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POLICY BRIEF

CLIMATE CHANGE INDUCED MIGRATION: INFORMING POLICY ON INTERNAL MIGRATION

Task Force 2
CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT

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موجز السياسة

الهجرة الناجمة عن التغير المناخي: إرشادات سياسية بشأن الهجرة الداخلية

فريق العمل الثاني
تغير المناخ والبيئة

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ABSTRACT

Climatic uncertainty, increasing disaster risks and exclusionary development patterns in the Global South have resulted in distinctive patterns of internal migration from rural hinterlands to urban spaces. This type of migration provides an escape from poverty and unemployment, while the remittances of migrants serve as a lifeline and insurance for the families left behind. However, these migrants face political marginality, economic disadvantages, and environmental vulnerability, often falling through the protective policy gaps in the destination/city spaces. Therefore, the realization of urban sustainability is closely related to the effective and rapid integration of internal migrants into planning and developmental frameworks at different levels and scales.

نتج عن عدم اليقين المناخي ومخاطر الكوارث المتزايدة المقرونة بأنماط التنمية الاستبعادية في الجنوب العالمي، أنماطٌ استثنائية للهجرة الداخلية من المناطق الداخلية الريفية إلى المناطق الحضرية. وتُمثل هذه الهجرة ملاذًا من الفقر والبطالة، وتمثّل التحويلات التي يُرسلها هؤلاء المهاجرون شريان حياة وتأمينًا لعائلاتهم التي يتركونها خلفهم. ويواجه هؤلاء المهاجرون ضغوطًا متزايدة من التهميش السياسي والحرمان الاقتصادي والتعرّض للمخاطر البيئية، وغالبًا ما يسقطون من فجوات السياسة الوقائية في مساحات الوجهة/المدينة. يرتبط تحقيق الاستدامة الحضرية ارتباطًا وثيقًا بفاعلية وسرعة اندماج المهاجرين الداخليين في أطر عمل التخطيط والتطوير عبر المستويات والنطاقات.

CHALLENGE

For centuries, patterns of migration across the globe have been largely marked by political marginality and economic disadvantages. However, over the past two decades, there has been an increasing incidence of new forms of crisis migration mediated by environmental stress, disasters, and climatic changes (Chu and Michael 2019; Michael, Deshpande, and Ziervogel 2019). While cross-border migration has garnered global attention, climate change is also a potent driver of internal migration, which will likely intensify in the coming decades (Rigaud et al. 2018). Despite the best efforts of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, internal migrants are a group not well understood in terms of how they cope and whether they are able to mobilize for building resilience.

The following issues are associated with this key challenge:

- Perpetuation and compounding of vulnerabilities in city spaces/destination areas: The above form of crisis migration is largely driven by multiple intersectionalities between socio-economic, ecological, and climatic factors when certain tipping points are reached. This is in contrast to the previous economically motivated migratory patterns. These massive inflows of migrants to city spaces challenge the absorptive capacities of cities and often lie outside the purview of these cities' official planning mechanisms. Hence, migrants find refuge in cities' informal settlements, which lack access to social safety nets. They thus have poorer access to basic infrastructure services and secure livelihood options.

- Exposure to urban climatic risks: The low adaptive capacity associated with internal migrants and their precarious living conditions makes these communities extremely vulnerable to climate-related risks, including urban flooding, heat stress, and changing disease vectors (Leichenko and Silva 2014; Revi et al. 2014; Satterthwaite et al. 2018).

- Lack of fine-grained datasets: The official statistics and datasets in many countries fail to identify and capture the exact number of internal migrants. This is due to the makeshift nature of the informal economy and the informal sector that absorb them in city spaces.

- Contemporary manifestation of the internal migration challenge: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the invisible lives and hardships of internal migrants to the fore. Lockdowns, travel bans, and social distancing measures have disproportionately affected the internal migrants residing in overcrowded informal settlements. They have found themselves stranded in hostile city spaces, rendered jobless due to the economic crisis, and unable to return to their homes in rural areas. This has triggered a mass exodus of migrants, who made their way on foot toward their homes in rural areas in India and many countries in Latin America (World Bank 2020). These journeys have had casualties due to climate impacts such as extreme heat, drought, and food insecurity (Paoletti and Vinke 2020). On one hand, this movement presented an enormous concern for human lives; on the other hand, it created a high risk of spreading the disease. The loss of migrant livelihoods has also ruptured an important lifeline for rural households in many countries in the form of urban–rural remittances.

PROPOSAL

Internal migration in the context of climate change is a pressing issue for the Group of Twenty (G20), given that some member countries have a large proportion of internal migrants—China and India each have over 100 million internal migrants. Furthermore, the G20 countries are heavyweight players in climate policy, the G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration reaffirming the commitment towards "sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth." It is thus critical to mainstream internal migration within the international development agenda in the context of climate change.

