

To mark International Migrants Day, the United Nations Regional Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific calls for more effective efforts in addressing the nexus between climate change and migration and in preventing and resolving cases of missing migrants.

Disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation are increasingly driving migration and displacement in all regions of the world. The Asia-Pacific region has been, and will continue to be, significantly affected by climate-related disasters. It is already the region most impacted by disaster displacement, accounting for over three-quarters of the global total between 2010 and 2021. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted due to restriction of mobilities, lack of information and poor preparedness, leading to greater loss of life, exploitation and gender-based violence, in addition to impact on their economic livelihoods<sup>1</sup>.

But this is only part of the picture. Human mobility in the context of climate change takes many forms, from disaster displacement and labour migration to planned relocation. These movements can be temporary, as is the case of seasonal and circular migration, or permanent, such as through planned relocation, and involve an individual, a household or a whole community.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that for many people, deciding to move can be a positive adaptation strategy. Indeed, many households across Asia and the Pacific already choose migration as a strategy to diversify their livelihood options by providing access to new education and employment opportunities and markets, enabling people to send remittances and facilitating the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Whatever the outcomes may be, we know that as the manifestations of climate change intensify – with increasing incidence of storms, floods, drought, and rising sea-levels across the planet – we can expect more people to be on the move in the future, in some cases, repeatedly.

This is why it is now critically important that governments recognize that human mobility in the context of climate change needs to be translated into adequate policies, finance, and actions. The Pacific region has shown notable leadership in this area, with governments raising awareness of climate mobility on the global stage.

Apart from climate-induced disasters, many other factors such as armed conflicts, war and violence also force people to move, often underprepared, causing migrants to go missing or die each year along migration routes in Asia. As of February 2022, reported deaths and disappearances in Asia – Pacific countries amounted to 810 individuals, or around 14 per cent of the global figures, with many more unrecorded. Beyond these numbers are countless families – mothers, fathers, spouses, children, siblings – suffering ambiguous loss and endlessly searching for answers. No one should have to suffer the pain of not knowing if their loved ones are alive. The issue of missing migrants has become a major humanitarian and human rights challenge.

Unfortunately, this challenge remains under-addressed. There are no specialized institutional responses to missing migrant cases, and existing official frameworks and mechanisms to search for missing persons in national contexts are not adapted to address the dynamics pertaining to irregular migratory journeys.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/gender-and-climate-change-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

In the face of climate-induced migration and missing migrants, the two major issues of real significance to our Asia-Pacific region, we must take meaningful actions to address them.

The Regional Network encourages States and all stakeholders to address climate-induced migration by:

- strengthening support to countries and people affected, especially Pacific small island developing states, including through investing in early warning systems and preparedness, and addressing the impacts of both economic and non-economic loss and damage, including for migrants
- strengthening people's climate resilience by helping diversify their livelihoods and providing training to enhance their ability to adapt
- ensuring availability of and access to basic services, including sexual and reproductive health care, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities during disasters and displacement
- ensuring that human and labour rights are at the heart of climate-related migration policies and programmes

The Regional Network urges States to give priority to resolving the cases of missing migrants and take actions to prevent more loss of lives and uphold their commitment to work towards promoting safe migration under both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) by:

- addressing the drivers for forced migration such as war, violence and disasters that compel people to move underprepared
- making safe and regular migratory routes more accessible to all to prevent migrants from relying on smugglers and resorting to perilous routes
- conducting awareness-raising campaigns to make migrants know about the dangers and risks of unsafe and irregular routes, as interviewed survivors often confess that it was when they were on the journey that they realized how bad it really was
- setting up transnational mechanisms for search and rescue of missing migrants including exchange of information, cooperation with civil societies and mutual notification
- putting families of missing migrants at the core by
  - providing avenues through which families can register cases of missing persons and obtain information on search efforts, while respecting the right to privacy and protecting personal data
  - conduct cross-border cooperation to help families exercise their rights and access services and other support to meet their specific needs
- investing more to collect and make disaggregated data on risks and fatalities along migratory routes, so that policymakers will have information they need to implement evidence-based migration policies and programmes

The Regional Network stands ready to build on the strong momentum of the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Regional Review of GCM Implementation and the International Migration Review Forum and work with all stakeholders to provide coordinated responses to current and future migration in the context of disasters, the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation, and mobilize efforts to save lives and prevent migrants from going missing.