

## Migration and Climate Change Nexus<sup>1</sup>



The increasing environmental challenges humanity is facing are globally recognized today.<sup>2</sup> Migration is one of the adaptive solution for those affected by environmental degradation. Due to its geographical and socio-economic specificities, Egypt is particularly exposed to environmental pressure and consequent human mobility, both directly, through the impacts on its population and economy, and indirectly, through the impact on neighboring societies.

### I. Climate change as a reason to move: a multicausal phenomenon

**Climate change is part of environmental push factors.**<sup>3</sup> Specific climate change factors are difficult to isolate from overall environmental factors such as desertification, land degradation and drought. Therefore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) refers to environmental factors that *encompass* and are *exacerbated* by climate change. Besides, environmental migration is a multicausal phenomenon, yet one in which environmental drivers play a significant and increasingly determinative role in the movement of people. Indeed, the relationship between environmental change, climate change, and migration is often complicated by the multifaceted associations with other factors, such as population growth, poverty, governance, human security and conflict. Environmental factors are drivers of migration in multiple ways either directly or indirectly, and over the course of sudden disasters or over prolonged periods of time. Environmental factors can affect multiple communities in multiple ways over multiple periods of time.

<b>No geographical limit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental migration may take place internally, regionally or internationally. Most empirical research tends to suggest that internal migration, such as rural-urban migration, or movement across immediate borders between neighboring countries, is likely to be predominant.</li> </ul>
<b>Both progressive and sudden</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desertification, land degradation and drought occurs over prolonged periods stressing local economies leading to gradual migration over time. Sudden factors such as typhoons or hurricanes cause unsustainable living conditions calling for movement of local communities.</li> </ul>
<b>No time frame</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In cases of irreversible environmental degradation (e.g. rises in sea level), resulting migration governance can require relocation of affected populations either internally or to a third country and may become permanent.</li> </ul>
<b>Forced or voluntary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmentally induced migration is best understood as a continuum, ranging from clear cases of forced to clear cases of voluntary movement, with grey zones in-between.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> This paper has benefitted from resources from the Migration, Environmental and Climate Change unit of IOM Headquarters.

<sup>2</sup> Global Warming of 1.5 C. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Push factor: a factor that repels the individual from continued stay in his/her place of habitual residence.

**There is no internationally accepted definition for persons on the move due to environmental factors,** and although terms such as "environmental refugee" or "climate change refugee" are working expressions, they do not have a legal basis in international refugee law. All persons moving for environmental reasons are protected by international human rights law. In addition, persons displaced within their country due to natural or human made disasters are covered by provisions laid out in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. IOM utilizes a broad working definition to capture the complexity of the issues at stake.

#### **Environmental Migrants – IOM Definition**

*Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad .*

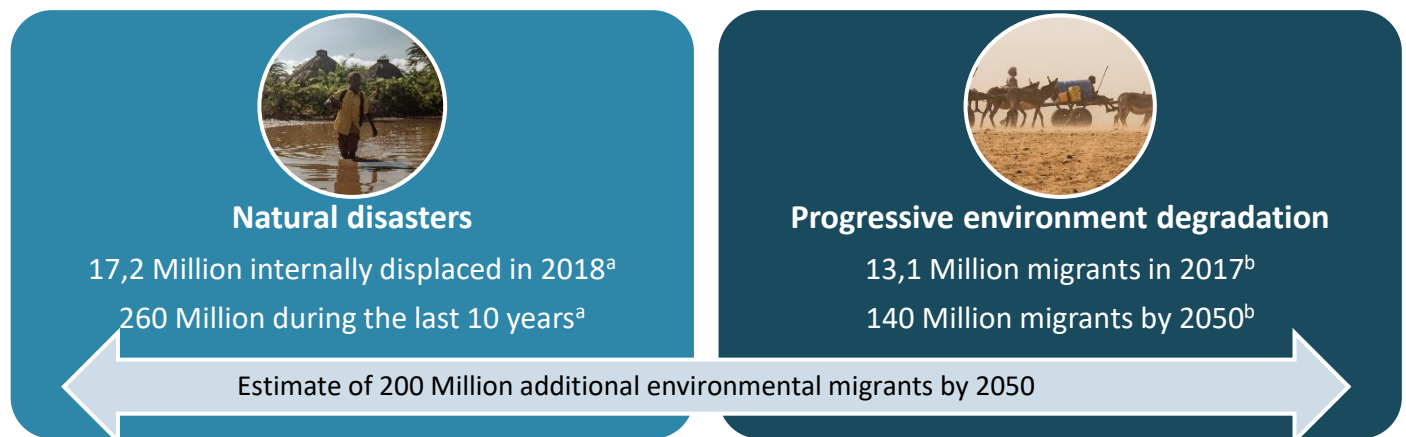
## **II. How many environmental migrants?**

