

Policy and Institutional Mechanisms to Address the Needs of Climate-Related Migrants

Results of the 2010 Summer Academy on Social Vulnerability

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Policy and Institutional Mechanisms to Address the Needs of Climate-Related Migrants

The ideas in this Research Brief are the result of the 2010 Summer Academy on Social Vulnerability organized by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and the Munich Re Foundation (MRF) from 25 to 31 July in Hohenkammer, Germany. The Academy brought together 20 PhD researchers from 13 countries with international scholars to consider issues of climate-related migration and future policy needs. The findings were derived from focused workshops and from the results of four Roundtable sessions convened with experts from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the European Commission, and the Council of Europe. The sessions explored a myriad of issues on human displacement and migration related to climate variability and disaster, with a particular focus on the gaps in current legal and institutional frameworks to protect vulnerable populations. The Summer Academy prepared a synthesis of these meetings in a separate report that can be accessed via the UNU-EHS website: <http://www.ehs.unu.edu/> and MRF website: <http://www.munichre-foundation.org/StiftungsWebsite/default.htm>. This paper presents a summary of the Academy's findings including its reflections on policy options.

Key Issues for Governments and Humanitarian Organizations in Addressing Climate-Related Migration

Climate change due to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions is expected to affect human migration and displacement in the near- and longer-term.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other scientific bodies have modeled a number of future scenarios predicting changes in weather patterns, ocean currents, and more recently ecosystems. Researchers predict that as average temperatures increase, rainfall will become more variable, natural hazards will grow in intensity and frequency, ice-sheets will melt more rapidly, and sea levels will rise. The timing of new climate disasters is quite speculative. Estimates suggest, however, that many biophysical changes may occur in the next three to four decades, just when the population of the planet will increase by 50 per cent (towards its expected leveling of nine billion). By 2050, the number of people inhabiting over-stressed river catchments, important to agriculture and human livelihood, will likely increase by three to five times the current level, reaching between four and seven billion. Adverse impacts on human survival are due to occur even sooner in Africa. In just 10 years, by 2020, 75 to 250 million people in the region are expected to be living in areas suffering increased water stress due to climate change. Food security could become a much more serious challenge. Some countries, especially those with an expected significant population increase, are likely to lose between 30 and 60 per cent of their agricultural production.

The majority of experts agree that the poor in developing countries are the most vulnerable to these climatic-related impacts. The deepening of problems in water scarcity, food insecurity, spread of disease, job loss and human displacement can increase their vulnerability to disasters and lead to migration. Those dependent on subsistence agriculture are at greatest risk of livelihood loss from slower-onset disasters, such as drought and desertification, and more immediately from

potential rapid-onset hazards leading to disasters. Rapid-onset hazards, such as storm surges, floods and hurricanes, may also cause the destruction of homes and infrastructure, displacing populations and leading to additional humanitarian crises. Even before the worst impacts of disasters occur, people may migrate in anticipation of livelihood loss. Rigorous studies in this area are still limited and in an early stage, making it difficult to disaggregate pure environmental factors from other socio-economic factors that drive migration.

Nonetheless, research suggests that some people are already engaging in migration as a coping strategy and response to climate shocks, such as prolonged drought.

The potential for increased migration and human displacement presents key challenges for governments, for those with growing internal population movements as well as those that will become source and destination countries where migrants cross borders. People forced to move as a result of climate change impacts may encounter discrimination or other abuse in the areas in which they settle, could be viewed as criminals if they do not have the appropriate documentation before entering or working in a country, or may engender local conflict.

The movement of a greater number of people may also create additional stress on the natural resources of other communities or on urban infrastructure.

While the needs of those affected by climate change and the level of protection and assistance required in any disaster is context-specific, few national or international standards have been adopted to protect current or future climate-related migrants. There is both a lack of standards and financial resources to assist governments in managing current and additional migration flows due to increasing climate variability and climate-related disasters.

