

The European Security and Defence Union



Migration and refugees
Will Europe finally face the challenge?



Adapting the EU's security and defence structures

Ioan Mircea Paşcu MEP,
Vice-President of the European Parliament



How to offer a decent life to refugees

Andrea Quaden,
Humanitarian aid worker in Iraq

Environmental migration and displacement

Whether chosen or forced, environmental migration is a reality of our times

by Dina Ionesco, Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division and Mariam Traore Chazalnoel, Environmental Migration Specialist, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva/New York

Examples of how climate conditions can directly or indirectly lead to the migration of people can be found in all continents, from the hundreds of thousands of people displaced overnight by floods and hurricanes in the United States, to rural populations in the Sahel unable to access water and grazing resources.¹ Robust scientific analysis corroborates what common sense tells us: in a world subjected to increasing threats of climate change, people are – and will continue – migrating to cope with the impacts on their daily lives. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) clearly outlines that global warming and increasing migration are linked.²

Migrating in unsafe conditions

This issue of The European – Security and Defence Union magazine addresses the contemporary migration challenges in a Europe facing major political uncertainty. It is clear that the impacts of climate change on populations' movements are one

of those issues that have an immense potential for destabilisation, not only in Europe but worldwide. Both the sudden impacts of natural disasters and the insidious slow destruction of nature and ecosystems brought about by environmental degradation lead to instances of people migrating in unsafe conditions.

Displacement after natural disasters

Massive levels of displacement of people caught in disasters are seen each year, 18.8 million people in 2017 according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), highlighting the need to increase action on disaster risk reduction, planning and disaster management. In Nepal in 2015, 2.8 million people were forced to move because of the earthquake. One year after the earthquake, 21,000 persons had not been able to go back home and were at risk of further displacement due to floods.³ In such cases, forced displacement situations are traumatic for the population and represent an immense challenge for both the national government and the international community facing the daunting prospect of having to manage such large-scale interventions. Less well known is the fact that these types of movements often bring about secondary sets of issues, such as increasing instances of human trafficking of desperate people seeking to make a living, or questions of protection of the

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rights of those living in displacement. The immediate aftermath of the disaster necessitates coordinated humanitarian action, but even more complex are the issues around supporting the return of these populations or ensuring that they are not displaced again in cases where recurring weather events are intensified by climate change impacts, such as the monsoon season in South East Asia.

Migration due to indirect climate impacts

Then there is another subset of “invisible” environmental migrants – those who move in search of better economic opportunities because of the indirect impacts of climate change. Of particular concern to Europe should be entire regions of the Sahel where desertification and land degradation eat away at available agricultural land, or where ocean acidification destroys fishermen’s livelihoods. It should come as no surprise that faced with often insurmountable difficulties to sustain livelihoods, many people – notably the youth – will choose to take their chances elsewhere and undertake unsafe migration journeys towards promised lands. In addition, people who are facing extreme environmental conditions, but are unable to migrate for financial or social reasons, are also vulnerable as they do not have the means to move out of harm’s way or look for alternative livelihood opportunities. These “trapped” populations are often absent from the public discourse on environmental migration. The picture depicted above is bleak and there is an urgent need to fully comprehend the magnitude of these challenges, yet, as with every type of migration, opportunities can arise.

For instance, there are examples of migrants who have truly made a positive difference in the daily lives of their communities by investing in climate proof infrastructures. It is well known that migration can bring economic and social benefits to countries of origin and destination – it is no different for environmental migrants who have the potential to contribute back



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Photo: privatet

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home and to their communities of destination. Environmental migration questions have been high on the global political agenda for a few years and this heightening political interest opens up a space of opportunity for both reflection and action on how to respond to contemporary environmental migration challenges.

Managing environmental migration

When thinking of practical solutions, it might be useful to look at the issue through different policy “lenses”: climate, migration, development and humanitarian lenses. It is equally important to gather responses from different policy areas and build on existing good practices among different communities. Policy makers and practitioners of climate action have a critical role to play. For instance, the Task Force on Displacement⁴ created under the Paris Climate Agreement has developed a set of recommendations for climate action to minimise the risks of displacement due to climate change.

The recently finalised Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is currently the most advanced global policy text addressing environmental migration issues, representing a global consensus on how migration challenges should be addressed.⁵ This compact clearly highlights that climate adaptation and mitigation measures in countries of origin should be the first supported measure, as this helps people build resilience and afford them livelihood opportunities. These



After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, 2.8 million people were forced to move

photo: © European Union, 2015, Source: EC – Audiovisual Service, by KC Ortiz

types of responses should be driven by climate action actors, working in partnership with migration specialists such as the UN Migration Agency.⁶

It is also important to turn to migration policy and practice to determine what helping both environmental migrants and the states of origin and destination of these migrants looks like concretely. For instance, it is clear that some places of the world will become uninhabitable due to climate conditions in the near future, because of the rise in temperature⁷ or sea level,⁸ such as in the emblematic example of disappearing small

islands in the Pacific. In these conditions, migration will be inevitable, and it is in everyone’s interest that these population movements take place in safe and regular conditions, minimising risks of disruptions. Managing environmental migration flows requires looking in more depth at the migration policy tools already at our disposal and adapt them to the specific situation of environmental migrants. It means that migration policy and practice measures must innovate in order to factor in the environmental and climate change threats. For instance, countries can already look at their current migration tools and adapt them to contemporary environmental migration challenges and opportunities: visa regimes, temporary protection status, consular services for citizens abroad, planned relocation schemes, diasporas’ services, labour migration and regional movement agreements.



International Organization for Migration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951. With 172 member states and a further 8 states holding observer status, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organisation in the field of migration. IOM has offices in over 100 countries and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.



The objectives of IOM's work is to

- help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration;
- promote international cooperation on migration issues;
- assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems,
- provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The IOM Constitution recognises the link between migration and economic, social and cultural development, as well as to the right of freedom of movement.

→ **Publications:** IOM produces a large variety of publications in the field of migration policy and research: <http://publications.iom.int/>

→ **Web:** www.iom.int

Envision the future

Whether migration driven by environmental degradation and climate change is voluntary or forced, it cannot be ignored. To respond effectively, countries should invest in new environmental and climate change solutions, and in parallel, innovate in their migration policies and practices. Environmental migration offers us a chance to envision the future we dream for our planet and for the future generations.

- 1 The Atlas of Environmental Migration provides examples of environmental migration worldwide <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/projects/atlas-environmental-migration>
- 2 <https://www.iom.int/news/nepal-thousands-remain-displaced-earthquake-exposed-impact-coming-monsoon-season>
- 3 <https://www.iom.int/news/nepal-thousands-remain-displaced-earthquake-exposed-impact-coming-monsoon-season>
- 4 Report of the Task Force on Displacement 16 September 2018 <https://bit.ly/2Rd9448>
- 5 <http://www.ipsnews.net/2018/08/perspectives-environmental-migration-10-key-takeaways-global-compact-migration/>
- 6 <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/>
- 7 <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/extreme-heat-and-migration>
- 8 Ocean, Environment, Climate Change and Human Mobility <https://bit.ly/2QoQed1>