

The impact of climate crisis on the movement of populations

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POLICY PAPER





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POLICY PAPER

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CRISIS ON THE MOVEMENT OF POPULATIONS

1. Introduction

It is a fact that mankind is faced with an unprecedented situation of climate crisis, with short-term and long-term implications for all societies. Climate crisis affects mostly the more vulnerable people, with adverse effects on their daily living, as well as on their future prospects. Either through extreme weather events such as flooding, droughts and wildfires, or through global warming that brings on poorer crops and a higher production cost for farmers, climate change deepens the existing inequalities and exacerbates poverty. These inequalities are not new, despite the efforts to mitigate them; because their key causes, lying in the unequal distribution of global wealth and protection of the prerogatives of the more powerful to the detriment of the more vulnerable, are not being addressed effectively. One of the most serious effects of climate crisis is the movement of populations either in the interior of several countries (internally displaced populations) or between different countries, which takes up a new character and additional causes; this fact will become even more visible in the years to come. It is necessary to take immediate measures to limit global warming, and the richer countries need to assume their fair share, in the context of this essential effort.

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals of the same year have attempted to set concrete targets and make tools and ways of cooperation available to the states, in view of addressing immediately the global challenge. However, despite the commitments, already in 2019 the global average temperature rose by 1.1°C versus the pre-industrial levels, heading to a direction that was opposite to the outcome of the 2015 negotiations, when the need to stabilize warming at a level below 2°C had been jointly accepted.¹ Immediate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions has been set as a priority, but the implementation of measures related to this goal is a huge challenge, as it requires a total transformation of the current production and consumption model to the direction of climate neutrality.

It is good that the concept of climate justice has gained considerable ground and is used to substantiate the argument of the unequal burden borne by the less developed states in terms of effects and costs compared to the richer/ more powerful. Mechanisms and tools, such as the adoption of modern legislation on due diligence² and climate financing³ pursue the active commitment, enhanced accountability and assumption of responsibility by more powerful states.

1 [ActionAid - Climate Action Network – South Asia \(CANSA\) \(2020\). Climate Migrants Pushed to the Brink](#)

2 OECD (2019). Forum on Green Finance and Investment – Session Note - Enhancing Disclosure and Due diligence for Climate-related Risks, 29 October 2019, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/cgfi/forum/Disclosure-and-Due-diligence-for-Climate-related-Risks-background-session-note-CGFI-Forum-2019.pdf>

3 Further information on the Green Climate Fund available at: <https://www.greenclimate.fund/>



However, seeing the delay or even the inability to meet the targets agreed by the international community, and as time is running out, millions of people all over the world are forced to flee their homes to seek a safe refuge. In this context, various questions arise and seek an answer: 1) what will happen to climate migrants? 2) is social welfare ensured for people who will be displaced due to climate conditions? 3) what support is received by persons and communities with vulnerabilities to reduce the risks and hazards they will be faced with? 4) is access ensured to basic services and rights, such as education, food, housing and to general personal safety conditions in the places of destination? 5) do they -especially women- have access to good-quality health and hygiene services in the contingent climate conditions that are shaped? 6) are the affected communities supported to recover from the impact of the climate crisis?

This policy summary presents some of the key discussion points on climate migration, formulating at the same time policy recommendations towards fulfilling the commitments of the international community and the European Union.

2. Field data: estimations on climate migration worldwide

Based on the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the subject: «*Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*»,⁴ the planet is heading to a rise of global average temperature far beyond 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Events related to the climate crisis that pose serious risks for society, in particular health, food, water and human safety, are expected to deteriorate. According to the same report, climate change may amplify the movement of populations, both within and among countries. In parallel, the report warns that intensification of weather events and other similar events may lead to increased displacement, disrupted food chains, threatened livelihoods and exacerbated stresses for conflict. Mental health of affected populations is also a particularly serious issue, as they are expected to suffer stress and trauma caused by displacements and loss of daily normality and property. In numbers, studies that have been carried out estimate an increase of environmental/climate migrants in a range from 25 million up to eventually one billion if environmental degradation and other associated events are not addressed immediately.⁵