Among decision makers in the international community, including those within the climate change debate, there has been little evaluation of the most appropriate migration management or governance strategies that could serve as models to help countries better prepare for and/or adapt to migration impacts. Where countries already face humanitarian and human rights challenges, the use of governance approaches that can more humanely and effectively address the needs of persons displaced or who migrate due to climate events is critical. To better plan for adaptation programmes and assist the short and long-term needs of those affected, government strategies will need to identify and incorporate best practice and international standards related to migration management.

As a foundation for moving forward, governments and aid agencies should conceptualize the adaptation needs of affected communities through a lens of potential migration impacts. For example, governance strategies and programmatic planning should better recognize and seek to understand how migration is used

by communities as a coping strategy for current or anticipated climate impacts. This poses a significant challenge as the reasons for migration are often complex and difficult to disaggregate. They are influenced by the interaction of human social organization and economics, as these are impacted by ecosystem change. These interactions can be affected further by government stability and its provision of welfare and justice at all levels of human society – the household, local, national, regional, and international levels. Thus, a further challenge in managing the additional burdens of human migration or displacement is the adoption of policies that enhance stability and social justice. These may be necessary to build community resilience to climate impacts and prevent forced displacement or migration crises. In some cases, government support for anticipatory migration or resettlement may be appropriate, but more dialogue and research is needed in this area.

The policy reflections discussed below relate to ways of better managing internal and international migration. They presuppose that governments with populations that are vulnerable to displacement and migration may need support in terms of technical or financial assistance to overcome these challenges. These findings suggest that there is a critical need to facilitate and support multilateral dialogue on these issues to provide better guidance to governments in adaptation planning.

Managing Internal Migration Flows Related to Climate Change

Governments may need to address an increase in the incidence of internal population displacement or migration from natural disasters. Communities that are vulnerable to intensifying climate variability may, over time, increasingly seek to cope with weather-related threats by engaging in temporary (seasonal) movement or by permanently relocating. In some cases, governments may seek to resettle threatened populations. Past experience in pre-disaster and post-disaster management demonstrates that governments face enormous challenges in identifying and adopting successful strategies for regulating these types of population movements and in undertaking resettlement before or after disasters occur. In part, this is due to a lack of standards, institutional planning and cohesion, and financial resources.

Many existing institutional structures in developing countries do not have the capacity to handle the impact of human displacement or to help communities build resilience.

Communities themselves may lack the social capital necessary to improve their resilience or ability to recover. A series of slow-onset disasters in consecutive growing seasons caused by prolonged drought, for example, can deplete social capital of a farming community as significantly as a rapid flood or hurricane. This may, in turn, create significant vulnerability to the next disaster, and make migration a more feasible survival strategy.

Disaster planning has not consistently or significantly included a deeper understanding of the socio-economic factors that either contribute to building or weakening the resilience of communities. In some cases, resettlement schemes

related to infrastructural development and disaster relief have resulted in further impoverishment for those affected. Too, disaster relief has tended to be short-term, leaving inadequate time for some communities to fully build resilience to future disaster. Corruption in some areas has hampered agency and community planning processes.

Disaster risk reduction and adaptation planning is likely to be more successful if it incorporates information on community vulnerability to migration, the local cultural context and scientific knowledge, and more effective local participation. Each community may be different in terms of whether it is adversely affected by migration or is receiving benefits, whether existing migrant remittances are helping to build resilience or fracturing community ties. Government institutions that plan for and respond to disasters should have the capacity to assess this information and incorporate the data into early warning systems that can facilitate their work with communities on disaster preparedness and planning. Many institutions need additional structural support to ensure that at each level the local, state, and national government agencies coordinate their work. The success of institutional planning and response may also depend upon increasing the level of long-term disaster assistance to particularly vulnerable countries. To better assist governments and communities to integrate internal migration in adaptation planning, participating experts identified and discussed the following policies and institutional tools:

