

## Fact Sheet 8/2024 MIGRATION AS ADAPTATION

*Under the right circumstances, migration can be a positive form of adaptation to climate change.*

### What is the connection between migration and climate change adaptation?

Migration is a broad term that is used to describe the movement of people from one place to another. IOM [defines a 'migrant'](#) as 'a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons'.

Climate adaptation encompasses actions taken by individuals or communities to adjust to the impacts of climate change. The IPCC [defines adaptation](#) as 'the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities'.

Under the right circumstances, migration can be a positive form of climate adaptation. It can enable people affected by climate change to access alternative livelihood options, seasonally or longer-term, and learn new skills. It can enable people living in high risk locations to move out of the way of harm before disaster strikes.

This role of migration as a form of climate adaptation has been recognised within international agreements, including paragraph 14(f) of the [2010 Cancún Adaptation Framework](#) and paragraph 36 of the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#). The [2015 Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda](#) identifies 'migration with dignity' as a positive form of adaptation that can build long-term resilience and recommends that States integrate mobility into climate change adaptation strategies.<sup>1</sup>

### Is migration always a positive form of adaptation?

While migration can be a positive form of adaptation to the impacts of climate change, it can be a negative form of *maladaptation*. According to researchers,

While for some groups, under certain circumstances migration can be an effective form of adaptation, for others it leads to increased vulnerabilities and a poverty spiral, reducing their adaptive capacities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nansen Initiative on Cross-Border Disaster-Induced Displacement, [Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change \(Vol I\)](#) esp paras 76–86, 117–18.

<sup>2</sup> Kira Vinke, Jonas Bergmann, Julia Blocher, Himani Upadhyay and Roman Hoffmann, '[Migration as Adaptation?](#)' (2020) 8(4) Migration Studies 626.

To be successful, international migration relies on people having access to opportunities and resources, which can be limited and unavailable to those most at risk from climate change. Internal migration can also be challenging, if people are unable to access secure livelihoods or basic assistance and services away from the homes. When some people move, those left at home may experience a loss of expertise within their communities. This can disproportionately impact older people and people with disabilities, who may rely on family and community members for care.

## How can laws and policies facilitate migration as a form of adaptation?

Formal migration pathways are important in facilitating safe and regular ‘migration with dignity’ and preventing people from taking dangerous journeys without the authorization of the destination state. The African Union’s [Migration Policy Framework for Africa](#) calls for migration on the continent to be ‘better governed in an integrated manner through comprehensive, human–rights based and gender responsive national migration strategies and policies’.<sup>3</sup>

Supporting migration as a positive form of adaptation is not only about establishing migration pathways, however. IOM identifies a variety of [policy actions](#) that governments can take to maximise the benefits of migration as adaptation. These include:<sup>4</sup>

- [Supporting local climate adaptation activities](#)  
This gives individuals the choice not to migrate, especially in areas with already high out-migration rates. Successful adaptation to climate change will allow people to stay in their areas of origin.
- [Promoting livelihood diversification through facilitated migration](#)  
Legal migration opportunities can allow individuals to earn a decent income whilst filling labor shortages in destination areas – this has the potential for a “win-win” situation for communities of origin and destination as well as for the migrants themselves.
- [Reducing pressure on increasingly inhospitable areas through facilitated migration](#)  
Migration can be planned and managed in areas that are becoming uninhabitable, where the degradation is irreversible and where communities are repeatedly exposed to natural hazards destroying their livelihoods. This planned migration can contribute to lifting pressures on ecosystems.
- [Harness the potential of social and financial remittances from migrants and diaspora communities](#)  
A favorable policy environment would support more systematically the potential of these financial resources and encourage diaspora investments towards climate adaptation in their countries of origin.

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<sup>3</sup> AU, [Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action \(2018 – 2030\)](#) 28.

<sup>4</sup> This is an abbreviated version of the full list, available at: IOM [Migration as an Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change](#).

Climate Mobility Africa *Insights* is a publication of the Climate Mobility Africa Research Network (CMARN) – a multidisciplinary, bi-lingual (EN+FR) network of researchers and policy makers that aims to advance evidence-based law and policy responses to climate mobility in Africa. Climate Mobility Africa *Insights* is generously supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation. To find out more, visit: [www.cmarnetwork.com](http://www.cmarnetwork.com).