**Millions of people are being displaced by natural disasters and extreme climate events while others look to migration as a deliberate strategy to adapt to simmering or sinking regions.** Providing particular figures of how many people have migrated for environmental reasons is extremely difficult because, as outlined above, it is not always possible to isolate environmental drivers from all other complex social, political, economic, and demographic factors that shape population movements. Yet, available data allow to reflect links and challenges of environment and migration.

**Between 2008 and 2018, more than 260 million people have been displaced by natural disasters.** The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that up to 17.2 million were displaced in 2018 alone. Until now, natural disaster-driven migration is mainly concentrated in South America and South Asia, but it has become a growing issue in other regions.

**In the context of drought, 13.1 million people were newly displaced within their countries in 2017** according to data from the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). When including all progressive environmental changes, such as desertification, land degradation or sea level rise, the figure would be definitely higher. The trend is likely to continue as more than 143 million people from Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America are at risk of being forced migrants resulting on progressive

environment degradation by 2050 according to The World Bank's simulation<sup>4</sup>. On a global scale, it is estimated that by 2050, between 25 million and 1 billion environmental migrants will be on the move, with 200 million being the most widely cited estimate. This estimate includes people moving across country borders and remaining within their countries, as well as on a permanent and temporary basis.



<sup>a</sup> Global report on Internal Displacement 2019, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

<sup>b</sup> International Organization for Migration and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2019): Addressing the Land Degradation – Migration Nexus: The Role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. IOM, Geneva.

### III. Migration, development policy and environment

**The 2015-2016 Paris Agreement is one of the milestones which included migration into the climate change nexus.** First turning points for joint international action for environmental change occurred in 1990's, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 1990, and Hurricane Mitch and the response to displacement induced by natural disasters in 1998. Since then, environmental change, climate change and environmental migration has appeared increasingly on the agenda of international conferences and in the policies of countries. Environmental factors are directly tackled in the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** under Goal 13: *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. Considering the secondary effects of climate change and environment degradation, Goal 8: *Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all*, is also relevant. Another international coalition focused on taking ambitious and real steps to curtail climate change is the **Paris Agreement**; a total of 186

<sup>4</sup> Rigaud, K., A. de Sherbinin, B. Jones, J. Bergmann, V. Clement, K. Ober, J. Schewe, et al. 2018 Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington.

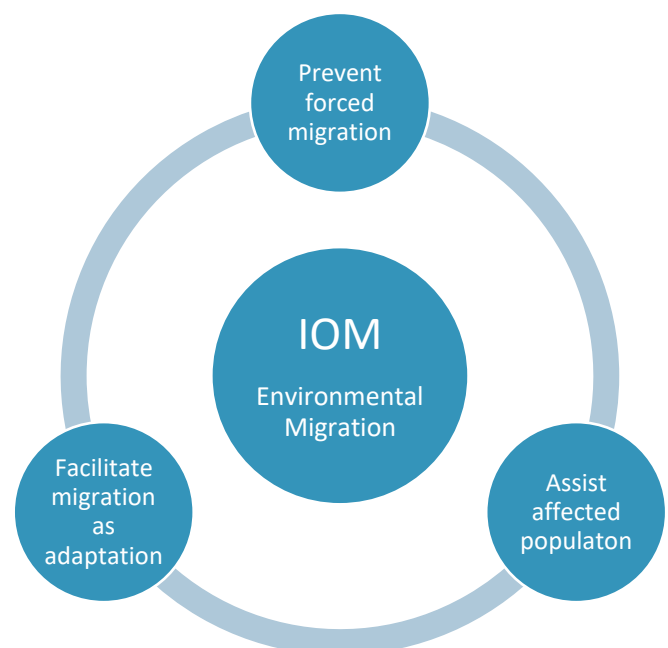
countries have ratified the agreement, of which at least 55 parties have taken action to meet the goals of reducing temperature increases to no further than 1.5 degree Celsius.

**The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the first-ever negotiated global framework on migration, recognizes that migration in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters is a reality**, and makes commitments to support both climate migrants and States. At the United Nations and IOM level, to work on policy coherence, a Task Force has been created on Climate Displacement (TFD) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The first meeting of the Task Force on Displacement under UNFCCC was held in IOM Geneva in July 2019 as follow up to COP 24 Katowice. This builds on previous establishment of the Platform on Disaster and Displacement (PDD) created in July.