- **Adopt sociocultural and environmental impact indicators that incorporate migration data and trends.** Tools currently exist to build indicators on vulnerability. These indicators can help to identify communities most vulnerable to disaster impact displacement and migration due to extreme climate events, and to help identify appropriate resettlement options if necessary in consultation with communities of origin and those of the potential destination community. Indicators will be most successful if they consider how vulnerabilities may vary across communities particularly in regard to gender and sociological factors.
- **Incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) into national law.** Domestic law should clarify how the standards apply to persons affected by both rapid-onset and slow-onset disasters, such as drought and desertification. At present, there is some speculation as to how the IDP principles affect voluntary, drought-related population movements.
- **Reorient work of institutions on disaster preparedness and response to include potential climate-related migration factors.** Agencies engaged in disaster risk and adaptation planning should reevaluate their current programmes to identify capacity gaps in both slow-onset and rapid-onset disasters. Planning should be reoriented to include climate-related displacement and migration. Improved coordination in this area can strengthen synergies in reducing risk and responding to impacts.
- **Professionalize resettlement personnel.** Professional and standardized training programmes should be adopted for disaster response and resettlement personnel. These should be based upon international best practices. Adaptation and other funding for disaster preparedness should be provided to governments in need of assistance to support such programmes.

- **Establish a responsible agency or institution with lead authority to coordinate migration and resettlement in response to disaster.** This agency should coordinate with other adaptation planning and disaster prevention agencies on incorporating migration data into planning efforts.
- **Build national research and data collection capacity to support long-term development of information on community migration and displacement trends.** Scientific research and data collection on migration as a coping response to climate variability has not been collected consistently, accurately, or on a scale over time that could be most relevant to national level planning. This information can significantly enhance official planning and response efforts. Collecting accurate data is often resource and time intensive, and therefore should be built into long-term adaptation planning programmes with durable financial support.

Managing International Migration Flows Related to Climate Change

Although the majority of population movements related to climate change are likely to be internal, it is believed that some portion will also cross neighbouring borders, or add to the growing number of migrants already moving longer distances, such as from regions in northern Africa to Europe. At present, there are limited opportunities for legal or regularized international migration, particularly for those without professional skills who are living in climate-vulnerable communities. There are also significant gaps in the immigration law and policies of receiving countries related to the protection of people displaced by environmental disasters. Few countries have established immigration protection for those affected and, even where they exist, it is unclear what type of climate disasters these protections would cover. These gaps can exacerbate the humanitarian crises and level of human suffering. This has become particularly acute as climate variability contributes to more prolonged droughts in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, and intensifies storms and floods in others, such as Asia and the Pacific where people have been forced to move across borders temporarily.

To address these gaps, governments will need to consider additional migration management policies and strategies that relate to both climate adaptation and protection of migrants. At the regional level, it will be beneficial for governments to coordinate policies on both natural resource protection and climate-related migration, particularly where a region shares natural resources and ecosystems upon which communities depend for their livelihood, and where seasonal migration is already being used in part as a coping strategy for climate variability.

Governments might consider the following policy options and institutional tools to address the needs of international climate-related human mobility:

- **Develop adaptation strategies on a regional level that include cross-border resource management and the recognition of migration as a potential part of adaptation.** It should be recognized that migration is not always a failure of adaptation but in some circumstances may be necessary and beneficial in assisting affected populations. Land formation, land use, and other biophysical features that span borders may be determinative of adaptation needs, and collaborative management may be an effective measure to address climate change impacts. Successful resource management is often influenced by cross-border

social, cultural, and economic linkages. Seasonal migration may already be playing a role in affecting the natural resource base and resilience of communities to withstand future climate shocks. This should be considered in the development of cooperative adaptation strategies. Ensuring the institutional support and financing for such regional cooperation is a critical challenge. Global adaptation funding should therefore incentivize cooperation among neighboring countries. International adaptation financing should be allocated to regions (such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Pacific) for joint regional projects.

