



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)  
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

## **International Organization for Migration**

### **International Dialogue on Migration 2011**

#### **INTERSESSIONAL WORKSHOP ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND MIGRATION**

#### **CHAIR'S SUMMARY**

As part of IOM's annual International Dialogue on Migration – dedicated in 2011 to the theme *The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change* – the IOM membership selected the topic "Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration" as the focus of a workshop in Geneva, Switzerland on 29 and 30 March 2011.<sup>1</sup> The workshop identified some of the main areas in which governments and institutions may need to reinforce their capacities to manage the complex interactions between climate change and environmental degradation and human mobility.

The workshop was framed by the notion that a comprehensive approach to managing environmental migration would aim to minimize to the extent possible forced migration resulting from environmental factors; where forced migration does occur, to ensure assistance and protection for those affected and seek durable solutions to their situation; and, lastly, to facilitate the role of migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change.

Three main areas of capacity building emerged: building knowledge and improving data collection; strengthening policy, institutional, administrative and legal frameworks and reinforcing operational and technical capacities.

This document summarizes the workshop discussions through a series of main messages and makes proposals for future activities to take forward the conclusions of the workshop.

#### **MAIN MESSAGES**

##### **1. Main messages on the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation and migration:**

- Environmental migration, like all migration, is a multi-causal phenomenon. There are no simple causal relationships between the environment and migration.

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop background paper *Climate change, environmental degradation and migration* and other conference material can be found at: [www.iom.int/idmclimatechange/lang/en](http://www.iom.int/idmclimatechange/lang/en)

- While the empirical evidence base remains thin and needs reinforcing, it is recognized that environmental drivers play a significant and increasingly determinative role in migration phenomena.
- Environmental migration is multifaceted: it can be internal, regional or international, temporary or permanent, forced, voluntary or a mix of those characteristics. The blurred distinction between forced and voluntary migration was mentioned repeatedly at the workshop.
- Participants at the workshop acknowledged that, given the complexity of the phenomenon, it is not easy to establish clear definitions and standard terminology. There was a general understanding, however, that the term “environmental / climate change *refugee*” should be avoided due to the specific meaning of “refugee” in international law.
- The importance of preparing for internal migration, in particular rural-urban migration, was a strong theme throughout the workshop; as was the need to reckon with increasing urbanization and the vulnerabilities of and in cities in the context of climate change.
- It was acknowledged that in the context of climate change and environmental degradation, migration can be both considered a challenge and a solution. Where displacement means harm and suffering, measures are needed to stabilize populations as much as possible. However, migration’s positive role as a potential adaptation strategy was also highlighted numerous times.
- Participants reflected on how to talk *about* and how to talk *with* the populations affected by climate change and possible migratory consequences.
- Speakers underlined that the concept of vulnerability is important but needs to be applied carefully. It was repeated that often the most vulnerable populations are in fact those *not* able to move.

## **2. Main messages on capacities and policy processes:**

- There was a strong call for inclusive and participatory processes involving affected populations as directly and as early as possible.
- It was repeatedly stated that local communities should form the primary locus of action and attention. Consultations, training and capacity building at the local level were cited.
- Particular emphasis was placed on capacities in developing and least developed countries that are at the greatest risk of suffering the effects of environmental degradation and climate change.
- Systematic budgeting and long-term planning of resources was called for, especially to allow for flexibility in responding to emergencies.
- The workshop reiterated the significance of adopting human rights based strategies in addressing environmental migration and suggested that multi-pronged legal

approaches may be the best way to tackle the diverse manifestations of environmental migration.

- As a starting point, it was suggested that policymakers should make full use of all existing bodies of laws and instruments, both hard and soft law (humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, instruments on internal displacement, disaster management, legal migration and others).
- It was emphasized that migration management systems should be linked with other policy objectives in terms of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian responses and sustainable development, in comprehensive policy strategies.
- The discussions sent out a strong message of urgency: even if not all consequences of climate change are visible now and even if there are still many gaps in our understanding of environmental migration, this should not be a disincentive to start acting now.
- Strong political will and the building of partnerships are indispensable for progress in dealing with environmental migration.

## **WAY FORWARD**

Based on the discussions that took place during the workshop, a number of possible future activities emerged in three main areas of capacities: building knowledge and improving data collection; strengthening policy, institutional, administrative and legal frameworks; and reinforcing operational and technical capacities.

### **1. Building knowledge and improving data collection:**

- Developing a strategic research agenda to enhance data and knowledge on the linkages between migration and the environment, as recommended also by the Global Forum on Migration and Development Round Table 3.2 in 2010, *inter alia* by:
  - Producing analytical frameworks that help isolating the climate change drivers of migration;
  - Analyzing how other factors (such as gender, conflict or economic, political, cultural elements) interact with environmental ones and impact on vulnerabilities and possible migratory outcomes;
  - Using scenario-based approaches to obtain a better picture of future migration patterns and flows related to climate change and environmental degradation;
  - Clarifying the terminology related to environmental migration.
- Preparing country / regional reports, in particular for the most vulnerable countries, to assess the existing evidence on migration and environment issues and sharing lessons learned.

## **2. Strengthening policy, institutional, administrative and legal frameworks:**

- Formulating strategies that involve local public, private and non governmental actors at all stages of policy design, from the assessment of needs to planning and implementation.
- Extending regional consultation and cooperation in addressing migration and environment / climate change, possibly in conjunction with regional bodies and / or Regional Consultative Processes on Migration.
- Acting in partnership at all levels and among a variety of actors, for example through inter-ministerial coordination, through inter-agency collaboration, and by bringing together stakeholders from migration, climate change, humanitarian, and development communities.
- Devising strategies to facilitate regular migration in response to environmental factors and developing solutions for those already on the move, including temporary authorization to stay for environmental migrants and temporary protection models.

## **3. Reinforcing operational and technical capacities:**

- Developing preparedness measures and programmes to prevent and manage displacement and to minimize the impacts of forced migration in natural disaster scenarios, through such measures as early warning systems, contingency planning and bolstered capacities for humanitarian assistance and protection, especially for the most vulnerable groups.
- Focussing on local communities, particularly in vulnerable areas, in efforts to mitigate any negative impacts of environmental factors on livelihoods and prepare for potential movement of people.
- Building comprehensive migration management approaches by mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction, Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation strategies into existing migration management policies as tools and frameworks that contribute to sustainable development.
- Facilitating migration as an adaptation strategy by incorporating migration issues into existing tools such as National Adaptation Programmes of Action, Poverty Reduction Strategies Plans and National Climate Change Programmes.

According to priorities defined by the IOM membership, based on the Organization's mandate<sup>2</sup> and experience, and in partnership with appropriate organizations, IOM will continue to support and facilitate the management of environmental migration.

Geneva, 30 March 2011

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<sup>2</sup> IOM Constitution and IOM Strategy: Council Resolution No. 1150 (XCIII) and Annex