actions towards ending global climate pollution, supporting resilient communities, ensuring rights for people on the move, and developing long-term strategies. The report also includes a recommendation that the now adopted “two Compacts must help to ensure safety, dignity and lasting solutions for those displaced or at risk of displacement as a result of the impacts of climate change.”¹¹³ At the same time it demands more concrete action and commitment on the regional and national levels as well. Those responses should include “the establishment and strengthening of regional mobility agreements, ensuring that these are driven by the needs of communities, include robust safeguards to prevent exploitation of migrants, and support those countries and communities most impacted by climate change”,¹¹⁴ the establishment of further legal pathways for migration such as special visa categories, and addressing “climate-induced displacement in [...] National Adaptation Plans, including: early identification of communities at risk of displacement; consultation with and full participation of affected communities; and strategies to support successful planned relocation, when appropriate, based on upholding human rights and protecting livelihoods and culture, among other factors.”¹¹⁵

Think tanks and research institutes are also working on the topic, but it is still rather seldomly addressed by the most renowned EU think tanks.¹¹⁶ EurActiv for example has published some articles about climate change and refugees, as well as the link between climate change and the threat

107 Cf. Blogpost by Save the Children: <https://www.savethechildren.net/article/children%E2%80%99s-role-mitigating-climate-change-and-disaster-preparedness>

108 US-based NGO advocating for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people, promoting solutions to displacement crises, has a dedicated staff member working on climate displacement, and released an issue brief, formulating recommendations on how an adequate follow up by international community should look like in 2018: <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/11/19/ensuring-that-the-global-compact-on-refugees-and-migration-deliver>

109 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/12/climate-change-human-rights/>

110 Cf. annex for non-exhaustive list with mapping.

111 Cf. <https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/20170524-greenpeace-studie-climate-change-migration-displacement-engl.pdf>

112 Full report: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-en.pdf; Summary: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-sum-en.pdf

113 https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-en.pdf, p. 38.

114 https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-en.pdf, p. 39.

115 https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-en.pdf, p. 39.

116 Rather superficial mention of the phenomenon in policy brief by Bruegel before COP21 in the context of the EU’s climate finance: <http://bruegel.org/2015/09/european-climate-finance-securing-the-best-return/>



of terrorism.¹¹⁷ Many think tanks do not tackle the phenomenon as such but rather focus on a particular aspect, such as its relation to sustainable development or to the UNFCCC framework.

117 Cf. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/climate-change-vic-tims-need-refugee-status-report-claims/>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/opinion/we-need-to-talk-about-climate-refugees/>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/climate-change-exacerbates-threat-of-terrorism/>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/development-policy/news/europe-warned-climate-change-will-bring-more-lampedusas/>;

Key issues

On the previous pages it has already become clear that environmental mobility and displacement are immensely complex issues that require in-depth analysis of the various layers and specificities. The following section will highlight some of the most important and controversial aspects of the phenomenon based on the latest academic findings.

It's a numbers game

Estimates of current climate refugees and, maybe even more so, predictions of people who will be displaced in the future by environmental changes have been instrumentalised in the public discourse as attention to the topic is growing. And while predictions such as 200 million climate-displaced people by the year 2050 have certainly increased awareness on the topic in general, scientific experts are very cautious when it comes to numbers as there is no consensus and no commonly agreed methodology. Some of the difficulties in providing accurate current numbers and future estimates on people are outlined below.

As illustrated in the beginning of this paper, there are different definitions and perceptions as to who is a climate refugee or an environmental migrant, and that leads to different numbers as different groups of people are factored in – or not. Moreover, as the large majority of people affected are internally displaced, a clear statistical approach is lacking because this kind of migration remains often undetected in comparison to individuals crossing national borders.¹¹⁸ The estimates of future climate refugees are oftentimes inflated as, firstly, they take the number of people living in areas at risk as a basis rather than estimating the number of people who migrate, i.e. those who will be 'trapped' and unable to migrate or those using a different adaptation strategy are not taken into account. Secondly, the predictions do not take demographic changes into account. Today for instance we can see accelerated urbanisation and "[w]hereas the global population growth can be predicted to a certain extent, its geographic distribution remains uncertain."¹¹⁹ Furthermore, future environmental migration and displacement can of course still be influenced by climate policies today. How far countries will be able to mitigate and adapt to climate change will determine how many people will decide or will be forced to migrate. The recent estimates for future climate refugees also leave it unclear whether they are referring to the entire cohort and, for example, also factor in those who will be able to return home after a while, or whether it looks at migratory flows in certain periods of time. So far, this question has not been addressed sufficiently in the respective literature.¹²⁰

118 Cf. Gemenne, François (2011). *Why the numbers don't add up. A review of estimates and predictions of people displaced by environmental changes*. In: *Global Environmental Change*. Vol. 21: S 1. P. 41-49. DOI : 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.09.005.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

120 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

A focus on inflated predictions of future climate refugees not only contributes to the narrative of those steering fear politics but also contributes to a very Western view of the phenomenon as something happening in the future, shifting public attention away from those already very much af-



fected today. Obtaining accurate numbers and predictions is also crucial in developing adequate programmes and funding strategies for assistance to those areas most affected. Without a common framework and working definition as well as tested and standardised data collection and research, we run the risk that “[i]n the absence of reliable statistics, numbers can be easily inflated and manipulated, in order to attract attention on some populations, sometimes at the expense of other populations in need of protection.”¹²¹

121 Ibid., p. 46-47.

A global phenomenon

Just as it is difficult to quantify environmental migration and displacement in regard to the number of people affected around the world, it is also a challenging task to map the geographical areas most affected, and even more so to predict future developments. In fact, “[a]ll geographic regions and localities experience some or other type of environmental change or stress; but some areas are particularly disadvantaged, both in terms of exposure of population and key infrastructures and assets to hazards, as well as in terms of local capacity to respond to adversity and to recover from disasters, which is often more limited in lower income countries.”¹²²

122 Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 35.

With the help of IOM’s Migration Data Portal and numbers by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) it is however possible to point out some global trends as illustrated in Figure 3. It is important to note that in their estimates, IOM does not differentiate between those migrating voluntarily and those displaced. It looks at sudden and progressive environmental changes as well as planned relocations.

Climate refugees as a national security threat?

The perception of climate change as a security threat has become an increasingly popular public narrative, not the least as high-level politicians such as former US president Obama¹²³ share it. As highlighted earlier, climate refugees are oftentimes referred to as a security threat in EU political discourse and climate change is mentioned in conjunction with security and peace (cf. Juncker’s SOTUs of the past years). In line with this, the report “Assessing and Mitigating the Cost of Climate Change” to the Economics and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in 2017 states:

123 Cf. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/20/remarks-president-united-states-coast-guard-academy-commencement>

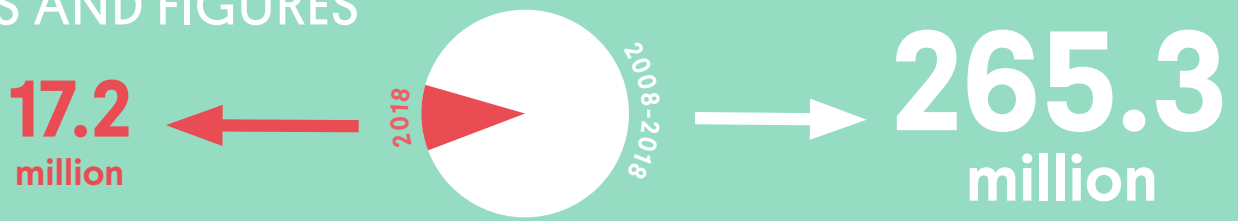
“Climate change could also be a factor in triggering violent conflicts linked to declining food production, water shortages or economic crises linked to these phenomena. Indeed, the potential for conflict between regions affected by climate change cannot be ruled out. The refugee crisis shaking political stability in the Middle East and posing serious challenges in Europe could be a harbinger of things to come. The huge economic and social costs linked to mass movements on this scale are self-evident. It is distinctly possible that global climate challenges could become a trigger of mass movements of people, particularly in arid regions where agriculture and food supplies are vulnerable to drought. The potential problems here are very much worth considering and could certainly emerge as a key element in the economic fallout of unmitigated climate change.”¹²⁴ It concludes by assessing climate change as a risk multiplier, particularly in fragile states, and notes that “[i]t is worth considering here that there is clear evidence that human civilization arose in a period of climate stability.”¹²⁵

124 Report to the Economics and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2017). *Assessing and Mitigating the Cost of Climate Change*. https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2017-11/2017%20-%20167%20ESCETER%2017%20E%20bis-%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20-%20ALFRESDOT-TIR%20REPORT_0.pdf, p. 9.

