



SDC Network **Climate, DRR & Environment**

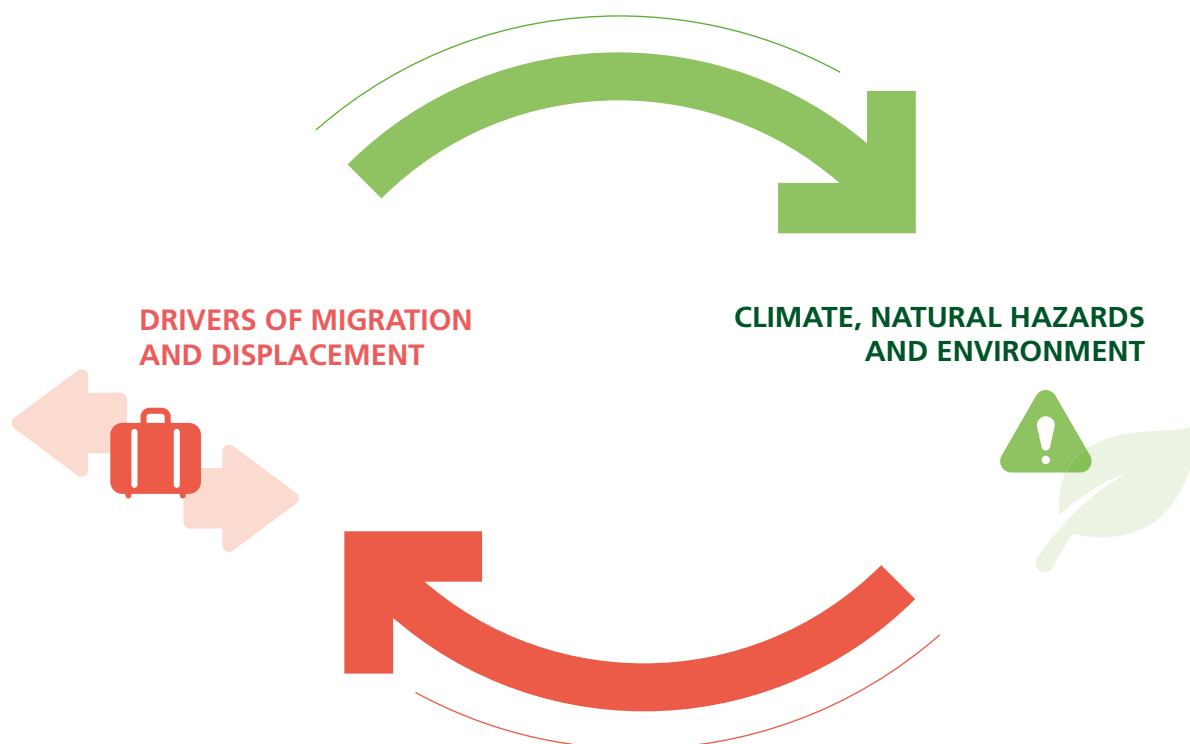


Migration and Forced Displacement
SDC Thematic Network

Thematic Integration Brief (TIB)

Climate, DRR & Environment ...and Migration and Displacement





The impacts of climate change (C), disaster risk (D), and the environment (E), can trigger migration and forced displacement, and have adverse impacts on people on the move. Migration and displacement can also have implications for C/D/E action. Effective development activities that integrate human mobility and C/D/E can help unlock the benefits of human mobility while mitigating the harms faced by those on the move.

This Thematic Integration Brief (TIB) provides a non-exhaustive compilation of interrelations between migration and displacement and climate change, disasters,¹ and environmental issues. The brief:

- Helps demonstrate how potential C/D/E risks can drive human mobility, as well as how potential impacts of migration and displacement affect C/D/E.
- Fosters systemic thinking in addressing C/D/E-related drivers of migration and displacement.
- Offers practical advice on how to integrate these issues into project interventions and strategic approaches.

Adapted from: [Managing Climate-Change Related Human Mobility: Potential Interventions for Operational Engagement](#), March 2024; and [Climate Change-Related Human Mobility: A Factsheet](#), March 2024.

SDC's Climate, DRR and Environment, and Migration and Forced Displacement sections welcome feedback to continuously improve this Thematic Integration Brief (TIB).

