

# What Coherence in Policies to Tackle Climate Migration

POLICY PAPER N. 1

April 2021



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FOM Policy Paper n. 1<sup>1</sup>

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"This background document has been realized in the framework of the project, to spread data and information based on a scientific analysis. If you want to know more about this project and be part of its activities, please feel free to contact the leading partner Diaconia in Czech Republic (email: nozinova@diakoniespolu.cz), as well as Focsiv in Italy (email: f.novella@focsiv.it)."

<sup>1</sup>This Policy Paper has been realised in the framework of the "Faces of Migration" project, co-financed by the European Union. The paper has been elaborated by Andrea Stocchiero, FOCSIV and Roberto Sensi, ActionAid. This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

## INTRODUCTION

### A complex nexus

There is no doubt that climate change and environmental stresses have an impact on migration. It is difficult, however, to understand how and with what intensity climate impacts migration in order to outline a coherent policy to address it. Indeed, as with many other drivers of migration, there is no cause-effect relationship, but rather a complex dynamic characterised by multiple factors. It is therefore more useful, when referring to the relationship between migration and climate change, to use the concept of “nexus” rather than “cause-effect”<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, several studies have shown how climate change acts as a stress multiplier, eventually exacerbating complex existing conditions in a specific context up to a breaking point that can trigger the migration process. This happens because climate change produces environmental impacts intertwining with political, demographic, economic and social factors that in turn influence migration dynamics.

The drivers are interconnected, their categories permeable and climate change may have a different impact on one or the other<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, it is important to consider that the decision to move is not a simple and linear response to the deterioration of living conditions in a specific place due to the sudden or cumulative effects of climate change, but rather an option characterised by biophysical, political and economic factors of the context and how they act at the level of single families and individuals<sup>4</sup>.

The characteristics of specific contexts are crucial in studying a possible correlation between the two phenomena. Migration may also represent an adaptation strategy<sup>5</sup> to the direct and indirect impacts of climate change.

As such, it is not intrinsically negative - despite the mainstream narrative<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, migration represents one option within a range of adaptation options. As the context changes, it can have such a negative impact on people that the option to migrate becomes unviable. This is particularly true with regard to the progressive effects of climate change: adaptation actions, e.g. through infrastructural land defence works, may initially make migration unnecessary. However, once the effects of climate change make local adaptation strategies no longer effective, the worsening of economic and social conditions may become the main obstacle to migration. An ‘involuntary immobility’ will thus arise, which can also occur in cases of sudden and extreme environmental events such as the floods in Mozambique or Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005<sup>7</sup>.

In a study on the subject<sup>8</sup>, attention was drawn to the risk of millions of people becoming ‘trapped’ in a downward spiral. On the one hand, the inability to move due to lack of resources, and on the other, increased vulnerability due to environmental impacts. The Government Office for Science report concluded that involuntary immobility had to be as much a concern as environmental migration, at least from the point of view of the humanitarian crises that could result.

<sup>2</sup> ActionAid, Migration, food security and cooperation policies. Exploring the nexus beyond simplifications, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/the-inconvenient-truth-of-future-mixed-migration-climate-change-mobility-and-legal-voids/>

<sup>4</sup> Mixed Migration Center, Weak links: Challenging the climate&mixed migration paradigm in the Horn of Africa & Yemen MMC Briefing Paper, Febbraio 2020, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Defined as the ability of individuals and societies to transform their structures, functions and organisational arrangements in order to better manage their response to environmental risks and other changes of an adverse nature.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/op-ed-mistaken-metaphor-the-root-causes-approach-to-migration-is-both-dishonest-and-ineffective/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/the-inconvenient-truth-of-future-mixed-migration-climate-change-mobility-and-legal-voids/>

<sup>8</sup> Foresight, Migration and Global Environmental Change Future Challenges and Opportunities, Government Office of Science, 2011.

## The numbers and definitions of climate migration

Disasters caused by natural hazards are the main cause of forced displacement, which occurs mainly within individual states. For example, the International Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that in 2018, 17.2 million people were forced to leave their homes due to extreme weather events, namely 47 thousand people every day<sup>9</sup>. A recent World Bank study<sup>10</sup> estimated a projection of 143 million people forced to move within countries due to climate-related causes by 2040. These movements can have different characteristics: temporary; permanent and local; permanent intra-country; permanent regional or even intercontinental. The last two are relevant to the study of trans-national migratory movements, including, in perspective, flows towards Europe.

