

Fact Sheet 1/2023

WHAT IS CLIMATE MOBILITY?

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Climate mobility happens within and across national borders. It involves different levels of constraints, agency, and vulnerability and encompasses both forced displacement and migration, including planned relocation. Climate mobility occurs over different distances and can be temporary, recurrent, or permanent.ⁱ

Climate mobility is not a legally defined term. Within the broad category of climate mobility, there may be significant variations in the nature, distance and duration of movement. Climate mobility may be short- or long-term. It may also be repeated or ‘circular’. For example, some people flee during an emergency but return home when the emergency abates. Some move permanently, or for the longer-term, in search of safety and more sustainable livelihoods. Some are stuck in protracted displacement, while others are displaced repeatedly. Some move *pre-emptively* – in order to avoid the future effects of disasters and climate change. Yet others may be in situations of forced *immobility*, without the resources to move even if they want or need to.ⁱⁱ

Does climate change *cause* people to move?

Human mobility is usually [multi-causal](#), meaning that the decision to move usually results from a combination of factors, rather than climate change alone. These other factors may include individuals’ aspirations, capacities and/or vulnerabilities, and other contextual factors or drivers, including political, demographic, economic and social factors.ⁱⁱⁱ In some cases, measures taken to mitigate the impacts of climate change may themselves be drivers of movement.^{iv}

While human mobility and climate change are undoubtedly linked, a narrow focus on trying to establish a causal link between climate change and displacement risks diverting attention from the core issue, which is identifying and addressing people’s individual needs and ensuring full respect for their human rights. This is why researchers and others often refer to climate mobility as human mobility that occurs *in the context of climate change*.

What are the different types of climate mobility?

There are four main types of climate mobility. These are: displacement, evacuation, migration and planned relocation.

- **Displacement** refers to predominantly *forced* movement. For example, the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#) (PDD) defines disaster displacement ‘situations where people are forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard’.^v
- **Migration** refers to predominantly *voluntary* movement, in which ‘people, while not necessarily having the ability to decide in complete freedom, still possess the ability to choose between different realistic options’.^{vi} Migration may also be internal or cross-border.
- **Planned relocation** refers to a ‘planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or places of temporary residence, are settled in a new location, and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives’.^{vii}
- **Evacuation** involves the ‘rapid movement of people away from the immediate threat or impact of a disaster to a safer place of shelter’.^{viii} Evacuation is usually a short term, emergency measure to save lives and property and minimise exposure to harm’.

What is the difference between ‘internal’ and ‘cross-border’ mobility?

[Internal mobility](#) occurs within a single country. Cross-border mobility involves movement across an international border. Both internal and cross-border mobility may be forced or voluntary. Most climate mobility is internal. However, cross-border climate mobility also occurs, and involves distinct challenges, particularly in the absence of lawful pathways for those who move.

About Climate Mobility Africa Insights

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.

ⁱ See <https://africa.climate-mobility.org/>

ⁱⁱ See CMARN Fact Sheet 5/2023, ‘Climate Immobility’.

ⁱⁱⁱ See generally Foresight, ‘Migration and Global Environmental Change’ (2011).

^{iv} See Ademola Jegede, ‘Rights away from home: Climate-induced displacement of indigenous peoples and the extraterritorial application of the Kampala Convention’ (2016) 16 *African Human Rights Law Journal* 58.

^v See: <https://disasterdisplacement.org/the-platform/key-definitions>

^{vi} Nansen Initiative, ‘Protection Agenda’ para 20.

^{vii} Georgetown University, UNHCR and Brookings Institution, ‘Guidance on Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocation’ (2015) p 5.

^{viii} *The MEND Guide: Comprehensive Guide for Planning Mass Evacuations in Natural Disasters* (2016) pp 16–17.