Areas of southeastern Asia such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh are typical case studies showing the link between climate crisis and migration.⁶ Despite the major differences in the national and geographical frameworks, people's experiences highlight that there are more similarities than differences on the issues related to the movement of populations due to climate change. The political situation in many of those countries makes it difficult to take the necessary measures for tackling the climate crisis. As a result, multiple

4 IPCC (2021). Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems, available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/11/SRCCL-Full-Report-Compiled-191128.pdf>

5 IDMC (2020). Global Report on Internal Displacement, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2020-IDMC-GRID.pdf>

6 ActionAid - Climate Action Network – South Asia (CANSA) (2020). [Climate Change Drives Migration in Conflict - Ridden Afghanistan](#).

reasons contribute to the forced displacement of populations, either within or between different countries. In parallel, the combination of these factors further increases the vulnerability of the populations under consideration and makes it necessary to elaborate a supportive framework and common international standards to safeguard the rights of climate migrants.

3. COVID -19 pandemic and climate migration

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, environmental crisis management, public health and migration have been intersecting areas, the common component being the strengthening of controls at the borders and in many cases their closing down. In practice, this meant that many people who were at risk because of the climate crisis and were seeking safe refuge ran into restrictions on the grounds of protection of public health, which were often hiding the effort to establish racist or xenophobic rhetoric and policies, aiming to exclude migrant or refugee populations. The complexity of the climate migration issue has not been displayed on the public sphere as much as it should, given, indeed, the urgent nature of the matter because of the ongoing environmental degradation. Eventually, the use of the term “crisis” to describe both the management of the pandemic and the migration or environmental issue, encountered the fatigue of the public and the real inability of several societies to handle concurrent crises requiring financial and human resources, as well as knowhow for their management. The characteristic of all these matters that differentiates them substantially from other respective individual situations of the past is their extent, as this time it concerns not just one country, but the entire world. As a result, the personal and the collective element intersected in a novel way, which involved a different way of understanding and managing the external environment.

4. Conclusions

Climate migration is expected to rise considerably in the next years, necessitating the adoption of comprehensive solutions on the international level and coordination among states, international organisations, as well as local societies, which was missing from the management of similar-range-and-importance matters in the past. The international community as a whole and the states must realise and agree that there cannot be any other response to climate crisis but climate justice, assumption of responsibility by the more powerful and substantive support of vulnerable groups on all levels. The goal is for them to be able to take back their lives and contribute to the building of resilient and inclusive societies that will be in a position to understand that local challenges have a potentially global character and solutions to them should be sought by and be the outcome of a joint effort.

5. Policy recommendations

Climate migration is a matter to be regulated on the national, regional and international level. In specific:

On the national level:

- States must adopt strategies to enhance the resilience of their local societies, considering the geographical particularities, human geography, their political and economic background, so that they can tackle the forthcoming crises.
- States must adopt policies and measures to ensure access to basic rights and social welfare for climate migrants.
- States must adopt policies and practices on the basis of equality, the principle of non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and take into account the gender dimension of the matters under consideration.
- States should adopt legislation on due diligence for the responsibility of large industries/corporations and put in place, as a result thereof, monitoring and control mechanisms.




On the regional level:

- Regional civil society bodies and organisations must work together to develop common policies and response to emergencies, in compliance with the international standards of human rights. Promoting knowledge and information through international networks is critical for the effective implementation of this recommendation.

On the international level:

- Developed states must support the developing states through the Green Climate Fund.
- Developed states should adopt swiftly more ambitious targets, in order to reduce global warming and move immediately in a just transition from the use of fossil fuels to other energy sources.
- States must seek enhanced resources πρέπει να αναζητούν ενισχυμένους πόρους for adaptation and response in cases of loss and damages through bilateral funding agreements, humanitarian aid and other available sources of financing.
- International organisations should support the states by providing the necessary know-how and respond effectively to the arising needs and facts.
- States and international organisations must update the institutional and legal framework for refugee and migrant populations, including climate migration as a matter requiring immediate regulation and ensuring, in parallel, unobstructed access of climate migrants/refugees to rights.
- States and international organisations must guarantee legal and safe routes for climate migrants/refugees.

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