

CLIMATE CHANGE & PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

The impacts of climate change are shaping some of the oldest human practices: moving and creating places where we feel safe and at home. This 2-sider focuses on climate-induced movement, and the specific international laws that protect people who may need to move due to climate change.

THE BACKGROUND

Incorporating human rights into climate policies and actions is known as a rights-based approach.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has shown that climate change impacts will significantly increase the number of people on the move. Urgent mitigation of greenhouse gases may reduce some of the disastrous climate consequences that cause climate change-related mobility. At the same time, however, we need rights-based and inclusive mitigation and adaptation action which is prepared to meet the reality of climate-change related mobility and offers protections and practical responses.

We therefore need to ensure that a rights-based approach, which recognizes the dignity and humanity of people on the move, is at the forefront of any discussion surrounding human mobility.

Climate-induced mobility includes international migration, internal migration (such as rural-urban), internal displacement (which is often hidden), and international displacement. Some people on the move fall into specific categories because of their reasons for crossing borders. These categories may entitle them to international protections that mean they should not be returned to their country of origin.

The lived realities of people means that these categories often overlap. Climate-induced movement can be permanent, but also seasonal or temporary. People on the move will be, and in some cases already are, impacted by climate change at the place of departure, transit, and arrival. The following questions invite further conversations:

- ▶ How are people on the move involved in the decision-making that affects their lives?
- ▶ When communities decide to relocate in response to climate change, what elements are important to ensure a successful, sustainable, and peaceful planned relocation?
- ▶ What are the tipping points that trigger decisions to move by local communities. – or by individual members of local communities? How are such decisions reached?
- ▶ How are local communities addressing competition over depleted natural resources?
- ▶ What do communities – including those at risk of displacement, those that have experienced displacement and those that have managed to avoid displacement – have to teach communities which are only now starting to confront these issues?
- ▶ How do age, gender, diversity and other power relations shape people's exposure to, and capacity to respond to, climate change and movement?
- ▶ The impacts of climate change are felt in both urban and rural communities. What can be learned from impacts and responses in these differing contexts?

Human mobility is a human adaptation strategy to the consequences of climate change. Movement may be in response to:

- *sudden-onset disasters*, like hurricanes and floods, which occur during a short period of time and cause large groups of people to move quickly and suddenly. This may cause internal migration or displacement both in the immediate aftermath and in the months and years to follow.
- *slow-onset disasters*, such as more frequent and longer droughts, which over time make it difficult to remain in place due to impacts such as livelihood loss. This may cause internal migration or hidden displacement.
- other factors exacerbated by climate change, such as violent conflict.

Why and how people move is multi-causal and interacts with other environmental, political, and economic dimensions. Migration – both internal and across borders – affects both the migrants and their community of origin. Moving across and within borders is expensive and inaccessible to many. Extreme poverty can therefore, mean that people become locked in disaster-prone places.



This page is an excerpt from QUNO's "People's Climate Empowerment Series", a publication that explains international efforts on climate change and how these can help us support fair, ambitious and inclusive climate action.

To find out more visit:

<https://quno.org/resource/peoples-climate-empowerment-series>

There is currently no legally-binding protection for people experiencing climate-induced movement. Climate refugees is a popular term describing a group of people forced to move by climate change and in a situation of particular vulnerability. Yet, it does not have a legal meaning for those displaced either within or across borders. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugee status for those outside their country of nationality or habitual residence based on the “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”. Climate-induced flight is only covered by this law when experiences of climate change intersect with these protected categories. This means that people who have experienced climate-induced displacement currently have no recourse to legal protection. Developing pathways for people on the move to find shelter, safety and livelihood opportunities, and ensuring their protection, is an important aspect of human rights-based climate action.

The Global Compact on Refugees is a soft law optional blueprint for governments, international organizations, and others to ensure both host communities and refugees are supported. The compact explicitly states that “while not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements,” and places the responsibility to address drivers with source countries and the world as a whole. This acknowledges climate impacts, including environmental degradation and sudden-onset disasters, but does not create a pathway to add these dimensions to the definition of refugee. This means climate-induced displaced people remain without comprehensive legal protection.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration is a political agreement between countries to respond to the needs of migrants and to improve how countries seek to govern migration. The compact recognizes the possible impacts of climate change on human mobility, including possible pathways for regular migration, such as providing humanitarian visas. Objective 2 invites countries to “develop adaptation and resilience strategies to sudden-onset and slow-onset natural disasters [and] the adverse effects of climate change [...] taking into account the potential implications for migration, while recognizing that adaptation in the country of origin is a priority.” Objective 5 calls for development of, or building on, existing pathways for those migrating (partially) due to climate change, while empowering people to choose to stay if communities are made safe and resilient.

The **Platform on Disaster Displacement** is a country-led initiative by “a group of States leading and working together towards better protection for people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change”. Countries share best practices on providing safety to those displaced by disasters, and collaborate on prevention by making communities more resilient. The Platform supports **Loss and Damage** efforts at the UNFCCC through its involvement in the **Taskforce on Displacement**, which provides recommendations to countries on how to avert, minimize, and address displacement related to climate change impacts.

Support to those who face irreversible loss and damage due to current and locked-in climate change.

WHAT TO DO NOW – PRACTICAL STEPS

Everyday: 1.) Consider how we can change our everyday behaviors to have less impact on our planet - this can include changing what we eat and throw away, the way we use energy at home, or how we travel. 2.) Talk with the people around us, especially those who may not understand the human impact of climate change or feel powerless and don't know how to help.

Medium-Term: 1.) Keep track of the development of climate laws on the online Climate Laws of the World Database. 2.) Engage with local groups or local chapters of organizations or movements we respect (be that environmental groups, faith community initiatives or a sports club). 3.) Search out and support local organisations serving people who are seeking sanctuary in your country.

Long-term: 1.) Engage politically – this spans getting involved in local, regional and national politics and making sure we vote in every election. 2.) Campaign, research or contribute to public consultations. Public participation in climate policy making is our legal right!

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUONO) is an expert observer of the UNFCCC, IPCC and Human Rights Council. QUONO has been supporting work on climate change at the international level through diplomacy, advocacy and education initiatives since 2012. Please consider making a donation to help us continue with this work.