**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's 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.

IOM's objectives concerning migration, environment and climate change are:

- To prevent forced migration that results from environmental factors to the extent possible;
- To assist and protect affected populations when forced migration does occur in situations of environmental and climate change, and to seek durable solutions to their situation;
- To facilitate migration in the context of climate change adaptation and enhance the resilience of affected communities.



IOM engages in policy work and advocacy, research, capacity building, and operational activities in the area of migration, environment and climate change in collaboration with IOM Member States, observers and partners.

**IOM Director General Antonio Vitorino called the international community during the UN Climate Change Action Summit in September 2019 in New York for coordinated support to climate change and migration.** Climate change and migration being two of the most defining challenges of current time, assisting vulnerable populations to be more resilient in the face of climate change is essential: IOM has launched a global campaign on climate migration called **#FindAWay**<sup>5</sup> to invite individuals from around the world to ally and address the negative impacts of climate change on people's daily lives.



#### IV. Focus on Egypt

**Egypt is one of the potential vulnerable countries to the effect of Global Warming and environmental degradation.** Areas the most vulnerable in order of severity and certainty of results are agriculture, coastal zones, aqua-culture and fisheries, water resources, human habitat and settlements, and human health.<sup>6</sup> In particular, Egypt's Nile Delta and its coastal front on the Mediterranean are considered vulnerable to shoreline changes due to erosion and sea level rise induced by climate change. Coastal zones host a major proportion of industrial activities, including petroleum, chemicals and tourism, distributed among a large number of highly populated economic centers, such as the cities of Alexandria, Rosetta, Damietta, Port Said, Suez and Hurghada. The dependence of the economy of the country on the environment constitutes an exacerbating factor to the vulnerability to climate change: agriculture remains the biggest employer (over 31.2% of the total population)<sup>7</sup>.

**Environment factors massively affect people.** Seventy per cent of internal migrants interviewed in the context of the "Where the Rain Falls" project in the Nile Delta and in slums in Old Cairo mentioned both **land degradation** and **water shortages** as some of the drivers which shaped their

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iom.int/findaway/en/>

<sup>6</sup> UNDP Climate Change Adaptation- Egypt, available at <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/northern-africa/egypt>

<sup>7</sup> Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics, available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/country-profiles/egypt/#legislative>



decision to migrate<sup>8</sup>. If considering sudden event, flooding in January 2010, for example, affected over 3,500 people and claimed 12 lives, while a similar flood in 1994 affected over 160,000 people<sup>9</sup>.

**IOM Egypt is engaged towards a less-carbon society through the promotion of green jobs for youth.**

Bridging the gap between the challenge of youth employment within the country and the benefit to promote environmentally friendly activities as promising sectors, IOM Egypt promotes green jobs for youth as a positive alternative for irregular migration. Allowing for sustainable income, such initiative lower the vulnerability of the people to climate change while contributing to mitigate the impact of the development of the economy in terms of Green House Gas emissions.

**The promotion of expatriates' engagement in green local development contribute to lower both vulnerability to climate change and carbon emissions.**

In mainstreaming environment in its activities of expatriates' engagement to local development in the country, IOM Egypt supports the economic development in less developed areas. On the one hand, allowing for sustainable income reduce vulnerabilities of the region to environmental push factors likely to incite the inhabitants to migrate. On the other hand, the promotion of green practices reduces the environmental impact of the activities of the region and thus limits the factors of environmental degradation.

**IOM Egypt is engaged toward the reduction of its own environmental footprint.**

Through its commitment and enhanced efforts to minimize the impact of its action on the environment, the office in the country achieved significant results in terms of resource consumption reduction, waste management and overall carbon emissions reduction. IOM Egypt is also strongly committed to support the greening of all UN operations in the country through the co-chairmanship of a dedicated UN working group<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Warner, K. and T. Afifi. 2014 *Where the Rain Falls: Evidence from 8 Countries on How Vulnerable Households Use Migration to Manage the Risk of Rainfall Variability and Food Insecurity*. *Climate and Development* 6 (1): 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> International Federation of Red Crescent, 2010; *Climate Change Adaptation and Natural Disasters Preparedness in the Coastal Cities of North Africa*, the World Bank, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> *Greening the Blue Egypt*, created in June 2019, is the working group aiming at supporting the mainstreaming of environment in all United Nations Operations in Egypt.



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