



Migration in the Context of Disasters, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

July 2021

BACKGROUND

The UN Network on Migration has launched a new workstream dedicated to building stronger synergies between the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the objectives of the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main UN platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. This year, the HLPF reviews Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 as well as the 43 voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to be conducted by Member States. The HLPF on 6-15 July provides a space for States to explore synergies between the various UN frameworks in addressing migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation, and progress on the 2030 Agenda.

This note provides key messages for delegations at the HLPF about migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation. The messages highlight how these frameworks can serve States, the UN system and stakeholders in ensuring safe, regular and orderly migration and sustainable communities in development policies and planning, even in the face of climate change.¹

Member States are invited to consider the following messages and commitments in their interventions in the ministerial segment, the thematic sessions and the voluntary national reviews sessions of the HLPF 2021.

¹ These messages are aligned with the Recommendations on integrated approaches to averting, minimizing and addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change of the Task Force on Displacement under the UNFCCC Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts. See <https://undocs.org/FCCC/CP/2018/10/ADD.1>

KEY MESSAGES

- Environmental events and processes, adverse climate change impacts, and disasters know no borders and have a profound impact on how, when, and where people migrate, worldwide.
- The types of impacts and the kinds of migration associated with such impacts can vary significantly. People may move in the context of slow-onset processes or sudden-onset disasters, and in the context of adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and other precarious situations. People may move to build resilience in anticipation of environmental degradation, or to help rebuild after disasters.
- Migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation is generally the result of a combination of drivers. Today, research suggests that most such movement takes place across short distances and within national borders.
- The impact of environmental change on migration is anticipated to increase in the future as the scale and scope of adverse climate impacts unfold for societies across the world. Additionally, such adverse effects are anticipated to impact, the human rights, health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of people. Issues including the governance of migration and of other types of movements, and complexities of economic, social, political and environmental drivers are anticipated to affect patterns of migration in the context of climate change.
- Some people in vulnerable situations exposed to environmental impacts lack the resources to utilize migration to cope. During COVID-19, experience has shown how lockdowns and border closures can restrict the movement of people and keep them in tenuous situations in dense urban areas. Scenarios of environmental change foresee the possibility of “trapped” populations in high-risk areas.
- Research suggests children are already disproportionately impacted by both climate variability and migration: 500 million children worldwide live in areas with high risk of flooding and 160 million are exposed to severe risks of drought.
- While countries have committed to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all persons, regardless of migration status, and to leave no one behind in their efforts towards achieving sustainable development, climate change impacts may exacerbate inequalities. This makes the alignment of the Agenda 2030 and the principles of the GCM all the more important to govern contemporary migration.
- Funding for climate and migration related actions will be essential to foster adaptive capacity and resilience of people and communities in vulnerable situations.
- The GCM, together with other UN frameworks, provides technical insights to address migration in the context of disasters, climate change, and environmental degradation. The Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda proposes additional tools to implement these

agreements. Underpinning all of these frameworks are international human rights law and labour standards.

- Under the UNFCCC process, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Excom’s Task Force on Displacement delivered recommendations inviting Parties to avert, minimize and address displacement, including considering strengthening legislation and policies, data and knowledge, and measures including early warning systems and forecast-based finance to avert and minimize climate change-related displacement.
- Member State commitments and guidance are in place to accelerate the integration of the potential impacts of climate change into the migration agenda at all levels and vice versa. This includes ensuring that migration is considered in national adaptation plans and that migration policies account for climate change impacts.
- The first International Migration Review Forum to be held during the first half of 2022, provides a critical opportunity to shape the next decade of migration governance by offering responses to current and future migration scenarios in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.
- The UN Network on Migration stands ready to support Member States, in particular Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States among other countries in highly vulnerable contexts, in addressing migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation. The Network can provide technical support and expertise, and support the development of joint programmes to integrate the mobility aspects of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation in national development planning cycles.

