

## Climate Change and Migration: Findings of the Transatlantic Study Team

### Why environmentally induced migration deserves policy attention today

Environmental change – from natural disasters to shifts in climate patterns which may bring glacial melt, sea level rise and desertification – is one of a larger set of factors that affect human migration and displacement worldwide. Environmental factors will particularly affect migration in and from highly vulnerable areas like low-lying islands and deltas, coastal areas, areas dependent on glacial-fed water systems and areas subject to persistent drought. Most environmentally induced migrants will move within the borders of their own countries or to nearby countries. Only a small portion is likely to relocate to more distant countries. Some movements will resemble other migration aimed at improving people's lives but other movements will likely occur under emergency circumstances, particularly where climate change exacerbates natural hazards, such as cyclones, and communal violence and conflict.

### Potential solutions to ease migration pressures for vulnerable people and countries

Policymakers need to take a holistic approach to this emerging issue which addresses both the drivers in origin areas (e.g., livelihood insecurity, environmental hazards, conflict, demographic pressures, gender inequality, etc.) and the pull factors in destinations (e.g., demand for labor, aging of the population). Here are parts of the solution policymakers need to consider today:

**Foster adaptation alternatives.** Migration can be part of strategies to help people adapt to climate change. Migration can be an effective way to manage the risks associated with climate change when done voluntarily and with ap-

propriate planning. Migration can also be an indicator that adaptation is failing if few other realistic options exist for people (move or perish, distress migration).

**Where possible, help people stay through sustainable rural and urban development:** It's about jobs and job creation (livelihood security), in the countryside and in cities. Today one of four people living on earth is a farmer. Climate change will take its toll on the ability of these people to feed themselves and their families in the future. When livelihoods fail, people often migrate...to cities (which may not be currently equipped to absorb them)

**Where necessary, help people go (with safety and dignity):** In cases where migration is the best or indeed only adaptation strategy, effective policy responses can help to ensure that movements are orderly and safe. Policies should avoid situations where people are forced to move (distress migration) or move in emergency situations.

**Involve the diaspora** in designing and funding adaptation strategies that enable their home countries and communities to cope with climate change. Just as the important role of diasporas in promoting development has only recently been recognized, their role in adaptation needs to be given greater attention.

**Support disaster risk reduction and conflict mediation strategies while strengthening humanitarian responses.** If governments do not take action to reduce the risks people face from acute crises arising from natural disasters and competition over resources leading to conflict, they will be called upon to help later, and then the prob-

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lem will be much more difficult to address. Invest today in resilience-building strategies designed to preempt uncontrolled crisis situations.

**Identify guiding principles, effective practices and institutional frameworks** to help governments in developing appropriate laws, policies and programs to address environmentally induced internal and international migration. Current laws, policies and institutional arrangements are inadequate to deal with complex movements of people. Of particular concern is the possibility that large numbers of people may be rendered stateless if rising sea levels inundate island countries and low-lying, densely populated delta areas. Guiding principles are needed today to shape thinking about how to manage potential larger-scale relocation in the future.

### What policymakers need to do now

Policymakers need to make strategic investments – in dialogue, resources and thinking – in four areas which would help realize the solutions mentioned above.

**Science.** Support more in-depth qualitative and quantitative research in specific hotspot regions. Support the collection of necessary demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental data (such as through census) in order to map areas and people of highest vulnerability. Support research to understand the different patterns and scenarios of climate change, migration and displacement in specific areas.

**Dialogue and exchange of good practices.** Foster moderate, solutions-oriented policy dialogues that review existing experience and identify emerging good practice in areas such as designing alternative livelihoods, facilitating migration where appropriate, relocation and resettlement of populations. There is little time to waste – earnest policy dialogue should begin now when there is still space and time to navigate some of the challenges and opportunities related to migration exacerbated by climate change.

**Participatory policy planning.** Involve affected communities in policy planning and implementation of human mobility solutions, providing them information needed for informed decisions. In some cases this may mean site identification for relocation projects; in other instances it may mean development of alternative livelihoods or agricultural practices which might ease pressure on migration. Recognize that migrants and diasporas can be effective partners in addressing climate change-induced migration, and involve them in planning processes.

**Proactive policies.** Get ahead of the curve. Support effective adaptation strategies that take potential migration impacts of climate change into account. Implement effective disaster risk reduction, conflict mediation and disaster management programs to reduce the likelihood of emergency movements with accompanying humanitarian consequences.

PHOTO CREDIT: Floods in Ifo refugee camp, Dadaab, Kenya, UNHCR: B. Bannon, December 2006.