

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE MOBILITY ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE MENA REGION



TABLE OF CONTENT

KEY MESSAGES	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WOMEN IN MENA	5
3. WOMEN, CLIMATE MIGRATION, AND PROTECTION RISKS SAFE AND DIGNIFIED RETURNS FROM NORTH AFRICA	6
4. WOMEN LEADING CLIMATE ACTION IN THE MENA REGION	10
5. GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL LEGAL, POLICY, AND KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORKS	12
6. GOOD PRACTICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE, HUMAN MOBILITY, AND WOMEN	17
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	20

Cover Image: Iraq, Dohuk, 2022-11 02. Harfa Mussa Mohammed in her farm.

KEY MESSAGES



Iraq, Dohuk, 02-11-2022. Workers are harvesting peppers in Harfa Mussa Mohammed farm.

The severe and accelerated impacts of climate change as well as environmental degradation and disasters in the MENA region create specific risks for women and girls. For example, women are more likely to die during disasters and to face difficulties accessing relief and assistance, and many women are reliant on climate-sensitive livelihoods such as agriculture and yet receive inadequate and inequitable support to adapt to environmental changes. Not all women and girls are the same, and factors such as age, disability, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and immigration status influence their exposure to these risks, and may also interact with inequitable social, economic, cultural, and political systems and practices to reinforce unequal power dynamics. These unequal power dynamics and inequitable systems can undermine the ability of women and girls to adapt to the effects of climate change and can compromise their long-term resilience.

Women's vulnerability in climate change adaptation and forced mobility in the context of climate change¹ can – and should – be reduced as part of efforts to accelerate gender equality, women and girls' empowerment and wider social equity, by recognizing and women's capacities and building upon these to address the economic, social, political, and cultural systems that reinforce gender inequality and that influence how they are able to adapt, make decisions, and protect themselves. change and can compromise their long-term resilience.

Women have the knowledge and capacities needed to minimize and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change and are already leading meaningful actions across the MENA region to reduce vulnerabilities, increase resilience and resolve conflicts in communities where scarce natural resources result in disputes. Given the right conditions, migration can function as an adaptation strategy for women, enabling them to protect themselves and their families and increase their resilience.

An intersectional lens is critical to unpacking the complex ways in which gender interacts with other forms of disadvantage and compound discrimination.² Women and girls are not a homogenous group, and individual women and girls will be impacted differently by the effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters depending on factors such as their socio-economic status, mobility status, and household composition. Vulnerabilities will be amplified for women who are refugees or IDPs, for instance, or who come from an ethnic or linguistic minority, have disabilities, are pregnant, or are older persons.³ Acknowledging and understanding these layers of disadvantage is essential to understanding the experience of women and girls and climate mobility.

1. INTRODUCTION

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are facing severe and accelerated impacts of climate change. Temperatures in the region are increasing at twice the speed of other parts of the globe,⁴ the region has the highest rates of water stress in the world,⁵ and coastal flooding and sea-level rise threaten vital urban centres.⁶ Human factors exacerbate environmental degradation across the region, including mismanagement and exploitation of natural resources, inequitable water distribution, poor water management, outdated agricultural techniques, rapid urbanisation, population growth, governance challenges, and conflict. Extreme weather and environmental degradation have already pushed people to migrate internally,⁷ particularly in response to drought, water scarcity and sea-level rise.⁸ Addressing the complex drivers of this climate-induced migration and understanding the needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities of climate migrants is increasingly important as environmental changes intensify.

Climate factors alone rarely cause people to migrate. Rather, each household will have its own tipping point⁹ as the environmental changes they are exposed to, exceed their ability to cope.¹⁰ This tipping point is reached by weighing multiple factors including personal resources and underlying socioeconomic conditions that affect their resilience and available support.¹¹ This Policy Brief uses the term ‘climate mobility’ to encompass all forms of movement influenced by sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, including (but not limited to) voluntary migration as adaptation, forced displacement, planned relocation of communities, and ‘immobility’. Although migration can be an adaptive strategy, what is clear is that those who are already marginalized, live in precarious conditions, have fewer resources, or have limited access to services and social protection are hit hardest by changing environmental conditions.

This Policy Brief presents an overview of women’s experiences of climate migration in the MENA region. It argues that women’s needs and experiences should be placed at the forefront of any response to climate mobility, because:

- **First**, women and girls face specific and often disproportionate risks resulting from climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. For example, women are more likely than men to die while crossing the Mediterranean due to gendered social practices that increase their risk factors (see case study later in this report), and women’s reliance on agriculture as a livelihood together with poor labour protections and discriminatory laws and practices around land ownership also makes them less resilient to climate change and disasters. Of course, not all women and girls are the same, and factors such as age, disability, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and immigration status influence their exposure to these risks, and may also interact with inequitable social, economic, cultural, and political systems and practices to reinforce unequal power dynamics. These unequal power dynamics and inequitable systems can undermine the ability of women and girls to adapt to the effects of climate change and can compromise their long-term resilience.
- **Second**, women’s vulnerability in relation to climate change and forced mobility in the context of climate change is not inevitable or innate. Rather, vulnerability is produced by economic, social, political, and cultural forces that influence how people of different genders and other intersecting social factors are able to adapt, make decisions, and protect themselves.¹² Women’s vulnerability to the effects of climate change and the experience of forced mobility can – and should – be reduced as part of efforts to accelerate gender equality, women and girl’s empowerment and wider social equity.

4) IOM. 2022. Changing Climate: Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow and the call for inclusive responses to climate change and forced migration in the MENA Region. Available at: <https://mena.iom.int/news/changing-climate-gender-equality-today-sustainable-tomorrow-and-call-inclusive-responses-climate-change-and-forced-migration-mena-region>

5) 14 of the 25 countries with the highest level of water stress are located in the MENA Region. See: <https://www.wri.org/insights/highest-water-stressed-countries>; see also: C Sieghart, Lia Carol and Mahlette Betre. 2018. Climate Change in MENA: Challenges and Opportunities for the World’s most water stressed region, MENA Knowledge and Learning Quick Notes Series, The World Bank. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/894251519999525186/123806-REVISED-BLOG-CC-REGION-QN-002.docx>

6) <https://www.iemed.org/publication/climate-change-in-the-mena-region-environmental-risks-socioeconomic-effects-and-policy-challenges-for-the-future/>

7) Adoho, F., and Q. Wodon. 2014c. “Do Changes in Weather Patterns and the Environment Lead to Migration?” In Climate Change and Migration: Evidence from the Middle East and North Africa, edited by Q. Wodon, A. Liverani, G. Joseph, and N. Bounoux. World Bank Study. Washington, DC: World Bank, chapter 7

8) Kumetat D (2012) Climate change on the arabian peninsula—regional security, sustainability strategies, and research needs. In: Scheffran J, Brozka M, Brauch HG, Link M, Schilling J (eds) Climate change, human security and violent conflict. Challenges for social stability, pp 373–386. Berlin: Springer

9) Camilla Boana, Roger Zetter, and Tim Morris, “Environmentally Displaced People: Understanding the Linkages Between Environmental Change, Livelihoods and Forced Migration,” Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2008.

10) Walter Kälin and Sanjula Weerasinghe, ‘Environmental Migrants and Global Governance: Facts, Policies and Practices’, in Marie McAuliffe and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners), Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, (2017).

11) Sarah Opitz Stapleton et al., ‘Climate Change, Migration and Displacement: The Need for a Risk-Informed and Coherent Approach,’ Overseas Development Institute, 2017

12) Phudoma Lama, Mo Hamza & Misse Wester (2021) Gendered dimensions of migration in relation to climate change, Climate and Development, 13:4, 326-336, DOI:10.1080/17565529.2020.1772708; Namrata Chindarkar, ‘Gender and climate change-induced migration: proposing a framework for analysis’ Environ. Res. Lett. 7 (2012).

- And third, women have important knowledge and capacities needed to minimize and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change and are already leading meaningful actions across the MENA region to reduce vulnerability, increase resilience and resolve conflict in communities where scarce natural resources result in disputes, when given the opportunity and when barriers of inequality are reduced. In the right circumstances women can use migration as an adaptation strategy that enhances their own wellbeing as well as that of their family and community. Efforts to capitalize on women and girls' skills and to support women to achieve positive migration outcomes should be recognized, supported, and expanded.

2. THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WOMEN IN MENA

Although climate change may not discriminate along gender lines, its social impacts do. Women face specific consequences of extreme heat, water scarcity, and other climatic and environmental changes due to inequalities and differences in the social, economic, cultural and political treatment of women that compound their vulnerability and capacity to cope. For example:

- Many women and girls rely on agriculture as their sole source of livelihood, which forces them into a precarious situation when extreme weather conditions compromise production. Agriculture is the largest employer of women in the MENA region, for example, sex-disaggregated data shows that the share of females in the agricultural workforce exceeds 60% in Jordan, Libya, and Syria. Agriculture is one of the few sectors open to refugees and therefore also employs large numbers of refugee women in Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.¹³
- Employment conditions for women who work in farming are precarious, with very little social security in the event of a crisis. Women are much less likely than men to own land (see below) and are typically employed as casual labourers with few if any labour protections, which also means they are often the first to be laid off in times of drought or declining harvests.¹⁴ These precarious employment conditions mean that women who are female heads of household or the primary family breadwinner are at risk of significant detriment if climate change or environmental degradation affects their farming activities. Precarious employment conditions may also compound other forms of risk and vulnerability: for example, Lebanon's agriculture sector employs a large number of Syrian refugee women since it is one of the few sectors open to refugees, and many of these women are the head of household; when drought decimated their crops in recent years these women faced significant losses,¹⁵ and their precarious employment conditions could not offer a pathway to mitigate those losses.
- Women who work in farming struggle more than men to diversify their skillset and find off-farm work. Many women struggle to identify 'off-farm' employment, particularly those with low literacy due to structural barriers affecting their educational attainment.¹⁶ One study in Syria found that while 64.2 per cent of men were engaged in off-farm work, only 1.5 per cent of women had the same opportunity.¹⁷ This inability to diversify undermines women's ability to adapt to the effects of climate change.
- Climate crises disproportionately affect women due to their inequitable access to assets and water infrastructure. Experiences from Jordan and Sudan demonstrate that the economic impacts of drought and floods disproportionately affect women with the smallest asset bases, particularly female-headed households with big families and fragile members.¹⁸ Moreover, women who work in farming are disproportionately affected by water scarcity and experience greater water insecurity than men, because they have less access

13) UNDP, Climate action, gender and displacement in the Arab region: Turning adversity into opportunity. Discussion paper, March 2021

14) UNDP, Climate action, gender and displacement in the Arab region: Turning adversity into opportunity. Discussion paper, March 2021

15) ESCWA, 'Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region'. E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/Policybrief.11 (2022)

16) Abdelali-Martini, M. and Hamza, R. (2014) 'How do migration remittances affect rural livelihoods in drylands?', *Journal of International Development*, 26(4), pp. 454-470.

17) Abdelali-Martini, M., Goldey, P., Jones, G. and Bailey, E. (2003) 'Towards a feminization of agricultural labour in Northwest Syria', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 30(2), pp. 71-94; Najjar, D., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A., Bentaibi, A. and Kassie, G.T. (2018) 'Women, work, and wage equity in agricultural labour in Saiss, Morocco', *Development in Practice*, 28(4), pp. 525-540.

18) Jean D'Cunha, 'Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan: Building women's economic and social resilience to climate risk and migration for survival within sustainable development.'

UN Women, Arab Water Council, and SDG Climate Facility in the Arab States. September 2023. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/gender-and-climate-related-migration-in-jordan-and-sudan>

to irrigated agriculture and do not have the resources to repair damaged irrigation systems or other forms of water infrastructure.¹⁹

- Women generally do not own agricultural land in the MENA region, which makes them particularly vulnerable to losing their livelihood due to external stressors such as climate change.²⁰ Regional statistics show that women in the MENA region have the least ownership rates for asset ownership in the world due to discriminatory laws and practices that prohibit or create barriers to their ability to own land,²¹ with only 4 per cent of women holding land titles.²²
- Traditional gender roles mean that women are typically responsible to source and manage water resources at the household level as well as searching for ways to reuse and recycle household water. Water scarcity creates an additional burden for women and can negatively affect their health, particularly in the hot summer – in Iraq, for instance, summer temperatures often exceed 50 degrees Celsius.²³
- Extreme weather events and associated disasters such as drought and flooding can increase risks of gender-based violence (GBV). Extreme stress, property and communal loss, and scarcity of food and water, and displacement often leads to heightened risks of violence, including GBV. In the aftermath of disasters, women and girls face a heightened risk of sexual assault and harassment, intimate partner violence, and child, early, and forced marriage. Family structures may also be destabilized, and the resulting social isolation may provide an environment where violence can occur undetected.²⁴ In addition, women and girls may be required to walk increasingly longer distances to find potable water and food for their families, making them vulnerable to sexual assault.²⁵ Communities under stress may adopt more conservative or customary patriarchal practices.²⁶
- There is insufficient understanding of how the effects of climate change affect or will affect women in the MENA region. It is important to understand how the effects of climate change such as hotter temperatures, rising sea levels, and unpredictable weather and rainfall patterns, as well as secondary issues such as lack of food and increase in disease will affect men, women, boys and girls differently, as well as intersectional and diversity considerations such as disability, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality.

These inequalities and differences affect women's experience of climate mobility, discussed in the next sections.

3. WOMEN, CLIMATE MIGRATION, AND PROTECTION RISKS

Forced mobility in the context of climate change exposes women and girls to a range of protection risks. Some risks are common to all types of migration, while others are distinctive to, or heightened by, climate mobility. One risk that is present throughout all phases of the migration experience is GBV. Climate change creates chronic and acute stressors on households, and these stressors can exacerbate pre-existing GBV risk factors for women and girls in any phase of the migration experience: for women during the migration journey or while displaced; to women after they arrive to their intended destination; or to those left behind while men and other family members migrate.²⁷ Stressors include an increase in economic and psychological pressures; an increase in risks for GBV (such as an absence of law enforcement and reduced access to health and social services); and the exacerbation

19) Jean D'Cunha, 'Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan: Building women's economic and social resilience to climate risk and migration for survival within sustainable development.' UN Women, Arab Water Council, and SDG Climate Facility in the Arab States. September 2023. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/gender-and-climate-related-migration-in-jordan-and-sudan>

20) UNDP, Climate action, gender and displacement in the Arab region: Turning adversity into opportunity. Discussion paper, March 20

21) Dina Najjar, Boubaker Dhehibi, Aden Aw-Hassan, and Abderrahim Bentaibi, 'Climate change, gender, decision-making power, and migration into the Saiss region of Morocco,' Working Paper No 1102, Economic Research Forum, June 2017.

22) UNICEF and Karama, Climate change and the impact on adolescent girls, Technical cohort advocacy brief, 2023.

23) Salma Kadry, 'Gender and water dynamics in Iraq: Towards inclusive and sustainable water responses,' in Elbarlament, 'Water is life: Perspectives on water in the land of two streams,' (2021), available at: <https://elbarlament.org/projects/water-is-life-perspectives-on-water-in-the-land-of-two-streams/>

24) UN Women and IUCN, Tackling violence against women and girls in the context of climate change, 2022. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-context-of-climate-change-en.pdf>

25) Global Protection Cluster 'Climate change and gender-based violence: what are the links,' 2021

26) Global Protection Cluster 'Climate change and gender-based violence: what are the links,' 2021

27) McLeod, C., Barr, H., & Rall, K. (2020). Does Climate Change Increase the Risk of Child Marriage? A Look at What We Know--And What We Don't--With Lessons from Bangladesh & Mozambique. Columbia Journal of Gender and Law, 38(1), 96–145. <https://doi.org/10.7916/cjgl.v38i1.4604>

of underlying harmful social and gendered norms in crisis.²⁸

Protection risks for women and girls who remain in the place of origin

The act of migrating requires economic and physical capacities that are not available to everyone²⁹ and is also heavily influenced by the availability of social networks linked to the migration journey or the intended destination. Those who are most vulnerable to the impact of climate change – such as female-headed households or women with disabilities – may not move at all even they desire to do so, since they don't have the resources and networks that migration requires.³⁰ This creates a vital need to support women in their place of origin, especially “trapped populations” including women, to build their resilience to climate change and enhance their adaptive capacity.

