IOM’S ENGAGEMENT IN

MIGRATION ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
Migration, environment and climate change: Our vision

The International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) vision on migration, environment and climate change is that contemporary migration governance, policy and practice must reflect the significance of environmental, disaster and climate change factors on human mobility. Environmental factors must be integrated across all areas of migration management, such as: prevention, preparedness and response to displacement, border management, labour migration and integration, and return and reintegration.

As the leading intergovernmental agency working on migration, IOM recognizes the necessity to step up national, regional and international efforts to address human mobility challenges associated with environmental factors and climate change.

IOM has been engaging in research, policy and advocacy efforts, and operational activities in the area of migration, environment and climate change since the 1990s, seeking to bring environmental migration to the heart of international, regional and national concerns in collaboration with its Member States, observers and partners.

Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division

Since 2007, Member States have requested IOM to report on its work on migration, environment and climate change within its governing bodies, including at its Council, the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finances and the International Dialogue on Migration. In 2014, Member States requested IOM to scale up action on migration, environment and climate change, which led to the establishment of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division in 2015. This institutional change formalized IOM’s engagement in this thematic area, making IOM the first international organization to have established an institutional unit fully devoted to this topic.

What are IOM’s objectives in managing environmental migration?

(a) To prevent forced migration that results from environmental factors to the extent possible;
(b) To provide assistance and protection to affected populations when forced migration does occur, and to seek durable solutions to their situation;
(c) To facilitate migration as a climate change adaptation strategy and enhance the resilience of affected communities.

Sustainable development is recognized as an integral part of this approach, implemented through disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability measures.

Decoding the nexus: Understanding environmental migration

- Environmental factors have always been a cause of migration.
- It is often difficult to isolate the environmental and climatic factors from social and economic factors, but increasing number of studies show that environmental challenges are clearly a factor that impact the decision to move or to stay.
- The movement of people is and will continue to be affected by natural disasters and environmental degradation. Climate change is expected to have major impacts on human mobility.
- Environmental migration may take many complex forms: forced and voluntary, temporary and permanent, internal and international.

---

1 For more information, please refer to the IOM Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (IOM, 2014).
The concept of “vulnerability” needs to be put at the centre of current and future responses to environmental migration. The most vulnerable may be those who are unable to or do not move (trapped populations).

Environmental migration should not be understood as a wholly negative or positive outcome – migration can amplify existing vulnerabilities and can also allow people to build resilience. For example, temporary migration and remittances can open up alternative sources of income and reduce reliance on the environment for subsistence.

Operational activities on migration, environment and climate change

Since 1998, more than 1,000 projects have been funded and implemented worldwide to respond to and address environmental migration and disaster displacement, demonstrating that creative solutions exist for communities affected by disasters, environmental degradation and climate change, and that migration does not have to be a “last resort” solution but can also be a positive driver for change.

Below are some examples of IOM’s ongoing efforts to address environmental migration.

IOM’s engagement in policy processes

Recognizing that migration is a multi-causal reality, over the past 10 years, IOM has devoted its policy work in the area of migration, environment and climate change to bringing human mobility into other key policy processes, promoting coherence across key thematic policy areas. The Organization has directly contributed to international policy processes through evidence building, advocacy, as well as technical expertise and communication campaigns.

At the international policy level, IOM has been actively advocating for the recognition of the migration, environment and climate change nexus in key global policy processes, such as the preparatory process for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Forum on
Migration and Development; and has also been supporting regional dialogue on these issues as part of the Regional Consultative Processes on Migration.

Finally, IOM supports State-led efforts to develop specific solutions to address these complex challenges, in particular the work of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative.  

Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (GCM)

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016 during the Seventy-first session of the General Assembly, clearly acknowledged the importance of environmental and climate change factors as drivers of human mobility.

The process towards a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration represents a historical opportunity for the international community to advance on global migration governance and management.