In recent years, many studies have provided estimates on the future number of such movements, ranging between 150 and 300 million in 2050. However, these estimates are mainly based on the number of people living in regions at risk rather than those who might actually migrate. These estimates do not necessarily take into account either other adaptation strategies or involuntary and voluntary immobility. Moreover, as we have mentioned, it is very difficult now, as in the future, to distinguish environmental migrants from other categories.

There are several definitions assigned to flows of people moving for reasons of climate stress, including those of 'climate refugees', 'environmental refugees' or 'climate migrants'.

From a legal point of view, the term 'environmental refugee' is misleading, as international law has not yet defined the status of those who leave their homes for environmental reasons; it is in fact difficult to clearly distinguish them from other categories, and therefore they are not covered by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. As a result, the legal means of protection remain inadequate. For this reason, several experts and non-governmental organisations are calling for their formal recognition in order to develop national, regional and international legislation to protect them, as it was the case, for example, with internally displaced persons through the adoption of the 1998 UN Guiding Principles for Internally Displaced Persons.

The problem, unfortunately, is not merely one of terminology. If the international community today fails to find a real solution to the situation of over 98% of refugees, what prospects will there be for even more people without a recognised status who will transit irregularly to other countries or remain stranded in neighbouring countries without the possibility of returning home?<sup>11</sup>

Without widening regular channels of entry or ensuring protection for more categories of vulnerable migrants, more and more people will remain stranded and without help, causing more and more major humanitarian emergencies<sup>12</sup>. It is therefore imperative to implement target 10.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which calls for the creation of regular, safe and orderly channels for migration. These channels must take environmental causes into account.

<sup>9</sup> International Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, Groundswell Report. Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/the-inconvenient-truth-of-future-mixed-migration-climate-change-mobility-and-legal-voids/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

# International Displacement Monitoring

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## Migration and climate change in the SDGs and the Global Compact on Migration

In the face of the above complexity, the SDGs do not explicitly consider the relationship between climate change and migration. Already in the GCAP 2018 report and then in the 2019 report<sup>13</sup>, the SDGs were analysed with reference to migration, noting that the targets are insufficient<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, Target 10.7 calls on the international community to establish safe channels for migration. And on this indication, the United Nations negotiated the first major global agreement on migration: the Global Compact on Migration.

This pact, signed in Marrakesh in 2018 (which lacks significant signatures such as those of the USA and Australia, as well as some European countries including Italy), outlines a system of objectives (23), commitments and actions (over 250), which should allow for a governance of migration compatible with the improvement of the living conditions of both migrants and communities of origin, transit and destination, balancing the rights of migrants with the territorial sovereignty of States.

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the relationship between migration and SDG see the migration chapter by Coresi F., Pezzati P. and Stocchiero A. in GCAP Italy (2018) Sustainable development for whom? A critical view for Italian and European policy coherence, GCAP and ENGIM, in <http://www.gcapitalia.it/presentazione-del-primo-rapporto-di-monitoraggio-degli-sdg-in-italia-a-cura-di-gcap-italia/>.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the need to enrich the 2030 Agenda by giving more space to the relationship between migration and development with reference to several SDGs, and in particular those on education and health, see also Marta Foresti and Jessica Hagen-Zanker (2017) „Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Executive Summary, ODI.

The second objective of the Compact addresses the structural causes that force people to migrate, including climate change. Indeed, the Compact devotes several articles to the climate issue. The assumption is that the effects of this great phenomenon will result in forced migration. Natural disasters with a sudden onset (floods and heat waves) or longer duration (desertification and sea level rise) need to be mapped, analysed and forecasted (action h of the second objective), in order to define adaptation and resilience strategies (action i), as well as disaster preparedness strategies that complement displacement (action j), addressing people's vulnerabilities with humanitarian assistance (action k). These actions require cooperation between neighbouring and other countries to agree on migration governance strategies, at regional and sub-regional levels (action k), including through state-led consultative processes such as the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disaster and Climate Change, and the Platform on Disaster Displacement (action l).

While this Compact approach acknowledges the effects of climate change and environmental degradation in general on migration, it does not acknowledge the interconnections between the different SDGs in relation to migration, thus making a coherent, integrated and multi-sectoral approach to mobility and migration impossible<sup>15</sup>. This chapter will explore some of these complex interconnections. Five different interconnections will be considered in the light of the multi-factorial nature of the relationship

between migration and the SDGs, and their consequences in terms of policy coherence.