Across the MENA region, it is more common for men to migrate and leave women and girls behind, at least in the short-term. This increases the workload on women since women are expected to continue the farming work of men in addition to their own farming and household responsibilities, all while managing the difficult environmental conditions that compelled the head of household to migrate.³¹ In the absence of men household members, women and girls may face an increased risk of GBV.³² Examples from the region demonstrate that the out-migration of men can change family dynamics and also leave women and girls vulnerable to protection risks:

- In Yemen, climate shocks in rural areas have led to greater numbers of men migrating to cities. Women are left behind to perform farming activities in areas where the land is degraded and where women's land ownership is severely limited, making them susceptible to various forms of violence and exploitation.³³
- In Syria, the multi-year drought led many men to migrate in search of work. This forced women to become heads of household, and in many cases these women have ended up malnourished, without land in their names, and exposed to GBV. Girls have also been taken out of school in order to help with domestic responsibilities due to the increased burden on the female head of household as a result of men out-migration, as well as for economic and protection reasons.³⁴
- In Sudan, economic hardships caused by faltering traditional livelihoods (due in part to climate change) have prompted men to migrate to other parts of the country for much lengthier periods, resulting in a significant increase in female-headed households.³⁵ Women left behind face a precarious situation when remittances are not regular, and if men relatives go missing, die in dangerous irregular movement, or if ransom money is demanded by traffickers (often with threats to their security).³⁶

Even when women take on additional farming duties due to the out-migration of the men family members, this does not necessarily translate into more income or control of the land or farming resources they now manage. In fact, it often results in economic stress for women as the increase in unpaid household and farming responsibilities leaves them with little time for paid employment, and since remittances from the migrating family member are often insufficient. For example, women from agrarian families in Egypt had to forego their wage work for non-wage farming work when men members of their household migrated, leading to a significant loss in income.³⁷

Another factor undermining women's resilience to climate change in the place of origin is social and cultural barriers which result in their low participation in local institutions related to agriculture – despite their high representation in actual farming activities.³⁸ Studies in Egypt, Morocco, and Syria show that women farmers are often excluded from agricultural extension services,

28) Thurston, A. M., Stöckl, H., & Ranganathan, M. (2021). Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed- methods systematic review. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(e004377), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004377>

29) Namrata Chindarkar, 'Gender and climate change-induced migration: proposing a framework for analysis' *Environ. Res. Lett.* 7 (2012).

30) David Kaczan and Jennifer Orgill-Meyer, 'The impact of climate change on migration - a synthesis of recent empirical insights,' *Climatic Change* (2020) 158: 281-300.

31) Nellesmann, C., Verma, R., and Hislop, L. (eds). 2011. *Women at the frontline of climate change: Gender risks and hopes. A Rapid Response Assessment.* United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal.

32) Global Protection Cluster 'Climate change and gender-based violence: what are the links,' 2021

33) ESCWA, 'Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region'. E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/Policybrief.11 (2022)

34) Global Protection Cluster 'Climate change and gender-based violence: what are the links,' 2021

35) UNEP, UN Women, UN Peacebuilding, and UNDP, "Promoting gender-responsive approach to natural resource management for peace in North Kordofan, Sudan." 2019. <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/27693?jsessionid=8F022D649419A2CC2015B1CF6364EF6B>

36) Jean D'Cunha, 'Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan: Building women's economic and social resilience to climate risk and migration for survival within sustainable development.' UN Women, Arab Water Council, and SDG Climate Facility in the Arab States. September 2023. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/gender-and-climate-related-migration-in-jordan-and-sudan>

37) Jemima Nomunume Baada and Dina Najjar, 'A review of the effects of migration on the feminization of agrarian dryland economic,' *Journal of Gender, Agriculture and Food Security*. (2020) 5(2) 1-12.

38) Jemima Nomunume Baada and Dina Najjar, 'A review of the effects of migration on the feminization of agrarian dryland economic,' *Journal of Gender, Agriculture and Food Security*. (2020) 5(2) 1-12.

training programs, and producer organizations as these are tailored to suit the needs of men.³⁹ There are several reasons for this: sociocultural norms that consider it inappropriate for women to attend management meetings; subtle deterrents such as an overwhelming overrepresentation of men in agricultural groups or institutions; and holding meetings at night-time or in areas that are not socially acceptable for women to attend.⁴⁰

Women farmers may be able to adapt to climate change if they have sufficient knowledge and resources – this is important not only to support people to stay in their place of origin, but also because some displaced people would be willing to return if they could sustain their agricultural livelihoods with sufficient water resources.⁴¹ However, women’s ability to adapt their farming techniques depends on their control over land and money, access to credit and safeguards, low dependency ratios, good health, personal mobility, and household entitlements.⁴² Since women farmers in the MENA region have limited access to credit and land rights and are excluded from agricultural extension services, training programs, and producer organizations,⁴³ their ability to adapt to the new demands of climate change is severely compromised.

Women’s limited access to land and property is not just about law but also about practice, tied to social and cultural norms. In Jordan, for instance, where legal provisions guarantee women’s rights to land ownership and inheritance, Jordanian women own only 17 percent of land versus men’s 48 percent. In Sudan, women are more likely to be landless than men even though Sudan’s national land laws do not discriminate against women; and even where women do have land ownership rights, social norms inhibit their authority, control and management over the land, particularly in the event of divorce or spousal death. Women’s equitable access to land – in practice and not just in law – is an essential component of resilience, since limited land rights constrain women’s scope of production and access to agricultural inputs, resources and services, including microcredit to start agribusinesses as land and other material assets are usually required to collateralize loans.⁴⁴ Without access to land and the ability to adapt, women are more likely to be forced into poverty or compelled to migrate in highly vulnerable circumstances.

Adolescent girls also face risks linked to climate change and the out-migration of men. Throughout the MENA region, the most common out-of-school children at both primary and secondary levels are girls in rural areas: ranging from around 30 per cent out-of-school in Sudan to 40 per cent in Yemen and 60 per cent in Iraq.⁴⁵ When rural families face economic stress caused by climate change, it is more likely for girls to drop out from school than boys due to the gendered expectation that they should help with domestic household responsibilities.⁴⁶ The added pressure on women and girls in the household during men’s out-migration exacerbates the practice of girls dropping out from school and engaging in child labour. For example, in Iraq, when men within a household migrate to another place in search of work, girls take on additional household responsibilities and are expected to help more on the farm. There are also reports of increases in early marriage for girls as a negative coping mechanism in this situation.⁴⁷

Protection risks for women and girls during the migration journey

Women and girls who are forced to migrate or displace face specific risks during their migration journey or period of displacement. One limitation in mapping these risks is that there is a persistent under-awareness at both the organizational and institutional level of women’s experiences with climate mobility in the MENA region. Cultural practices and norms create barriers to women’s participation in public discussions or decision-making, and there is limited political will together with social and cultural barriers to include women in research and policy design.⁴⁸ As a result, women are underrepresented in national dialogues on disaster risk reduction and climate change. Another factor contributing to the under-awareness of women’s migration experiences is that there is inconsistent collection of sex-disaggregated data, due to multiple factors linked to cultural sensitivities, operational constraints, and methodological challenges. These factors also contribute to a shortage of research, particularly on critical issues like trafficking and GBV.

However, there are clear indications that women and girls who are forced to migrate or displace are exposed to risks such as

39) Abdelali-Martini, M., Goldey, P., Jones, G. and Bailey, E. (2003) ‘Towards a feminization of agricultural labour in Northwest Syria’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 30(2), pp. 71(94).

40) Najjar, D., Percic, M., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A., and Stloukal, L. (2017) *Women, decent work and empowerment in rural*

41) Roger Guiu, ‘When canals run dry: Displacement triggered by water stress in the south of Iraq.’ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Social Inqui, and Nowegian refugee Council, (2020). Available from <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/when-canals-run-dry>

42) Lambrou Y and Piana G 2006 *Gender: The Missing Component of the Response to Climate Change* (New York: Gender and Population Division, Sustainable Development Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States)

43) Abdelali-Martini, M., Goldey, P., Jones, G. and Bailey, E. (2003) ‘Towards a feminization of agricultural labour in Northwest Syria’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 30(2), pp. 71(94).