¹ This brief focuses on disasters related to natural hazards, and does not consider industrial accidents, technological or structural failures, terrorist attacks or other causes of disasters.

Interconnections at a Glance

This brief discusses the interconnections between C/D/E and human mobility, which includes both forced and voluntary migration whether temporary, permanent, or circular, and whether internal or cross-border. These types of human mobility are typically categorised as migration, displacement, and planned relocation.



C/D/E effects on migration and displacement

- Climate change creates and exacerbates the conditions that lead to displacement and migration. Decreased water availability, reduced livelihood opportunities, and increased instability and/or conflict add to the pressure on individuals and communities to move.
- Disasters related to natural hazards can forcibly displace residents either temporarily or permanently. The number of people internally displaced by disasters in 2023 came to 26.4 million worldwide; most of those remain internal, short-distance, and temporary, but some disasters have been linked to spikes in international migration.²
- The slow-onset effects of climate change can render areas permanently uninhabitable –through sea level rise in coastal areas and islands and through desertification in arid and semi-arid climates. In the absence of strong climate and development action, an estimated 216 million people could migrate internally by 2050 due directly, or in part, to slow-onset climate impacts.³ Many people affected by C/D/E events choose to stay, preferring adaptation in place over migration, but the capacity for adaptation varies significantly by individual and group.
- Some C/D/E events can trap individuals in place, rendering them 'involuntarily immobile' and unable to move because they lack the resources, networks, or pathways to move safely.
- Migrants and displaced individuals are vulnerable to the effects of C/D/E while on the move, as many settle in more hazard-prone or climate-vulnerable areas in transit and destination locations.

Climate change effects are not experienced uniformly across populations, but are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Limited economic, social, and institutional resources, constrain the capacity for adaptation and exacerbate vulnerability. These limitations may disproportionately affect some populations impacted by C/D/E events or restrict their ability to migrate safely or choose to stay.



Impacts of migration and displacement on C/D/E

- Already overtaxed infrastructure, service systems, and social cohesion can be further strained by the arrival of newcomers, and the additional strain on infrastructure in particular can lead to environmental degradation.
- New migrant and refugee settlements themselves can lead to environmental degradation if not properly planned and constructed.

While not affecting the climate directly, migration is a form of adaptation that allows individuals to escape hazard-prone or climate-vulnerable areas, thereby relieving some of the pressure placed on those areas.

Migration can help diversify livelihoods, enhance resilience, and contribute to sustainable local development in hazard-prone or climate-vulnerable areas through the monetary and knowledge transfers of migrants who move due to climate change.

² See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Report on Internal Displacement: 2024](#), 2024.

³ Viviane Clement et al., [Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration](#), 2021.

1. Interactions between Migration and Displacement and Climate, Disasters and the Environment

The factors driving migration and displacement are complex and multi-causal, and people's decisions to move can be shaped by the adverse effects of C/D/E. C/D/E sometimes directly force people to move, but more often, it is C/D/E's impacts on different sectors such as food and agriculture, human health, and infrastructure that prompt people to move. This movement can be both internal and cross-border, temporary and permanent, and voluntary, forced, or planned.

Effects on migration and displacement related to climate change, natural hazards, and environmental degradation

Direct effects occur when the C/D/E impacts compel people to move for survival or to leave as places become gradually uninhabitable:

- The immediate threat to life due to disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods and storms can lead to evacuation and displacement (usually temporary).
- The long-term threat to the habitability of an area due to slow-onset climate events, including rising sea levels and desertification, can displace people and eventually require planned relocation of households and entire communities, typically internally at first.

Direct effects also occur in migrant communities:

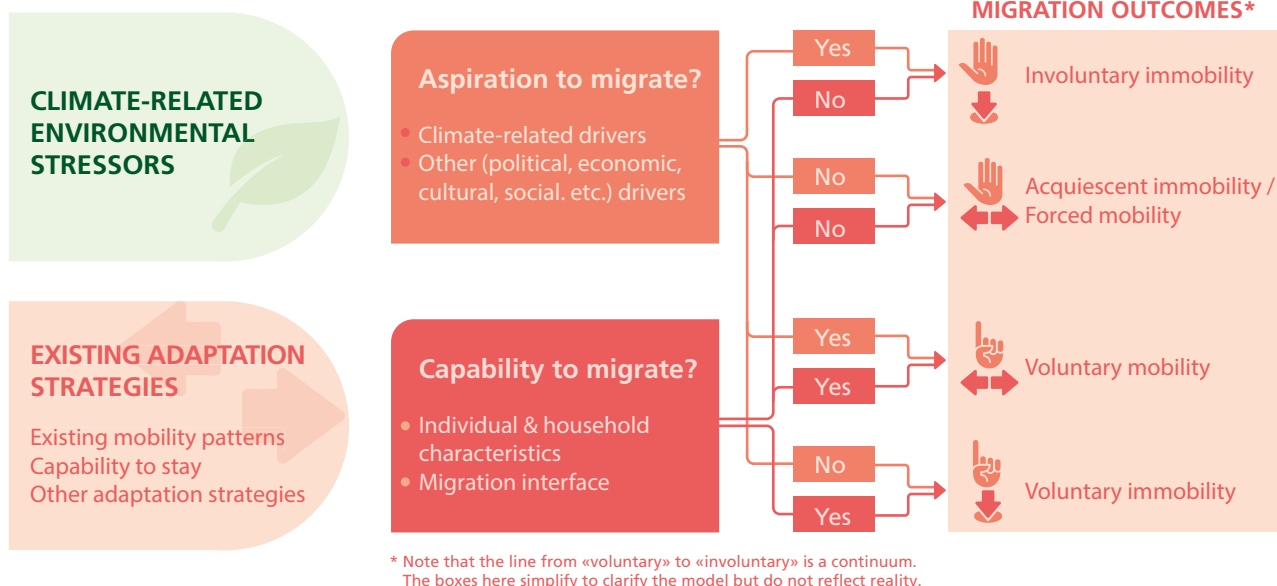
- Existing migrant and refugee communities may face additional C/D/E pressures – refugee camps affected by droughts, for example, or floods that compel migrants and displaced people to move yet again.

Indirect effects occur when the C/D/E impacts create, contribute to, or exacerbate conditions that drive migration and displacement:

- The reduced viability of livelihoods, in particular agricultural or fisheries-based livelihoods, may induce people to move for better economic opportunities or to diversify their livelihoods. This pressure to move may have gendered effects, for instance if men predominantly work in jobs threatened by C/D/E effects and are therefore more likely to move (and women are more likely to stay), or may disproportionately shape the decisions of youth to migrate.
- Local infrastructure weakened due to C/D/E events, such as through water supply contamination, overburdened waste treatment, and road degradation, can prompt people to move elsewhere.
- Negative health implications, such as an increase in food-, water-, and vector-borne diseases, poor nutrition through reduced agricultural production, and injury during extreme events can motivate individuals to seek better health and/or treatment opportunities elsewhere.
- Conflict and public disorder exacerbated or linked to C/D/E effects, alongside political and governance decisions, can lead to forced displacement.⁴ While the impacts of climate change on fragility and conflict are not direct, C/D/E events can amplify risks of conflict.

People who have insufficient knowledge or lack the financial, physical, or social resources to migrate can become trapped. Women and people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to involuntary immobility when cultural restrictions and preferences limit their ability to evacuate ahead of disasters, or when women stay behind while male family members migrate in response to diminished livelihoods. Still others may prefer to stay in a place for family ties or cultural and spiritual connections.

⁴ For example, in both Sudan and South Sudan, the limited availability of arable land has been one of the factors leading to conflict. UNHCR, [Climate Change Impacts and Cross-Border Displacement: International Refugee Law and UNHCR's Mandate](#), December 12, 2023.



Source: Jane Linekar and Bram Frouws, [Climate Change, Environmental Stressors, and Mixed Migration](#), Mixed Migration Centre, Geneva, December 2022.

Impacts of migration and displacement on the climate, natural hazards and environment

The main positive impact of migration on the environment:

- Migration relieves the competition for resources in vulnerable communities of origin.

Other benefits of migration related to C/D/E:

- Well-managed migration can reduce exposure to C/D/E effects by helping people move away from hazard-prone or climate-affected places to safer destinations.
- Migration can help households diversify livelihoods and sources of income, and provide opportunities for remittances, which households at origin can invest in adaptation or use for disaster response and recovery.
- Migrants can support adaptation by facilitating knowledge transfer between their countries of origin and destination, bringing climate-smart agriculture skills, for instance.
- Migrants can provide needed skills, capital, and labour for the green transition, addressing labour shortages in the green economy and contributing to decarbonisation.