According to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations (UN) Habitat New Urban Agenda (2016), high levels of socio-economic inequality, informality of work, and poverty remain some of the most pressing global development challenges. Within the SDG operational framework, internal migration needs to be re-examined in the context of source, transit, and destination areas to ensure equitable and sustainable development outcomes. There are significant lacunae in terms of policies addressing "climate mobility" in its various manifestations and there is limited monitoring, which leads to climate-induced migrants often falling through the gaps. Therefore, it is necessary to address the climatic drivers of migration, along with the interlinked goals of reducing poverty, fighting hunger and achieving food security, and promoting sustainable development. Migration should be a choice and not a necessity.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development references migration under SDGs 8, 10, and 17 regarding inclusive growth and decent work for all, reducing inequality, and global partnerships for sustainable development, respectively. However, it does not adequately capture the relationship with SDG 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities or with SDG 13, which focuses exclusively on climate change but completely neglects migration in its context (Adger et al. 2019). There is an urgent need to look at human mobility through the climate justice lens and form the necessary linkages within the above goals to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Migration is included within the SDG framework (Article 29), but the focus is only on international migration. The SDGs refer to the empowerment of vulnerable people, including internally displaced persons and migrants. However, they refer to supporting them through conflict and other humanitarian exigencies, not making any explicit link with climate change and environmental concerns. Overall, they largely fail to grapple the newly emerging urban realities of migrant workers (Adger et al. 2019).

The 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement include “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of [...] natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” However, this definition excludes those who move due to slow-onset climate change or environmental degradation and specifically leaves out those who choose to migrate voluntarily.

In 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which brings together the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Global Compact is framed in consonance with target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically addressing migration in the context of climate change. However, this agreement is non-binding under international law and, moreover, applies only to international migration.

The UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) first recognized the growing importance of human mobility with the adoption of the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework. However, it was only with the ratification of the 2015 Paris Agreement during the twenty-first Conference of Parties (COP21) that migration in the context of climate change was brought into the international policy agenda. The Paris Agreement envisions to protect people, livelihoods, and ecosystems by strengthening international cooperation on enhancing adaptation action under Article 7, with specific focus on vulnerable groups and communities. It thus brings within its purview, migration in the context of climate change, which is used by vulnerable communities as an adaptive strategy. Article 8 establishes the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) to avert, minimize, and address the loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. The Executive Committee of the WIM set up the Taskforce on Displacement to “provide knowledge, data and scientific information on both internal and cross-border migration, displacement and other forms of human mobility” in the context of climate change.

Given the complexity of this phenomenon and the diversity of individual situations, legal definitions and categorizations have proven difficult for internal climate migrants. Therefore, the enactment and implementation of specific protective provisions and laws have been lacking. The World Bank states that the magnitude of internal migration is about two-and-a-half times that of international migration (World Bank 2020). The UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that there will be 25 million to 1 billion climate-induced migrants by 2050 (IOM 2009). Thus, this trend is an imminent crisis in the absence of relevant policy interventions.

It is unequivocally certain that climate change is a threat to livelihoods and human safety, and recognition needs to be given to migration as an adaptation strategy. The realization of urban sustainability is closely related to an effective and rapid integration of migrant populations into urban planning and developmental frameworks. The contribution of marginalized migrant groups to urban economies has been widely documented by researchers (Adger et al. 2019; Chu et al. 2019; Kundu 2007; Rao and Vakulabharanam 2019). However, this has not garnered adequate policy attention. Hence, it is critical to capitalize on the transformative nature of migration, capacitate migrant communities, and develop a resilience building strategy.

Recommendations

- **Mainstreaming internal migration within the G20 Agenda in the context of climate change**

The Saudi Arabian Presidency of the G20 should consider internal migration in the context of climate change as part of its main workstream. Further, in its 2020 declaration, the G20 should call on the IOM, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Executive Committee of the WIM, and the Platform for Disaster Displacement to jointly submit annual reports to the G20 on the dynamics of global environmental change and the temporary, protracted, or permanent displacement of people. The G20 should also call for enhanced global cooperation and local action on this issue and firmly establish responsibilities for member states regarding internal climate migrants. It should also ensure the allocation of dedicated resources to this end.

- **Creating dedicated institutions/mechanisms to address internal migration in the context of climate change**

There is a clear lack in terms of policies regarding internal migration in the context of climate change, with few countries having policies or mechanisms in place to guide such migration. The G20 leadership can provide guidance to member states toward the development of nationally appropriate frameworks to address this type of migration. This includes integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into national sustainable development plans.

