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# 8 KEY POINTS ON JOURNALISM, MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE



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A new [Climate Change Mitigation Report](#), was published in April 2022, a few months after the [Emissions Gap Report](#) released alarming data such as the projection that “if current emissions are not cut by half, the world will experience a dangerous global temperature rise of at least 2.7°C this century”<sup>1</sup>. This context positions climate change as a high priority issue on global agendas, as it affects various dimensions, including human mobility. This document highlights 8 aspects as a starting point for the coverage of climate change in general and more specifically when it is related to migration.

## 1 There are no unique definitions

It is true that terms such as environmental migrants are becoming more frequent. However, it is important to remember that there are no unique concepts to refer to new migratory movements for environmental factors or associated with climate change. However, actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have created [concepts](#) that are widely used by various actors internationally. They are a good starting point to give more context to audiences.

### ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION ACCORDING TO IOM

“The movement of persons or groups of persons who, **predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment** that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence”.

Source: IOM, Glossary on Migration, 2019

#### Important:

Environmental migration can be due to many factors (such as a volcanic eruption, for example), while in climatic migration there must be a direct relationship with climate change (such as rising sea levels or rising temperatures).

1) <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/10/1498972#:~:text=Si%20no%20reducimos%20las%20emisiones,al%20que%20nos%20enfrentamos%20como>

## 2

### The concept of climate refugees is not a term of art under international law

Although the term "climate refugees" is often used to refer to forced migration in the context of climate change and other environmental changes, this term has no legal validity.

The 1951 Refugee Convention does not establish environmental factors as a reason for the application of the refugee definition.

- ◆ It is common to hear in the media the idea of people who migrate due to climatic events. These movements are commonly related to the traditional definition of refugees, i.e. people who, for conflict, violence and other reasons, are forced to leave their communities.
- ◆ Environmental factors are **not a valid reason** for seeking refuge, therefore, we cannot speak of environmental or climate refugees. Although the Cartagena Convention opens broader perspectives, in general the solutions to environmental mobility situations do not usually involve refugee/asylum law.
- ◆ Finally, for a person to apply for refugee status, he or she must migrate internationally. Environmental migration can occur within the territory of a country and is not always entirely forced, as it is when seeking refuge.

## 3

### There are different categories of mobility

Although there are no specific internationally agreed definitions, the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework, identifies categories to refer to people on the move associated with climate/environmental factors:

Displacement	Migration	Planned relocation
<p>It is associated with forced movements, often around a sudden event: earthquake, hurricane, volcanic eruption, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Displacement can be internal and cross border.</li><li>◆ We would then speak of internally displaced persons (IDP's) and cross-border displaced persons.</li></ul>	<p>Migration is associated with "more voluntary" processes where people at least have more agency to plan their decisions. In the case of a drought, for example, people have somewhat more agency to decide what to do, since there is some degree of control over other coping mechanisms.</p>	<p>Very specific processes where people are moved from one location to another to avoid exposure. It is usually associated with a political decision such as a measure for risk prevention.</p>

\*Check the IOM Glossary for more details of these definitions.

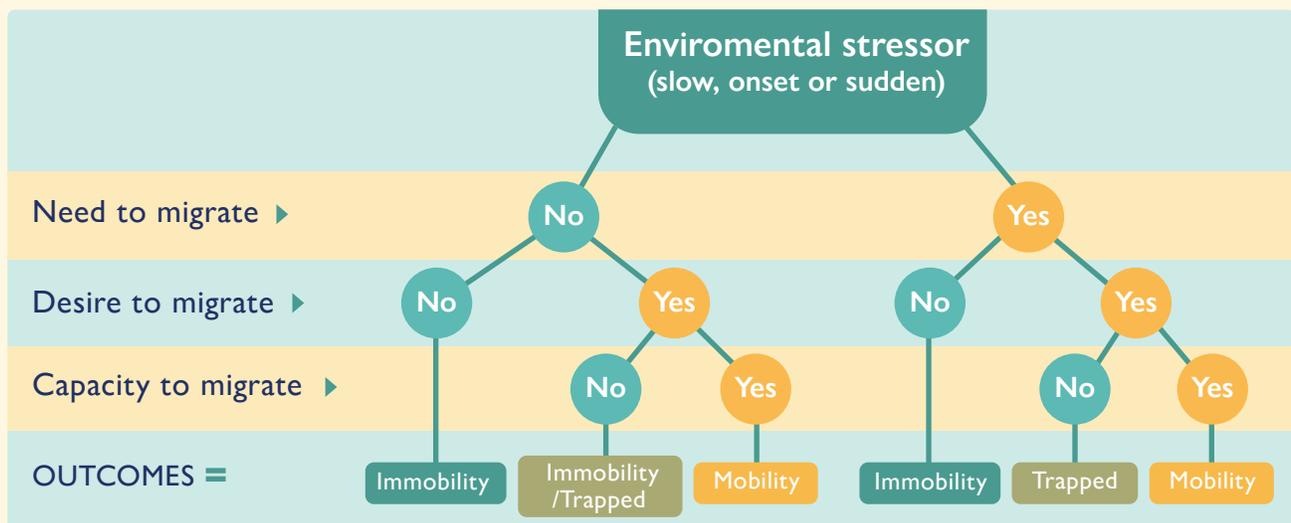
- ✓ When there are **forced movements**, then it is possible to speak of disaster displacement.
- ✓ It should be noted that the forced or voluntary nature of these movements is difficult to identify. The boundary between migration and displacement is, in fact, a blurred line and we often speak of situations of rather forced and more voluntary mobility.
- ✓ There is also the concept of **immobility**, i.e., people who, despite being at risk, are unable or unwilling to move from where they are located for economic reasons, lack of other resources, etc.

These conceptual clarifications are an extremely important tool for improving the accuracy and quality of news coverage and the development of communication products.

## 4 Avoid too simple causalities

Migration is a complex phenomenon that is related to multiple causes. Therefore, it would not be correct to say that just a natural hazard might cause migration. Also, it is important to remember that there are also **immobility factors and outcomes** that should be considered as the ones listed below:

### Mobility and immobility factors and outcomes



- ✓ Migration is caused by multiple factors and climate change is one of them.

## 5 Beware of the use of numbers and metaphors

It is very common to hear phrases such as "there will be 50 million environmental migrants by 2050". While these phrases help to dimension the impact of climate change on Earth, they should be used with caution. First, it is always important to clarify that these are projections and, as such, may vary if mitigation and adaptation actions are taken.

On the other hand, and as mentioned above, given the multi-causality of migration, it would not be correct to assume that all people affected by climate change will migrate. Many will be affected, but for economic reasons, difficulty in transportation, etc., they will not be able to leave their homes and, therefore, will not be environmental migrants, even if they suffer the impact of climate change.

- ✓ Climate migration is about people and NOT about numbers, which are often very apocalyptic.

These scenarios can lead to xenophobic perceptions by associating migrants with hazards when using terms such as “waves of migrants” “millions of displacements,” etc. As a result, a Human Rights perspective must always be considered when using metaphors and numbers.

## 6 There are several approaches that can be used to talk about environmental migration

Environmental migration should not be just mentioned when it comes to displacement or alarming figures as mentioned in the previous point. The topic can be incorporated into the media agenda more permanently in addressing issues such as the climate agenda and migration policies.

### ◆ Climate Agenda

It includes all climate action, adaptation and mitigation and how they impact not only migrants but also vulnerable communities.

### ◆ Migration Policies

All those global or regional processes that address the relationship between migration, environment, and climate change. It is important to mention these policies to give audiences some context and to show that the fight against climate change is an issue of global relevance. Some of these policies are:



Global Compact objectives related to environmental migration and climate change:



### ◆ Disaster Risk Management

Based on the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), the risk management agenda increasingly integrates environmental migration. This framework integrates issues such as early warning systems, shelter management, post-disaster recovery, preparedness, among others.

# 7

## Basics matter a lot

It may seem very basic, but it is different to talk about a hazard or a risk. As a result, it is important to use these concepts correctly in media coverage. If it is perceived that audiences are not clear about them, start explaining these concepts so there is a better understanding of complex issues such as migration and its relation to climate change or environmental factors.

Here are some basic definitions:

### ◆ Climate-related hazards

A physical condition with the potential to cause undesirable consequences (on populations, their lives and the environment).

Climate-related hazards:



### ◆ Vulnerability

It is the susceptibility of a system to suffer alterations determined by its exposure, fragility, response and adaptation capacity.

### ◆ Risk

The probability that a hazard will become a disaster.

### ◆ Disaster

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability, and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.

Source: UNDRR Terminology Guide

Vulnerability or hazards, separately, do not represent a risk. But if they are put together, they do become a risk, that is, the probability of a disaster occurring. However, risks can be reduced or managed.

### Is it correct to talk about natural disasters?

No. We must remember that a disaster is the impact of a hazard. Hazards can have a natural origin. Therefore, it would be better to talk about "natural hazards" rather than natural disasters. [For more information, click here.](#)

# 8

## Migration is not always a negative consequence of environmental impacts; it can also be a tool for adaptation

It is important to emphasize that human mobility itself is not negative or positive *per se* but depends on the conditions under which it occurs.

While some forms of displacement, when unplanned, can lead to increased vulnerability, in other cases, migration is itself an instrument of adaptation. In drought-affected communities, for example, temporary migration allows for income diversification through remittances.

Planned relocation, despite all the difficulties it entails, can be a very powerful tool for managing risk and reducing exposure to environmental hazards.

Migration is fundamental in our society and region. Therefore, any approach to environmental migration cannot be limited to preventing mobility but must address the need for regular migration and the ways in which it occurs.

### Is this subject interesting to you?

Below, you can find links and documents of interest:

- ◆ [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)
- ◆ [Emissions gap report 2021](#)
- ◆ [Frontiers 2022: Noise, Blazes and Mismatches](#)
- ◆ [Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration](#)

This text is an adaptation from the Workshop for Journalists on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change given by Pablo Escibano and Diego Reyes for the IOM Regional Office in Buenos Aires.

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For more resources on migration and journalism, please visit [programamesocaribe.iom.int/en/migration-coverage](https://programamesocaribe.iom.int/en/migration-coverage)