It also offers an important opportunity to anchor environmental and climate change concerns in the international migration governance agenda, as an important root cause of migration that needs to be recognized and addressed.

IOM advocates for action minimizing forced forms of migration due to climate change and environmental degradation, and for policies that recognize migrants and diasporas as positive actors of climate change mitigation and adaptation action and as contributors to sustainable development efforts.

IOM provides support to States in the process leading to the GCM by:

- Providing evidence, data and examples of good practices and lessons learned from the field to inform policymaking;
- Supporting national consultations and intergovernmental dialogue at global and regional levels and promoting coherence across policy domains.

IOM’s overall role in the GCM is defined in the “Resolution for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration” as jointly servicing the negotiations and providing technical and policy expertise and supporting the Secretary-General.

UNFCCC and the Task Force on Displacement

The UNFCCC first recognized the growing importance of human mobility with the adoption of the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework (Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 14(f)) and the 2012 Doha Decision on Loss and Damage (Decision 3/CP.18, paragraph 7 (a) (vi)).

With the 2015 Conference of Parties in Paris (COP21), climate migrants finally moved from invisibility into the spotlight. The Paris Agreement represents an unprecedented breakthrough for action on migration and climate with the formal inclusion of references to migrants in the Agreement’s Preamble and in Paragraph 50 of the COP21 Decision referring to Loss and Damage and “integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change”.

From 2012, IOM joined forces with other likeminded intergovernmental and civil society stakeholders in the informal “Advisory Group on Human Mobility and Climate Change” to provide technical advice to negotiators, and the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, and promoting the inclusion of the topic in the negotiations during the Conferences of the Parties (COP).

Over the years, the Organization has made over 40 official submissions to the UNFCCC, has organized and contributed to side events and press conferences every year since 2008, and has supported each COP presidency with technical inputs, notably accompanying the Moroccan Presidency of the COP22 in the implementation of mobility-related commitments made under the Paris Agreement, and supporting the Fijian Presidency of the COP23 in advancing climate action solutions related to human mobility.
IOM has also played an active role in supporting the Executive Committee (Excom) of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM). In 2016, IOM and the WIM Excom organized a Technical Meeting on Migration, Displacement and Human Mobility in Casablanca, which brought together experts from governmental institutions, specialized agencies and the academia to provide recommendations in support of the implementation of the workplan of the Excom.

In 2017, IOM joined the Task Force on Displacement established under decision 1/CP.21, and is leading on several activities under the 2017–2018 work plan of the Task Force in areas related to national, regional and international policy and practice, as well as research.

Supporting the implementation of the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda and the Platform on Disaster Displacement

IOM provided active support to the Nansen Initiative from 2012 to 2015 and welcomed the endorsement in 2015 of the Nansen Initiative Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change.

In 2016, Germany and Bangladesh established the State-led PDD to follow up on the work of the Nansen Initiative and implement the recommendations of the Protection Agenda.

Under an arrangement funded by the Federal Government of Germany, IOM is a standing invitee on the Platform’s Steering Group, a close partner of the Platform’s Coordination Unit and a member of its Advisory Committee. IOM also provides key support for the implementation of the Platform’s 2016–2019 Workplan, which seeks to address the protection needs of persons displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change.

Activities under the Workplan are directly in line with IOM’s long-standing vision and action on migration and displacement in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change. Since the platform’s launch in July 2016, IOM has provided expertise for a wide range of activities under its four strategic priorities, including addressing knowledge and data gaps, supporting governmental capacity-building, developing practical tools and solutions to address disaster displacement, promoting the mainstreaming of disaster displacement in key global and regional policy dialogues, and supporting policy development.³

Building capacities to address environmental migration

IOM’s capacity-building programme on migration, environment and climate change focuses on enhancing the understanding of the complex issue of managing migration in the context of climate and environmental change; and linking the many policy areas that are relevant in addressing environmental migration, including migration, climate change adaptation, environment, development, security and disaster risk reduction.

