

GP Conference

Climate Change and Migration: Point of No Return!?

An African Perspective

Factsheet

December 2020

An event hosted by the Global Perspectives Initiative,
supported by Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator, Open Society Foundations,
Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Deutsche Welle



Climate Change as a Central Driver of Migration

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“We know that climate change is a driver of migration, and is expected to increase the displacement of populations.”
— *Mary Robinson* (2014), former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The drivers behind the decision to migrate are complex.

People have always and will continue to move for many reasons: economic, social, political, environmental. Today, climate change is often exacerbating existing challenges, pressuring people to move from vulnerable to seemingly more viable areas.

People have always and will continue to move for many reasons.

In 2018, the international community has recognized climate change as a driver and cause for migration with the *Global Compact for Migration (GCM)*¹.

For the first time, specific commitments have been made to address disasters and climate change as drivers of migration, and also to protect those who are compelled to leave their homes because of such events. However, it does not include any legal framework.

In 2019, extreme weather and disasters led to three times more displacements than war and conflict. Nearly 1,900 disasters triggered 24.9 million new displacements.

As disasters become more frequent and severe due to climate change, this number is expected to increase according to the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC)*².

By 2050, 143 million people could migrate within their countries due to gradual climate impacts in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

According to the *World Bank*, if no action is taken, 86 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million people in South Asia and 17 million people in Latin America could be forced to migrate due to slow-onset events by 2050, implicating a growing challenge for human development and planning³.

By 2050, 143 million people could migrate within their countries due to gradual climate impacts.

¹ United Nations General Assembly. (2019). Resolution 73/195: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, A/RES/73/195 (11.01.2019).

² iDMC. (2020). Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

³ *Rigaud, K. K., et al.* (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC.

Causes and Consequences of Climate Change

If no active steps are taken against the causes of global warming, temperatures are expected to rise further.

With the *Paris Agreement*, 194 countries worldwide undertake to implement climate protection measures in order to limit global warming to well below 2 or 1.5° C until 2100. A radical reduction in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide is necessary, especially by 2030⁴.

The consequences of climate change pose one of the greatest challenges to society, the economy, security and development, and are expected to increase in the future.

Climate change will lead to temperature rise and changes in rainfall patterns negatively affecting crop yield and water availability. Freshwater resources are also at risk through the rise of sea level which can salinize groundwater and increase salt-water intrusion into freshwater. Together, these impacts present substantial problems to agriculture and human consumption. Moreover, they may fuel competition over natural resources which can contribute to drivers of conflict. Extreme weather events such as storms, droughts and floods are also occurring more frequently and becoming more severe⁵.

With only three percent of all CO₂ emissions, Africa is contributing the least to global warming⁶. However, the continent is disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change and the most vulnerable people are hit the worst.

Poor countries and communities are the most vulnerable. Their resources to confront hazards are limited and many of their livelihoods depend on ecosystem goods and services that are increasingly threatened by climate change. As a result, the poorest often bear climate impacts unequally⁵.

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⁴ *Masson-Delmotte, V., et al. (2018). Global Warming of 1.5C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5° C 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.* <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

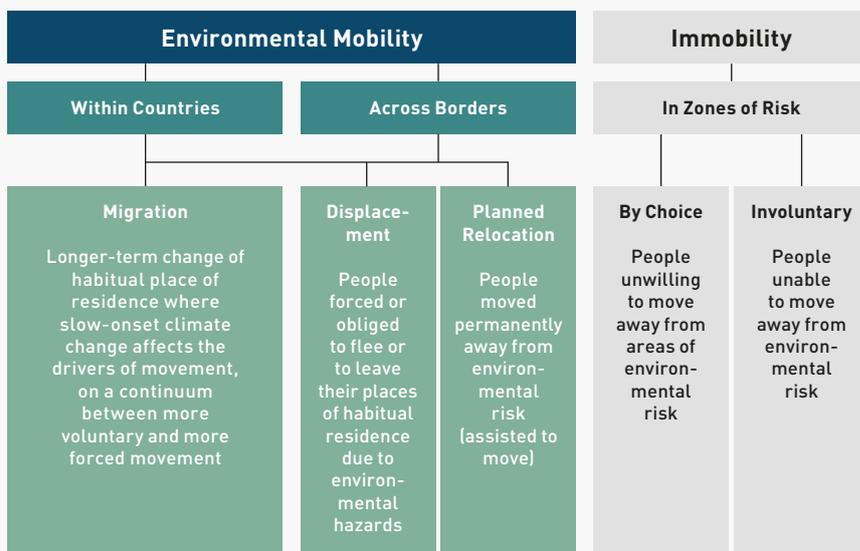
⁵ *Rigaud, K. K., et al. (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration.* World Bank, Washington, DC.

⁶ *Hogarth, J. R., Haywood, C., & Whitley, S. (2015). Low-carbon Development in sub-Saharan Africa: 20 Cross-sector Transitions.* Overseas Development Institute, London.

The Nexus between Climate Change and Migration in sub-Saharan Africa

There is no universal definition for people on the move due to climate change. Mobility is often used as an umbrella term.

Human mobility and immobility in the context of climate change



Source: Rigaud, K. K., et al. (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC.

Two types of climate change scenarios influence the decision to move: rapid-onset events and slow-onset events.

Rapid-onset events are disasters which take place in days or weeks, such as cyclones, floods and droughts. Slow-onset events are changes in climate parameters which occur over long periods of time — such as temperature, rainfall patterns and associated impacts, like water stress and crop production declines⁷.

Rapid-onset events led to 3.4 million displacements in sub-Saharan Africa last year. This represents one of the highest figures ever recorded in this region.

Over 70% of displacements were caused by flooding. Countries in the East and the Horn of Africa experienced one of the wettest rainy seasons in 40 years. Most displacements due to disasters in 2019 were recorded in Ethiopia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria⁸.

⁷ Rigaud, K. K., et al. (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC.

⁸ iDMC. (2020). Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

Many countries, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia, face both challenges: a high number of disasters as well as conflict and violence.

In 2019, 4.6 million internal displacements recorded in sub-Saharan Africa were due to conflict and violence⁹.

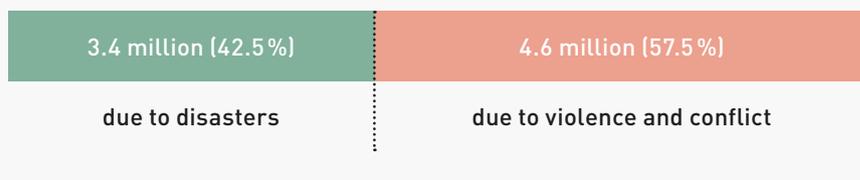
Internal displacements globally in 2019

Total: 33.4 million internal displacements

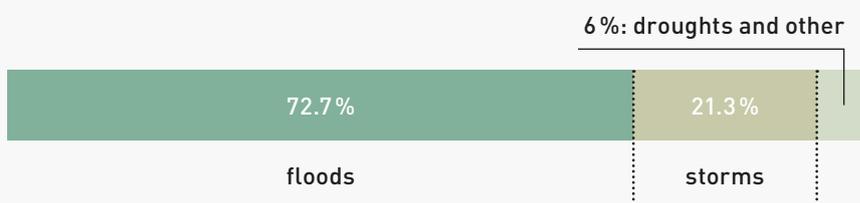


Internal displacements in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019

Total: 8 million internal displacements



Causes of disaster displacement in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019



Source: iDMC. (2020). Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

Slow-onset migration is difficult to measure.

For 2019, there is little reliable data on migration due to slow-onset events because migration is a multicausal and dynamic phenomenon. However, due to global warming, the negative effects of slow-onset events (crop failure, water stress and sea level rise) will increase significantly¹⁰, highlighting the likelihood of increased migration due to these events.

⁹ iDMC. (2020). Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020.

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

¹⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2012).

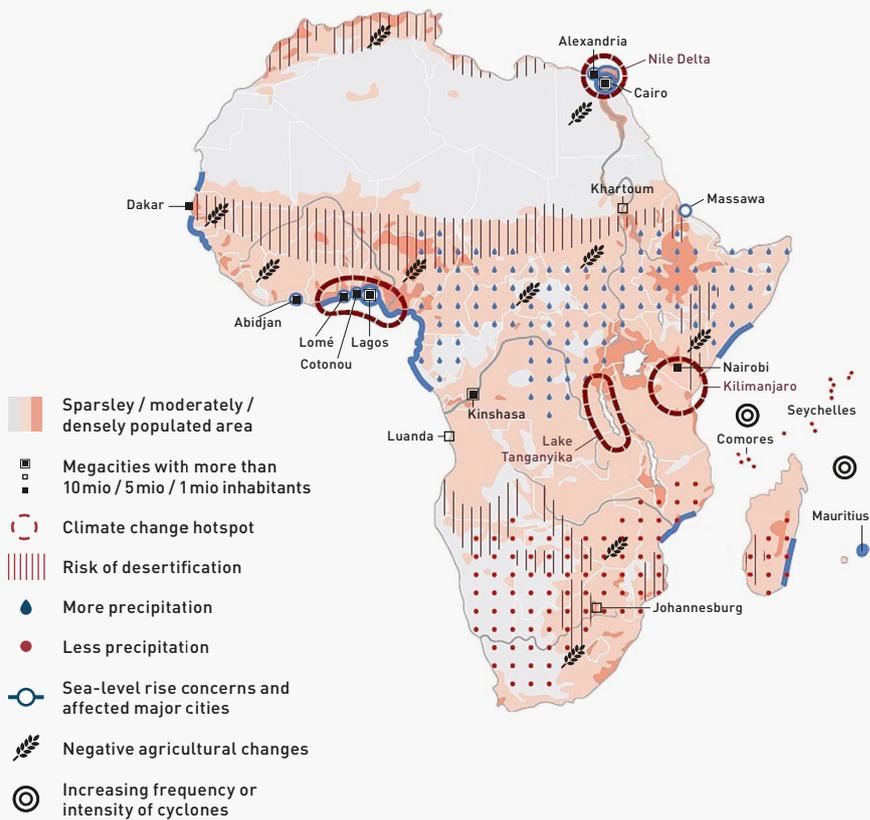
Slow Onset Events: Technical Paper, FCCC/TP/2012/7 (26.11.2012).

<https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2012/tp/07.pdf>

Slow-onset events put people's livelihoods in many regions at risk. In many regions, changes in rainfall patterns will reduce agricultural yield. Some countries face additional stress through desertification as well as sea-level rise¹¹.

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Regional Consequences of Climate Change and Climate Change Hotspots in Africa



Source: *Ionesco, D., Mokhnacheva, D., & Gemenne, F. (2016). The Atlas of Environmental Migration. Taylor & Francis, London.*

Sub-Saharan Africa could see 86 million internal climate migrants by 2050 due to slow-onset climate impacts if no action is taken¹².

More than 70 percent of all sub-Saharan African migrants stay within the continent, only a small percentage heads to Europe¹³. Climate induced migration is mostly a regional phenomenon. A significant proportion of internal migrants will start a new life in major cities, resulting in rising urbanization¹².

More than 70 percent of all sub-Saharan African migrants stay within the continent.

¹¹ *Ionesco, D., Mokhnacheva, D., & Gemenne, F. (2016). The Atlas of Environmental Migration. Taylor & Francis, London.*
¹² *Rigaud, K. K., et al. (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC.*
¹³ Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2019). Africa's Youth: Jobs or Migration? <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/about-us/our-research>

Cities as Climate Change and Migration Hotspot

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Cities are at the forefront when handling climate change and migration challenges.

Cities will need to prepare for an increasing number of people, and care for improved housing and infrastructure, social services as well as employment opportunities¹⁴. At the same time, cities account for more than 70 percent of global CO₂ emissions¹⁵.

African cities are among the fastest growing in the world.

Based on UN population estimates, the world's 15 fastest-growing cities are all in Africa. They are projected to almost double their populations by 2035¹⁶.

The vulnerability in African cities increases as cities further expand.

Many African cities experience an increasing vulnerability of the rapidly expanding urban areas. Climate change is likely to exacerbate this situation. A lot of the mega cities are situated at coastlines bringing them under dual pressure from uncontrolled urbanization and floods worsened by climate change¹⁷.

The vulnerability in African cities increases as cities further expand.

¹⁴ Rigaud, K. K., et al. (2018). Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC.

¹⁵ Guterres, A. (2019). Secretary-General's Remarks at C40 World Mayors Summit (Speech). United Nations.
<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-10-11/secretary-generals-remarks-c40-world-mayors-summit>

¹⁶ These are the 15 Fastest-growing Cities in the World. (2020). World Economic Forum (20.02.2020).
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/02/15-fastest-growing-cities-world-africa-populations-shift/>

¹⁷ Wamsler, L., Gudmundsson, S. & Johannesen, S. (2015). Drowning Megacities.
https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2015/drowning_megacities/index.html

Global Perspectives Initiative (GPI)

GPI brings together actors from politics, business, science, the media and society, discusses approaches for sustainable global development and advocates for more German responsibility.

As a non-profit and neutral platform, the initiative provides new impulses, raises awareness for the opportunities and challenges of a global society, shares different views and the potential of African countries and thus shapes the political discourse in Germany.

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