



Md. Jakir Khan and his wife Shefali Begum will be going to a different place for work for the next couple of months from their house in Badurtola, Morrelganj, Khulna, Bangladesh.

## GUIDANCE PAPER

# UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Authors: Régis Blanc, Jana Junghardt

With contributions by: Rupa Mukerji, Owen Frazer, Agnieszka Kroskowska

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**The impact of climate change is intensifying across the world, altering migration patterns and causing socio-economic strain.**

Helvetas is active in many climate-vulnerable areas where people are facing the consequences of this phenomenon. As part of its 2025–2028 strategy, Helvetas is increasing its engagement on climate-linked mobility: to sensitize for the linkages, to acknowledge its importance in partner countries and to develop innovative support relying on a long-standing presence on the ground, a network of local partners and a wide thematic expertise.





## KEY TAKEAWAYS



**Human mobility**<sup>1</sup> has always been a strategy to adapt to changing conditions. For many societies, migration has formed an essential part of their livelihoods. But this decision on when and where to move used to be theirs to make – which is no longer the case, also due to climate change<sup>2</sup>.



**Climate change** is a catalyzer in altering migration decision-making by people in climate-vulnerable areas. The relationship between climate change and mobility is context-specific, non-linear and complex. Some individuals can adapt in place, while many people do not have the capability to move (= involuntary immobility), and others might be able to but are reluctant to leave homelands. Climate change also interacts with other drivers of mobility, be they social, political, economic, or demographic and enhances vulnerabilities.



Climate-linked **mobility** is predominantly a domestic and short-distance phenomenon. Sudden-onset events (e.g. storms, floods and wildfires) are strongly associated with short- and long-term displacement in most regions, while slow-onset events (e.g. extreme heat, precipitation anomalies and resulting droughts) are provoking longer-term changes in migration patterns. They require tailored and differentiated approaches to support people in their acute (humanitarian response) and longer-term (development cooperation) needs and aspirations.



Promoting the agency of the populations, including the **right to stay and the right to move**, and applying a **human-rights based approach** are pivotal to ensure people are supported in their individual and context-specific needs. This holds true for groups particularly at risk, such as women and children and people in fragile and conflict-affected settings.



Migration is in many cases an **adaptation strategy**. Temporarily or permanently leaving your homelands has the potential of building climate resilience, for the migrant, for the people staying behind, and people in destination areas. In order to enhance resilience through mobility, migration needs to be safe, planned and voluntary – as far as possible for the cases of planned relocation. Otherwise, migration can also increase risks for people staying behind, on the move, and in the area of destination.



Helvetas works in many of the most **climate-vulnerable countries** of the world, and communities and individuals are being exposed to growing risks and have inadequate capacities to adapt to the changes. Many countries are already facing climate-linked mobility, mostly through internal migration, and its consequences.

1 As part of this document, the term used to describe the movement of people in the context of climate change is « mobility » to avoid any confusion considering the multiple terms used in the current debate (see box on types of mobility). When the use is more generic, migration is used.

2 IPCC, 2022: [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#).

## INTRODUCTION

Human mobility<sup>3</sup> has always been a strategy to adapt to changing conditions. In recent years, climate change has become a catalyzer in altering decisions of people in climate-vulnerable areas to move. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states in 2022 in the Sixth Assessment Report: “There is increased evidence that climate hazards associated with extreme events and variability act as direct drivers of involuntary migration and displacement and as indirect drivers through deteriorating climate-sensitive livelihoods (high confidence)<sup>4</sup>.”

Over three billion people live in countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change<sup>5</sup>. Millions of people move each year, and an increasing share of migration can be linked to extreme weather such as cyclones and floods and seasonal changes such as prolonged droughts, which are projected to intensify and increase in frequency due to climate change<sup>6</sup>. While people do cross international borders, typically these movements are within their own country. In 2023 alone, disasters drove some 26.4 million recorded internal displacements, of which 77% were caused by weather-related hazards<sup>7</sup>. Yet the vast majority of people living in places highly vulnerable to climate change do not migrate.

What are the main motives of people to migrate – or not migrate? What role does climate change play? And what could the future of climate-linked mobility look like? Increasingly, this nexus is gaining interest in the field of international cooperation, nourished by growing evidence of changing migration patterns and implications for the areas of origin and destination alike.

In a number of reports, though, misleading assumptions are promoted and the topic tends to be framed as a threat, particularly in the Global North. It masks the reality of being, among other things, a predominantly domestic phenomenon and an unlikely mass migration trend. The polarized and often-simplistic debate risks preventing productive discussions and the design of action plans that are adapted to the needs and perspectives of people affected by the impacts of climate change. It prevents policymakers from mobilizing adaptation financing and implement-



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The Safer Migration Project (SaMi) is a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal (GoN) and Switzerland, with technical assistance from Helvetas.

ing strategies considering, on one hand, migration as a livelihood and risk reduction strategy and, on the other hand, adaptation strategies to reduce unsafe migration.

This paper aims to enhance the understanding of climate-linked mobility, unpacking myths and shifting the focus to practical support and recognition of its potential and risks. We need effective climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, robust legal and policy frameworks, and inclusive planning and financing mechanisms that can support the needs of underserved communities.

4 IPCC, 2022: [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#), Technical summary, p.52.

5 World Health Organization (2023). [Climate webpage](#).

6 IPCC, 2022: [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#), Technical summary, p.52

7 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2024). [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#).

### Human influence on climate change is unequivocal

Human activity and associated emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases are responsible for the rise in global temperatures<sup>8</sup>. At the time of writing, a temperature increase of 1.1°C was already documented. 2023 was the hottest year on record, which continues the trend of an annual increase in global temperatures<sup>9</sup>. Impacts of this changing climate are complex and show as changed seasons and precipitation patterns, glacier and ice sheet retreat, and more intense and frequent floods and storms. It also intensifies a range of slow-onset processes such as, but not limited to, desertification, coastal erosion, heatwaves and droughts, sea-level rise and ecosystem loss<sup>10</sup>. Changes that we are currently witnessing are linked to past emissions. Current projections indicate that by the end of the century global temperatures will increase between 2.5 and 4°C, depending on climate action<sup>11</sup>.

### Mobility as a coping strategy for climate change effects

Mobility, whether temporary or permanent, has always been a response to changes, be they environmental, political or economic. Most people rely on a stable livelihood to make a living, and climate change and its impacts erode this stability. Its adverse effect on the sustainable development of regions, countries and communities are exacerbating inequality gaps and pushing climate vulnerable communities further into poverty<sup>12</sup>. These gaps and vulnerabilities can trigger tensions, conflicts, social insecurity, and instability. As a result, affected individuals and groups may use mobility as a coping strategy. Climate-linked mobility occurs in all parts of the world but is unequally distributed and is currently concentrated in the most climate-vulnerable regions, also known as climate change hotspots (e.g., Sahel region, East Africa, Himalayas, Central Asia, Pacific, Central American Dry Corridor, deltas in South and South-East Asia).

### Relationship is non-linear and multi-causal

Catastrophic predictions that climate change will create huge numbers of international migrants overlook

that the relationship between mobility and climate change is non-linear. Its impacts are not distributed evenly nor responded to equally. Some individuals can adapt in place. But many people do not have the capability to move or might be able to but are reluctant to leave homelands to which they feel irrevocably bound<sup>13</sup>. Evidence from case studies suggests that migration rarely is the first choice<sup>14</sup>. Changing environmental conditions interact with other drivers of mobility. All migration is multi-causal, and climate-linked mobility is no different. Climate change acts as a threat or a vulnerability multiplier, exposing and exacerbating (pre-)existing vulnerabilities of those affected, rather than creating them outright<sup>15</sup>.

### Different migration patterns

People engage in different forms of mobility. Most is within their countries, but also across borders. These movements can be temporary, such as seasonal and circular migration, or permanent. They might occur from rural to urban areas and vice versa, as well as between rural locations. As cities become hotspots of environmental risk (in particular, coastal cities), migrants increasingly originate from urban areas, too. These forms of mobility exist on a continuum, from displacement to more voluntary forms of mobility. Migration is not always a last resort. Some people depart voluntarily, some are forced to flee, but most people fall somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum. Internal displacement in some contexts can also lead to international mobility and displacements can also take the form of planned or organized resettlement.

### Supporting data

Global data on migration dynamics remains insufficiently precise – many movements remain unreported and decisions to migrate are influenced by a number of factors. Information linked to displacement due to weather-related events is more reliable though, with the largest movements occurring in Asia linked to storms and floods (see Figure 2).

8 IPCC (2022)

9 <https://wmo.int/media/news/wmo-confirms-2023-smashes-global-temperature-record>

10 Cissé, G. & McLeman, R. & al. (2022). [Health, Wellbeing, and the Changing Structure of Communities](#). In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, p. 1079.

11 <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/>

12 International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022). [People on the Move in a Changing Climate – Linking Policy, Evidence and Action](#). IOM, Geneva.

13 Caroline Zickgraf (2023). [Where are all the climate migrants? Explaining immobility amid environmental change](#). Migration Policy Institute. October 2023.

14 OKUP (2023): Migration not a choice but a compulsion. <https://www.okup.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/migration-is-not-a-choice.pdf>

15 Caroline Zickgraf (2021) Stifling silos : the need for a more holistic approach to mixed migration in a warming world, [Mixed Migration Review 2021](#).

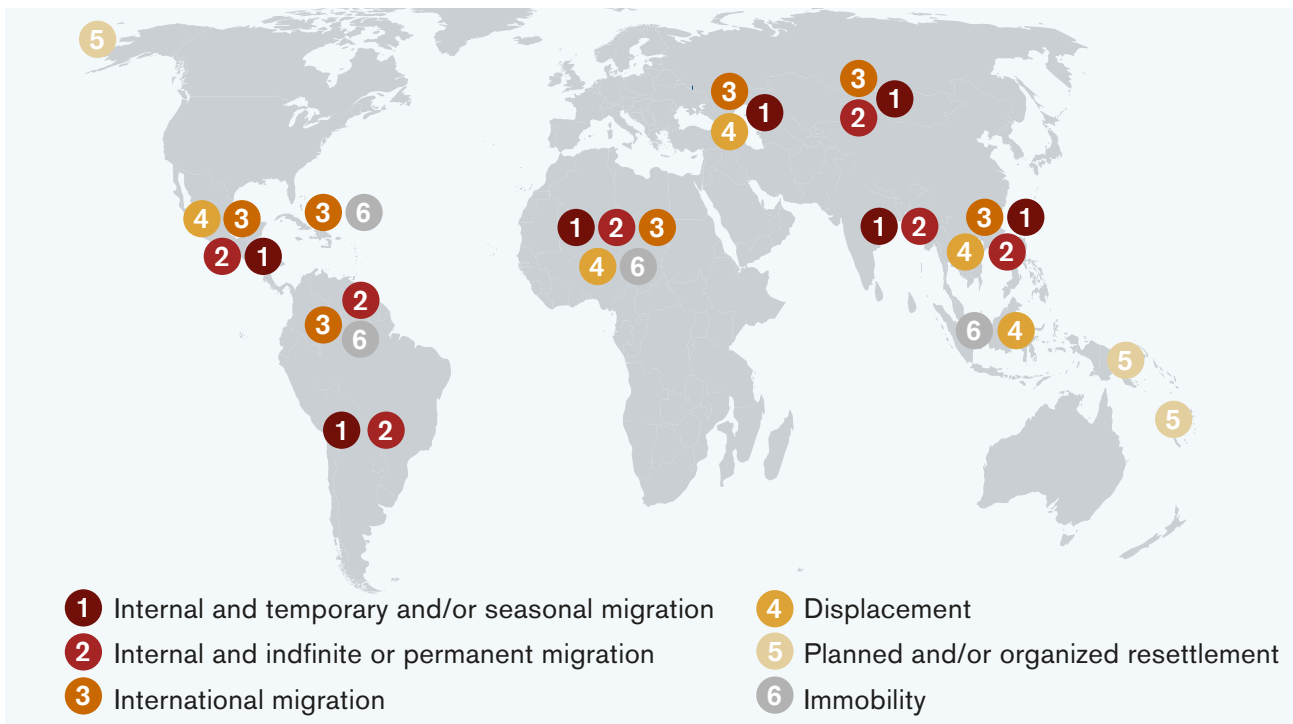


Figure 1: Typology of mobility, predominant types regionally (adapted source: IPCC)



## Main types of climate-linked mobility

**Migration** refers to predominantly voluntary movement in which “people, while not necessarily having the ability to decide in complete freedom, still possess the ability to choose between different realistic options” (The Nansen Initiative, [Protection Agenda](#)). Migration is a fundamental development strategy in all Helvetas partner countries, with climate change being documented as an important driver in countries like Mali, Madagascar, Bangladesh, Honduras and Guatemala, where people’s livelihoods depend on rain-fed agriculture.

**Planned relocation** refers to a “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” (Georgetown University, UNHCR and Brookings Institution, ‘[Guidance on Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocation](#)’). In relation to climate change, planned relocation is increasingly applied in climate-vulnerable hotspots such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, such as Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the Marshall Islands.

**Displacement** refers to predominantly forced movement. For example, the [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#) defines disaster displacement as “situations where people are forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard.” Globally, over 140 countries are experiencing disaster displacement. In Pakistan, one of Helvetas partner countries, the devastating floods in 2022 led to the displacement of almost 8 million people. While less obvious, slow-onset processes such as droughts may also push displacement, like in Borana in Southern Ethiopia (another Helvetas partner country).

**Evacuation** involves the “rapid movement of people away from the immediate threat or impact of a disaster to a safer place of shelter” ([The MEND Guide: Comprehensive Guide for Planning Mass Evacuations in Natural Disasters](#)). Evacuation is usually a temporary emergency measure to save lives and property and minimize exposure to harm. For example, in coastal Bangladesh cyclone shelters act as evacuation centers and safe havens during tropical cyclones, offering refuge to the population.



## Average annual weather-related displacements, 2010–2020

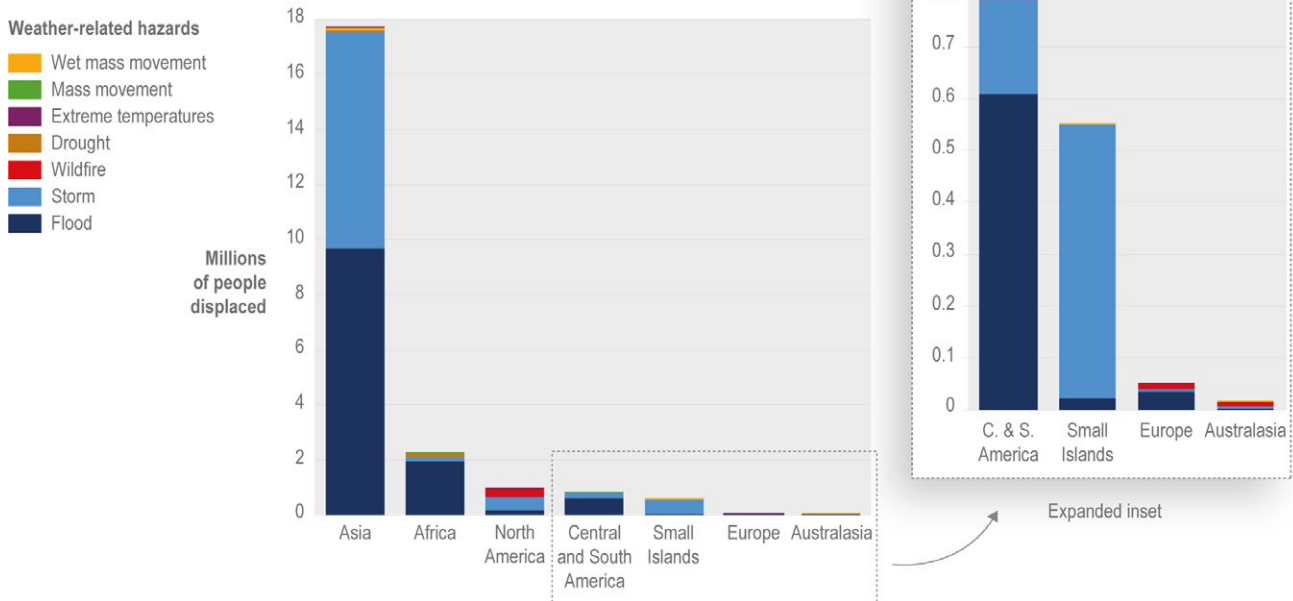


Figure 2: Average number of people displaced by region annually by weather-related events from 2010 to 2020 (Source: IPCC AR 6 WG II, 2022)

Many reports are produced to support the correlation between climate change and mobility – and at times feed an alarmist rhetoric. In their Groundswell Report, the World Bank projects these figures:

- An additional internal migration of 170 million people in six world regions due to slow-onset climate change impacts by mid-century. In this scenario, high emissions would continue and uneven development would take place.
- Halving the number to about 78 million displaced people by 2050, assuming that ambitious climate action is being taken now and showing the importance of adaptation action and reducing exposure to climate extremes.
- According to their high-emissions scenario, by 2100, one to three billion people could live in regions that are not conducive anymore for human development<sup>16</sup>.

### Proceed cautiously with predictions

Such reports aiming to quantify mobility and displacement may be conceived and prepared as a way to foster action but tend to create fear of the future and feed into narratives of mass migration. They need to be read with caution, since the relation between climate change and mobility remains complex and very specific

<sup>16</sup> Clement, Viviane & al. (2021). [Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration](#). World Bank, Washington, DC.



### Helvetas' experience in Mali

The Segou region is characterized by the growing inability of local production systems to meet the needs of their populations. This is due to a combination of factors such as climate change effects, demographics, and human pressure on natural resources. This requires most people to diversify their sources of income. Among these off-farm strategies is circular migration, which is mainly seasonal towards cities or abroad. Departures take place after agricultural work; migrants return before the start of the next season. But even if these seasonal migrations still dominate, these are increasingly combined with movements whose temporalities are random, with departures and returns not necessarily following this pattern and with increased risks for migrants, including women (DRR Platform/Helvetas Case study, upcoming).

Based on these observations, Helvetas is integrating a migration component to the new phase of the project Nyèsigi, which contributes to strengthening the resilience of communities to climate change (agro-meteorological services, adapted practices and seeds). The new phase will test pilot activities on migration (e.g., awareness-raising and capacity-building sessions for migrants, in particular women) to reduce the risks and better leverage the potential of migration.

to the local situation (see below). There is no consensus on how strong that effect is locally or, in some cases, even whether climate change is increasing or decreasing mobility in a specific place<sup>17</sup>. To be clear: There are high uncertainties linked to these predictions. Further, instead of fuelling climate actions, such figures may fuel building rhetoric or real walls, despite climate-linked mobility being foremost a domestic phenomenon and a strong resilience strategy (see box below).

### Climate-related migration outcomes

As stated in the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (2022), “a general theme across studies from all regions is that climate-related migration outcomes are diverse (high confidence) and may be manifested as decreases or increases in migration flows and may lead to changes in the timing or duration of migration and to changes in migration source locations and destinations<sup>18</sup>.” Research indicates that sudden-onset events (e.g., extreme storms, floods and wildfires) are strongly associated with high levels of short- and long-term displacement in most regions, while slow-onset events (e.g., droughts, extreme heat and precipitation anomalies and resulting droughts) are more likely to stimulate longer-term changes in migration patterns<sup>19</sup>. As global warming accelerates, both types of events are projected to increase in frequency and intensity. While migration patterns linked to climate change are hard to predict due to their multi-causal nature, projections for the second half of this century point towards some “regions that are presentably densely populated

will become unsafe or uninhabitable<sup>20</sup>” due to high temperatures, decreases in precipitation, sea level rise and implications for people’s livelihoods and wellbeing.

### Mobility vs immobility

Not everyone is able or willing to migrate, but there is much less focus on those that stay where they are<sup>21</sup>. Households with greater financial resources and higher levels of education have greater capacity to adapt onsite (see Figure 3). They are also able to migrate with greater agency once such a decision is made. By contrast, poor households with limited physical, social and financial resources have less capacity to adapt locally and are often limited in their migration options<sup>22</sup>. In order to decide to move, potential migrants need 1) the aspiration (desire, motivation) to move and 2) the capabilities (resources, networks, knowledge and abilities), resulting in various migration outcomes (see figure 3). What is important to note: The involuntarily immobile populations are often the most vulnerable and need not to be forgotten (see Helvetas & OKUP Action-research, 2021 and box below).

17 IOM (2023). [Thinking about Tomorrow, Acting Today: The Future of Climate Mobility](#). IOM, Geneva.

18 Cissé, G. & McLeman, R. & al. (2022). p. 1079.

19 Kaczan, D.J. and J. Orgill-Meyer (2020): [The impact of climate change on migration: a synthesis of recent empirical insights](#). *Clim. Change*, 158(3), 281–300; Hoffmann, R., et al. (2020): [A meta-analysis of country-level studies on environmental change and migration](#). *Nat. Clim. Change*, 10(10), 904–912.

20 IPCC 2022 [WG II report. Technical summary](#), p. 64

21 Cissé, G. & McLeman, R. & al. (2022). p. 1079.

22 Ibid.

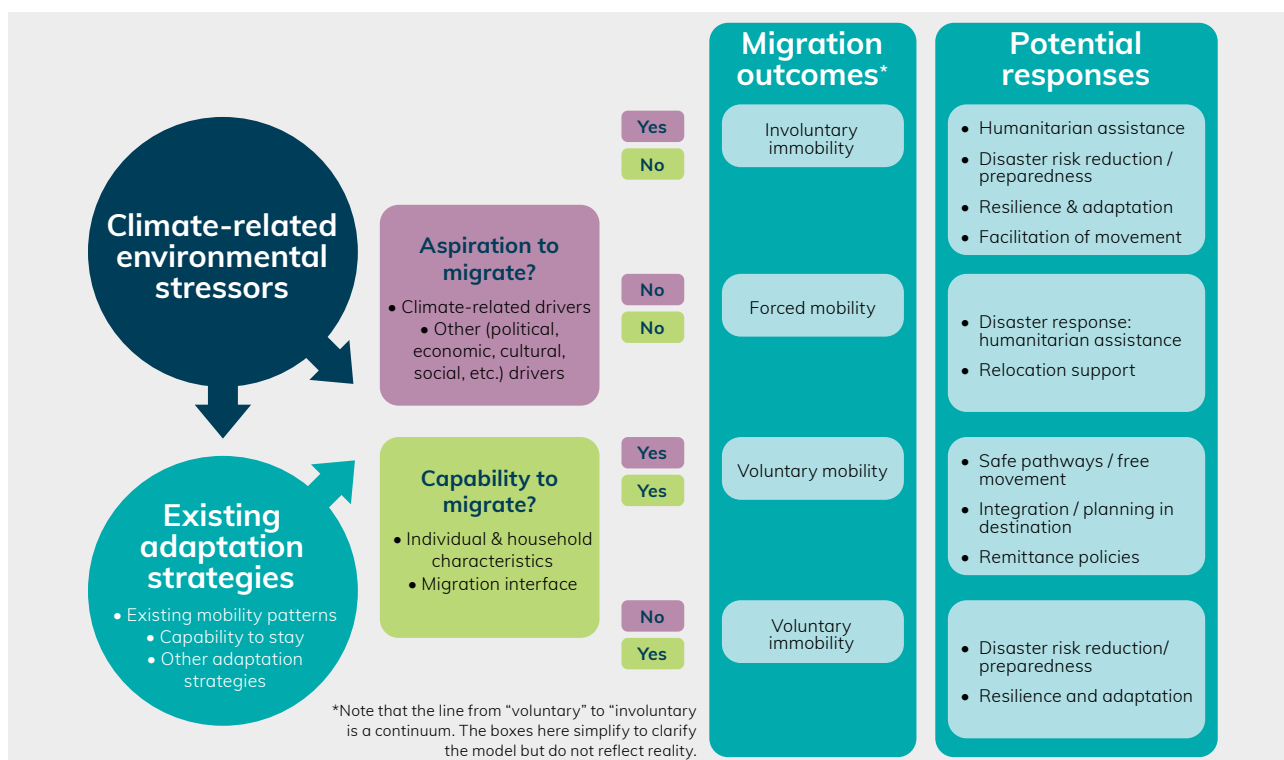


Figure 3: Drivers of mobility and immobility (source: Mixed Migration Centre)



## Migration also comes with risks

Such as: recurrent displacement, legal gaps, higher vulnerability, abuses, human trafficking, forced labor, etc. Risks may apply to both the areas of origin and the destination areas. These risks are more probable for poorly educated/skilled migrants, unaccompanied youth, and women – especially from more remote areas and/or minority or indigenous groups. These

groups are also at particular risk of being trapped (involuntarily immobile) in the area of origin, unprotected during the process of migration, and with less favorable conditions in the area of destination. This leads to the important questions: Who is able to achieve successful and effective migration outcomes? Who is not? Whose vulnerabilities increase due to migration or due to immobility?



## Relevant legal and policy frameworks

The inclusion of migration and climate change concerns has grown significantly across relevant international processes, policies and legal frameworks, especially from 2015 onwards:

[The Paris Agreement](#) is the first climate agreement acknowledging the human rights of migrants. In 2018, UNFCCC Parties then welcomed the [Task Force on Displacement](#) with recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change. At the [27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties \(COP27\)](#) to the UNFCCC in 2022, Parties took decisions on several areas relevant to human mobility (implementation, loss and damage, adaptation, financing).

[The Sendai Framework](#) makes a direct connection between disasters, climate change, migration and displacement, as it acknowledges the role of disasters in driving human mobility and recognizes displacement as one of the consequences of disasters. [The Platform on Disaster Displacement](#)

details measures states and other stakeholders can take to address the protection needs of persons displaced across international borders by disasters, including those linked to the adverse effects of climate change.

[The Global Compact for Migration](#) dedicates a specific paragraph to “natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation” under Objective 2 (minimize adverse drivers) and contains other references to climate-related migration. The Global Compact calls for coherent approaches to address the challenges of migration in the context of disasters triggered by sudden-onset and slow-onset hazards.

[The New Urban Agenda](#) (2016) recognizes the role of migrants in urban economies and the challenges that climate change poses for cities. It calls for respecting the human rights of migrants, refugees and IDPs and supports action that can improve conditions for people on the move in cities.



## Helvetas' experience in Bangladesh

In Southwestern Bangladesh, studies show that the changing climate has reduced agricultural yields and narrowed the options for land- and water-based economic activities due to saltwater intrusion, cyclones and heat stress. Increasingly, the livelihoods of millions of people are being cut off, making migration one of the only options for coping and adapting. Given the overall decrease in local economic opportunities in hotspots, locally rooted options are reaching their limits and exposing gaps in adaptive capacities. Communities are therefore looking for alternative livelihood options, which may be found locally or involve migrating to cities seasonally within the region or overseas for income oppor-

tunities ([Helvetas & OKUP Action-research, 2021](#)). Based on the findings of action research, Helvetas has been implementing the Panii Jibon project, which aims to build resilience and reduce the livelihood loss of climate change-affected communities. More specifically, on migration: Helvetas and partners build awareness on migration risks and opportunities with a special focus on migrants' rights; promote the establishment of information hubs on the migration process at the Union level; support the development of alternative livelihood skills for potential migrants; and promote safe migration, advocating for recognition and actions to address climate-linked migration and support a better use of remittances.

## A gendered perspective

Climate change disproportionately burdens women and girls. This is linked to certain social responsibilities, their livelihoods and existing social and political norms. As climate change alters existing livelihoods and the natural resources they rely on, women are more exposed to the risk of being left behind and trapped in dangerous environments. Many are expected to take care of their family and household while men migrate to seek better livelihood opportunities elsewhere<sup>23</sup>. Climate-linked mobility, like all types of migration, thus is a gendered process, often exacerbating existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. When women migrate to sustain a healthy and safe living elsewhere, they often face specific risks during their migration routes, such as abuse, discrimination, exploitation and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). They also face challenges in accessing sanitation, sexual and reproductive and mental health services.

## Links to conflict and fragility

Fragile contexts generate and host the majority of forcibly displaced people. These contexts also experienced 29% of disaster events and 46% of deaths from disaster events globally from 2019 to 2021<sup>24</sup>. Climate change and conflict are often interconnected, and both contribute to fragility. According to UNHCR, “95 percent of all conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change”<sup>25</sup>. Climate change is now widely recognized<sup>26</sup> as an aggravating factor in conflict dynamics, contributing to increased competition and conflict over scarce resources. Conflicts and fragility are at the same time reducing capacities to mitigate the effects of climate change and support adaptation measures. Climate-linked mobility, as with other forms of migration, may also contribute to tensions and conflicts between newly arrived people and existing residents owing to pressures on resources and social cohesion. These are particularly pronounced in contexts where a combination of conflict- and climate-linked crises lead to very large displacements of people. Considering the interconnection between climate change, conflict and mobility, it is essential to adopt a holistic approach that takes into account both migrants and receiving communities’ perspectives and evolving dynamics created by migration and climate change.

23 IOM (2015). [Brief 13: A Gender Approach to Environmental Migration](#).

24 OECD (2022). [States of Fragility 2022, key characteristics of fragile contexts](#).

25 <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>

26 SIPRI (2022). [Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk](#)

27 USAID (2022): [Migration as a climate adaptation strategy](#).

28 UNEP, [About Loss and Damage](#).

29 Institute for Security Studies (2023). - [ISS \(2023\)](#)

## Migration as a strategy to adapt to negative impacts of climate change

Human mobility in response to climate change and its impacts is often framed in a negative way, being seen as a development failure<sup>27</sup>. Increasingly though, migration is being recognized as a viable adaptation strategy, creating benefits for people on the move, their families and even the destinations to which they migrate. In simple terms, adaptation refers to any human response taken to cope with climate change in order to survive these impacts with minimal damage and ideally improve living conditions. These responses can be taken onsite (e.g., crop variation and diversification, resilient infrastructure).

In some cases though, migration may offer more safety and climate resilience than staying put (e.g., when there are limits to adaptation), or allowing people to escape harm or danger. Families can diversify income sources (including through remittances for those left behind), acquire new skills, increase autonomy and spread household risk through migration. Adaptation limits are closely linked to the subject of Loss and Damage.<sup>28</sup> Maximising the development potential of mobility in the context of climate change requires solutions that enable safe, planned and free movement, support integration in new locations, offer safe returns and reintegration for those who seek it, and support efforts to improve circumstances and maximise development benefits<sup>29</sup>.



### Helvetas' research in Madagascar

Over the past decade, there has been a significant trend in the displacement of people from the far south of Madagascar to the north, including Ambanja district/Diana region. This trend is driven by drought, recurrent crop failures and insecurity throughout the south. The settlement of these migrants in Ambanja is disrupting socio-cultural, economic, ecological and environmental systems (Augustin Rakotoarison/Helvetas, *État de lieu des récents déplacements de masse des gens venant du grand sud de Madagascar à Ambanja*, upcoming). The potential to integrate the migrants into local production systems remains largely untapped even though their farming experiences could be beneficial. Helvetas is exploring how to more strongly work with migrants, in particular on issues related to natural resources (e.g. WASH) and social cohesion.



**Increasingly, decisions on whether or not to migrate are influenced by the impacts of climate change. In many cases, migration appears as an adaptation strategy, and may be viable if it helps to move to safer or to more prosperous ground.**

Instead of creating fear of people leaving their homelands temporarily or permanently, staying within or crossing borders, we argue that we need to better understand the phenomenon, the frameworks as well as the opportunities and challenges, on-site and in the areas of destination.

Doing so, we can contribute to changing the fearful narrative surrounding migration into a productive and supportive one. In order to enhance resilience through mobility and reduce risks, migration needs to be safe, planned and voluntary.

In the next chapter, we will explore how Helvetas is working on climate-linked mobility through different approaches, along the migration cycle, and in the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.





# ADDRESSING CLIMATE-LINKED MOBILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR HELVETAS

## Implications for programming

Helvetas works in many climate-vulnerable countries, often with marginalized groups that are exposed to climate change’s growing impacts. The following dynamics are prevalent:

**In the areas of origin:** Droughts, floods and changes in seasonality of temperature and precipitations contribute to the increased scarcity of natural resources and reduced productivity. This leads to dwindling income and associated working opportunities, leading to the increased departure of youth and the workforce. Social fabrics change and returnees accelerate the evolution of societal structures, including gender dynamics and social tensions, increased reliance on remittances, etc.

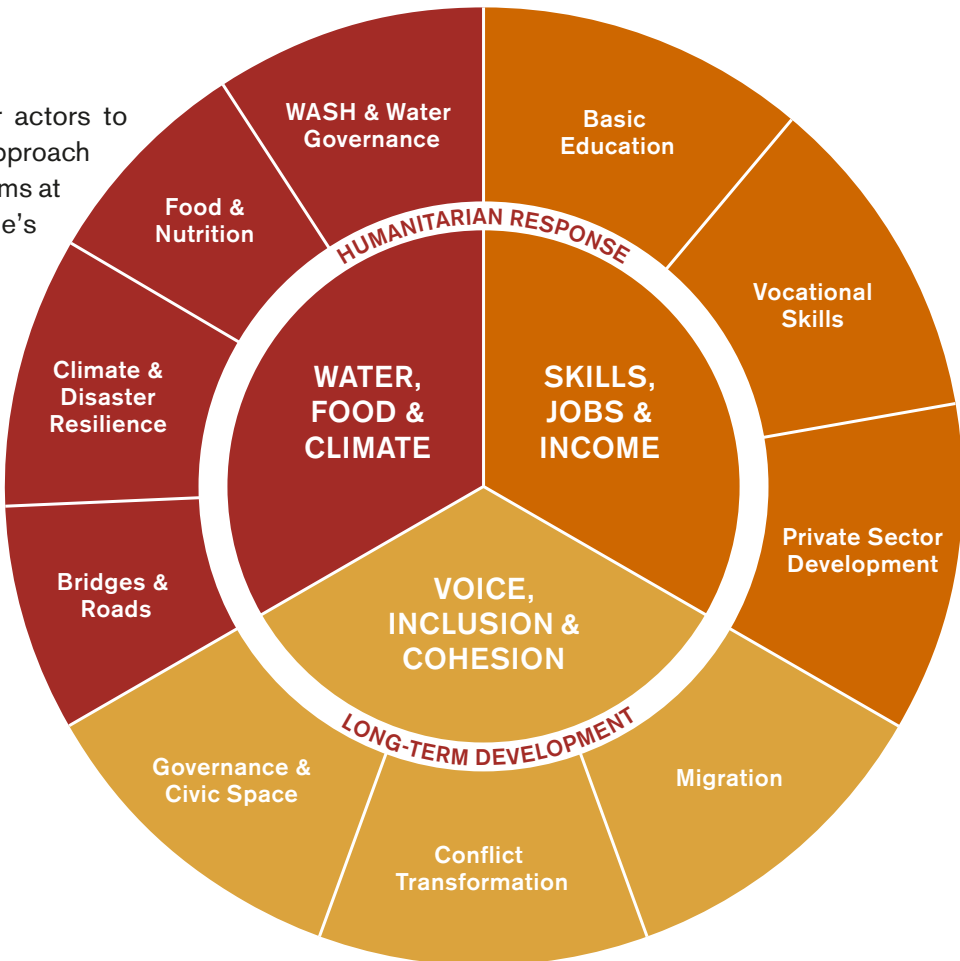
**In the areas of transit/destination:** Migration accelerates urbanization. Rapidly increasing urban population can strain the provision of services to a growing number of people (WASH and food systems, education and housing, governance) and alter the social cohesion in cities between existing and newly arriving persons. This may bear protection risks for migrants, have implications on the labor market and negatively affect the environment and management of (scarce) natural resources.

individual needs and ensuring full respect for their human rights, regardless of their type of mobility. This approach implies applying existing – and incomplete – legal frameworks both at the global level and nationally, as well as putting in place additional solutions adapted to the context (as highlighted below). It is important that these mechanisms provide sustainable solutions defined in collaboration with the communities affected and with the concerned service providers and local authorities so that needs are addressed more holistically.

Through its multi-faceted expertise on topics interacting with climate-linked mobility and its longstanding presence in climate-vulnerable regions, Helvetas is well-placed to respond to the needs of underserved communities and to provide innovative and practical support to local actors. Helvetas can also provide technical advice and capacity building support to develop specific tools and methods to integrate climate-linked mobility into interventions.

## Approach for action

We adopt and encourage other actors to promote a human rights-based approach to climate-linked mobility, which aims at identifying and addressing people’s





## Recommendations for programming

We suggest a series of recommendations and entry points that are structured along the 3-pronged approach promoted by IOM<sup>30</sup>: solutions for people to stay, for people to move, and for people on the move.

Further recommendations are clustered along three interlinked levels of change: people (individual change), partnerships (societal change), and frame conditions (structural change):

In the areas of origin, interventions supporting people to stay are geared towards diversifying, adapting and climate-proofing livelihoods and income generation opportunities, while reducing vulnerability and exposure to climate extremes and variability. These approaches aim for a strengthened resource and income base for relatives of people on the move, but also reduce incentives for migration.



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### Solutions for people to stay

#### Onsite adaptation, climate resilience and DRR to avert displacement

##### *People*

Know your risk: Use weather, water and climate services to support agricultural productivity and informed planning of crop cycles, as well as to strengthen early warning systems and capacities.

Green skills trainings (incl. agroecology, agroforestry methods) for communities including returning migrants to support more sustainable reintegration into the community

Strengthening and diversifying the livelihood base to be better adapted to current and future climate changes, both related to on-farm and off-farm income generating activities

Disaster risk reduction: Strengthen capacities and skills for risk reduction (such as slope stabilization, reforestation and mangrove restoration, protection infrastructure) and preparedness (early warning, local community action plans and committees) to reduce the impacts of extremes on communities.

Natural resource governance: Support transfer of adapted technologies for water harvesting, treatment of saline water, promotion of ecosystem-based adaptation with co-benefits for biodiversity, ecosystem health, water availability, income diversification

Life-skills training adapted to the local risk profile

Financial literacy and remittances management for families with migrants abroad to support local investments into climate resilience

##### *Partnership*

Social and community-based dialogue on climate-linked mobility

Strengthening governance and conflict resolution capacities of local institutions and organizations in climate-change affected areas to increase resilience and resources to adapt to the effects of climate change

30 Rachel Furlow (2022). [Addressing the politics of the climate-migration-conflict link](#). Forced Migration Review n°69, March 2022.

While migration is seldom the first preference for adaptation, increasingly, people seek to move from their home grounds on a temporary or permanent basis. As outlined above, unsafe and unplanned migration bears considerable risks for people. This is why approaches to support people to move are centred around information and skilling, but can also include support before, during and after planned relocation to ensure human rights are valued.



### Solutions for people to move

actions aiming to enable safe migration and to ensure that people are able to take informed decisions

#### People

Use climate information services to inform migration decisions (e.g., seasonal migration routes)

Provide information, awareness raising and advisory services (on risks/opportunities, migration regulations, labor law in areas of destinations, etc.)

Life skills trainings

Financial education programs

Skills training opportunities that meet the needs of (destination) markets, including on green economy and green skills



### Solutions for people on the move/in area of transit or destination

actions aiming to protect migrants' rights and increase benefits for migrants and areas of destination, improve their protection, promote decent work conditions and integration

#### People

Support for access to basic services (education, health, food, water), regardless of status

Financial education programs for migrants (e.g., management of remittances, secure savings)

Promote and protect migrants' rights through advocacy work and providing protection (e.g., shelter, legal support, mental health and psychosocial assistance)

Support for the transfer/ portability of social protection programs, including in the informal sector

#### Partnership

Support for local economic development that benefits host communities and people on the move, increasing urban climate resilience

Action to reduce conflicts and strengthen social cohesion between host communities and migrants (e.g., dialogue, campaign to communicate the shared benefits of migration)

Strengthen capacities and knowledge of local authorities/cities to improve the integration of migrants in local urban planning and management





## Transversal

### *Partnership*

Raise awareness on interlinkages and climate-linked mobility considerations across programming, including creating a local knowledge base to take informed decisions

Promote a “whole migration cycle approach” with both actions in area of origin and of destination to enhance coherence and relevance of the action (ex. match between skills trainings and labor market; connections between organizations present in both areas, etc.)

### *Frame conditions*

Continue to build evidence on climate-linked mobility and use as an advocacy tool, thus strengthening a better understanding of the phenomena and promoting a balanced view

In-depth, contextualized analysis is important to unpack causal links and feedback loops and design appropriate responses. Simplistic, linear analysis along the lines of “climate change causes conflict,” which in turn causes people to migrate, will miss the many other contributing factors that may also be important to tackle (e.g., the role of government policy)<sup>31</sup>

Advocate for and support the integration of climate-linked mobility in urban planning

Advocate for and support the integration of human mobility in National Adaptation Plans by focusing on protecting and supporting people on the move and utilizing migration as an adaptation strategy (see good practice of Ethiopia and Benin and Bangladesh)

Advocate for and support the establishment of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding on migration in conformity with international norms

31 Rachel Furlow (2022). Ibid.



Preparation for a 6-month work assignment away from home.

## WORKING WITH HELVETAS TO DELIVER MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS



### Applying These Approaches to Cities

To date, cities and areas of destination tend to be neglected by policies and interventions on climate-linked mobility but are crucial component for successful adaptation. Helvetas aims to work on optimizing the integration of migration dynamics in urban/regional planning and resource allocation, requiring that basic services, critical and social infrastructure (incl. education and transportation) are informed by climate projections and different scenarios of likely impacts on human mobility.

Helvetas also promotes collaborations between major areas of origin and destination, supporting the rights of migrants and the duties of state institutions at various levels simultaneously. This type of collaboration exists in several Helvetas safe labor migration interventions along specific migration corridors (South Asia – Arab States).

**Helvetas' key areas of expertise for applying these approaches in areas of destination include: governance, migration, climate and disaster resilience, and urban engagement.**



### Increasing Focus on Gender Dynamics

Climate-linked mobility changes the gender dynamics and deconstructs some myths on male and female migration. Helvetas is incorporating this phenomenon into its work by applying a gendered analysis of climate-linked mobility and developing specific gender-responsive measures in ongoing and future programming. Such is the case, for example, of the

Pani Jibon Project (see above) in which specific needs of women are incorporated in the planning and implementation (e.g. training courses, curricula, gendered safe information, facility conditions).

**Helvetas' key areas of expertise for applying a gender-centric approach includes: gender and social equity, migration, and climate and disaster resilience.**



### Mitigating Conflict Around New Arrivals

Climate-linked mobility has the potential to contribute to tensions and conflicts in home and destination contexts. Helvetas systematically takes into account the topic of social cohesion between receiving communities and migrants and, when possible, adopts

an inclusive and conflict-sensitive approach. The latter is illustrated through the example of our experience in Burkina Faso which is used to target both internally displaced people and receiving communities through frameworks for joint dialogue.

**Helvetas' key areas of expertise for applying this approach include: conflict transformation, migration, and climate and disaster resilience.**

