

**2nd meeting of the Permanent group on Immigration and Integration:
Climate migration: where to next?
Tuesday, 10 September 2024**

Report

Key takeaways of the event

- Most people want to stay in their homelands rather than to be on the move. The EU, Member States and partner third countries all have a role in facilitating this preference by supporting communities to become more climate resilient, as well as improving infrastructure and economic and social stability. However, there comes a point when such facilitation is no longer possible: people have to move to survive. Therefore, the EU and Member States must also be prepared for this outcome, and the surest way to be prepared is to facilitate legal pathways.
- Nonetheless, we have to acknowledge that it ought to be left up to people to choose whether to stay or to go. Thus, there needs to be a holistic approach to migration as adaptation to climate change, and to migration as survival. The EU has to be open to this and not be influenced by sedentary bias. Greater coherence in coordination between the EU and Member States is needed to prepare for the outcomes of climate change and human mobility.
- Words matter. Narratives and how language is framed around this debate play a key role. Climate change and human mobility appears to be the umbrella term and there can be sensitivities around terminology used to describe people on the move due. Furthermore, negative narratives around human mobility and climate change are portrayed by the media and politicians, based on little evidence.
- Data is important. As with all migration-related phenomenon, accurate and credible data is necessary for understanding trends and making forecasts, as well as to help with capacity building and strategies.
- Young people are the agents of change. Climate change is their present and future. It is vital that they are involved in the decision-making process.
- Where to next? Europe is becoming more and more climate-stressed; the Arctic region is warming up; we are aware of the extreme weather events across the world. Climate change and human mobility is something that cannot be ignored, whether it is happening in the EU or beyond. The EU has an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership in this context and must act now.



Objectives of the event

Climate migration is still seen as internal displacement rather than crossing borders. However, we can predict with some confidence that people arriving to the EU because of climate change or climate-induced disasters could become more and more frequent. How can the EU prepare for or anticipate this phenomenon?

This event aimed to explore this question. It turned to leading experts on climate change and human mobility to help us understand the urgency of this issue and what the EU can do to prepare itself.

The event is divided into two panels. The first panel provides introduction to this issue, looking at current trends and making predictions. The second panel looks at the EU response to this phenomenon.

All the presentations and resources referred to during the event are mentioned below.

Panel 1: Where are we? Current trends of climate migration and prediction

- **Christoph DEUSTER**, Scientific Officer, Demography and Migration, DG Joint Research Centre, European Commission
- **Susanne MELDE**, Global Thematic Specialist Climate Action, IOM Climate Action Europe
- **Fahmida MIAH**, Programme Manager, Climate Outreach, Climate and Migration Coalition
- **Raffaella GRECO TONEGUTTI**, Lead Expert Migration and Development, ENABEL, Development Agency of the Belgian Federal Government
- **Miriam CULLEN**, Professor, Nordic Network on Climate Related Displacement and Mobility, University of Copenhagen

This panel looked at the state of play of and future estimates regarding climate migration data, not just on the global scale but also in certain regions such as the middle East and north Africa (MENA), Central Asia and the Nordic regions. It also looked at strategies to accommodate climate migration, especially from the development perspective, and finally, it looked at narratives framing this issue.

Regarding global trends, it was noted that there is no strong consensus between climatic factors and international migration. People move at different geographical scales, but internally 20% of people do not make plans to move internationally, perhaps due to resource constraints. It is also possible that there can be two different migratory responses in two different regions. Predictions regarding climate migration keeps evolving, however the fairly traditionally held estimation that by 2050 there will be around 200 million climate migrants is still prominent.

Nonetheless, forecasts are only as good as the data available, thus credible data is key. Models are good at the underlying data, but there needs to be more investment in gender and age-disaggregated data. However, as noted in the second panel, data is also needed on capacity-building measures.

Regarding the neighbouring regions of the EU, in certain parts of Central Asia, little or no access to drinking water is affecting more than 1.5 million people. The MENA regions is one of the most climate-stressed regions in the world due to water scarcity. Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities increasing the potential for civil strife and migration.

In the Nordic region, cross-border mobility does not happen on a note-worthy scale. There appears to be a disconnect between international policies and domestic policies: the global outlook is humanitarian; however, domestic endeavours tend to side-line human rights approaches. For example, the Finnish and Swedish governments used to have environmental protection for people on the move, but both of these have since been repealed. There is the ever-present notion of migration deterrence in the Nordic region and there is currently no coherent linked-up approach in this region on climate mobility.

Using the example of Belgium, Member States' development agencies can make important contributions in assisting climate-stressed partner countries: standardising their processes and tools for building climate-resilient communities and mobility adaptation strategies; sharing this knowledge with stakeholders; identifying and working with international, national and local partners; and finally, contributing to the fora so that development actors can advance the dialogue on this issue.