The objectives of the capacity-building programme are as follows:

(a) Build capacity of policymakers and practitioners in order to factor migration into environmental and development policies, climate change adaptation strategies, and to take into account environmental change in comprehensive migration management policies at the national level; and

(b) Facilitate policy exchange among policymakers and practitioners on migration, environment and climate change.

IOM has been organizing regional and national training workshops since 2013 in response to the needs and requests of Member States. To date, IOM has built capacity of over 400 policymakers from 50 countries, through 13 national and 5 regional workshops.

³ For more information about IOM’s activities in support of the PDD, please see http://environmentalmigration.iom.int/platform-disaster-displacement
To respond to the increasing urgency to address human mobility and climate change, IOM has published a standardized Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Training Manual (Facilitator’s Guide) in 2016. This participatory training tool is available in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Azerbaijani to respond to the global demand and allow to build capacities of States.

The MECC capacity-building programme is in line with the overall IOM’s goal to support the integration of human mobility issues within climate change and environmental policies, and, vice versa, the inclusion of climate and environmental concerns within migration processes. The programme is also in line with paragraph 14(f) of the Cancun Adaptation Framework, which first brought the notion of human mobility to international climate negotiations, the Paris Agreement and COP21 Decision, and the Marrakesh Accords on Capacity Building in developing countries (Decision 2/CP.7).

Ensuring environmental sustainability

IOM recognizes that a healthy environment is intrinsically linked to the well-being and resilience of migrants and host communities. In 2017, IOM launched its institutional programme of work on environmental sustainability. It made an institutional commitment to improve the sustainability of its operations at the strategic, programmatic and facility levels, focusing on three key areas: (a) greenhouse gas emissions; (b) water and (c) waste management. By the end of 2018, IOM will have developed an internal environmental policy; a related environmental management system will be designed by 2023.

After joining the United Nations Environment Management Group in 2017 and in order to adhere to United Nations’ sustainability standards, IOM carried out an organization-wide mapping exercise that identified over 100 IOM projects with an environmentally sustainable component implemented since 2012. It also piloted the first greenhouse gas inventory in line with international standards (ISO 14001) at Headquarters, in one Regional and one Country Office. Besides looking at its own facilities and operations, IOM has been contributing to policy-level discussions to highlight the significance of environmentally sustainable practices in migration management governance.

Strengthening data and evidence to support policy development

IOM has been conducting research in the area of migration, environment and climate change since the early 1990s to support the development of evidence-based policy and practice.

Over the years, IOM has devoted efforts to improving the understanding of key issues around the migration, environment and climate change nexus through a number of regional and global studies, and has contributed to strengthening the evidence base on migration, environment and climate change in many countries through national studies, migration profiles and operational data collection in the field.

Since 1992, IOM has published more than 130 publications on migration, environment and climate change, including flagship publications, reports, thematic papers and infosheets – exploring the links to such issues as land degradation, oceanic change, heat, human trafficking – MECC Policy Brief Series, articles in external books and journals and others.

Flagship publications

Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Assessing the Evidence
2009/448 pages
English
USD 78

IOM Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change
2014/144 pages
ISBN 978-92-9068-703-0
English

The Atlas of Environmental Migration
2017/172 pages
English
The Environmental Migration Portal is an online knowledge sharing platform on migration, environment and climate change.

The Portal seeks to fill the existing data, research and knowledge gaps on the migration-environment nexus, and provides up-to-date information on IOM’s activities, as well as external key events, new publications, and more.

Visit the Environmental Migration Portal at: www.environmentalmigration.iom.int

Follow us on Twitter: @IOM_MECC
For more information on IOM’s activities in the area of migration, environment and climate change, please visit the Environmental Migration Portal www.environmentalmigration.iom.int or contact:

**Dina Ionesco**  
Head of Division – Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division (IOM Geneva)  
E-mail: dionesco@iom.int  
Tel. +41 22 717 9481

MECC Division  
E-mail: mecchq@iom.int