



**NGO Committee on Migration**  
*A committee of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative  
Relationship with the United Nations*

## **Discussion Paper on Environmentally-induced Migration (EIM)**

**According to current estimates, there are 214 million** persons in the world today who have migrated to countries other than their own and around **740 million** persons who have migrated within their countries.<sup>1</sup> In other words, around a billion people (roughly 1 in 7 of the world's population) are migrants. A range of complex factors and constraints inform a relocation decision. Environmental issues—though rarely the sole impetus—have contributed to a large number of migrations.

“Failing ecosystems, vulnerability to natural hazards and disasters, gradual climate-driven environmental changes, and degradation are putting pressure on human migration and can lead to a future crisis in sustainable development.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Realities of Environmentally-induced Migration (EIM):**

- For decades, many migrants have moved from mountainous and rural areas to urban ones due to economic, social, political, demographic, and environmental factors.
- Environmental issues causing migration include lack of fertile soil, erosion, environmental degradation, water scarcity, floods, and natural disasters, which in some cases have been influenced by environmental change.
- Sea-level rise is making some low-lying coastal regions more prone to flooding.
- According to estimates, percentages of dry lands affected or threatened by desertification are the following<sup>3</sup>:
  - 43% in Africa
  - 65% in West Asia (i.e., Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, United Arab Emirates)
- Lack of attention to sustainable development and resulting environmental changes will most likely exacerbate both sudden- and slow-onset disasters and environmental degradation.

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<sup>1</sup> Black, R. & Bennett, S. R. G. *Migration and global environmental change: priorities for policymakers*, (Dec. 2011 – Jan. 2012), *Migration Policy Practice* 1(2).and IOM, World Migration Report 2011, p.49.

<sup>2</sup> Areikat, S. & Milan, A. *Environmentally induced migration and sustainable development*. (2010)

<sup>3</sup> Black, R. & Bennett, S. R. G. *Migration and global environmental change: priorities for policymakers*, (Dec. 2011 – Jan. 2012), *Migration Policy Practice* 1(2).

- Increasingly, due to gradual environmental degradation as well as sudden disasters, many people migrate to environments which are already struggling with environmental issues.<sup>4</sup>
- Other people, usually those affected by extreme poverty, cannot move from dangers at all.<sup>5</sup>
- Women, who comprise two-thirds of the agricultural sector in developing countries, and more than 90 percent in many African countries, are among the most vulnerable to effects of climate change and to forced migration.<sup>6</sup>
- In this context, there is a growing call for capacity building, to anticipate and address environmental changes and their relationship to human mobility.<sup>7</sup>

### **Concerns about Environmentally-induced Migration (EIM):**

1. A growing concern about EIM is uncoordinated coping strategies by states, resulting in population displacement, competition for scarce resources, and increased likelihood for violence.
2. An increasing concern is statelessness<sup>8</sup> due to resource scarcity, overcrowding, and displacement from sea-level rise affecting coastal areas and islands.
3. Reduced availability of clean water has led to water stress for hundreds of millions of people, and decreasing crop yields are placing tens of millions of people at risk of hunger and the possibility of forced migration.
4. The effects of climate change have caused a negative overall impact on human health, especially for older persons, the young, the poor, and other marginalized populations, calling for new adaptations and policies that support these adaptations.<sup>9</sup>
5. Similarly, adjustments and policy adaptations are needed for children's education, which is impaired by the impact of environmental changes such as floods and drought.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Government Office for Science, London. *Foresight: Migration and global Environmental Change Final Project Report* (2012)

<sup>5</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Environment, climate change and migration: IOM's approach and activities* (2008)

<sup>6</sup> UN WomenWatch, *Women, gender equality and climate change* (2009), Web, [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/)

<sup>7</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Environment, climate change and migration: IOM's approach and activities* (2008).

<sup>8</sup> A stateless person is not recognized as a citizen by any state. Citizenship often enables people to obtain health care, employment, housing, and education, as well as provides voting rights and the ability to enter and exit a nation freely. Open Society Institute, Web, <http://www.soros.org/indepth/stateless>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Protecting people crossing borders in the context of climate change normative gaps and possible approaches* (2012), *Legal and Protection Policy Research Series*

<sup>10</sup> Save the Children, *Climate Change*, Web, <http://www.savethechildren.uk/about-us/what-we-do/climate-change>

6. Further drivers of EIM occur as migrants arrive in areas which are already struggling with negative effects of environmental change, such as urban slums and dangerous coastal areas, which are often overextended and unable to effectively absorb migrants.
7. A critical concern is human trafficking, especially of women and children who are forced to move out of their social-cultural surroundings and are very vulnerable to labor exploitation and sexual violence.

Much attention has been given to the debate between “minimalists” and “maximalists”, regarding the numbers of people likely to be subject to environmentally-induced migration (EIM). Instead, attention should be focused on ways in which to protect migrants.<sup>11</sup>

Migration, as one form of adaptation to the effects of climate change, will always exist. Given this reality, below are some proposed recommendations, which consider both the adaptation to, and mitigation of, effects of unsustainable social, economic, and environmental habits and policies:

### **Recommendations to Address Environmentally-induced Migration (EIM)**

1. Coordination of coping strategies by States regarding:
  - Enhancement of livelihoods through the development of green jobs, sustainable fisheries, provision of sustainable infrastructure and services, and sustainable agricultural development.
  - Adoption of policies that facilitate sustainable production and consumption.
  - Urban planning that takes environmentally-induced migration to cities into account..
  - Participation in decision making by all stakeholders, especially migrant populations and indigenous peoples.<sup>12</sup>
  - Facilitation of equitable distribution of benefits by means of a Social Protection Floor<sup>13</sup> providing: community-level insurance and individual micro-insurance; social protection, via conditional cash transfers, and government-subsidized index insurance.<sup>14</sup>
2. Admission of environmental migrants by Industrialized nations.
3. Enhancement of food and water security by improving the management of agricultural water systems, both rain-fed and irrigated; soil fertility management; expanding cropped areas; investing in irrigation; engaging in fair agricultural trade; and by improvement of

<sup>11</sup> Kalin, W. & Schrepfer, N., *Protecting People Crossing Borders in the Context of Climate of Change* (2012)

<sup>12</sup> UNDESA, *Participatory Dialogue*

<sup>13</sup> The Government Office for Science, London. *Foresight: Migration and global Environmental Change Final Project Report* (2011)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

sanitation and clean water supply through the use of photovoltaic systems. This is important both for areas where migrants originate and their areas of destination.

4. Adoption and implementation of policies addressing human well being, particularly health, for the most vulnerable groups - women and girls, youth, minorities, the disabled, and older persons.
5. Attention to education for sustainable development as part of all instruction and capacity building.
6. Measures by States to help migrants struggling with environmental change to address the rate of environmental degradation, such as:
  - reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and reduced loss of coastal wetlands through conservation laws,
  - reversed deforestation through good land management practices,
  - decreased soil erosion through structural measuring and planting.<sup>15</sup>
7. Clear and people-centered policies by States addressing mixed population movements, so that vulnerabilities of these groups do not result in abuse, exploitation and human trafficking
8. Finally, if we are serious about proactive approaches to migration due to unsustainable environments, all stakeholders need to pay attention to:
  - good governance
  - debt management
  - enhancing domestic resources
  - ending capital flight to tax havens
  - costing and budgeting using innovative financing for adaptation and mitigation
  - protection of the environment from commercial exploitation.

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<sup>15</sup> The Government Office for Science, London. *Foresight: Migration and global Environmental Change Final Project Report* (2011)