- **Provide opportunities to the most vulnerable climate-affected communities for migration within a broader co-development scheme.** Where appropriate and feasible, states should consider adopting circular labour migration schemes that incorporate programmes on development and the investment of remittances in communities vulnerable to climate disasters. These programmes could offer community members the opportunity to work in another country and to learn skills that can help to build resilience within their community upon their return home. This scheme should build upon and scale-up existing labour-migration models to cover a larger segment of vulnerable populations. A useful model might be the Colombian Temporary and Circular Labour Migration Scheme (TCLM). Under this programme, Colombians facing recurring natural disasters are offered employment opportunities, business training, and education in Spain, and can send remittances home while their community recuperates. The scheme includes a co-development component in which people who do not migrate are given social and financial support. Essentially, this is a co-development scheme which views migrants as agents for development.
- **Establish a Temporary Relocation Scheme (TRS) for climate-displaced migrants where some migration or displacement across borders will be inevitable.** The TRS mechanism could allow individuals to apply for temporary status while still in their home country if they are displaced by certain extreme rapid- and/or slow-onset climate disasters (e.g., high-impact storms and prolonged droughts), and have no opportunity to relocate elsewhere in their country. States could consider establishing an open-ended scheme or one based on quota for such disaster victims, and should include an appropriate framework for duration, employment, and assistance. This mechanism could also serve to reduce irregular migration by providing temporary legal avenues for those most critically affected. It can also be an important mechanism to assist countries with potential mass displacement across borders from unanticipated natural calamities.
- **Establish Migration and Displacement Vulnerability Assessments (MDVA) within the national adaptation planning process.** MDVAs could assist governments in identifying the role of migration as a positive or negative influence on adaptation, and could be developed with the assistance of international agencies, such as the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which already monitors potential humanitarian situations. Vulnerability assessments can include a number of criteria such as, environmental

stressors, income patterns, and livelihood base that are important for effective government planning and migration management.

- **Extend the stay of deportation for migrants or provide Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to migrants living in a host country but who cannot return to their home country.** Countries should clarify national law to ensure that a stay of deportation is possible for those who cannot safely return to their home country and where no internal flight alternative is possible, or survival is threatened upon return due to their vulnerability. In this context, the extended stay of deportation would be consistent with international law, granting limited rights and legal status where return would jeopardize a person's survival. Supporting evidence of the nature of disaster could be provided through review of national MDVA, referred to above. A certification process could be established to verify disaster threats and ensure that receiving countries have access to such information in determining legal status.
- **Consider the establishment of a new legal status akin to asylum under refugee law for those fleeing long-term, life-threatening environmental disasters.** This would ensure broader and more equal treatment of affected victims and burden-sharing among the source and destination states affected by climate change and population displacement. It underscores the global community's recognition that the impact of human rights and humanitarian concerns imposed by climate disasters fall on the poorest countries of the world, and that states contributing to climate change share responsibility for assisting impacted communities. It further recognizes that in some cases a compelling public interest exists to provide a legal framework of protection for persons who are forced to move temporarily or permanently. Similar to asylum criteria, the status could be granted on the basis that the person has fled – or cannot be returned to – his or her place of origin due to an environmental disaster related to climate change. This legal status may be necessary to assist persons threatened by permanent climate disaster such as those needing relocation from sinking islands.

Priority Areas for Policy Dialogue

The implementation of appropriate migration policies and institutional options, as with other areas of climate adaptation, present a number of challenges for governments and humanitarian agencies. States would benefit from fostering further dialogue among international experts and with affected communities, particularly to document and exchange standards and tools of best practice. Given the understanding among most experts that migration related to climate variability is context-specific (climate shocks may drive migration in some households and communities, while in others it would not), further research into vulnerability, appropriate impact assessments, and fostering inter-ministerial agency collaboration will be important in improving future policy development in this arena.