## 1. CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION



The first interconnection concerns the impact of greenhouse gas emissions (SDG13) on natural disasters causing displacement and migration (SDG10). This relationship is the one highlighted in Goal 2 of the GCM. The impact of natural disasters on displacement and migration can involve hundreds of thousands of people, especially in the so-called hotspots, areas where exposure to risks is higher (e.g. at the mouths of major rivers prone to flooding and rising sea levels) and communities are more vulnerable (poor people living near these areas). These are mostly short-range displacements or migration patterns. But vulnerability depends on the condition of poverty and inequality in accessing protection; on the existence or absence of adaptation strategies, community resilience capacity building, and land protection policies.

Thus, the relationship between climate change, disasters and migration is indirect; it's mediated and more or less impactful depending on the economic and social conditions of populations,

<sup>15</sup>In this regard, in the GCAP 2018 report (p.103) a diagram was drawn that tries to highlight these interconnections.

and on the existence of adequate policies to deal with it.

At the political level, there is a need to seek new ways of governing migration due to natural disasters, and thus having regular and safe channels for environmental migrants as well (SDG10 target 10.7). We need plans for displacement and relocation to areas with access to a decent life, both within countries and in neighbouring countries, with humanitarian visas that can be converted into work permits and thus paths to economic and social integration.

These issues are being addressed with adaptation plans within states and on platforms for political dialogue between states, such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement, whose steering committee the EU participates, and which should be expanded to include more states. It would be important for the Italian government to participate actively in its work in order to contribute to defining a European strategy in the Mediterranean.

At the same time, as mentioned above, a debate has been opened at international and European level on the possibility of extending refugee status to so-called climate refugees, thus amending the Geneva Convention, and/or providing humanitarian visas that cover the causes of climate and environmental degradation<sup>16</sup>.

In Italy, this possibility had been recognised by case law<sup>17</sup>. With the introduction of the security decrees in 2019, humanitarian protection has been replaced by a series of special cases, including natural disasters<sup>18</sup>, which seems to confirm the possibility of obtaining a residence permit but without access to adequate reception services.

## 2. CLIMATE CHANGE, POVERTY, INEQUALITIES AND MIGRATION



The second interconnection concerns the relationship between climate change (SDG13), the eradication of absolute poverty (SDG1), the reduction of inequalities (SDG10) and migration. The nexus predicts that climate change causes more poverty and inequality with increased migration. The consequences of short- and long-lasting disasters usually fall most heavily on vulnerable populations, generally the poorest and those suffering the greatest inequalities of opportunity and achievement.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding this debate at European level see European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019, The concept of 'climate refugee'. Towards a possible definition; European Parliament Briefing.

<sup>17</sup> Reference can be made to two decisions, one by the Court of Bologna and one by the Court of L'Aquila, which recognised the migrant claimants' right to humanitarian protection for environmental causes (these were the great floods in Pakistan in 2013 and extreme events in Bangladesh), as also provided for in a circular letter of 30 July 2015 by the National Commission for the Right to Asylum of the Ministry of the Interior. In turn, the Court of Cassation in 2018 issued a ruling in favour of the recognition of humanitarian protection for contextual and therefore environmental factors that make access to basic goods impossible.

<sup>18</sup> According to Metlingpot's analysis, among the special cases there is: "the residence permit for calamity, a circumscribed and residual situation also in this case, which can be justified only in contingent and extraordinary situations. These situations are not very usable; in addition to this, there must be the proven situation that security situations are not guaranteed in the country of origin; this too is not convertible and is only renewable if the requirements persist". In <https://www.meltingpot.org/Capiamo-il-decreto-legge-Salvini.html#XnjnZXJ7nIU>. Similarly, ASGI indicates that: "Basically, after dl 113/2018, the Consolidated Text only mentions humanitarian needs in the heading of Title III of Chapter II [8] and in Article 20, which provides for "temporary protection measures to be adopted, also by way of derogation from the provisions of this Consolidated Text, for significant humanitarian needs, on the occasion of conflicts, natural disasters or other particularly serious events in countries outside the European Union"; in <https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/permesso-umanitario-dopo-decreto-11-2018/>

These communities of peasants, nomadic herders, slum and bidonville dwellers live in areas undermined by environmental degradation. In order to survive, they are forced to move in search of places that offer better living conditions. The migration pattern is mainly short- and medium-distance. In such cases, migration is also a family strategy of adaptation to adversity. Not the whole family migrates, only the youngest. They move in order to find a job, earn money and send a large part of their income to their family of origin which, in this way, can improve its resilience. They migrate in order to be better able to stay in their territory of origin (they can return or commute while the family stay), where this is still possible.

On the other hand, as indicated above, it has been observed that the communities that suffer most from environmental, economic and social degradation are those that remain 'trapped' in the territory.