125 Report to the Economics and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2017). *Assessing and Mitigating the Cost of Climate Change*. https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2017-11/2017%20-%20167%20ESCETER%2017%20E%20bis-%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20-%20ALFRESDOT-TIR%20REPORT_0.pdf, p. 10.



FIGURE 3: DISPLACEMENT WORLDWIDE — TRENDS AND FIGURES

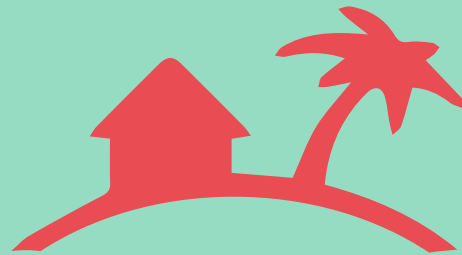


In 2018, **17.2 million people** in 144 countries and territories were newly displaced in the context of disasters within their own country.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) records that worldwide, over a period of eleven years (2008-2018), about **265.3 million people** were displaced internally as a response to disasters.



South and East Asia, and the Pacific were the most affected regions. In particular, the Philippines, China and India recorded the highest numbers of disaster displacements in 2018.



Small island developing states (SIDS) continued to be disproportionately affected by natural hazards.



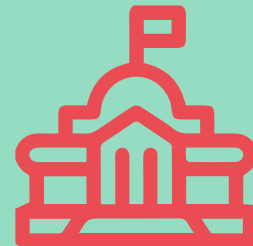
In 2018, displacement has been caused primarily by extreme weather events, especially **storms** (9.3 million) and **cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons** (7.9 million). Particularly devastating were the southwest monsoons in India and Typhoon Mangkhut in China and the Philippines.



While the majority of mobility in the context of environmental and climate change more generally, including disaster displacement, occurs within the borders of countries, **some people are forced to move abroad**. Global data on cross-border movement in the context of disasters are, however, limited, with only a few notable cases being examined so far.



Slow-onset processes such as **droughts** or **sea level** rise also increasingly affect people's mobility worldwide. Though specific data are not available, case studies are highlighted by existing research.



The **relocation of communities** in the context of environmental and climate change is also increasingly implemented by **governments**. For instance, tens of thousands of people have been relocated in Haiti and in Viet Nam, hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia, about a million in the Philippines and several millions in China.

FIGURE 4: CAUSES OF DISASTER DISPLACEMENT 2017

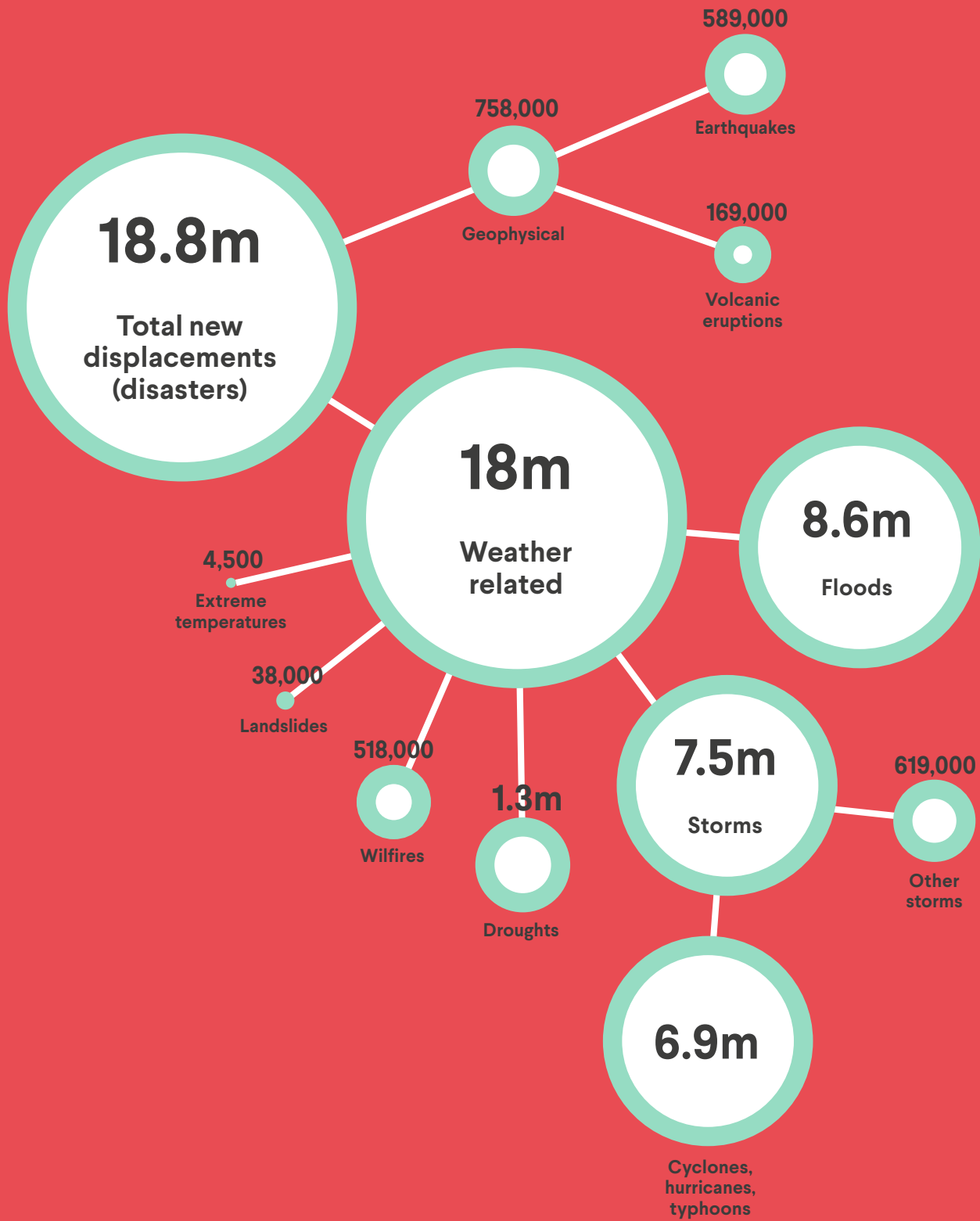


Figure as shown in:
 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council (2018).
 Global Report on Internal Displacement.
 Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. p. 7.

There are, certainly legitimate, fears that “[o]ver time, climate change stresses on natural resources – combined with demographic, economic and political pressures on those resources – can degrade a nation’s capacity to govern itself. This includes its ability to meet its citizens’ demands for basic resources – like food, water, energy and employment”.¹²⁶ Rising sea levels in countries with urbanised coastal areas threatening the freshwater supplies, or advancing ocean acidification and warming decreasing fish stock and thereby narrowing economic opportunities are only two examples showing how climate-related changes can compromise social stability.¹²⁷ What’s more is that climate change might also change the geopolitical landscape, as countries such as Small Island States will be losing their entire territory without a clear strategy yet in place on an international level for their populations’ protection and resettlement which, in return, can have geopolitical consequences and aggravate conflict. However, the lack of empirical evidence to prove the links between environmental change and political instability in so-called developing countries has led the leading research in this field to adopt a more nuanced approach, particularly as “the risk of conflict is highly context dependent, where causality is multifactorial and complex.”¹²⁸

Current research suggests that “environmental change and environmental migration will not independently cause conflicts, but that either of the two may, in conjunction with other factors, catalyse conflict depending on local conditions.”¹²⁹ In other words, while a direct causal link between environmental pressure, migration, and consequently violence is not supported by empirical evidence, countries and societies that are already in conflict are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and the capacity to adapt to those or mitigate will be most likely limited.¹³⁰ Further, “generalisable evidence that migration leads to violence in receiving areas”¹³¹ does not exist, and is also a highly dangerous premise in regard to social cohesion. Perceiving migration – a natural human phenomenon – as a security risk could be counter-productive and feed into fear politics in the ‘receiving’ countries. As highlighted earlier, migration can actually be seen as a successful adaptation strategy to climate change in many cases. Enabling the choice of migration as an adaptation strategy can have benefits for the affected communities through remittances, but also through transfer of knowledge and skills, thereby minimising future displacement or migration.¹³² Mwakalimi and Raleigh (2018) hence warn that a securitisation of environmental migration could be used by some politicians to argue for stricter border controls or other security measures and could “end up militarising not just climate policy but development aid as well.”¹³³

The current debate prevalent in the Global North often misses a nuanced approach to human mobility and perceives it as a threat to peace. The approach should instead be protection-based and focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Moreover, coherent development policies that build capacity on the ground to foster stronger democratic institutions, social welfare policies, and peace building will be indispensable to avoid conflicts. And “[w]here displacement or migration occurs, promoting development in both departure and destination areas, improving the conditions in host communities, and ensuring the integration of migrants will be essential in order to avoid tensions, and ensure human security in a broader sense.”¹³⁴

¹²⁶ <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/climate-change-raises-conflict-concerns>

¹²⁷ Cf. <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/climate-change-raises-conflict-concerns>

¹²⁸ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency working paper (2017). The relationship between climate change and violent conflict: <https://www.sida.se/contentassets/c571800e01e448ac9dce2d097ba125a1/working-paper---climate-change-and-conflict.pdf>, p. 6.

¹²⁹ Kita, Stern Mwakalimi and Clionadh Raleigh (2018). Environmental migration and international political security. Rhetoric, reality and questions. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge, p. 365

¹³⁰ Cf. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency working paper (2017). The relationship between climate change and violent conflict: <https://www.sida.se/contentassets/c571800e01e448ac9dce2d097ba125a1/working-paper---climate-change-and-conflict.pdf> and Kita, Stern Mwakalimi and Clionadh Raleigh (2018). Environmental migration and international political security. Rhetoric, reality and questions. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge, p. 356–368.

¹³¹ Kita, Stern Mwakalimi and Clionadh Raleigh (2018). Environmental migration and international political security. Rhetoric, reality and questions. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge, p. 365

¹³² Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge, p. 77.

¹³³ Kita, Stern Mwakalimi and Clionadh Raleigh (2018). Environmental migration and international political security. Rhetoric, reality and questions. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge, p. 363

¹³⁴ Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge, p. 83.



Climate change and the most vulnerable

It is widely acknowledged, for instance in Sustainable Development Goal 13,¹³⁵ that the most vulnerable persons will be affected the most by climate change and hence related slow- or sudden-onset environmental changes. Those groups are in particular women, children, elderly, disabled, minorities, and indigenous persons. Exacerbating this is that the most vulnerable at times lack the ability to migrate. Experts refer to them as being “trapped” – if they want to move.¹³⁶ “In such cases, environmental stress functions as an aggravating factor which adds to systemic economic, demographic, and political factors that shape individual livelihoods, access to resources and vulnerability, and influence the need (or desire) to move. If existing vulnerability is further accentuated by economic, social, political, geographic, or cultural factors, then individuals may find themselves trapped in hazardous circumstances. Poor health, limited access to information, belonging to marginalised groups, and isolation can all be factors undermining the ability to leave hazard-prone or gradually degrading environments.”¹³⁷

Research looking at the climate change-migration nexus through a gender lens is relatively limited and it is difficult to draw broader conclusions from the few, more qualitative, case studies conducted.¹³⁸ However, there is meanwhile a consensus in the literature that “[e]xisting vulnerabilities (often, but not always, overlapping with poverty) are further complicated by gendered power relations.”¹³⁹ In recent years, gender justice has become more integrated in the quest for climate justice, including in the framework of the COP, while in particular feminists and political ecologists warn of oversimplifying the concept of gender by only looking at the impact on women and girls. Rather, gender must be “understood and implemented as a relational, intersectional category” so as to not overlook gender minorities and the “complex ways that masculinities and femininities are constructed, negotiated, altered, and transformed through climate change processes”.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, gender (identity) determines together with other social identity markers such as ethnic or religious background, sexual orientation, class, disability, and urban or rural living situation, who can migrate when, where, how, and why. Gender also plays a role in further increasing the vulnerability of migrants, their legal status, and what their social, economic, and political opportunities are in the country of arrival. Because current research oftentimes still equates gender with women (and girls) and the research is overall still limited, the conclusions drawn have to be taken with a grain of salt, in particular as they seem to go in two diametrical directions. Climate- and environmental change-related migration processes are sometimes analysed as empowering women because they can strengthen women’s financial independence and contribution to the economy, which might in turn lead to a shift in gender roles. On the other hand, women are more likely to die or be injured during a natural disaster if their mobility is limited by a sociocultural context. Women and children suffer more than men from the social consequences of a crisis situation, meaning that they for instance are much more vulnerable to human trafficking if the legal apparatus in the country becomes dysfunctional in the wake of a natural disaster, as happened for example during the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia where human trafficking was a massive problem. Moreover, migration caused by environmental and climate change exacerbates pre-existing inequalities such as the gender dimension of discrimination and poverty.¹⁴¹