44) Jean D’Cunha, ‘Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan: Building women’s economic and social resilience to climate risk and migration for survival within sustainable development.’ UN Women, Arab Water Council, and SDG Climate Facility in the Arab States. September 2023. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/gender-and-climate-related-migration-in-jordan-and-sudan>

45) UNICEF and Karama, *Climate change and the impact on adolescent girls*, Technical cohort advocacy brief, 2023

46) UNICEF and Karama, *Climate change and the impact on adolescent girls*, Technical cohort advocacy brief, 2023

47) People in Need, *A gender-inclusive climate-migration study in Salah al-Din Governorate, Iraq*, June 2023.

48) Erin McFee, *Climate change, conflict, and migration (CCM) nexus and water scarcity Study*, International Organisation for Migration, 2023.

GBV, discrimination, exploitation, and trafficking in persons, and also face challenges in accessing sanitation, and sexual, and reproductive and mental health services.⁴⁹ Examples from the MENA region indicate the severity of these risks – while not specific to climate migrants, they are highly likely to affect those forced to move for climate-related reasons:

- Since 2015, frontline responders observed an increase in women migrating via the Mediterranean routes, often travelling on their own.⁵⁰ While it is unclear how many of these women migrated for climate-induced reasons, women and girl migrants are likely to have common experiences during transit, regardless of the drivers of their migration.
- Along the Mediterranean routes, sexual violence against women in irregular migration processes is endemic⁵¹. Sexual violence against women and girl migrants is often used by smugglers as a source of profit, and women are also more vulnerable to transactional rape as a form of payment, particularly since they are more likely than men to be short of money earlier and more frequently during the migration process.⁵²
- Separation from men family members heightens the risk of GBV and is often utilized by smugglers to exercise different types of violence on migrants of different genders.⁵³
- Women face higher health risks need for healthcare on the migration journey as they may be performing tasks like childcare or breastfeeding, and due to exposure to sexual violence.⁵⁴

Women are disproportionately at risk of dying at sea on the Mediterranean routes due to a range of factors that reflect gendered social practices⁵⁵. These practices include:

- Women are often placed in the middle of the rubber boat, where other passengers likely believe they are more protected as they are as far as possible from the water. However, it is in the middle of the boat that seawater and fuel mix up, creating a toxic substance that burns people's skin and often causes them severe injuries. There they are also more at risk of being stepped on and suffocated when the boat is in distress and chaos breaks out on board.
- Women tend to have weaker swimming skills (often as the result of cultural or social norms that restrict women's participation in swimming) and tend to wear longer and heavier clothes than men, making it harder for them to float.
- Some women are pregnant, which reduces their mobility and increases their risk of dehydration.
- Women often hold the responsibility to care for young children traveling with them, including children that are not their own, as well as sick or elderly migrants. In situations of distress women may therefore have to struggle for both their own lives and those of children or people under their care who are often not self-sufficient, making it harder for them to survive.
- On the other hand, women have proved to be a key resource and the best point of contact when communicating with third parties to arrange rescue operations when in distress at sea.

Protection risks for women in the destination or place of displacement

People forced to move due to the effects of climate change and disasters rarely find themselves in a better position after their movements. This is particularly the case for women who worked in agriculture, since they often find it hard to secure 'off-farm'

49) <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/gender-migration-environment-and-climate-change>

50) Freedman, J. "Engendering Security at the Borders of Europe: Women Migrants and the Mediterranean Crisis", J. Refugee Stud., 29 (2016), pp. 568-569. FRONTEX, Annual Risk Analysis for 2020 (2020) p.8, available at: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf.

51) https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf

52) Ravenstone Consult, 'Captive commodities: This route if like a fire': Commodification, exploitation and missingness of Ethiopian irregular migrants on the Eastern Route to Yemen and Saudi Arabia.' 2023, at: <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/captive-commodities-this-route-is-like-a-fire/>. For the same finding in more general settings, see: https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf

53) Ravenstone Consult, 'Captive commodities: This route if like a fire': Commodification, exploitation and missingness of Ethiopian irregular migrants on the Eastern Route to Yemen and Saudi Arabia.' 2023, at: <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/captive-commodities-this-route-is-like-a-fire/>. For the same finding in more general settings, see: https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf

54) https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf

55) https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf at p41

employment, due to conservative social norms that consider certain occupations unsuitable for women⁵⁶ and women with low or no education find it particularly difficult to find employment.⁵⁷ Moreover, when women migrate, job opportunities tend to be less attractive than those for their men counterparts.⁵⁸

The living environment for those forced to move also tends to be poor across the spectrum of migration including temporary displacement and longer-term migration. Climate migration is contributing to the sharp increase in rural-to-urban migration across the MENA region, as people affected by poor rural development, endemic water shortages, and drought move to urban areas for better access to income, safety, and services. People forced to migrate due to climate- and environment-related factors and who lack adequate resources or support networks may end up living in informal sites on the outskirts of urban centres, where unsuitable conditions puts them at risk of secondary displacement: in Sudan, for example, internal migrants including those displaced by climate factors live on unplanned, flood-prone land, with a high proportion of female-headed households.⁵⁹ The arrival of migrants to already overpopulated urban areas places pressure on infrastructure and service delivery, exacerbated since the MENA region also hosts over 37% of the world's displaced (250 million), migrants and refugees.⁶⁰ The sites are often characterized by poor quality housing and inadequate access to services, where residents are more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, detention, restrictions of freedom of movement and access to services. Women and girls face heightened risks including to their health, reproductive health, and GBV.⁶¹

Seasonal or circular migration is one way that agricultural workers deal with weather variation caused by climate change. While most migrants practicing circular migration in the MENA region are men, the experience of Moroccan women demonstrates how this practice introduces new opportunities and new risks to women. Prompted in large part by the inability to cultivate crops in part of the year, there is a regular practice of Moroccan women traveling to Spain to pick strawberries during the harvest season. Most women come from poor families and do not own land, meaning that they have little opportunity to move out of the informal sector. Labour conditions for these women migrants are often exploitative with few protections. Moreover, women are not well-equipped to leverage their earnings from this period. Most would like to leverage their earnings from this period to increase the profitability, but they have not had the opportunity to develop the skills needed to invest, budget, and otherwise manage this income,⁶² in part due to gender norms around decision-making and financial control. This demonstrates the need to support women migrants to capitalize on their migration experience so it can help build their resilience and improve their socio-economic situation.

4. WOMEN LEADING CLIMATE ACTION IN THE MENA REGION

4.1 ADAPTATION, MITIGATION, AND RESILIENCE-BUILDING

Women and girls have an important role to play in minimizing and adapting to the adverse effects of climate change in the MENA region. Many women already engage in climate-sensitive agriculture practices and natural resource management and possess local knowledge that can help tailor climate change actions to their context.⁶³ Several valuable initiatives exist to empower local women to take the lead in water conservation and increase transnational knowledge-sharing among community leaders and decision-makers,⁶⁴ such as Water Wise Women and the Women and Water Diplomacy in the Nile (WIN) Network.

- In Iraq, women have been at the forefront of hazard mapping and risk reduction. Parts of Kirkuk have large IDP populations (with particularly high proportions of female-headed households) living in informal

56) Roger Guiu, 'When canals run dry: Displacement triggered by water stress in the south of Iraq.' Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Social Inquiry, and Norwegian refugee Council, (2020). Available from <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/when-canals-run-dry>.

57) Abdelali-Martini, M. and Hamza, R. (2014) 'How do migration remittances affect rural livelihoods in drylands?', *Journal of International Development*, 26(4), pp. 454(470).

58) Wodon, Quentin, Andrea Liverani, George Joseph, and Nathalie Bounoux, eds. 2014. *Climate Change and Migration: Evidence from the Middle East and North Africa*. World Bank Studies. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-0-8213-9971-2.

59) Jean D'Cunha, 'Gender and climate-related migration in Jordan and Sudan: Building women's economic and social resilience to climate risk and migration for survival within sustainable development.' UN Women, Arab Water Council, and SDG Climate Facility in the Arab States. September 2023. Available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/gender-and-climate-related-migration-in-jordan-and-sudan>

60) *Climate Change in MENA: Current Pressures and Future Dangers*, Wilson Centre (2022): <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/climate-change-mena-current-pressures-and-future-dangers>

61) Aamer, F. (2021, September 9). *Water Crisis in the MENA region*. Energy, Water & Oceans - Stimson Center. <https://www.stimson.org/2021/water-crisis-in-the-mena-region/>

62) IOM Morocco, *Etude sur l'autonomization des travailleuses saisonnières participant au programme de migration circulaire Maroc – Espagne*, 2022

63) ESCWA, 'Mainstreaming gender in climate action in the Arab region'. E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/Policybrief.11 (2022)

64) IOM, UNICEF, UNODC, WDO, UN Women, UNFPA, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 'WDO Flagship Report 2023: Women and Climate Change, 2022-2023', forthcoming.

settlements with poor access to services. Although they were originally displaced due to conflict, most IDPs come from agricultural areas and a key barrier to return is the severe drought that has made farming unfeasible. IOM supported the community to establish small committees to undertake mapping of hazards and risks associated with climate and environmental change. The women's committee – members of which were chosen by the community – demonstrated high awareness of the risks and options to respond. They drew on their existing responsibilities in areas such as water management and childcare to identify a range of hazards associated with health protection, flooding, and service provision.

- Due to traditional gender norms, women are typically responsible for managing water in the home, and their leadership on this issue has been recognised by programs that engage with collectives of women to successfully manage communal water resources in a way that benefits the community equitably and advances development.⁶⁵ This often crosses over into conflict management, which is addressed in more detail in the next section.

Yet, despite their valuable knowledge regarding agriculture and water management, women often struggle to influence policymaking around water and climate issues due to the male-centric environment. Conservative social attitudes often inhibit women's involvement in decision-making, and there is a lack of meritocracy in appointments to formal roles (thus favoring men.) Professional environments are often inaccessible to women because they require employees to join meetings at night or in social settings that are considered off-limits to women.⁶⁶ To benefit from women's knowledge and skills and to create a more equitable and just climate future, authorities and organizations will need to address these obstacles to women's participation. This may involve adapting working hours so that employees are not expected to work at night, hosting professional meetings in gender-neutral locations, and overcoming resistance through change to discriminatory laws and institutional practices through social norms change and investment in women's political empowerment.⁶⁷

4.2 PEACEBUILDING AND WATER MANAGEMENT

New entry points are emerging for women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a result of changing gender roles, power relations and livelihood patterns prompted by climate change. For example, in communities where men migrate in search of alternative livelihoods, women often take on roles that challenge traditional gender norms – they may mediate local conflicts or work in traditionally male-dominated economic sectors, for example. These shifts have the potential to overcome longstanding barriers to women's empowerment in peacebuilding processes. They may also help to widen peace networks, strengthen dialogue, and secure inclusive political, social and economic structures that center on gender equality and environmental sustainability in conflict-affected contexts.⁶⁸

Women play a particularly strong role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding related to water management. Conflict over water is a growing concern globally, with the number of conflicts over water more than doubling from 2009 to 2019.⁶⁹ Water scarcity is not a new issue in the MENA region, but the current scale of water scarcity is unprecedented. This makes it even more urgent to find peaceful ways of managing water equitably.

Examples from the MENA region demonstrate the crucial role women can play in water diplomacy:

- In Yemen, IOM and FAO have supported 'Women Water User Groups,' which recognize that water insecurity is one of the nation's largest stressors, and that over 80% of rural armed conflicts occur over water disputes.⁷⁰ Leveraging the fact that water management is seen as 'women's business,' the Women Water Users Groups empower women to negotiate these disputes and reach an equitable arrangement for water usage. To support their negotiations and strengthen the likelihood of a positive and sustainable outcome, IOM also provides technical support to relieve blockages in water channel beds, repair damaged canals, and build embankments in a fair way so people can benefit equitably from water access.⁷¹ Ultimately, the

65) IOM. (2023b). Women-led Water Management Committee Makes Waves in Jebel Kheir, South Sudan | IOM Storyteller. <https://storyteller.iom.int/stories/women-led-water-management-committee-makes-waves-jebel-kheir-south-sudan>;

66) Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, People and Planet: Gender, Environment and Climate in the 2030 Agenda - report from the MENA Hub. 16-18 March 2021

67) Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, People and Planet: Gender, Environment and Climate in the 2030 Agenda - report from the MENA Hub. 16-18 March 2021

68) UN Women and UN Environment Programme, Gender, climate and security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change. 2020

69) UNICEF, "Water Security for All," March 2021, available at: www.unicef.org/media/95241/file/water-security-for-all.pdf.

70) IOM, UNICEF, UNODC, WDO, UN Women, UNFPA, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 'WDO Flagship Report 2023: Women and Climate Change, 2022-2023', forthcoming.

71) Interview with IOM Yemen, 22 November 2023.

Women Water User Groups help to strengthen both legal and tribal conflict resolution infrastructures.⁷²

- In North Kordofan, Sudan, women in some communities have become actively involved in facilitating dialogue over natural resource disputes, a role previously entirely reserved to men.⁷³
- In Yemen, women have engaged in cross-line negotiations between authorities in North and South Yemen that produced resource management deals,⁷⁴ including access to water.⁷⁵
- Networks that connect women on issues related to water management are another vital way to support women's leadership in water management, as well as to benefit from and strengthen their expertise. In the MENA region, these networks include:
 - The Arab Women Network for Water and Sanitation was launched in August 2023. The initiative, supported by regional and international organizations, aims to empower women in the Arab region to actively participate in decision-making processes related to water and sanitation.
 - The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Voluntary Stakeholder Group on Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab States strengthens cooperation at national and regional levels to implement the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Group puts a strong focus on section 36a(i) of the Sendai Framework, which calls for the participation of women as critical to managing risk and designing and implementing disaster risk reduction initiatives, and for strengthening women's capacities for preparedness and alternate livelihoods post-disaster.⁷⁶ The Group also seeks to address gender responsive climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, as well as gender-sensitive migration.
 - Originating in the Nile Basin in 2017, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network is today a global community of women water leaders (and male champions supporting gender equality) working collectively to strengthen women's leadership in transboundary water decision making in basins across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.⁷⁷ The Network works through ministries of foreign affairs, ministries of water and environment, or civil society and academia. It aims to connect women across borders, exchange experiences, cooperate on research, build women's capacities in water diplomacy, and elevate women's voices in transboundary dialogues at local, regional and global levels.⁷⁸

5. GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL LEGAL, POLICY, AND KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORKS

5.1 GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Most people displaced in the context of climate change and disasters do not flee to other countries but are internally displaced.⁷⁹

72) IOM, UNICEF, UNODC, WDO, UN Women, UNFPA, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 'WDO Flagship Report 2023: Women and Climate Change, 2022-2023', forthcoming.

73) UNEP, UN Women, UN Development Programme. (2019). Promoting Gender-Responsive Approaches to Natural Resource Management for Peace in North Kordofan, Sudan. United Nations: Geneva.

74) H. Tabbara and G. Rubin (2018). Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen – A Discussion Paper. UN Women. Available at: <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/8/women-on-the-frontlines-of-conflict-resolution>.

75) K. Walker (27 April 2020). "On the Frontline of War, Yemeni Women Are Building Peace". Equal Times.

76) Global Water Partnership Mediterranean and Geneva Water Hub, Empowering women in water diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa: A comparative study of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine. 2021

77) Global Water Partnership Mediterranean and Geneva Water Hub, Empowering women in water diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa: A comparative study of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine. 2021

78) Global Water Partnership Mediterranean and Geneva Water Hub, Empowering women in water diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa: A comparative study of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine. 2021

79) <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/6242ea7c4/climate-change-displacement-human-rights.html>

Those who do cross international borders mostly fall outside the existing framework for international protection, that are available to refugees and, stateless persons under the 1951 Refugee Convention, as the definitions of these statuses do not include climate migrants.⁸⁰ Indeed, only climate migrants who flee owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion can obtain the refugee status under the 1951 Convention.

In addition, few governments currently offers a humanitarian legal migration pathway based solely on an individual's exposure to climate change,⁸¹ and in several cases where it is offered (for example in the case of Australia) it is targeted to specific populations (which to date do not include the MENA region).⁸² Moreover, mechanisms such as resettlement, family reunification, or labour migration schemes are – to date- not designed for climate migrants.

Therefore, In general, IOM recognizes that currently international human rights law is the international legal framework that offers the best protection to people affected by climate-related displacement and migration, given its scope, adaptability and flexibility necessary to address the challenges of migration in the context of climate change for all persons without discrimination. International human rights law indeed provides for all relevant rights - from the right to information, to leave any country, to have access to food, housing and decent conditions of living, to the right to life, to access to justice and remedy, to non-discrimination etc. – to mention just a few.

International human rights law is also relevant as it provides for the principle of non-refoulement, that may apply, on a case-by-case basis, to climate migrants, falling outside the scope of refugee law. In its landmark decision in *Teitiota v New Zealand*,⁸³ the Human Rights Committee observed that “environmental degradation, climate change and unsustainable development” can be serious threats to the enjoyment of the right to life and that States have an obligation to undertake “adequate and individualized assessment of the risk of a threat to the right to life”. Specifically under the right to life (Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) there is the obligation “not to extradite, deport or otherwise transfer” individuals to places where they would be at a risk of irreparable harm. Such an obligation of non-refoulement is broader in scope than what is envisaged under international refugee law. Consequently, depending on the circumstances of their case, this protection under international human rights law may apply to climate migrants.⁸⁴

In other words, human rights law addresses the needs and vulnerable circumstances of migrants and local communities, in each case and at every stage. Human rights law integrates and promotes individual assessments to determine the needs of each individual in current mixed migration contexts and requires respect for key principles such as non-discrimination and the principle of non-refoulement, thereby also allowing for admission and stay based on human rights grounds in certain cases.

For IDPs displaced by climate change, environmental degradation or disaster, it is the obligation of their State to protect, promote, and fulfil their human rights, as they are the nationals or residents of the country. Internal displacement in the MENA region occurs frequently in the context of disasters and climate change: over 223,000 new internal displacements were recorded in 2021 due to disasters, mostly triggered by severe drought, flash floods and storms.⁸⁵ Despite these high numbers, there is no specific regional framework or mechanism to address internal displacement. Only two countries so far have adopted comprehensive frameworks on the protection and assistance of IDPs: Iraq, which adopted its National Policy on Displacement in July 2008, and Yemen, which adopted its National Policy for Addressing Internal Displacement in 2013. However, neither policy addresses climate-induced migration specifically.

Empowering women and their communities to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate and environmental change requires a comprehensive legal framework that protects and fulfils their rights – whether in their place of origin, displaced in their own country, or migrants in another country. While a review of national policies is beyond the scope of this Brief, two key areas of law that are essential for the protection of women climate migrants are (1) labor laws that ensure decent working conditions, adequate labor protections, and prevention of abuse for migrants of all genders; and (2) laws that recognize women's equitable rights to land and property, such as the right to buy, sell, and own land, receive inheritance, receive allocated rights in a divorce, and obtain identity documents.

80) Thea Philip, 'Climate change displacement and migration: An analysis of the current international legal regime's deficiency, proposed solutions and a way forward for Australia'

81) <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/who-counts-climate-migrant#:~:text=No%20government%20currently%20offers%20a,is%20limited%20to%20people%20escaping>

82) <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/10/australia-to-offer-residency-to-tuvalu-residents-displaced-by-climate-change>

83) Communication No 2728/2016, UNCCPROR, 127th Sess, UN Doc CCRP/C/127/D/2728/2016 (2019)

84) Ibid Para 9.3, 9.4, 9.7

85) IDMC, GRID 2022, p.34

5.2 GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The MENA region's policy framework on climate mobility has progressed significantly further than the legal framework, although gaps remain. Following the adoption of the Sendai Framework, Paris Agreement, and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, several important commitments have been made in the MENA region to advance the response to climate change, often through the lens of disaster risk reduction. Some (but not all) recognize the specific needs and capacities of women, and future iterations of each document could strengthen this recognition further. The key components of the policy framework include:

- The Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2030, established in 2018, and its associated Plan of Action. The Arab Strategy commits to incorporating risk reduction considerations into national and local policies, plans, and legal frameworks as a means of addressing the vulnerability of women and IDPs (amongst other vulnerable populations), and by ensuring the participation of both women and IDPs in disaster response preparedness and recovery/reconstruction.⁸⁶ The Action Plan also commits to ensuring “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in disaster risk reduction.”
- The Arab Ministerial Council launched the Arab Water Security Strategy in 2018, with a scope of work until 2030. The Water Security Strategy aims to develop sustainable water resources, ensure efficient and equitable water utilization, enhance water governance, and ensure financial stability.
- The Climate Risk Nexus Initiative launched by the Arab Council in 2015 has served as a useful platform for greater policy coherence across shared goals of climate change, DRR, food and water security, and social vulnerability.⁸⁷
- The League of Arab States has committed to facilitating cooperation between Arab countries in areas related to climate change.⁸⁸ The 17 Member States of the League of Arab States who endorsed the Arab Declaration in advance of the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women indicated their strong interest and commitment to combat the negative impacts of climate change on women and girls in the region.⁸⁹
- In March 2022, Egypt launched the African Women’s Climate Adaptive Priorities Initiative (AWCAP) as part of its broader Global Perspective on Women, Environment, and Climate Change. The AWCAP focuses on three goals, which are to (1) promote gender sensitive perspectives within adaptation, mitigation, and responses; (2) leverage opportunities for women within the just transition to the green economy and green consumption habits and within blue economy; and (3) promote educational and behavioural change on women and climate change.⁹⁰
- The Continental Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change (KDMECC-Africa), officially launched and signed at COP 28 on 2 December 2023, outlines 25 commitments by its signatory countries to address the effects of climate change on human mobility in Africa. One of these commitments addresses the gendered impact of climate mobility, by urging signatory States to integrate climate change considerations into existing health policies and strategies, taking into account gender differentiated impacts and responses.⁹¹
- The African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032),⁹² which recognizes the critical role that women play as change agents in informing and driving climate responses, as well as women’s particular vulnerability to climate changes, environmental degradation, and disasters.

86) Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2030: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59464_asdrrreportinsidefinalforweb.pdf

87) The Climate Risk Nexus Initiative, Arab Water Council: https://www.arabwatercouncil.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=467:the-climate-risk-nexus-initiative&catid=160&Itemid=576&lang=en

88) The League of Arab States is an intergovernmental organization comprising 22 member states, including those in the MENA region.

89) United Nations Population Fund (2023). “The need for integrated climate change action in sexual and reproductive health and gender based violence programming. Evidence and recommendations for the Arab region.”

90) COP27 Presidency Initiative, African Women’s Climate Adaptive Priorities. 2022

91) <https://eastandhornafrica.iom.int/kampala-ministerial-declaration-migration-environment-and-climate-change>

92) https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42276-doc-CC_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_2022-2032_23_06_22_ENGLISH-compressed.pdf

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are another way for governments to address the gender dimensions of climate mobility. Of the NDCs that exist in the MENA region, most reference gender in some way, but do not include detailed provisions necessary to ensure the full participation and empowerment of women affected by climate change, and women's experience of climate mobility is unaddressed. Trends amongst the NDCs show: ⁹³

- 11 of the 15 NDCs make some reference to gender.
- Seven NDCs describe women as a group vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- Ten NDCs cite gender-mainstreaming or gender-responsiveness as a means to address climate change impacts and ensure representation of women in NDCs.
- Five NDCs make specific reference to GBV, and Jordan and Tunisia include a measure to support women exposed to GBV as a health-related adaptation pillar.
- Two (Jordan and Syria) call for gender-responsive measures that include greater participation by women with a focus on increasing the resilience of women, communities, and systems so that they can expand their ability to adapt.
- In addition, some 45% of national plans on adaptation to climate change were considered child sensitive (including towards girls), such as UAE, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Palestine. ⁹⁴

Future revisions of each NDC should build on this foundation to strengthen recognition of women's needs, capacities, and rights and include human mobility considerations including women's specific experiences and vulnerabilities.

In addition to NDCs, since 2011, under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, some countries have developed and submitted National Adaptation Plans. These National Adaptation Plans offer another opportunity for governments to address the gender dimensions of climate mobility, although to date in the MENA region only Kuwait and Sudan have submitted Plans. Sudan includes some elements of gender equality in relation to climate migration in its Plan by integrating actions on capacity-building and empowerment of women.

Finally, Jordan has advanced the recognition of women and climate change furthest in the region by addressing the needs and capacities of women in strategies on climate change, and also recognizing climate change in frameworks concerning gender equality and women's empowerment. Specifically, Jordan included a section on gender equality in its National Climate Change Policy, and also directed the development of a roadmap for gender equality and climate change. In addition, one outcome in Jordan's National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2022–2025) relates to climate change. However, despite this high-level awareness, policies to operationalize these connections remain pending, ⁹⁵ demonstrating the challenge that exists between formalizing and implementing policies of this nature.

5.3 GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Gaps in our knowledge concerning women and climate mobility are significant, not only in the MENA region but globally. For the MENA region, the following gaps in knowledge should be prioritized:

- There is a lack of gender data, including sex- and age- disaggregated data and gender analysis related to climate mobility, which paints an incomplete picture and limits our understanding of the needs, capacities and experiences of the diversity of women and girls in relation to climate mobility. ⁹⁶ This lack of data also poses a serious challenge to the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices and government institutions to collect, analyse, disseminate, and use data and statistics on gender and climate change, environmental degradation

⁹³ This data is based on a study by the United Nations Population Fund, which defined the MENA region slightly differently from IOM. In particular, the UNFPA report included Somalia. See: United Nations Population Fund (2023). "The need for integrated climate change action in sexual and reproductive health and gender based violence programming. Evidence and recommendations for the Arab region."

⁹⁴ The impact of climate change on children in MENA, UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/19631/file/ClimateChangeImpactOnChildren-MENA-Report-5Nov22.pdf%20.pdf>

⁹⁵ Aya Kamil and Adele Malle, 'Climate change and gender in Morocco and Jordan,' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2023.

⁹⁶ UN Women, 'Ensuring safe and regular migration for women and girls in the context of climate change' 2023.

and disasters.⁹⁷ There is also a need to conduct research on lesser understood aspects of gender and climate mobility, such as the experience of girls and the impact of intersectionality.

- One specific gap in knowledge is the link between climate-induced migration and trafficking in persons. Environmental and climatic events and processes do not in themselves cause trafficking in persons or smuggling of migrants. However, they can create unfavorable conditions and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, heightening the risk of exploitation and potentially even trafficking⁹⁸. Given the prevalence and heightened risks of exploitation and GBV on the Mediterranean routes; climate migrants' reliance on daily labour in a context of weak labour protections; and the socio-economic vulnerability of female climate migrants and IDPs generally, it is important to understand how climate mobility and trafficking interact. One out-of-region example may be found in Kenya, where IOM is implementing a five-year research project on climate change as a growing driver of human trafficking and alternative livelihood options and economic opportunities for populations affected by climate change.
- There is often overlap between climate-induced mobility and conflict-induced displacement, but the interaction is not systematically tracked or studied. The IPCC 2022 report calls for further research on the interactions between climate change and peacebuilding, since climate change impacts are likely to undermine human security and this could have significant implications for peace and stability.⁹⁹ It is vital to take into account the perspectives and experiences of women and girls when such research is carried out. DTM and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre are both making valuable contributions to our understanding of this interaction,¹⁰⁰ but due to lack of funding, operational constraints, methodological challenges, and cultural sensitivities particularly when researching issues such as trafficking and GBV, there are significant gaps in knowledge. It is important to fill this gap in knowledge because households affected by multiple forms or drivers of displacement face much higher barriers to durable solutions.
- Practitioners working on Disaster Risk Reduction or migration management in the MENA region often struggle to access or understand complex laws concerning women's access to land and property ownership, which is fundamental to women's ability to mitigate the effects of climate change and build their resilience. Given the technical complexity of this issue, country-specific information sheets or toolkits would fill an important gap in knowledge.
- There is a pressing need to document, evaluate, and share knowledge on strategies, programming, or other interventions that have supported the protection and empowerment of women and girls affected by climate and environmental change in the MENA region. This will contribute to evidence-based programming and a wider awareness of why and how to put women's needs and experiences at the forefront of any response to climate mobility.



Iraq, Dohuk, Workers from Khanke Carpet Factory

97) UN Women, 'Ensuring safe and regular migration for women and girls in the context of climate change' 2023.

98) UNODC, Policy Brief on Climate, crime and exploitation: The gendered links between climate change-related risk, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants (October 2022); IOM. 2016. The Climate Change–Human Trafficking Nexus. Bangkok, Thailand: Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mecc_infosheet_climate_change_nexus.pdf

99) IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," in Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, ed. Hans-Otto Pörtner et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022),

100) For example, see: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023>

6. GOOD PRACTICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE, HUMAN MOBILITY, AND WOMEN

This section sketches some examples of good practice that bring together climate change, human mobility, and women. The reflections here are modest and do not claim to be comprehensive, but rather identify initial themes observed by IOM through its programming experience in the MENA region, as a first contribution to a body of good practices.

GOOD PRACTICE #1

Invest in disaggregated data collection, gender analysis, knowledge management, and knowledge sharing related to climate-induced displacement in order to support evidence-based programming and decision-making.



PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

In Iraq, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has been tracking climate-induced displacement since June 2018, linked to the drought crisis affecting central and southern Iraq. To support evidence-based programming and decision-making, IOM has set up bilateral information sharing with relevant government departments; carried out joint field visits and household interviews with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement in support of IDP registration; and presented at the Baghdad Annual Water Conference. These interactions have provided a forum to discuss the rights and experiences of climate migrants including women and girls, and advocate for gender-sensitive policy responses that are guided by the available data.

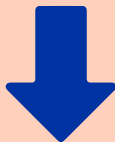
In Sudan, IOM has carried out a mapping exercise to understand women's involvement in conflict and resource management and how this can be strengthened. Investing in this type of granular research is essential to creating context-specific and effective programming.



Hameeda stands in front of her home with her children in Abugarin village in Bao locality, Blue Nile State

GOOD PRACTICE #2

Support women who are affected by the adverse mobility drivers linked to climate change to reduce the risks associated with migration and to utilize migration as an adaptation strategy that can build their resilience to the impact of future environmental changes.



PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

In Morocco, women engaged in seasonal migration to Spain were poorly equipped to leverage their earnings and were also poorly informed about labour laws and standards; however, most wanted to understand how to use migration more strategically to improve their overall socio-economic wellbeing. Training and support carried out jointly with the Moroccan Ministry of Labour pre- and post- migration were crucial to enabling these women to capitalize on their migratory experience, mitigate the risks it exposed them to, and help them to reinvest their acquired knowledge in their society.¹⁰¹

GOOD PRACTICE #3

To address the complexities of climate mobility more effectively, work in partnership and coordination with other actors (including women-led organizations and women's rights organizations) to collect data, build evidence, deliver comprehensive services and amplify advocacy.



PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

In Iraq, one stream of the Interagency Protection Platform (co-led by UNHCR and OHCHR) is climate mobility and protection. The platform enables UN agencies, organizations, government departments, and donors to share analysis, gain a common understanding of the issues, and develop common advocacy and programming goals. IOM and other UN agencies have utilized the Platform to pursue gender equality within climate mobility, by investing in research on the topic; sharing data and programming experiences; forming partnerships within Platform members to increase the effectiveness of advocacy; and advocating with government counterparts for the recognition of gendered experiences and needs in climate mobility, including related to GBV and trafficking.

101) IOM Morocco, Etude sur L'autonomization des travailleuses saisonnières participant au programme de migration circulaire Maroc – Espagne, 2022

GOOD PRACTICE #4

Support women to lead initiatives related to hazard mitigation and conflict resolution, drawing on their existing expertise and responsibilities on issues such as water and resource management.



PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

In Yemen, Women's Water User Groups (established in partnership between IOM and FAO) empowered women to negotiate local water disputes, leveraging their existing responsibilities in water management. In support of women's negotiations, IOM also repairs and improves the existing water infrastructure. This model helped to influence positive norms around women's roles in natural resource management and dispute resolution, as well as reducing conflict over water resources and improve communal livelihoods threatened by water scarcity.¹⁰²

In Iraq, a women's committee supported by IOM excelled in conducting hazard and risk mapping to address climate-related risks in their community, drawing on their knowledge of water management as well as health and childcare. This community-level mapping and mobilization is essential for the effectiveness of a national crisis structure and can benefit significantly from women's expertise

GOOD PRACTICE #5

Work with women to understand the different roles they may wish to play and to identify a range of entry points through which they can address environmental degradation, disasters, and mobility.



PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

In Libya, IOM programming on disaster risk reduction highlighted that it is essential for women themselves to define how they wish to be involved in planning, decision-making, and programming – in some instances, women lead initiatives; in others, they influence the outcome in less visible but equally valuable ways, and it is important to support multiple pathways in order to give a range of women the opportunity to participate. The MENA region is politically, culturally, and socially diverse, and this creates different expectations around the way that women engage in public forums and decision-making processes.

In addition, since forums that explicitly address climate change may be limited and face their own political challenges, it is important to identify a variety of sectoral entry points through which women (and men) can address environmental degradation, disasters, and migration. In IOM's case, this is done through programming in disaster risk reduction, community stabilization and peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, migration management and policy engagement.

102) Evaluation of project "Strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding through natural resource management at the community level in Sana'a and Lahj, FAO: <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/fr/c/CB4637EN/>

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Putting women's needs and experiences at the forefront of the response to climate mobility requires concrete actions, as well as sustained cooperation and collaboration of governments, humanitarian and development actors, donors, academics, and research institutes. The recommendations below identify priority areas of action to strengthen the link between women and climate mobility in the MENA region and centre women as crucial actors in both policy and programmatic interventions.

Governments in the MENA region

- Integrate actions that relate to the specific needs, capacities, and concerns of women and climate mobility into National Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. This should include actions to enable women's participation and amplify women's voices in relation to policy decision, and to protect and empower women who may consider migration as an adaptation strategy as well as those left behind when men household members migrate.
- Integrate actions that relate to the specific needs, capacities, and concerns of women and climate mobility into DRR strategies, urban resilience planning and associated crisis planning.
- Mainstream climate concerns within gender equality frameworks, such as 1325 National Action Plans. This means that existing processes for protecting and empowering women can be used to address their concerns regarding climate change and climate mobility.
- Invest in national data capabilities, including gender and diversity data collection (disaggregated by sex and age at minimum), gender analysis, knowledge management and knowledge transfer. Prioritise collection of and widespread access to quality data that is publicly available, including baseline data, year-over-year change, and environmental and population impact metrics.
- Utilize climate financing to meaningfully address women's empowerment as well as risk associated with climate change. As an example, major financing instruments deal with sustainable livelihoods, and there is scope to utilize this investment in livelihoods programming to empower women and address the risk of trafficking and smuggling faced by women and girls affected by climate mobility.¹⁰³
- Ensure local disaster risk reduction action plans also build in safety planning for vulnerable and at-risk groups, such as female-headed households and women with disabilities, based on their protection needs. This could include development of specific safety plans for female migrants or women left behind.
- Strengthen national laws that protect and empower women affected by climate change and forced mobility in the context of climate change, such as labour laws, land and property rights, access to essential services, and regular migration pathways.
- Enhance social protection (pensions, health insurance etc.) for women who work in the informal economy, as well as women left behind when men migrate.
- Ensure workplace conditions (such as appropriate locations and working hours) and associated legal frameworks (and their application) enable women to participate in jobs and formal initiatives related to climate change and climate mobility.

Actors involved in programming in the MENA region

- Invest in gender data capacity, including gender analysis, knowledge management and knowledge-sharing to provide the foundation for evidence-based programming and ensure migration policies are responsive to the needs of women and girls migrating in the context of climate change. Funding for data collection should be dedicated specifically to climate mobility and target the areas most affected by climate change and environmental degradation. Data should be consistently disaggregated by sex and age.

103) UNODC, Policy Brief on Climate, crime and exploitation: The gendered links between climate change-related risk, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants (October 2022)

- Invest in local research capacities through partnerships with local universities, research organizations, and think tanks. Utilize local research partnerships to explore topics that are difficult to research, such as trafficking and GBV linked to forced mobility in the context of climate change, ensuring adherence to ethical research principles, especially guided by 'do no harm'.
- Evaluate programming that links climate change, human mobility and women, and publicize findings on what has worked, what hasn't, and why.
- Diversify employment capacities and opportunities for women away from agriculture, both in origin areas that are vulnerable to climate change, as well as in destinations where women have migrated due to climate change.
- Programs that support adaptation to climate change should include gender-specific socio-economic and political empowerment initiatives. They should aim to challenge patriarchal traditions, while also being responsive to women's concrete needs (as defined by women) and while building on women's existing spaces of power and authority within their communities.
- Working with national governments and civil society, equip women with information that can support their decision-making and experience of climate mobility, such as information on conditions in the destination area (including internal movements from rural to urban areas), type of assistance available, labour laws and standards, and legal recourse for abuse.
- Support women to build their financial literacy and ensure access to financial products to help them capitalize on their migration experience and earning.
- Strengthen partnerships with diverse national and regional women-led and women's rights groups to accelerate change, and ensure programming is led and informed by women affected by climate mobility.
- Develop or adapt training modules for law enforcement to integrate more case studies of climate-related displacement, gender considerations, unsafe migration, and exploitation.
- Ensure that programming on women's access to land and housing (such as legal assistance or advocacy campaigns) are accessible to and address the impact on women living in areas under significant climate stress, and those affected by climate mobility. HLP programming must also be based on gender analysis and should address barriers to women's HLP access.
- Support the engagement and leadership of women and girls in disaster preparedness and response. This includes bringing women to the table in policy discussions, in risk assessments, in the development of early warning strategies, and in building out a response. Community-based women's groups may also play an important role in leading local risk reduction.
- Identify opportunities for women to lead or influence local water diplomacy efforts and conflict resolution related to water management, and support initiatives that amplify the role women play in those processes.
- Conduct awareness-raising and information-sharing on disaster and climate risks in forums that women can access and engage with.
- Support the government to strengthen national laws that protect women affected by climate change and climate mobility, such as labour laws, land and property rights, access to essential services, and migration pathways. IOM MENA can support regional efforts to bring together inter-ministerial groups to adopt agreements and pathways to strengthen support for people on the move.
- Ensure women have access to essential services including sexual and reproductive health services and protection services while on the move.

- Support and strengthen existing networks related to women's leadership in water management.
- Initiate or strengthen programming that aims to transform social norms that relate to women's labour force engagement and underemployment, political participation, decision-making, and risks of GBV, including initiatives to engage men and boys and change discriminatory legal frameworks and practices.
- In partnership or collaboration with national authorities, prioritize programs that improve women migrants' financial literacy and their access to financial products so they can make use of their earnings from labour migration.

Academics and Research Institutes

- Use gender analysis and research, continue to shift attention and resources to slow-onset processes, and specifically the impact on women and girls. Disasters with high mortality and property destruction consume more attention and resources but slow-onset events are likely to contribute to a greater scale of unsafe migration, exploitation through trafficking, public health issues, and GBV.
- Conduct research, programming evaluations, or other initiatives that demonstrate how laws and practices on women's ownership and control over unalienable assets (such as land and housing) impact women affected by climate change, environmental degradation and disaster.
- Conduct research on lesser understood aspects of gender and climate mobility, such as the experience of girls and the impact of intersectionality.
- Work with practitioners to consider how language related to climate mobility (and particularly a lack of common terminology) affects issues such as data collection and knowledge transfer, and how this can be better addressed.



Iraq, International Organization for Migration.