Those who are unable to migrate because they belong to social categories that are incapacitated, such as women and children, the disabled, the very poor and excluded. People and families who do not want to migrate even if they had the opportunity, because they would lose all of the little they had managed to set apart, including the social relations that allow them to live with some dignity. Communities fight hard against outplacement plans because they do not offer better alternatives. These plans are emergency measures and do not address structural factors of poverty and inequality.

Climate change adaptation policy and strategies should therefore be closely linked to security and social justice measures, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable populations, women and children, and the disabled. The World Bank report cited above predicts that climate migration will drop if states adopt more equitable development policies. In these strategies, in addition to providing regular channels for youth migration by giving them the opportunity to earn money to help the resilience of their families and communities of origin, the rights of 'trapped' populations should be considered more substantially.

### 3. CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD SECURITY AND MIGRATION



The third interconnection between climate change (SDG13), food security (SDG2) and migration (SDG10), points at how environmental disasters degrade the land by reducing food production and availability, thus pushing local communities to leave. The process of desertification shows how entire populations of nomadic farmers and herders in the Sahel are increasingly forced to move to neighbouring areas, generating, among other things, tensions with local populations, and even more conflicts between farmers and nomads over access to scarce natural resources.



Alongside short- and medium-haul migration patterns of entire families and clans, there are also long-haul migrations of young people to find more income opportunities. Migration is both forced and the result of risk diversification strategies.

On the other hand, once again, the impact of environmental degradation depends on inequality situations and conditions, and on unsustainable policies that make local populations even more vulnerable and therefore, in some cases, forced to migrate. For example, the policies and investments of states and large corporations that impose monoculture agricultural models with the use of plant protection products and pesticides that reduce biodiversity and degrade soil fertility<sup>19</sup>. In such cases, local farming communities are made dependent on large development projects, and see their resilience in an increasingly polluted environment reduced. Over time, they suffer from the depletion of natural resources and are forced to move.

These processes demand for public policies to support resilience and sustainable production models such as agroecological ones, access to local markets, with adaptation plans to reduce exposure to environmental risk. Strengthening food security and food sovereignty should be based on empowering local communities, on their capacity to become resilient. Development cooperation by many NGOs in close partnership with farmers' movements in the South is already playing an important role in this regard.

These measures must be accompanied by policies that recognise and support migration as a way of adapting to and making a positive contribution to communities of origin. This will require actions to protect migrants' work in the places of destination in order to avoid their exploitation.

#### 4. CLIMATE CHANGE, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS, AND MIGRATION.



The fourth interconnection between climate change (SDG13), production and consumption patterns (SDG12) and migration (SDG10) assumes that climate change exacerbates competition over increasingly scarce resources, causing an even stronger push for the adoption of extractive models that in turn cause displacement and migration.

On the other hand, climate change itself is the result of unsustainable production models that generate dead lands and waters (Sassen, 2015). A vicious circle is thus generated that causes exclusion and displacement of poor and vulnerable populations.

Already in the 2019 GCAP report, it was shown how investments by companies, states and financial entities, which cause cases of land grabbing and in general grabbing of natural

<sup>19</sup> See Focsv's "I Padroni della Terra" Reports : <https://www.focsv.it/i-patroni-della-terra-2020/>; <https://www.focsv.it/i-patroni-della-terra-online-il-nuovo-rapporto-focsv-coldiretti/>; <https://www.focsv.it/i-patroni-della-terra-in-un-mondo-finito/>;

resources, lead local populations to migrate from an increasingly degraded environment. There are many cases of dispossession of local communities from their territories, pollution and unsustainable exploitation of soil and water<sup>20</sup>.

These investments are part of international value chains and public-private partnerships for the development of corridors, poles, production zones for export, which imply displacement of people with new urbanisation. Unfortunately, these plans rarely take into account the right to decent housing and access to social and economic safety nets. Relocation programmes are also implemented that are not shared with populations, applied without consultation, and making use of coercive measures.

This can be countered by defending the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to land and advocating for mandatory application of due diligence along value chains. This includes the negotiation of the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights and the new debate on an EU due diligence regulation, following the French national law and the interest shown by other states. At the same time, as already highlighted above, national, regional and international migration should be valued, as it can strengthen (and not weaken) local communities, with regular, safe and orderly migration channels.