COMMITMENTS

1. Embed migration and migrants in regional and national planning for sustainable development and climate change.

Relevant for:

- **MINISTERIAL SEGMENT - Keynote by the President of UN Environment Assembly**, Tuesday, 13 July 2021, 3:00 PM-3:15 PM
 - **MINISTERIAL SEGMENT - Messages from the regions**, Wednesday, 14 July 2021, 9:00 AM-10:30 AM
 - **THEMATIC SESSION - The SDGs in time of crisis: A sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 as an opportunity to realize the SDGs**, Tuesday, 6 July 2021, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
 - **THEMATIC SESSION - Going local**, Thursday, 8 July 2021, 12:15 PM-1:15 PM
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- The 2030 Agenda explicitly acknowledges the importance of integrating migration into development strategies.
 - Fulfilling the SDGs' fundamental goal of leaving no one behind means ensuring that migrants are included in regional and national development and climate change policies and planning.
 - Including migrants in regional and national planning can sustain our efforts on climate change (SDG 13) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). Migrants and diasporas can contribute remittances and knowledge which can help foster adaptation to climate change². The integration of migrant perspectives into adaptation planning and implementation can reduce inequality and amplify migrants' capacities to contribute to the green economy and other sustainable solutions.
 - Holistic approaches are needed to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. While the current focus is on recovering from the effects of COVID-19, Member states, the UN system, and stakeholders are already considering ways to support the transition to a green economy, build climate resilience, create decent green jobs, support effective action to reach carbon neutrality and examine how this interacts with our future migration scenarios.
 - The creation and expansion of safe, accessible and regular pathways for admission and stay of migrants on the basis of human rights, international labour standards, and humanitarian grounds are a key avenue for ensuring sustainable protection and integration of migrants in vulnerable situations related to environmental factors.
 - City and local governments play a crucial role in sustainably integrating migrants and further mitigating COVID-19. They can play a key role in incubating local solutions that can be replicated and scaled. Fully empowering local authorities to integrate migration into and ensure the participation of migrants in local response strategies will be helpful.
 - There is also a need to strengthen regional dialogue on migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation, including between the state-led Regional Consultative Processes on Migration, the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, the UN Network on Migration through its regional structures, the regional economic communities and the UN Regional Economic and Social Commissions.

² Please see <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/about-iom/gender/Atlas-of-Environmental-Migration.pdf>

- Finally, a whole-of-society approach is required, building on the expertise, knowledge and unique perspectives of key stakeholders, including migrants, diasporas, local communities, civil society, academia, the private sector, parliamentarians, trade unions, national human rights institutions, the media and other relevant stakeholders in migration governance, in line with the GCM's guiding principles.
- The new UN Network on Migration workstream on *Migration in the Context of Disasters, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation* jointly led by ILO, IOM and UNFCCC, can support States in these policy coherence efforts ahead of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021 and the 2022 International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). The workstream will, more specifically, help identify existing knowledge and gaps, and enable the necessary platforms for dialogue with States, regions, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders with a view to providing policy recommendations in the run up to the IMRF. Most importantly, the Network's efforts to advocate for enhanced planning and actions for climate change impacts that include migration and vice versa can help achieve the SDGs.

2. Address issues specific to displacement and migration, including those that may arise in the context of sudden-onset and slow-onset disasters, the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

Relevant for: **THEMATIC SESSION - Ensuring that no one is left behind**, Tuesday, 6 July 2021, 12:00 PM-1:00 PM

- It is important to ensure that the focus on environment and migration is framed as one of (ex ante) safety, dignity, development and prosperity, and not primarily one of (ex post) exposure to vulnerability and tragedy. Safe, orderly and regular migration is crucial for ensuring this enabling framing.
- Countries are invited to expand safe and legal pathways to increase opportunities for people to move before they become displaced, including on the basis of human rights, international labour standards, and humanitarian grounds. By supporting labour migration schemes based on international labour standards and other pathways that allow families to move together, and by supporting young migrants to legally pursue education and opportunities for decent work in another part of the country or abroad, certain situations of vulnerability may be mitigated.
- Migration and migrants are key development and climate actors in the run up to reducing inequality and achieving SDG 10. In this regard, it is crucial to ensure that migrants who have moved as a means of building resilience against climate change impacts are able to enjoy the full range of their human rights, as well as fair recruitment and decent work as envisaged in SDG target 8.8 and Objective 5 of the GCM.
- Migration of young workers can offer a way to adaptively manage labour market transitions to low carbon and climate-resilient economies, if their rights are protected. Social dialogue between governments, workers' and employers' organizations can help to ensure access to decent work in the low carbon sector, support the training and reskilling of young migrants, and facilitate safe mobility.

