

Rabb, Aganijo Pir village, Pakistan, walks along a flooded road. "Our houses have collapsed completely now, and the water is still around six or seven feet high. There's nothing else there, nothing at all. I have no idea what will happen in the future, but we will have to stay in the camps until the water recedes. In 1978 there was a flood but not of this magnitude. It's also hotter now as compared to 1978."
Photo: Gideon Mendel/Drowning World, September 2010

BRIEFING PAPER

SEIZING THE MOMENTUM

Displacement on the global climate change agenda

2 NOVEMBER 2016

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) raised the prospect of significant displacement and migration as major human impacts of global warming as early as 1990.¹ Research on the issue has grown exponentially since, and its importance is increasingly recognised in international discourse, policy and action emanating from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

With global temperatures breaking new records and an average of at least 21.5 million people already being displaced each year by the impact and threat of climate-related hazards, it is time to ratchet up efforts to mitigate, adapt to and prepare for ever greater displacement risk.²

This briefing paper summarises for parties, observers, civil society and private sector actors heading for the climate change conference in Marrakech where the issues of displacement, migration and planned relocation stand in the UNFCCC agreements, decisions and discourse, and highlights opportunities and challenges inherent in turning knowledge and commitments into concrete action for people already displaced and those at greatest risk of becoming so.

KEY MESSAGES

- The need to ratchet up efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change is made ever more urgent by the millions of people being displaced from their homes each year by climate-related disasters.
- The political momentum of the Paris Agreement provides a golden opportunity to mobilise investment in the resilience of countries and communities facing displacement risk.
- Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction and the UN's Agenda for Humanity may serve to complement, reinforce and accelerate climate action for people already displaced and those at increasing risk of becoming so.
- Commitments to avert, minimise and address displacement must now translate into increased capacity and financial and technical support where it is most needed, including in small island developing states (SIDSs) and the least developed countries (LDCs).

KEY TERMS

Adaptation: Action to cope with climate change or “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities”.³ This may include the relocation and resettlement of communities away from areas that have become uninhabitable or are in the process of becoming so because of environmental degradation or the risk and impacts of weather-related hazards linked to climate change. It may also include early and voluntary migration away from deteriorating conditions and toward better prospects. Adaptation is seen as a positive measure, while displacement - a negative consequence - is sometimes described as a failure to adapt.

Loss and damage: The negative effects of climate variability and climate change that people have not been able to cope with or adapt to.⁴ Or the

actual and/or potential manifestation of impacts associated with climate change in developing countries that negatively affect human and natural systems. This includes the impacts of extreme, time-bound weather “events” associated with the variability of current climatic norms, such as storms, floods and droughts, and “processes” associated with gradual environmental changes, such as sea level rise, coastal erosion, desertification and ocean acidification.

Under the loss and damage work programme, displacement is recognised as a “**non-economic loss**”. In other words, the loss that displacement represents in terms of social welfare is not commonly quantified in monetary terms and is not something that can be traded in markets. It is, however, no less important, particularly in many developing countries where such losses may well be more significant than economic ones.⁵ As such, it is argued that recognising and managing the risk of non-economic losses, including displacement, should be a central aspect of climate change policy.⁶

Mitigation: Action that will reduce man-made climate change or “a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. Examples include using fossil fuels more efficiently for industrial processes or electricity generation, switching to solar energy or wind power, improving the insulation of buildings, and expanding forests and other ‘sinks’ to remove greater amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere”.⁷

Mitigation is relevant in terms of displacement when reforestation and environmental conservation projects or large-scale land acquisitions for the cultivation of biofuels take place without due respect for the rights of the people who live in the project areas and who are forcibly displaced from their homes and land to make way for them.

See below for more on the definition of displacement, migration and planned relocation.

Thanks to the landmark Paris Agreement and other decisions adopted at the 21st COP in December 2015, displacement and related migration and planned relocation issues are more strongly positioned on the agenda than ever before. Displacement is relevant in this context as:

- a. “Loss and damage” related to the adverse effects of climate change on affected populations and countries, where the limits of measures that enable people to safely and voluntarily remain where they are living have been exceeded, and as
- b. “adaptation” or a coping response to moderate actual or potential harm to people caused by climate-related hazardous events or processes, as well as
- c. the result of climate “mitigation” and “adaptation” actions that force people to seek new homes elsewhere, such as the acquisition of land for bio-fuel production or forest conservation projects.

