

Fact Sheet 5/2023 CLIMATE IMMOBILITY

Those who don't move in the face of climate-related risks have often been ignored in climate mobility research and policy development, despite their diverse experiences and potential vulnerabilities.

What is climate *immobility*?

To date, researchers and policy makers exploring the relationship between climate change and human mobility have focused on people on the move. In some contexts, however, the adverse impacts of climate change may *decrease* human mobility, with people becoming 'trapped' as a result of climate impacts. Yet others will choose to stay at home, despite significant risks.

Climate immobility may be involuntary or voluntary.

- Involuntary immobility – the inability to move away from a place of risk or exposure to climate-related harm
- Voluntary immobility – the deliberate choice not to move away from a place of risk

Research suggests that those who *don't* move in the context of climate change may be among the most vulnerable populations – [too poor to move](#), and effectively 'trapped' in areas facing serious climate-related risks.

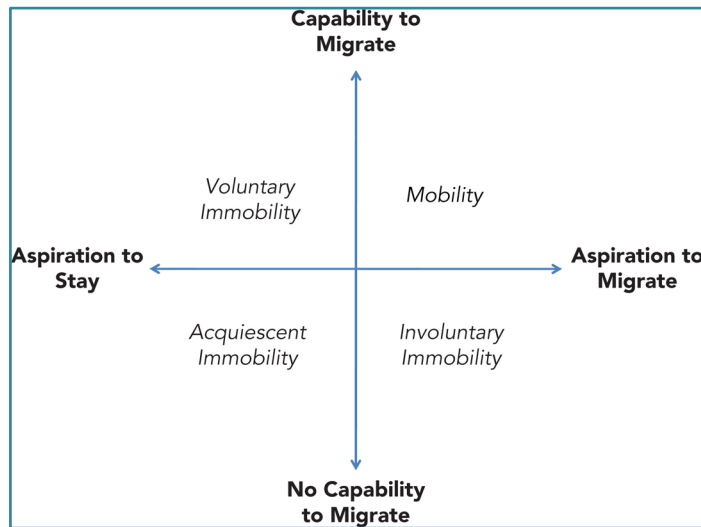
On the other hand, some people may resist movement in preference for [staying in place](#). This could be for many reasons, including attachment to place, culture and livelihoods.

What is the relationship between climate *mobility* and climate *immobility*?

The decision to move, or not to move, is sometimes understood as being the combination of individuals' (or households') [aspirations and capabilities](#). According to this paradigm, those who move have both the aspiration (desire) to move, and the capability (resources, networks, knowledge and abilities) to do so.

For those who don't move, immobility may result from different combinations of (lack of) aspirations and/or capabilities. In the context of climate change, those who have the aspiration to move but lack the capability are sometimes referred to as 'trapped populations'. Those who have the capability to move but not the aspiration are sometimes described as 'voluntarily immobile'. A fourth category of people who have no capability to move, but also no aspiration, are described as 'acquiescent immobile'.

[Schewel \(2019\)](#) depicts this understanding of mobility and immobility using the following diagram:ⁱ



Source: K. Schewel (2019)

Why should researchers and policy makers be concerned about climate immobility?

In comparison to climate mobility, climate immobility has been little studied and is poorly understood. This has been described as a '[mobility bias](#)' in migration and human mobility studies. This is despite the fact that immobile populations may be among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Including immobility in the full spectrum of climate mobility studies and policy development would enable a more holistic and inclusive approach to addressing this issue.

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 K. Schewel (2019) 'Understanding Immobility: Moving Beyond the Mobility Bias in Migration Studies' <https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918319831>