Within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), governments recognize the importance of addressing the impacts of migration and displacement related to climate change.

The UNFCCC process presents an opportunity for governments to facilitate beneficial dialogue and guidance for governments on these issues beyond the Cancun meeting. Governments should provide support to a process of dialogue among states, humanitarian agencies, and NGOs, with a view toward building the capacity of governments to better integrate migration and displacement into national and regional programmes on adaptation.

The following areas for future dialogue are viewed as priorities by participating experts of the 2010 Summer Academy:

- How can governments best incorporate migration management and displacement standards into adaptation programmes and planning at the national and regional level? The main question concerns guidance on best practices in migration management and alternatives for managing environmental stressors with a mix of human mobility, livelihood options, and social capital.
- How can governments best support more in-depth qualitative and quantitative research, the collection of necessary demographic, socio-economic and environmental data on different patterns and scenarios of climate change, migration, and displacement?
- How can national lead agencies for adaptation, humanitarian and emergency response planning institutions best collect, document and exchange information with affected communities on local practices, migration experiences, and future projects?
- How can the diaspora communities best be involved as effective partners in addressing climate change adaptation planning processes? How can effective disaster risk reduction and conflict mediation policies be implemented to reduce the likelihood of emergency movements with accompanying humanitarian consequences?

Final Remarks

Paragraph 14(f) of the UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework was a milestone in policy discussions on climate change and its impacts on human migration and displacement. Paragraph 14(f) reads as follows:

14. Invites all Parties to enhance action on adaptation under the Cancun Adaptation Framework, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, by undertaking, inter alia, the following:

....

(f) Measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels;

....

It has increased recognition of the importance of climate-related migration issues by governments. However, policy gaps and challenges remain in coping with internal and international climate-related migrants as identified by attendees of the 2010 Summer Academy. The findings presented in this document are considered as a first step in exploring policy options to close these gaps and to provide the affected populations with better protection.

The main messages of this Research Brief point towards proactive policy discussion about current and expected impacts of climate change on society, and ways to adjust current institutional management of migration and displacement to manage some of these changes.

This can be enhanced by integrating migration and displacement vulnerability assessments within the national adaptation planning process. Furthermore, governments could take into consideration compiling a compendium of socio-cultural and environmental impact indicators that incorporate migration data and trends to support long-term development of information on community migration and displacement flows.

In cases where migration occurs, meeting the needs of the internal migrants should be strengthened by applying existing guidelines such as the Guiding Principles on IDPs. These principles could be translated into national law which provides standards both applying to persons affected by both rapid-onset and slow-onset disasters.

On an international scale where climate-related migrants have to cross national borders, developing adaptation strategies on a regional level could contribute to better cross-border resource management. Providing opportunities to the most vulnerable climate-affected communities for migration within a broader co-development scheme would have co-benefit for adaptation. In the mean time, some states are beginning to recognize migration as a potential part of adaptation.

Moving forward, research will continue responding to policy relevant questions about migration and displacement and the implications of climate change on resilience and vulnerability of populations of concern. With the inclusion of climate-induced displacement, migration, and planned relocation in the Cancun Adaptation Framework, many new windows of opportunity have opened for work on the issue.

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The Munich Re Foundation (MRF) Chair on Social Vulnerability has been accommodated at UNU-EHS since 2005 to support and initiate policy relevant research on social vulnerability. This project has been extended to 2012 due to its success in the first project period between 2005 and 2009.

The chair consists of seven internationally renowned professors acting on a rotating basis for one academic year. They explore the cultural and economic dimensions of social vulnerability, including institutional and governance factors. The project has engaged over 120 top PhD candidates from around the world in the annual Summer Academy, and has created an active social vulnerability network among students, prestigious academic institutions and professors. A series of policy relevant publications dealing with social vulnerabilities from interdisciplinary perspectives has been generated by Summer Academy participants and the chair holders.

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