Adverse impacts of migration on the environment and natural hazards:

- Migration may increase the competition for resources in destination communities.
- The arrival of newcomers can strain already overtaxed infrastructure to the point of failures that lead to environmental degradation.
- Mass movements following the same routes can cause environmental degradation.⁵
- New migrant and refugee settlements themselves can lead to environmental degradation if not properly planned and constructed.

Other challenges related to migration and C/D/E:

- Migrants and forcibly displaced persons often settle, either by individual choice or due to restrictions on settlement, in more hazard-prone or climate-vulnerable areas, further exacerbating the vulnerability of those people and adding to the number of people at risk.
- Migrants and forcibly displaced persons moving to cities are more likely to settle in slums, which are more vulnerable to natural hazards and environmental degradation. This settlement increases the number of people at risk.

⁵ For example, the Darién Gap has seen disrupted wildlife, solid waste pollution, and soil contamination. Daniel F. Runde and Thomas Bryja, [Mind the Darién Gap, Migration Bottleneck of the Americas](#), CSIS, May 16, 2024.

2. Key Areas for Action: Integrating C/D/E and Human Mobility

Addressing the complex linkages between human mobility and C/D/E requires a holistic approach that acknowledges the root causes of migration and displacement, accounts for the differentiated risks facing diverse populations, and strives for durable solutions. The actions proposed below are meant to contribute to such systemic thinking and offer potential interventions from the planning stage up to the implementation of projects and programmes.

These actions are divided into three key approaches covering the migration and displacement continuum, from enabling people to stay, to supporting their movement, and providing assistance after they move.

Supporting people to stay

Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):

- Enhance DRR initiatives in line with the Sendai Framework to help prevent disaster displacement, reduce vulnerability and exposure to hazards, and enable quicker and more resilient recovery and rebuilding.
- Invest in hazard fundamentals, such as flood risk maps, and in early warning systems that are accessible to all people, regardless of their visual, auditory or mental capacities, such as through the [Climate Risks and Early Warning Systems \(CREWS\)](#) Initiative.
- Invest in displacement risk modelling – ideally at the local level and gender, age and disability disaggregated – to help communities prepare for displacement risks, and to guide resourcing and programming decisions⁶

Building resilience and preparedness:

- Provide development support in hazard-prone or climate-vulnerable areas, in particular secondary cities and rural areas, to help build resilient infrastructure and public services including health systems.⁷
- Build the capacity of local governments to prepare for and adapt to climate and environmental shocks. Support participatory, local-level adaptation planning, and strengthening local authorities' capacities and expertise to implement such plans. This planning should account for the diverse

impacts of climate and environmental shocks, such as the potential for less mobile populations to be trapped.

- Provide humanitarian assistance before, during, and after C/D/E shocks by providing anticipatory funding to help people prepare for disasters and to reduce the impacts incurred.⁸
- Provide access to information to local communities and governments about climate risks and the short- and long-term implications of disasters and environmental degradation.

Investing in diversified livelihoods:

- Work with local communities to diversify livelihoods, including by cultivating drought- and flood-resistant crops.⁹ In particular, work with women to identify opportunities for formalised employment that can provide access to social safety nets.
- Invest in financial inclusion and access to banking for local communities to allow them to build savings, invest in diverse assets, and channel remittances.¹⁰ Address gendered policy and cultural barriers to financial inclusion to ensure women can open their own bank accounts and save their own money.
- Provide support to governments to build effective social safety nets that can provide substitute income and immediate assistance to help people withstand C/D/E shocks.¹¹

⁶ See, for example, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's [displacement risk model](#).

⁷ See, for example, the World Bank's projects on building climate resilient schools and road infrastructure. World Bank, [Building Safer and More Resilient Schools in a Changing Climate](#) (results brief, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2024); the World Bank's [Climate Resilient Infrastructure](#) Project in Belize.

⁸ See, for example, the one-time cash transfers in Bangladesh ahead of forecasted extreme floods. Ashley People, Ruth Hill, Stefan Dercorn, and Ben Brunkhorst, [Anticipatory Cash Transfers in Climate Disaster Response](#), Centre for Disaster Protection, London, 2021.