- Complex migration challenges can weaken advancement on the SDGs and require urgent responses, including for protracted disaster displacement, which when left unaddressed, exacerbate situations of marginalization, inequality, fragility, vulnerability and erodes people's resilience. This poses a serious impediment to all pillars of sustainable development both for migrants and host communities.
- National plans, and voluntary national reviews are an excellent opportunity for countries to report on and address issues that are not fully captured in the SDGs, but which are nonetheless crucial to safe, orderly and regular migration, such as migration and displacement in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.

3. Leverage migration and climate funds for the full achievement of the SDGs.

Relevant for: **THEMATIC SESSION - Investing in the SDGs**, Monday, 12 July 2021, 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM

- Addressing migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation by achieving the SDGs in line with the GCM, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework, also means making additional and accountable support available, targeted at reducing poverty and ameliorating situations of vulnerability.
- The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) is a key instrument to implement the GCM. The Fund currently supports a diverse portfolio of joint programmes around the globe, one of which is addressing migration and climate change in East Africa. This programme is helping facilitate pathways for regular migration in the IGAD region and minimize displacement risk for people compelled to move in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters.
- The Migration MPTF has a strong potential to expand its support and answer to the already high demand from Member States. A concerted effort is needed to expand its resource mobilization efforts to respond to current and future mobility scenarios in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation and to address adverse impacts of climate change.
- Countries may request technical guidance on the use of climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), or the Adaptation Fund, for addressing migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation as a contribution to achieving the SDGs.
- It is key that all projects seeking the support of the migration and climate change funds are aligned with the GCM guiding principles. In particular, to ensure that they leave no-one behind and contribute effectively to achieving the SDGs, the projects should integrate human rights and be people-centered, gender-responsive and child-sensitive.
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About the United Nations Network on Migration Workstream on Migration in the Context of Disasters, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

These messages have been developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the co-leads of the United Nations Network on Migration (Network) Thematic Priority 4 on *Migration in the Context of Disasters, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation*, together with the Executive Committee and the Network secretariat.

The strategic goal of Thematic Priority 4 of the Network is to ensure that the climate discourse fully embraces the migration dimension and vice-versa, including that outcomes at COP26 and the IMRF comprise concrete, actionable recommendations in this regard.

The UN system is strengthening its approach on and support to States on migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation. The pillars of work under the UN Migration Network's new thematic priority on this topic focus on knowledge sharing, dialogue and joint advocacy.

DOCUMENTS TO CONSULT

[Accelerating integrated action on sustainable development: migration, the environment and climate change](#) - International Dialogue on Migration 25-27 May 2021, Summary of Conclusions.

[Leveraging migration to recover better from COVID-19 and achieve the 2030 Agenda](#) - IOM submission to the HLPF 2021.

[Migration, Environment and Climate Change in the Sustainable Development Goals](#), IOM Environmental Migration Portal 2021.

[Analytical study on the rights of older persons in the context of climate change](#), OHCHR 2021

[Futures at Risk: Protecting the Rights of Children on the Move in a Changing Climate](#), UNICEF UK, 2021.

[Climate Change, Environmental Migration and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), IOM Environmental Migration Portal 2020.

[Key Messages on human rights, climate change and migration](#), OHCHR 2020.

[Recommendations from the report of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts on integrated approaches to averting, minimizing and addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change](#), UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement 2018.

[Study on the slow-onset effects of climate change and the human rights protection of cross-border migrants](#), OHCHR and the Platform for Disaster Displacement (Human Rights Council A/HRC/37/CRP.4) 2018.

[Labour Mobility in Pacific Island Countries](#), ILO, 2019

[Migration and the 2030 Agenda – A Guide for Practitioners](#), IOM 2018.

[Climate change, displacement and labour migration](#), ILO 2018

[Migration in the 2030 Agenda](#), IOM 2017.

[Follow-up and Review of Migration in the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) - International Dialogue on Migration 28 February - 1 March and 11-12 October 2016.

[Joint Programme Addressing drivers and facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration in the contexts of disasters and climate change in the IGAD region](#) supported by the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund.