



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Migration and climate change in the Arab region



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1. Introduction

Climate change has devastating impacts on people, their communities, and their jobs and livelihoods. The negative impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by persons and communities who are already in a disadvantageous situation. Nonetheless, migration and labour mobility could be a meaningful climate resilience and adaptation strategy for origin and host communities, when it takes place in a safe, regular and orderly manner, and ensures productive employment and decent work. The present policy brief calls upon stakeholders, including United Nations resident coordinator offices, to protect and empower migrants, and other affected groups such as refugees and internally displaced persons, to overcome the direct and longer-term impacts of climate change.¹



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



2. Migration-climate change nexus

The Arab region witnesses complex patterns and trends of human mobility, including internal migration, especially in the form of rural-urban migration, international migration, and displacement owing to conflict and disaster. These patterns and trends affect the lives of millions of people in the region. Moreover, climate change threatens every Arab country to varying degrees.

Environmental pressure aggravated by the effects of climate events, such as drought, sea level rise, flash floods and desertification, often acts as a threat multiplier exacerbating other adverse drivers of migration. It can have implications on agricultural production and the livelihoods of rural populations, owing to shifting and unpredictable rainfall patterns and temperatures. It can also threaten peace and stability in the region, protracting existing displacement in conflict-affected and fragile countries. Urban expansion, land degradation, and competition over increasingly scarce natural resources may also exacerbate conflict and tension leading, in turn, to more displacement and forced migration. The impacts of climate change adversely affect the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, self-determination, decent work, development, health, food, water and sanitation, adequate housing, and a range of cultural rights.



▶ Flooding contributed to

58%

of the total share of persons displaced by disasters in the MENA region between 2010 and 2019.



▶ In 2020, there were around

2 million

newly internally displaced persons due to natural hazards in the Arab region.



▶ Rates of food insecurity and malnutrition are rising: the number of undernourished in the Arab region people reached

54.3 million

in 2021, while

53.9 million

people were classed as severely food insecure.



3.Challenges and policy priorities

A. Migrant workers

- Few government plans consider the potential of, or need for, labour mobility of migrant workers with skills in green jobs.
- A just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies requires inclusion of migrant workers, and empowering them to contribute to building low-carbon economies.
- A just transition can ensure that migrant workers have access to decent jobs, and can contribute to greening the economy by working in environmentally friendly sectors.
- Increasing temperatures elevate the risk of occupational heat-related illnesses and injuries, making heat stress more common in duration, frequency and intensity.²

B. Women

- In the Arab region, women contribute less to greenhouse gas emissions than men, in their socially prescribed traditional roles, yet suffer disproportionate climate impacts, especially women with the smallest asset bases.
- Women’s heavier burden of unpaid care work relative to men increases in the worsened context of climate crises.³
- The water-energy-food insecurity nexus has disproportionate impacts on women.
- Women and girls tend to be marginalized from education and decision-making, and are more at risk of violence in climate crises.

C. Children

- Children in the region face high exposure to climate and environmental risk factors, coupled with high vulnerability.⁴
- Children moving in the context of climate change, especially unaccompanied minors, may be exposed to a variety of risks, such as abuse, exploitation or trafficking. They

are more vulnerable to child labour, including hazardous forms of work, and they may lose access to education.⁵

- There is currently no global policy framework for addressing the needs and rights of children moving in the context of climate change.

D. Food security

- Worsening heat, drought and aridity conditions in the Arab region risk undermining the viability of farming, with severe implications for food production.
- Through impacts on agriculture, climate change is shaping food security in the Arab region.
- Rural populations that directly depend on climate-sensitive natural resources for their income and subsistence are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change.
- Structural drivers of vulnerability, such as poverty, inequality and marginality, compromise the adaptive capacity of the region’s small farmers.

E. Urbanization

- More than half of the Arab population now lives in cities and informal settlements.⁶
- The region’s accelerated warming, compounded by political conflict, reliance on fossil fuels and dependency on climate-sensitive livelihoods, has driven rural-to-urban migration and conflict-induced displacement.
- This increase in the migrant population poses significant challenges for urbanization, particularly in big cities. For instance, service providers in urban areas often find it difficult to cater to both the established population and incoming migrants, leading to potential gaps in accessing essential services and securing housing.⁷
- The trend of informal settlements expanding into climate-sensitive areas like floodplains increases the vulnerability of these communities to environmental risks.⁸

4. Policy recommendations



A. Advocacy and mainstreaming

- Raise awareness of policymakers on climate change and its relationship to human mobility.
- Support States to integrate human mobility considerations into nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, and just transition strategies in the region.
- Improve rural-urban migration management by linking it to urban planning, and rural development planning, among other relevant national policies and planning.
- Invite and engage the Ministry of Public Works and Urban Planning in migration dialogues and national consultations.



B. Data and research

- Invest and strengthen the collection, analysis and dissemination of disaster-induced population movement data, on both migration and displacement.
- Support the scientific community to advance research on the migration-climate change nexus.
- Develop research on the link between slow-onset climate change processes and migration.
- Expand the network of scholars specialized in climate change and encourage their collaboration with migration scholars, and assess the climate change-mobility nexus in the region.





C. Migrant workers

- Set out obligations of employers to prevent migrant workers' rights violations, including occupational heat stress, and mitigate the risk of abuse.
- Create and strengthen labour mobility pathways that give access to green, alternative and sustainable decent work opportunities for populations affected by the impact of climate change.
- Step up efforts, on the basis of inclusive social dialogue, to support a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, by promoting skills development and promoting green job creation.
- Assist Governments, private sector actors and workers' organizations in the region to discuss, design and implement skills mobility partnerships, so as to build a skilled workforce for a just transition to greener economies.
- Explore the linkages between climate change, a just transition and labour mobility, through engagement with Government, United Nations agencies and relevant national stakeholders, including social partners, civil society organizations and academia.



D. A gender-sensitive, age-sensitive and disability-sensitive perspective

- Support States to integrate the climate vulnerability of migrants into national development planning, including migration governance policies.
- Include child protection, gender equity, and the needs of persons with disabilities in resilience and adaptation plans.
- Conduct gender-responsive and age-sensitive impact reviews of climate crises, post-disaster needs assessments, response and recovery packages, and migration and development policies and programmes, taking account of intersecting inequalities.
- Develop gender-responsive budgeting for target groups of women affected by climate risk.
- Conduct training on gender-responsive budgeting for climate change and human mobility related programmes.



E. Protecting food security

- Develop comprehensive solutions to build climate resilience in resource-based rural livelihoods, while addressing the adverse drivers of migration and displacement.
- Strengthen the links between rural and urban food systems, recognizing that these are interlinked, thus strengthening food security for both rural and urban households, including migrants and their families.
- Ensure that food security is maintained during crises by guaranteeing coverage by and access to social protection schemes, regardless of migration status.
- Address all dimensions of food insecurity, including availability, access, stability and utilization, in vulnerable migrant populations, especially for children.
- Promote farm-to-fork strategies for sustainable production and consumption in national and local development plans.⁹



F. Institutional development

- Integrate climate change adaptation measures in public policies, strategies and planning, particularly those affecting migrants.
- Integrate climate change issues in migration governance frameworks, employment policies and sectoral policies.
- Ensure that policies related to climate change and migration comply with human and labour rights obligations.
- Invest in disaster risk reduction measures and local adaptation to manage environmental risks and land use.
- Invite local authorities to participate in formulating public policies, strategies and planning relevant to migration and climate change.

Endnotes

- 1 The present policy brief synthesizes the findings from a policy paper on migration and climate change in the Arab Region. It builds on the momentum around the interlinkages between climate change and human mobility that were acknowledged at the twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties (COP 27) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 7–18 November 2022) and at COP 28 (Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, 30 November–12 December 2023). It also builds on a [regional dialogue on the climate change and migration nexus in the Arab region](#), organized by the Issue Based Coalition on Migration in the Arab Region (online, 24–25 October 2022).
- 2 Heat stress can result in heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, or heat rashes. Heat can also increase the risk of injuries in workers as it may result in sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses, and dizziness. Burns may also occur as a result of accidental contact with hot surfaces or steam (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Heat stress](#)).
- 3 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), [Regional assessment report on disaster risk reduction in the Arab region](#), 2021.
- 4 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), [The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index](#), 2021.
- 5 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), [The relations between climate change and child labour in agriculture: evidence on children’s work trends after climate-related events in Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nepal and Peru](#), 2023.
- 6 UN-Habitat, Arab States Region, [Urban numbers](#).
- 7 Gabriela Nagle Alverio and others, [Displaced to Cities: Conflict, Climate Change, and Rural-to-Urban Migration](#), 2023.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 [Farm-to-fork strategies](#) aim to reduce the environmental and climate impact of primary production, while ensuring fair economic returns for farmers.



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