Finally, the approach to climate mobility needs to be seen from a number of angles. Migration should be looked at through the lens of climate adaptation but not all climate inducement migration is adaptation, it is also simply survival. Migration can only be seen as resilience-enhancing if people choose to move and are not forced to. Also, narrative plays a huge role in developing strategies. Media and politicians often refer to cross-border migration but we know that migration is mostly internal and most people want to stay where they are. There needs to be more accurate and compelling language around narratives, which can mobilise and connect society as well as challenge power and break the negativity.

Panel 2: How can the EU prepare for and accommodate climate migration?

- **Francesco LUCIANI**, Head of Unit, Migration and Forced Displacement, DG for International Partnerships, European Commission
- **Helena HAHN**, Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre
- **Florien VAN WEERELT**, Human Rights Lawyer

This panel focused on EU policy regarding climate change and human mobility. EU policy is based on the principle that people would generally like to stay where they are. Therefore, activities of the European Commission focus more on prevention and accommodating this phenomenon, such as helping third country partners with tailor-made measures, supporting their communities and economies to adapt when possible. It is important for countries to take responsibility to help their citizens as well.

From a critical standpoint, there needs to be greater policy coherence within the EU institutional structure to accommodate this phenomenon, bridging the gap between migration and the EU green deal. Security is high on the political agenda, and climate and migration (whether as separate or joint issues) are contextualised within the security debate. Within EU migration policy, there is the sedentary bias (that migration is a problem and people should simply stay put): border control; agreements with neighbouring third countries; solving root causes. However, this ignores the fact that people move and will continue to do so, therefore this conversation needs to move towards migration as adaptation to climate change.

What can be done to improve joined-up thinking within the EU? First, EU institutions and policies need to overcome silos and have greater policy coherence by strengthening their coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, they need to develop a long-term plan, which is more strategic, institutional, and addresses migration as a format of adaptation to climate change. The best outcome of EU policy is to empower people to make the best migration decisions against the circumstances that they face.

Finally, how about framing climate mobility as a human right? This is where the power of young people as decision-makers, agents of change, and as people on the move themselves can play an influential role. The European External Action's Youth Action Plan (YAP) is an opportunity for young people to help prioritise climate change and human rights in policies. Such policies not only develop or support measures that promote resilience so that people stay in place, but they also create measures that reflect the reality that people are moving – whether they choose to or not. Facilitating movement is a way to protect people, especially young people, and help them enjoy their human rights. Focussing on these aspects can help us focus on climate migration policy in the EU and beyond.

Key resources and references

- Presentations by Christoph Deuster (JRC) and Susanna Melde (IOM) posted on event page.
- DG Joint Research Centre's project, 'Climate Change Induced Migration (CLICIM)' https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/migration-demography/climate-change-induced-migration-clicim-project_en, which aims to advance our understanding of the impacts of climate change on migration and population distribution
- [Groundswell report](#): Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, 2021
- IOM, [Climate Change, Conflict, Migration \(MENA\)](#)
- IOM, [Migration in the Context of Climate and Environmental Changes within Central Asia and to the European Union and the Russian Federation](#)
- IOM, [Climate Change, Conflict, Migration](#)
- [Human Mobility](#), ENABEL, Development Agency of the Belgian Federal Government
- [The Climate and Migration Coalition](#)
- The [Nordic Network on Climate Related Displacement and Mobility](#) has released a book of its work to date: [Nordic Approaches to Climate-Related Human Mobility](#), edited by the Network's co-founders Miriam Cullen and Matthew Scott, available online for free.

- Commission staff working document, [Addressing displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation](#), July 2022
- [The concept of 'climate refugee'](#): towards a possible definition, EPRS briefing, European Parliament
- Helena Hahn and Melanie Fessler, ['The EU's approach to climate mobility: Which way forward?'](#) European Policy Centre, 2023
- [Youth Action Plan](#) (YAP)
- Florian van Weerelt, [The Youth Action Plan \(YAP\) in EU External Action: A Key Opportunity to Shape the EU's Approach to Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change](#), IOM Blog Series: Youth Voices on Migration, Environment and Climate Change
- EEAS, [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#)

Background of the IMI group

The [Immigration and Integration \(IMI\) group](#) is made up of 15 member of the EESC, the group comprises of 5 members from Group I (employers); Group II (workers) and Group III (civil society organisations).

The group aims to support the EESC's work on migration and asylum by: promoting the development of a common European immigration and integration policy based on the principles of fundamental rights and solidarity, with strong involvement of the civil society; preparing the EESC's contribution to the European Migration Forum (EMF); and to make more concretely the EESC's role as a facilitator between organised civil society and the EU institutions in the area of migration policy and migrant integration.