## 5. CLIMATE CHANGE, CONFLICT AND MIGRATION



The fifth interconnection between climate change (SDG13), the promotion of peace to address conflict (SDG16) and migration governance (SDG10) highlights how environmental degradation can be conducive to conflicts and social tensions, which can lead to displacement and migration. Migrations that in turn can provoke new conflicts and tensions, especially with host communities. Already in 2014, a World Bank report<sup>21</sup> indicated how migration, resulting from climate change with the pressure on natural resources, would increase the risks of conflict. This may be especially the case in some geographical areas, such as the Middle East, where climate change could act as a multiplier of security threats.

The literature has analysed, for example, the case of the conflict in Syria<sup>22</sup>, highlighting how a long period of drought displaced many people towards the cities and increased the price of bread, creating some of the conditions that led to social tensions and then to the conflict which, in turn, caused the displacement and migration of millions of Syrians.

<sup>20</sup> See Focsiv's "I Padroni della Terra" Reports : <https://www.focsiv.it/i-padroni-della-terra-2020/>; <https://www.focsiv.it/i-padroni-della-terra-online-il-nuovo-rapporto-focsiv-coldiretti/>; <https://www.focsiv.it/i-padroni-della-terra-in-un-mondo-finito/>;

<sup>21</sup> World Bank 2014, 4<sup>o</sup> Turn Down the Heat, Confronting the New Climate Normal.

<sup>22</sup> Kelley C. ed altri, 2015, "Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought", Proceedings of the National Academies of Science-

Less well known is the case of Boko Haram terrorism, which, in conjunction with the environmental crisis in Lake Chad, has led to the displacement of some 2.5 million people from Nigeria since the conflict began in 2009<sup>23</sup>.

Of these people, 428.289 are in the region of Far North Cameroon, where pressure on scarce natural resources, which already caused conflicts between farmers and nomadic herders, has led to new tensions with local populations<sup>24</sup>.

A recent statistical analysis<sup>25</sup> tried to verify the interconnection between climate change, conflict and migration on the basis of data collected for 157 countries over the period 2006-2015. The results show that climate conditions, by influencing the severity of drought and the likelihood of armed conflicts, played a significant role as an explanatory factor for asylum claims in the period 2011-2015.

Countering forced migration resulting from the intertwining of climate change and conflict requires a new policy of peace, diplomacy and multilateral dialogue, control and reduction of arms production and trade, which must be accompanied by a major policy of adaptation and resilience, with more protection and durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons. Humanitarian assistance must be linked to durable solutions that include the creation of safe and regular channels such as resettlement, humanitarian corridors, and more opportunities for local integration by governing tensions with local communities.



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<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2019/2/5c6287a6a/apres-attaques-boko-haram-refugies-nigeriens-luttent-survivre.html>

<sup>24</sup> Sophie Suita in Stocchiero Andrea (ed.), I padroni della terra 2020, FOCSIV: <https://www.focsiv.it/i-padroni-della-terra-2020/>

<sup>25</sup> Guy J. Abela, Michael Brottragerb, Jesus Crespo Cuaresmac, Raya Muttarak, 2019, Climate, conflict and forced migration, Global Environmental Change 54. Elsevier

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis of the interconnections, a series of considerations and recommendations emerge that require coherence and integration among different policies. We indicate below some lines of action for the Italian government.

- First of all, it is necessary to apply target 10.7, sign the GCM and participate in cooperation platforms to govern flows in a sustainable development framework. Lasting solutions for refugees should be supported, both through local integration and through resettlement and humanitarian channels, while shared channels should be sought at a multilateral and regional level also for the so-called environmental migrants.
- At the same time, progress should be made in implementing the Paris Agenda with more ambitious commitments on greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation, recognising migration as an adaptation measure to be supported, at national and cross-border levels. Therefore, together with just transition plans, relocation plans with informed consent and access to adequate resources and capacities should be outlined, to be supported by development cooperation.
- Resilience and social security with social equity strategies for migrants and host communities, housing, work and land should be more strongly supported in transition plans. This is in contrast to the extractive model of production and consumption that expels communities and generates dead land and water.

It is necessary to move forward in regulating the behaviour of businesses, with standards of mandatory due diligence along the value chains.

- The transformation of economic models for a better management of migration should also be supported with reference to the promotion of peace, dialogue and conflict prevention: transforming the economy of war into an economy of peace means drastically reducing forced migration.
- Finally, development cooperation has an important role to play in supporting local communities in the South and indigenous peoples in protecting the environment and social relations, and in supporting resilient models that are alternatives to extractivism. Diasporas can also contribute in this direction, both for the implementation of innovative projects and for awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns in support of regular and safe migration.



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Focsiv and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

This document is part of the SDGs and Migration – Multipliers project and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens project funded by the European Union's Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme