

Call for inputs

Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change

Report of the Special Rapporteur of the human rights of IDPs

Deadline 17 June

Context

The EU recognises that displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change (such as drought, desertification, sea level rise), environmental degradation and sudden on-set disasters (such as floods, earthquakes, etc.) – is an increasingly important humanitarian, development and security challenge for states and the international community.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 24.9 million people were displaced *internally* in 2019 as a result of disasters (of which 23.9 million were weather-related)¹. Environmental stresses worsened by climate change may exacerbate existing insecurity and tensions between populations over already scarce natural resources, triggering conflict, displacement, migration and additional humanitarian and development needs. Climate-related displacement/mobility is hence likely to become more structural/permanent (e.g. caused by sea-level rise or desertification, with people having to relocate to survive) and protracted (reconstruction/rehabilitation of affected areas may take longer, especially in low-income countries). Involuntary immobility, when people may be trapped in areas extremely vulnerable to climate change, environmental degradation or disasters due to lack of financial, social or physical assets is also likely to become an issue of concern²

The EU has been long involved in addressing climate-related displacement/mobility³. The contribution provides an overview of the EU work, based among others on the experience gained in the application of the EU's policy framework on forced displacement, including the Communication on Lives in Dignity and related programming.

Examples of EU support

The examples below illustrate some of the EU's most recent engagement on the topic:

- ✓ The EU's **European Green Deal**⁴ resets the Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges. It proposes a number of concrete climate initiatives, including the proposal of the first European "Climate Law" that

¹ IDMC, Global Report on Displacement and Disasters, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2018/03/19/groundswell---preparing-for-internal-climate-migration>

³ A 2013 Commission Staff Working Document 'climate change, environmental degradation, and migration (SWD (2013) 138), contains an analysis of current legal frameworks for regulating migration in the context of climate change and points to the significant potential of ensuring a more efficient application of existing regional, national and multilateral frameworks.

⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

enshrines in law the long-term strategy of reaching climate neutrality by 2050.⁵ The Green Deal also increases the focus on adaptation to climate change both in the EU and globally, in particular through the development of a new, more ambitious EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, to be adopted in early 2021. The Green Deal also includes an external dimension, further endorsed in the Council conclusions on climate diplomacy of January 2020⁶. These reiterate that the scope of external climate action includes helping the most vulnerable countries particularly affected by climate change to adapt to the realities of climate change and strengthen resilience to its negative impacts, as well as promoting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes assisting those in the most fragile and vulnerable situations, including persons displaced as a result of climate change-related events.

- ✓ As one of the largest humanitarian and development donor, the EU has been providing **assistance** to cover the immediate needs of displaced persons, while also supporting efforts on **prevention and preparedness to boost resilience**. In addition, efforts to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian and development action, as well as climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and where relevant peacebuilding efforts, have also been enhanced. Some examples may be found in the attached EU submission to the High Level Panel on Internal Displacement.
- ✓ Climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction and preparedness are an integral part of the EU's approach to **resilience**. The EU applies a resilience building approach in its response to crises (disasters and conflict) and fragility. This implies moving to a more structural and long-term approach that addresses root causes of vulnerabilities and fragility - thus reducing future risks – and builds capacity to manage risks more efficiently. The EU has been also promoting a stronger integration of risk reduction elements in its funded programmes through the establishment of a resilience marker, which requires partners to address risks and vulnerabilities in their interventions.
- ✓ In its approach to **Disaster Preparedness**, the EU has adopted a stronger emphasis on climate change and environmental impacts, including possible consequences such as displacement. In so doing, funded actions will strengthen preparedness capacities related to managing displacement situations. Additionally, a stronger focus is placed on building protection capacities, particularly in situations of displacement, which contributes to promote respect of the rights of the most vulnerable groups, including IDPs. All these aspects are also taken into account in sectorial interventions as preparedness is an essential element of all EU's humanitarian sector policies such as health, education, WASH, shelter and settlements, food security, nutrition, protection, logistics and cash assistance.
- ✓ Further, the EU is increasingly promoting a consistent use of **risk analysis and early warning systems**⁷ for anticipation to be able to prepare and intervene before a crisis hits or a situation deteriorates, thus reducing suffering and humanitarian needs. This approach can prove particularly effective to pre-empt the impact of climate related events through accurate forecast.

⁵ A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy COM (2018) 773

⁶ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5033-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

⁷ For example the EU Conflict Early Warning System

- ✓ Measures to **reduce the risk of displacement**, reduce or eliminate the effects of natural hazards, improve people’s resilience, provide anticipatory early action, or move people out of harm’s way before disasters strike. As an example, the EU supports the project “Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement” in 21 Pacific Small Island Developing States, implemented by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in cooperation with IOM and the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD). The overall objective of the action is to reduce the risk and impact of disaster displacement on persons at risk of being displaced in developing small islands states in the Pacific, so that targeted populations would not be displaced at all, less affected or better assisted and protected when compelled to move.⁸

- ✓ As knowledge gaps on the scope and severity of slow-onset climatic events and their relations with internal displacement still exist, the EU is also investing in research on the topic:
 - the **EU Joint Research Centre** has recently initiated a research project on climate change related displacement and mobility. The ultimate objective of the project is to estimate displacement and migration related to slow-onset climatic events and environmental degradation. By combining data on climate change and climate change impacts to population and migration data at high geographical detail, the project will analyse the climate change migration nexus, taking into account local vulnerabilities and adaptation processes in rural and urban areas worldwide. The project is proceeding incrementally: from the development of net migration data at high geographical resolution⁹, to the estimation of the long-term relation between climate change and mobility on the basis of historical data, to the final quantification of population that it is exposed to climatic adverse events and may be forced to move either within countries or internationally.
 - The **Horizon 2020 research programme** has funded a large international consortium with EUR 7 million, to conduct the ‘HABITABLE’ project. The project focuses at linking climate change, habitability and social tipping points, as a way to better understand the relation between environmental disruptions and major social change leading to displacement. It counts 20 partners from 17 countries, collecting primary data from various cases which are hardly hit by climate change effects.

- ✓ At **international level**, beyond contributing to implementation of international commitments as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction or the Paris Agreement, several initiatives seek to address the issue of climate related displacement. The EU has been actively involved in all of them.
 - The **Task Force on Displacement**, established at Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its 21st session in Paris in 2015, under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) as an expert group to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address displacement related to

⁸ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/pacific-disasters>

⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/estimating-net-migration-high-spatial-resolution>

the adverse impacts of climate change.¹⁰ The EU is part of the WIM Executive Committee and the TFD expert group. The TFD has produced a report¹¹ providing a comprehensive assessment of broader issues of displacement related to climate change, including a set of recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimise and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.

- The recently established **High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement**, where internal displacement due to disasters and the adverse effects of climate change will also be addressed. The EU submission to the Panel is attached.
 - The **Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)**, a state-led initiative working towards better protection for people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change across borders. The PDD also supports global policy developments, cross-sectoral, coordinated action to address the diverse and region-specific challenges of human mobility in the context of disasters and climate change. The EU is a member of the Steering group and leads a Group of Friends of the initiative in Geneva and in New York.
- ✓ While the impacts of the **COVID19 crisis** and the measures for its containment affect everybody, they do not affect populations in the same way. In internal displacement situations it can often turn into a crisis on top of a crisis. One of the biggest concerns is that the COVID-19 pandemic will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, including the forcibly displaced. Therefore, the EU advocates for the identification of opportunities for inclusion in all Covid-19 related measures. Even more fundamentally, there is a need to ensure that displaced populations become visible in existing assessments and forecasts focusing on the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.
 - ✓ Finally, even though the focus of the UNSR report will be on human rights of IDPs, the EU would like to highlight that at the same time that **displacements** or the presence of **camps** may create significant impact on **the surrounding environment and natural resources**, which, in turn, can contribute to tensions with local communities (e.g. deforestation, increased water use, and unsustainable waste management). Tackling these aspects by supporting both displaced and host communities can generate benefits for displaced persons whilst limiting the environmental impact of a crisis (e.g. clean cooking/deforestation, waste and waste water etc.). Therefore, it is important to reinforce the nexus displacement - environment/natural resources - sustainable energy.

¹⁰ Decision 10/CP.24, <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/10a1.pdf>

¹¹ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/2018_TFD_report_17_Sep.pdf