(See key terms above.)

Less than a year later (as of 1 November 2016), 87 of the 192 signatories to the Paris Agreement have ratified it, including major emitters of greenhouse gases such as China, the US, the EU, India and Brazil, together with many of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming. The agreement enters into legal force on 4 November 2016 and preparations for its full implementation are underway. A first meeting of the parties will be held in Marrakech in conjunction with COP 22, which takes place from 7 to 18 November.

GROWING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY-MAKING

The body of knowledge about the relationship of climate change to displacement and migration has grown rapidly and continues to inform policy discourse, including via the publication of IPCC assessments of the scientific basis for understanding climate change, its impacts and future risks, and adaptation and mitigation options.

IPCC’s Working Group II Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability (AR5) was published in 2014. It recognises with “medium confidence” and “high agreement” that “climate change over the 21st century is projected to increase displacement of people” and that “changes in the incidence of extreme events will amplify the challenges and risks of such displacement”.⁸

AR5 further notes that displacement is just one possible outcome of extreme weather events, because it depends on a range of factors that influence people’s ability to cope with their impacts *in situ*. Immobility may also be a negative outcome for those without the resources or ability to move and voluntary migration may be used to adapt to gradual change before conditions for survival become critical.⁹ Because of displacement’s “complex, multi-causal nature”, AR5 places only “low confidence” in quantitative projections and states that “it is difficult to categorize any individual as a climate migrant”.¹⁰

That said, AR5 provides strong evidence of recent climate change impacts on physical, biological and human systems, such as some indigenous communities changing their seasonal migration and hunting patterns to adapt to the effects of temperature change.¹¹ It further refers to “significant evidence that planning and increased mobility can reduce the human

security costs of displacement from extreme weather events”, and that climate changes in rural areas “could amplify migration” to urban centres.

Climate change and weather-related hazards do not act alone as drivers of vulnerability and risk, but in combination with other non-climatic factors

While the report does not attribute past displacement to climate change per se, it does note that extreme weather events have played a role in significant population movements.¹² IDMC’s displacement data sheds light on recent patterns that may be further exacerbated by climate change. Disasters brought on by rapid-onset weather-related hazards - primarily floods and storms - forced an average of 21.5 million people a year from their homes between 2008 and 2015 (Figure 1). The vast majority of those displaced remained within their country of origin. Many thousands more have been forced to leave their homes by creeping disasters brought on by slow-onset events such as agricultural drought and environmental degradation, but we do not yet have global figures and significant knowledge gaps on these phenomena remain.¹³

Even before the link between weather hazard events and their displacement impacts are understood, attributing an individual extreme weather event to human-caused climate change is difficult. Recent advances in the science of “extreme event attribution” promise clearer answers. A rapid assessment by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and partners, for example, quantifies the “fingerprint” of human-induced climate warming on the torrential rains that triggered the Louisiana flood disaster in the US in August 2016.¹⁴ The study, which is still under peer review, estimates that climate change has increased the odds of such an extreme

