

## ***Labour migration, climate change and decent work***

ILO Submission for “*Recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change*”

Warsaw International Mechanism Task Force on Displacement Stakeholder’s Meeting.

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The risks arising from climate change are many, but include economic and welfare losses that may lead to human displacement, human and labour rights violations, and lost opportunities for development. The interrelation of various types of risks translates into significant challenges for decent work. In many instances, jobs in sectors characterised by informality and decent work deficits are further undermined by the impacts of climate change. Regular and safe labour migration opportunities that are gender-responsive and in line with international labour standards, can play a role in helping communities recover from and adapt to climate change and natural disasters.

In 2014, 19.3 million people were forced to flee their homes due to natural hazards, the majority of whom were located in the global South.<sup>1</sup> Over the coming decades, climate change is expected to increase the incidents of acute disasters, livelihoods loss and social disorder, all of which will increase displacement and migration. Climate change also risks to exacerbate certain groups’ vulnerability to discrimination, exclusion and exploitation, creating additional risks.

Migration has become an important safety valve for communities coping with extreme weather events. Past experiences have shown that when people do move, they eventually need to enter the labour market to support themselves and their families. While internal or international migration, and in particular international labour migration, can help communities adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change events, it can also make individuals vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and other risks at different stages of the migration process.

When regular migration pathways are not available or are inaccessible to certain populations, migrants may be forced to choose irregular pathways where they risk finding work only in the informal economy or risk suffering a disadvantage due to their irregular immigration status. Further, insufficient attention to gender concerns affects and at times limits labour migration options for women who play an important role in securing livelihoods and income. The lack of human rights and labour protections exposes migrant workers to costly recruitment fees, forced labour, trafficking or other forms of exploitation, while potentially displacing native workers and contributing to downward pressure on wages and working conditions in the labour market. Where migration is already occurring from climate-affected areas, high costs of movement and subsequent repayment of debt may undermine the full contributions migrant workers can make, and hinder efforts at climate adaptation and resilience building.

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<sup>1</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), *Global Estimates 2015: People displaced by disasters*, July 2015

Measures aimed at mitigation and adaptation through labour migration can only be successful with the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders. ILO's strategy for fair and effective labour migration provides important guidance in this regard, and is premised on international labour standards and social dialogue. The ILO also adopted *Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market* in 2016 through tripartite negotiations which provide further programmatic guidance to improve the functioning of labour markets to benefit those displaced by environmental degradation or natural disasters as well as national workers. The application of guidance can help bring stakeholders around the same table to coordinate and monitor actions to help displaced persons access decent work opportunities and protect them from unacceptable forms of work.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) Facilitate dialogue between line ministries, including ministries of the environment, ministries of labour and those addressing migration, and with employers' and workers' organizations, to ensure cohesion and coherence between labour migration policies, employment and social protection policies with environmental policies. Such policies should take account of gender differences in migration patterns in the context of climate change, and promote gender equality and non-discrimination as underlying principles.
- 2) Promote dialogue at the level of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), bringing together the secretariats, ministries and stakeholders working on regional climate and labour migration frameworks.
- 3) Promote decent work and job creation, as well as enterprise growth, in countries of origin and transit with dedicated capacity building and other assistance. Where appropriate, support the creation of green jobs opportunities.
- 4) Develop policies based on ILO standards, tools and guidance, including the *ILO Employment and Decent Work Peace and Resilience Recommendation No. 205* and the *ILO Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market*, to support a fair migration agenda that can help States effectively address displaced populations' livelihood needs and access to decent work.
- 5) Support the drafting and adoption of integrated bilateral and multilateral labour migration agreements or arrangements that foster access to decent work and, where appropriate, labour mobility opportunities for workers in regions particularly vulnerable to climate risks. Such agreements should be grounded in international labour standards and other related human rights norms and instruments, and be gender responsive.