- **Linking the global climate policy with the global migration policy within the sustainable development agenda**

As explained above, there is a disconnection between the international policy frameworks relating to climate change and migration, as the two issues have been dealt with separately. For realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is necessary to bridge this gap. We must holistically address the issue of migration in the context of climate change through interlinked frameworks and mutual collaboration.

- **Developing a universally applicable and all-inclusive human rights framework**

G20 leaders can issue guidance to develop a human rights framework for the protection of internal climate migrants, who are difficult to categorize. As such, the protection afforded to them should be broad in nature and must encompass the safeguards of the basic human rights granted to all individuals at all times, irrespective of legal status. Under this framework, the principles of universality and non-discrimination are particularly important to ensure no one falls through the gaps. Such a framework should necessarily include fundamental rights to life and bodily integrity, as well as other rights embodied in international instruments. For instance, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (e.g., right to health, decent work, an adequate standard of living, and family rights).

• **Establishing policies for planned relocation and resettlement**

G20 leaders should recognize that migration in the context of climate change will escalate, especially within state borders. This movement is likely to be protracted and increasingly permanent given the mounting impacts of climate change. While facing such impacts, some vulnerable groups will find themselves unable to move due to socio-economic and environmental factors, thus becoming "trapped populations." In such cases, planned relocation or resettlement may be the only strategy to save lives. For planning an effective response, the G20 should call for the formulation of specific policies and stress international cooperation to assist, protect, and provide durable solutions for those forced to move due to climate change. It should control climate risks for communities that opt to stay in-situ and provide opportunities of voluntary migration as an adaptive strategy.

• **Integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) strategies**

The integration of DRR and CCA strategies to reduce vulnerability and risk exposure has proven effective for the better management of migration, particularly in times of crisis (IOM 2010). Synergies among DRR, CCA, and development should be incorporated at all policy levels, especially in urban planning strategies, ensuring representation, participation, and the coordination of different stakeholders. These mechanisms should be strengthened at the global, regional, national, and local levels through an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, supported by appropriate and innovative financing systems.

• **Ensuring portability of entitlements**

Existing International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and Recommendations, in particular the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202, call upon states to establish and maintain national social protection floors (ILO, n.d.). These cover basic social security guarantees and ensure that all residents, including migrants and their families, have access to basic-level entitlements in the state they reside. This includes access to essential healthcare services and basic income security, which secure effective access to necessary goods and services. Such social security guarantees ought to be linked with a central identity document, which allows individuals to easily access the benefits, irrespective of place of residence. Furthermore, it should account for both the formal and informal economy, and provide support for disadvantaged groups and people with special needs.

• Capacity building

The G20 should call on relevant international organizations to create awareness on internal climate migration by generating and disseminating information on issues such as the rights of migrants, access to welfare schemes, and social security guarantees, especially amongst vulnerable communities. It should also facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchanges on internal migration in the context of climate change, ensuring member states learn from good and best practices. Managing this migration will also present new challenges for policy makers in developing countries, where governance structures are already weak. To aid them, capacity building should extend to the policy realm as well.

• Strengthening research on migration

There is a basic lack of migration data available, especially in the Global South, which is facing a looming crisis of internal migration in the context of climate change. Many countries still do not include basic questions about migration in their censuses. The G20 leadership should call on relevant international organizations, such as the IOM, IDMC, ILO, and UNEP among others, to coordinate with member states to collect migration-related data. This would enable the creation of a fine-grained database that includes disaggregated data across different socio-economic categories and different governance levels. Such inter-disciplinary research would allow capturing the various intersections of socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities across migratory landscapes. Modeling approaches could also be employed to integrate climatic and socio-economic data. This can capture broad trends that would help in the formulation of evidence-based policies.

Summary

It is unequivocally certain that climate change is a threat to livelihoods and human safety, and thus recognition needs to be given to migration as an adaptation strategy. The realization of urban sustainability is closely tied to the effective and rapid integration of migrant populations into urban planning and developmental frameworks. Hence, it is critical to capitalize on the transformative nature of migration, capacitate migrant communities, and develop a resilience building strategy.

To achieve this, we suggest the implementation of the following key recommendations:

- Mainstreaming internal migration in the context of climate change within the G20 agenda
- Creating dedicated institutions/mechanisms to address internal migration in the context of climate change
- Linking the global climate policy with the global migration policy within the sustainable development agenda
- Developing a universally applicable and all-inclusive human rights framework
- Establishing policies for planned relocation and resettlement
- Integrating the DRR and CCA strategies
- Ensuring the portability of entitlements
- Capacity building
- Strengthening the research on migration

Disclaimer

This policy brief was developed and written by the authors and has undergone a peer review process. The views and opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the authors' organizations or the T20 Secretariat.

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