⁹ Several models exist for these types of training, including participatory models such as Farmer Field Schools (see FAO, [Global Farmer Field School Program](#)) and more systemic efforts such as SDC's ongoing work on modernising agricultural vocational training in Armenia.

¹⁰ FinDev Gateway, [Climate Change and Financial Inclusion](#); Ravenna Sohst, [Leaving No One Behind: Inclusive Fintech for Remittances](#) (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024); Ting Zhing, [Often Shut Out of the Financial System, Refugees and Other Migrants Face Economic Integration Challenges](#), Migration Information Source, December 6, 2023.

¹¹ Camilla Holmemo, et al., [Boosting Opportunities for the Most Vulnerable: The Productive Social Safety Net Toolbox for Africa](#), World Bank Blogs, November 2, 2023.

Supporting safe movement

Supporting protection mechanisms and regular migration pathways:

- Strengthen the capacity of national governments to develop and implement regular migration pathways and to protect the rights of migrants and displaced people.¹² Development actors can help build governmental capacity to identify, process, transport, and welcome those using these facilitated channels.
- Enhance asylum and protection systems in transit and destination countries to be sensitive to C/D/E considerations within refugee and humanitarian status decisions.
- Invest in skills and vocational training for communities most vulnerable to C/D/E shocks, to enable them to access regular labour migration pathways.¹³

Investing along the route:

- Provide humanitarian assistance and invest in communities along mixed migration routes to meet the basic needs and protect the rights of both host communities and the people on the move.
- Identify and make additional investments in localities vulnerable to environmental degradation along mixed migration routes where the dual challenges of transit migration and C/D/E impacts are likely to occur.

Supporting people after arrival

Promoting local integration and other durable solutions:

- Provide humanitarian support upon arrival at the places where migrants and displaced people move, such as urban peripheries or settlements. Target support for specific vulnerabilities such as age, gender, and disability.
- Support the identification of safe sites, accessible for people with reduced mobility (not prone to hazards such as floods and droughts) for the reception and/or settlement of refugees and migrants.
- Facilitate access to livelihood and skill training for migrants and displaced people in order to support their economic self-reliance and to meet local labour market needs, especially in the green economy.
- Support destination and host governments in providing legal documentation and information on rights to new arrivals to facilitate their access to socio-economic services.

Investing in climate resilience for migrants and host communities:

- In communities hosting migrants and displaced people, support local climate resilience and disaster risk management, including through sound local planning, climate-resilient infrastructure, and disaster preparedness.¹⁴
- Focus development interventions on providing services to vulnerable populations in informal settlements that may be left out of traditional planning efforts. These interventions can include efforts in the area of affordable, decentralised water and sanitation services and in education and skill development for improved livelihoods.
- Support the inclusion of migrants and refugees in policies related to climate resilience, disaster risk management, and urban planning, especially for migrants moving to urban peripheries that are likely to be impacted by C/D/E risks and to be underfunded for adaptation and preparedness.

12 Some pathways are specific to people moving due to C/D/E events, like [Argentina's disaster displacement humanitarian visa](#), or the disaster displacement provision within the [Free Movement Protocol of the IGAD region](#), while in most cases, such people can move through regular pathways not specific to C/D/E.

13 Michelle Leighton and Meredith Byrne, [With Millions Displaced by Climate Change or Extreme Weather, Is There a Role for Labor Migration Pathways?](#), 2017.

14 This can include supporting local authorities in sustainable urban expansion planning, as supported by SDC and Cities Alliance. See Patrick Lamson-Hall and Shlomo Angel, [Climate-Resilient Urban Expansion Planning: A Tool for Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Risks in Secondary Cities](#), Cities Alliance/UNOPS, Brussels, 2022.

Further reading

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Sections Climate, DRR & Environment CDE and Migration & Forced Displacement

Co-Authors:

Samuel Davidoff-Gore, Associate Policy Analyst Migration Policy Institute

Camille Le Coz, Associate Director, Migration Policy Institute (Europe)

Lawrence Huang, Policy Analyst, Migration Policy Institute

André Wehrli, Focal Point CDE Network

Alice Ochsenbein, Programme Manager Migration & Forced Displacement

Design:

Zoï Environment Network

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