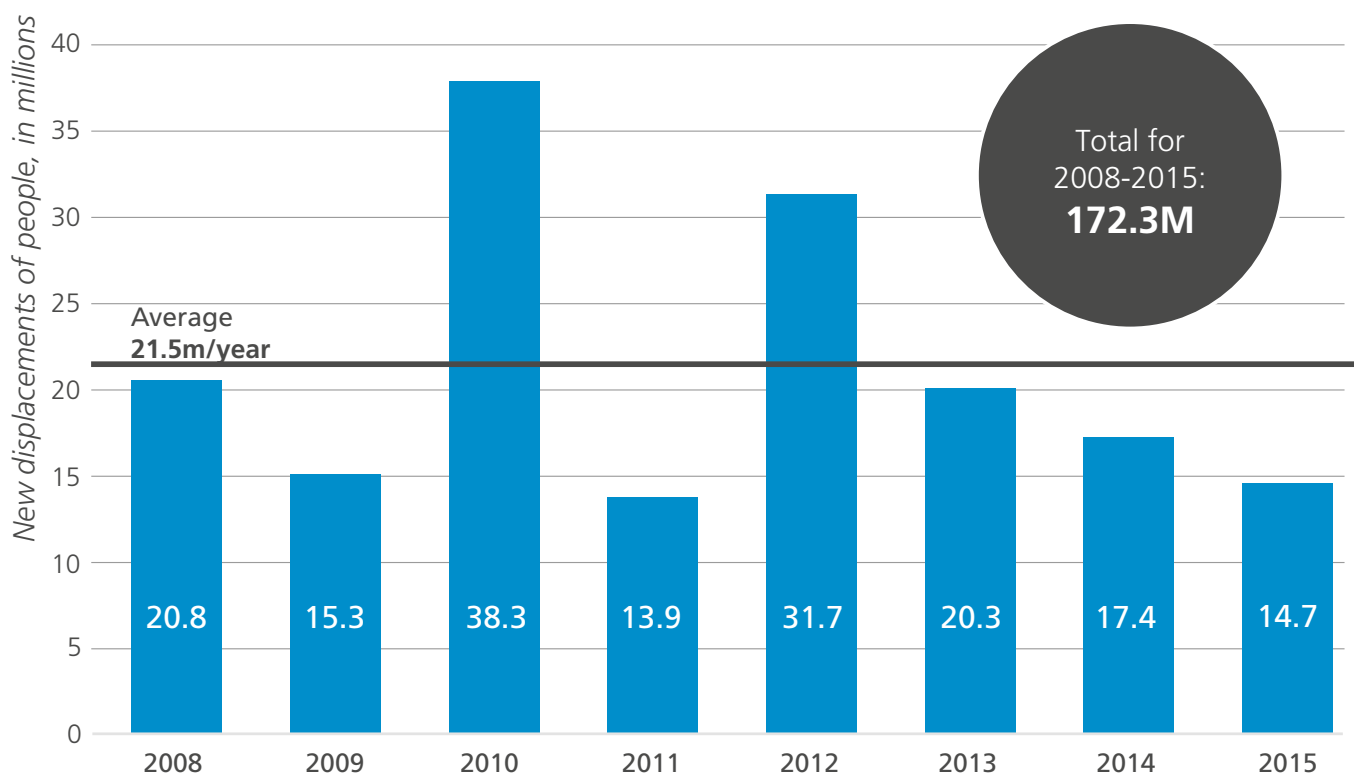
rainfall event in this coastal area of the US by at least 40 per cent, and most likely doubled them.¹⁵ Development of this knowledge is important to inform the assessment and management of risk, including disaster displacement risk, and to guide adaptation strategies.¹⁶

At the same time, AR5 points out that climate change and weather-related hazards do not act alone as drivers of vulnerability and risk, but in combination with other non-climatic factors. The report finds that “differences in exposure and vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change arise from multidimensional inequalities often produced by uneven development processes”.¹⁷ This, in turn, makes some people particularly vulnerable to climate change. The Louisiana flood disaster also provides an example here, as low-income households displaced from their homes struggle to recover two months on.¹⁸

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IPCC has begun preparations for its next assessment report, AR6. It will also produce a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways “in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty”. Knowledge and expertise on displacement and migration will be highly relevant, given that the report will discuss adaptation options, the conditions needed to enable them, the implications of failing to limit warming to 1.5C and the lessons learned from experience to date.

FIGURE 1: TOTAL NEW DISASTER DISPLACEMENT RELATED TO RAPID-ONSET WEATHER HAZARD EVENTS, 2008-2015



The gathering of further knowledge on displacement and migration has been coordinated by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), which provides UNFCCC with information to support its work, including via the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.¹⁹ Human mobility, including displacement, is addressed under its thematic work stream on human settlements, and further technical work is planned to continue to inform adaptation planning at the regional, national and subnational level, with a focus on supporting the formulation and implementation of national adaptation plans (NAPs).²⁰

DEFINING DISPLACEMENT, PLANNED RELOCATION AND MIGRATION

Displacement related to climate change tends to have been discussed along with other forms of population movement or human mobility, namely planned relocation and migration, and the importance of the links and differences between them are recognised. UNFCCC does not include formal definitions for these terms, but their usage draws on widely accepted characterisations outside the convention.