However, Gioli and Milan (2018) argue that “overly simplistic storylines in policy circles and the popular media, such as ‘women will be disproportionately affected by climate change’, [...] are ultimately counter-productive

135 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg13>

136 For in-depth examination of immobility in the face of environmental disruption, cf. Zickgraf, Caroline (2018). *Immobility*. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 71-83.

137 Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 28.

138 The Greens/EFA group organised a conference in the European Parliament on climate displacement from a gender perspective in October 2018: <https://www.greens-efa.eu/en/article/event/climate-displacement-in-a-gender-perspective/>
The Greens/EFA have also published a toolkit on gender and climate change: <https://www.greens-efa.eu/en/article/document/gender-and-climate-toolkit-8157/>

139 Gioli, Giovanna and Andrea Milan (2018). *Gender, migration and (global) environmental change*. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 136.

140 Gioli, Giovanna and Andrea Milan (2018). *Gender, migration and (global) environmental change*. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 36.

141 Cf. Ionesco, Dina et al. (2017). *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*. New York: Routledge. p. 90-91.



tive for addressing real gendered vulnerabilities and the power structures that (re)produce them.”¹⁴² Progress made in related research fields such as gender and migration, gender and environmental hazards and climate change, as well as gender and development can be beneficial for any further research looking at the migration and environmental change nexus through gender a lens; but as Gioli and Milan (2018) state, a limited amount of empirical findings has led to out-of-context and oversimplified findings, showing that too little research is available to develop concrete and effective policy responses on the matter.¹⁴³

Far more attention also has to be paid to indigenous peoples as they “are particularly sensitive to the effects of climate change due to their close association with, and dependence on, the natural environment for their lives and livelihoods.”¹⁴⁴ For the first time, the Paris Agreement of COP21 recognised the important role of indigenous knowledge in developing adaptation strategies and the importance of indigenous peoples themselves in stabilising the climate. While the Paris Agreement refers to indigenous peoples, their rights, and knowledge five times, it does not specify how this could be translated in reality and be operationalised in climate science as well as political decision-making.¹⁴⁵

Outlook

Through academic research, knowledge of and reliable statistics on environmental migration and mobility around the world is growing slowly but surely. At the same time, an increasing awareness among the general public about not only the urgency of climate change but also the concrete impacts of it signals that there is momentum to tackle this issue on a broader scale and finally achieve recognition and potentially even legal status for the millions of environmentally displaced. Leading academics, politicians, experts, and activists working in a wide range of policy fields – migration and asylum, climate and environment, development and sustainability – will be needed to work together on a feasible but effective solution – whether that will be on a regional level and then replicated in other areas of the world, or developed in an international forum.

However, this should not happen isolated from wider political processes and discussions on migration and climate change. While this paper has hopefully shown that there is no doubt that the environment and human mobility are closely linked and that there is an urgent need to recognise the environment and climate as one of the drivers of migration, “there is a need to think carefully about what is gained and what is lost in putting emphasis on environmental rather than other factors (e.g. political, economic). The politics of causal attribution are politics of blame and exoneration. But while debating whether those millions risking their lives to cross international borders are ‘environmentally-displaced persons’, ‘ecological migrants’ or perhaps ‘economic refugees’, one needs to keep in mind what really matters: that migrants, notwithstanding what drives them, are human beings.”¹⁴⁶

142 Gioli, Giovanna and Andrea Milan (2018). Gender, migration and (global) environmental change. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 138.

143 Cf. Gioli, Giovanna and Andrea Milan (2018). Gender, migration and (global) environmental change. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 142-145.

144 Pearce, Tristan (2018). Incorporating Indigenous knowledge in research. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 125.

145 Cf. Pearce, Tristan (2018). Incorporating Indigenous knowledge in research. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 125-132.

146 Mayer, Benoît (2018). Environmental migration research. Evolution and current state of the science. In: *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*. London: Routledge. p. 327.





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