Central to the notion of displacement is its forced or obligatory nature.²¹ Other considerations include whether movements are internal or cross-border; temporary or permanent; short or long term; near or long distance; arbitrary, illegal or legally enforced; and undertaken as government-led initiatives or through the agency and initiative of people themselves. The term “climate refugee” is still used sometimes, particularly by the media, but it is increasingly avoided as inaccurate, given the legal definition of refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which refers to someone fleeing conflict or persecution.

Displacement and migration are understood to exist on a continuum between forced and voluntary forms of movement, particularly as they relate to gradual or slow-onset climate-related processes where the differences between them are less clear. Displacement may be part of a survival strategy or a life-saving adaptive measure of last resort in response to a crisis, but it is also a form of unavoids or unavoidable “loss and damage”. To be forced to move against one’s will, to abandon one’s home and property and become separated from one’s land and community, is in most cases a devastating experience, particularly for those whose coping capacity has already been severely eroded.

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Displacement is a result of people’s exposure and vulnerability to climate effects in combination with other socio-economic factors and the failure to protect human rights. It can, in turn, drive further vulnerability and risk, a fact that becomes clear where it does not lead to an improvement in the safety, security and protection of those displaced. Our monitoring and research shows this to be a particular concern when it becomes chronic or protracted.²² Such situations tend to exacerbate pre-existing vulnerability, erode resilience and impoverish people over time.²³

The term “planned relocation” is open to various interpretations, but it is a form of displacement forced by untenable circumstances and/or the orders of local or national authorities when those affected are less than accepting of the situation. If the option of a community remaining in situ is assessed to be unsafe or unfeasible, it is often undertaken as a necessary measure of last resort. The best working definition is provided in recent guidance developed by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Brookings Institution and Georgetown University:

Planned relocation is “a planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or places of temporary residence, are settled in a new location, and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives. Planned Relocation is carried out under the authority of the State, takes place within national borders, and is undertaken to protect people from risks and impacts related to disasters and environmental change, including the effects of climate change. Such Planned Relocation may be carried out at the individual, household, and/or community levels”.²⁴

Though undertaken as a protective measure, planned relocation can carry serious risks for those it is intended to benefit. As analogous cases of resettlement forced by development projects demonstrate, it has the potential to violate basic rights, disrupt livelihoods and cultural practices, and leave those relocated worse off.²⁵ To prevent such outcomes, the close participation of affected communities in planning and implementing the process is vital.

Displacement may be the result of a missed opportunity to migrate or use planned relocation as an early, strategic and voluntary measure to increase people’s resilience, enable them to maintain their dignity and avoid the worst effects of forced movement.

Even when relocation is planned in ways that respect a community’s perspectives and wishes, however, a lack of adequate policy and governance mechanisms and prohibitive financial costs may prove significant obstacles when it comes to implementation, leaving communities trapped in vulnerable situations.²⁶ Examples include ongoing cases in Alaska, where indigenous communities who have decided on the need to move away from their coastal homes because of the worsening impacts of flooding and erosion linked to global warming and sea level rise face delays in the process and, meanwhile, are continuing to live in highly hazardous conditions.²⁷

The forced or obligatory nature of displacement and many planned relocations differentiates them from more voluntary forms of movement captured by the term “migration”. An individual, family or community decision to migrate to avoid the foreseeable challenges of climate change may be seen as an opportunity to establish a better life, and as such a positive option that leaves open the possibility to return. The extent to which those affected may feel their decision was forced by circumstances beyond their control, however, is a moot point.

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DISPLACEMENT IN UNFCCC AGREEMENTS AND COP DECISIONS

The first ever mention of displacement and other forms of human mobility in international climate policy was made in paragraph 14(f) of the Cancún Adaptation Framework (CAF), which was adopted at COP 16 in November 2010.²⁸

Cancun Adaptation Framework paragraph 14(f) invited "all Parties to enhance action on adaptation under the Cancun Adaptation Framework, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, by undertaking, inter alia, the following ... (f) Measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels".

Paragraphs 25 to 29 of CAF also called for the consideration and implementation of approaches to address loss and damage. The work stream focuses on the knowledge and action needed to address economic and non-economic losses beyond adaptation. This led to the Doha Climate Gateway Decision in 2012, which echoes CAF paragraph 14(f) in referring to the need for more knowledge about climate impacts on human mobility as a form of loss and damage.²⁹

Doha Climate Gateway decision 3/CP.18, paragraph 7(a)

acknowledges "the further work to advance the understanding of and expertise on loss and damage, which includes, inter alia, the following ... (a) Enhancing the understanding of ... (vi) How impacts of climate change are affecting patterns of migration, displacement and human mobility".

The following year at COP 19 in Poland, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change (WIM) was established "to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change". The initial two-year work plan of WIM's executive committee included the following action area³⁰.

Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage initial workplan, action area 6:

"Enhance the understanding of and expertise on how the impacts of climate change are affecting patterns of migration, displacement and human mobility; and the application of such understanding and expertise."

At COP 21 in Paris in 2015, while mention of displacement and relocation did not make it into the Paris Agreement text, which is soon to become legally binding, parties are reminded in the preamble that they should "respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights" when taking action to address climate change, including reference to the rights of migrants and other vulnerable groups.³¹ At the same time, the agreement does highlight the importance of "averting, minimising and addressing" loss and damage under Article 8, and accompanying "decisions to give effect to the Agreement" include a request to WIM's executive committee to establish a taskforce on displacement associated with climate change.³²

COP decision 1/CP.21, decisions on loss and damage to give effect to the Agreement, paragraph 49

"requests the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism to establish, according to its procedures and mandate, a taskforce to complement, draw upon the work of and involve, as appropriate, existing bodies and expert groups under the Convention including the Adaptation Committee and the Least Developed Countries Expert Group, as well as relevant organizations and expert bodies outside the Convention, to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change".³³

Implementation of this decision was initiated at the second meeting of WIM's executive committee in February 2016, and as a further action under its initial work plan, the International Organisation for Migration was asked to organise a technical meeting in Morocco in July. The meeting brought together members of the executive committee, national and regional experts, and representatives from international and UN organisations and the academic community. Outputs included a set of synthesised documents containing information, lessons learned and good practices, and inputs/recommendations on supporting the work of the future taskforce.³⁴

At the executive committee's fourth meeting in September 2016, terms of reference for the taskforce were adopted, giving it an initial mandate to develop recommendations by COP 24 in 2018 for the executive committee, conference parties, civil society, practitioners, technical and scientific communities and others.³⁵ The recommendations will draw on the latest research, data and good practice, including lessons learned from legal, policy and institutional challenges, and they will link to other organisations and bodies both within and outside UNFCCC.

The taskforce will consist of a careful balance of as many as 14 people representing different UNFCCC constituencies and regional or country groups that have practical experience and expertise in displacement work. Up to four executive committee members representing a balance of industrialised and developing countries will join the taskforce, two of whom will co-chair it, as well as one representative from the adaptation committee (AC) and one from the least developed countries expert group (LEG). It will also have as many as eight technical experts from different regions, who may include representatives from UNFCCC NGO constituency groups, intergovernmental organisations and other institutions.³⁶ Additional experts or representatives from other bodies may also be asked to serve as ad-hoc members. The nomination process is now getting underway.

At COP 22, WIM will be reviewed and a new five-year rolling work plan will be proposed for adoption. Human mobility issues are likely to continue to feature strongly as a specific action area. Turning the plans into concrete action for the most vulnerable countries and communities will require clarity and increased commitments in terms of the capacity and financing needed to address loss and damage risks, including displacement, at the local, national, regional and international level.

Turning the plans into concrete action for the most vulnerable countries and communities will require clarity and increased commitments in terms of the capacity and financing needed

At the invitation of WIM's executive committee, loss and damage was the focus of discussion at the 2016 forum of the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), which took place in Manila in September 2016 and brought together representatives from governments, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society.

The meeting reviewed existing financial instruments and emerging national and regional-level schemes and approaches, with a focus on risk transfer schemes, social protection schemes, catastrophe and resilience bonds and contingency finance. It highlighted the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to financing action on loss and damage, and that governments and others will need to understand and navigate a diverse set of instruments with different strengths and limitations. They will also have to develop enabling policies, and strengthen community capacity and the involvement of the private sector.³⁷

Also key to action and financing will be the level of ambition and investment in the conference parties' "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) toward the Paris Agreement's goals, the activities of UNFCCC's subsidiary bodies and work programmes, and the extent to which current and future NDCs reflect human mobility concerns. These efforts and inputs will be further informed by a first global stocktake of collective progress toward the Paris Agreement's goals in 2018.

Governments will require more good quality data to understand the specific ways in which climate change will affect - and may be affected by - migration, displacement and planned relocation

The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process provides another avenue for the integration of human mobility issues. A COP 19 decision in Warsaw in 2013 called for technical and financial support to help the least developed country parties in developing their NAPs. The process involves identifying medium and long-term adaptation needs, and the development of strategies and programmes to address them. Human mobility has emerged as a theme in NAPs, but those developed so far contain little detail on strategies to avert, minimise and address displacement or facilitate migration and planned relocation.³⁸ That said, the development of further NAPs provides an opportunity to engage parties further and share expertise.

To strengthen the development and implementation of their NAPs, governments will require more good quality data to understand the specific ways in which climate change will affect - and may be affected by - migration, displacement

and planned relocation in their countries.³⁹ Increasing their access to expertise, examples of good practice and guidance, including via the WIM executive committee's taskforce and the Nairobi work programme's support for the NAP process, would also be a great help.

SEIZING THE MOMENTUM

The institutional arrangements for adaptation and addressing loss and damage are still a work in progress, but knowledge and discussions on displacement and human mobility have matured. The visibility of displacement, migration and planned relocation in UNFCCC agreements and decisions and the work of its subsidiary bodies has been important in signalling recognition of, and drawing attention to the issues concerned. So far, however, policy decisions have focused on enhancing understanding, coordination and cooperation, rather than on facilitating concrete solutions for the most vulnerable countries and communities.

Moving from discourse and commitments to planning, resourcing and action is a matter of urgency for communities already losing their homes and ways of life

This is perhaps unsurprising given the political implications, both domestic and transboundary, of displacement and migration. Under the UNFCCC negotiations, they have been associated with points of contention between countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDSs) that have most to lose as a result of anthropogenic climate processes, and wealthy industrialised countries responsible for the lion's share of carbon emissions that are looked to as sources of finance. Strong red lines have been repeatedly drawn on questions of liability and compensation for loss and damage. Commitments continue to fall short of what is required to make the most vulnerable countries and communities resilient to displacement risk, but the negotiated position has at least kept the issue on the agenda and provides a window of opportunity that must be used to accelerate action.

The UNFCCC processes may benefit further from complementary momentum created on displacement issues through the work of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, established to take forward the Nansen Initiative's protection agenda for people displaced across borders. At the same time, further opportunities to link action on climate change and human mobility issues are presented by governments' commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Secretary's Agenda for Humanity, and work towards Global Compacts on responsibility-sharing for refugees, and for safe, regular and orderly migration.⁴⁰

Across this raft of policy frameworks, ensuring coherent approaches and coordinated action will be an ongoing challenge for governments. If effectively implemented, they will support significant progress in addressing the risk and impacts of displacement. Moving from discourse and commitments to planning, resourcing and action at the regional, national and subnational level is a matter of urgency for communities already losing their homes and ways of life as our planet continues to warm.

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CONTACT

Michelle Yonetani
Senior Strategic Advisor on
Disasters and Climate Change
+41 22 552 36 37
michelle.yonetani@idmc.ch

IDMC
NRC, 3 rue de Varembe
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
www.internal-displacement.org
+41 22 552 3600
info@idmc.ch