



The Impact of Climate Change on Labour Migration Thematic Workshop | Geneva, 29 March 2023 Summary

This note summarises reflections that emerged during a thematic workshop on the impact of climate change on labour migration organized by the French 2022-2023 Chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The workshop was developed in partnership with a broad range of GFMD stakeholders.¹ It was held at the headquarters of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on March 29, 2023 in hybrid format. Participants were welcomed by Ms. Manuela Tomei, Assistant Director-General, ILO and Ms. Emmanuelle Lachaussée, Deputy Permanent Representative of France in Geneva. In keeping with the spirit of the GFMD, a diversity of stakeholders was represented among the panellists: Representatives of States, local governments, civil society, trade unions, the private sector and youth. Substantive input was provided by two panel discussions and interactions from participants in the room and online. This workshop relates to the priorities of roundtables 1 (*The effects of climate change on human mobility*) and 4 (*Labour migration: promoting the economic inclusion of migrants*) of the 14th GFMD Summit and initiates a series of thematic workshops organised under the French chairmanship in Paris on the 27 and 28 June 2023. Below a summary of discussions.

PANEL DISCUSSION 1 – LABOUR MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY

Speakers:

- H.E. Ambassador Sumbue Antas, Permanent Mission of Vanuatu to the UN in Geneva
- Kajsa Fernström Nåtby, Ministry of Climate and Enterprise, Division for Climate, Sweden and co-chair Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage Taskforce on Displacement, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Dina Ionesco, Senior Advisor for Migration, Climate Vulnerability Forum
- Elizabeth Warn, Head Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Division, International Organization for Migration
- Stephanie Sepúlveda, Immigration and Labor Specialist, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
- Careen Joel Mwakitalu, Co-Founder of NoTakaTanzania

Moderator: Agi Veres, Director UNDP Representation Office, Geneva

The impacts of climate change interact with a broad range of social and economic factors and influence human mobility as an adaptation strategy to escape life-threatening situations, build resilience or diversify livelihoods. While most people are displaced or move internally due to climate impacts, often from rural to urban areas, the lack of decent work opportunities locally may force people to move across borders. These movements are largely taking place within regions, in particular in the Pacific, Africa and Asia, and strongly affect youth. **Under conditions enabling regular migration and decent work, labour migration has the potential to build adaptive capacities and resilience of migrants, their families, as well as countries and communities of origin and destination.**

¹ The [concept note and program](#) for this workshop were developed in partnership with the governments of Argentina, Sweden, Vanuatu, the International Organization of Employers (IOE) hosting the GFMD Business Mechanism, the GFMD Civil Society Mechanism, the GFMD Mayors Mechanism, the Migration Youth and Children Platform, ILO, IOM, UNDP, UNICEF and World Bank.

Panel 1 key take-aways

- **Shifting the narrative.** The narrative around climate action should change from climate vulnerability to climate prosperity. It is imperative to focus on the opportunities and the positive investments needed for long-term development, while closing protection gaps experienced by migrants and displaced people. More broadly, this workshop adopted a positive approach on labour migration, considered as a sustainable development driver.
- **Policy coherence across labour, migration and climate.** Labour migration policies and programmes need to be aligned with broader adaptation and just transition agendas. For example, Nationally Determined Contributions and Climate Prosperity Plans should be consistent with migration policies, including with the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Livelihoods and skills are common threads that can potentially tie these policy areas together.
- **Protection.** When people are compelled to move, they become more vulnerable to risks of forced labour, indebtedness and human trafficking. It is necessary to guarantee minimum standards of protection in line with international labour standards to ensure equal rights for all workers regardless of migratory status. These should include protection in the workplace from climate-induced heat stress, rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It is also key to provide reliable information throughout the migration cycle from pre-departure to return.
- **Permanent pathways.** Most legal pathways available for climate-affected populations fall under temporary protection regimes. This increases the risk of exploitation and the treatment of migrants as a subclass of workers, limiting development outcomes. Permanent pathways allowing family reunification can promote more resilient communities, facilitate socio-economic integration, and harness a broad range of benefits in terms of skills, intercultural dialogue, remittances, economic growth, etc. Besides creating new pathways, existing ones could be expanded.
- **Social dialogue.** Meaningful consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including trade unions, the private sector and migrants themselves are crucial. Moving out of silos, synergizing efforts and empowering grassroots initiatives lead to a strong national ownership of responses. The important role of diasporas' socio-economic and human capital in climate action is also largely untapped and should be actively supported and promoted.
- **Capacity development, data and financing.** Increased cooperation is needed to develop user-friendly tools to implement technical guidance on climate-related migration and displacement, such as those developed by the UNFCCC Taskforce on Displacement. Quality data is also needed as a basis for any intervention and the use of modern sources such as drone mapping technologies and satellites. The involvement of youth in data collection should be explored. Pre-arranged financing mechanisms for climate-related human mobility with a focus on slow-onset events could be established, including in the loss and damage fund created as an outcome of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Sharm el-Sheikh.
- **Addressing root causes.** Labour mobility is just one tool in the toolbox of climate adaptation. It is equally essential to provide solutions for those who want to stay and more importantly, addressing root causes and inequalities to make migration a choice instead of a necessity.

PANEL DISCUSSION 2 – MEETING NEW SKILLS DEMANDS CREATED BY CLIMATE ACTION

Speakers:

- H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas, Permanent Representative of Argentina, to the UN in Geneva
- Victor Kotey, Deputy Director, Waste Management Department, Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Ghana
- Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Chairperson of Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka and Founding Chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
- Mirela Stoia, Head of Stakeholder Engagement Ad Interim, International Organisation of Employers
- Joy Quintain Hernandez Communications and Advocacy Officer, International Trade Union Confederation Asia-Pacific
- Marc Tilley, Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy Adviser to the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Migration.

Moderator: Michelle Leighton, Director, Labour Migration Branch, ILO

Studies conducted by the ILO show that implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change could create a net gain of 18 million jobs by 2030. New skills are therefore needed for a just transition to low-carbon economies. Attracting diverse skill sets is key to stimulating competitiveness and innovation. When well-managed, labour migration supports green skills development and helps fill labour shortages; otherwise, migrants can end up in precarious jobs with deteriorating working conditions where they experience deskilling, brain waste and skills mismatches. Strengthening skills policies and programmes is at the heart of transforming challenges into opportunities.

Panel 2 key take-aways

- **Youth empowerment and diaspora engagement.** Investing in green skills for young people and creating decent jobs for them in countries of origin is of high importance. Without these, a lot of youth with green skills move to countries where green transition is a priority, thereby contributing to brain drain. To mitigate this, more countries like Argentina are attracting its diaspora to bring back new expertise and facilitate technology transfers that could be instrumental in just transitions.
- **Integrating humanitarian access and long-term sustainable development.** Protection mechanisms for migrants affected by climate change should include perspectives for longer-term settlement and socioeconomic integration to support wider sustainable development goals. The humanitarian visa in Argentina shows how this approach can be implemented.
- **Rights-based regular labour migration schemes.** Growing demand for green talent to support just transitions can be met by putting in place rights-based and targeted labour mobility schemes, bilateral labour migration agreements, and regional migration schemes. This allows employers to benefit from predictable and efficient mobility frameworks that foster intra-company transfers and respond to fast-changing needs and business models. At the same time, international labour standards, including fair recruitment policies should be mainstreamed to ensure respect for migrants' fundamental human and labour rights and guarantee migrant workers' access to social protection.
- **Skills recognition and development.** Bilateral or regional labour migration agreements should include qualifications and skills recognition and development (including technical and vocational education and training) before and after departure in line with labour market demands. Migrants should enjoy accessible, non-discriminatory and equal opportunities as nationals in terms of career progression and access to life-long learning opportunities. This does not only empower and protect migrants, but also promotes green transitions.

- **Transition to formal employment.** In many countries, including Bangladesh and cities like Accra, there is heavy migrant presence in the informal economy. Migrants provide essential services, for instance in health care, waste management, recycling, yet face exclusion from financial systems and social protection frameworks, among others. This weakens their adaptative capacity. Upskilling and reskilling programmes across all sectors and skill levels, as well as skills recognition of prior learning can help diversify employment opportunities and contribute to the transition from informal to formal employment.
- **Policy coherence and social dialogue.** National labour migration and skills development policies should be fit for purpose and aligned with national adaption planning and just transition plans and, in the case of disasters, reconstruction plans. To better anticipate skills and identify labour market shortages in rapidly evolving workplaces, social dialogue, engaging employers' and workers' organizations, in designing policy responses are essential.
- **Gender-sensitive approach.** Skills development policies can and should promote a gender-sensitive approach, taking into consideration specific challenges faced by women in accessing decent work opportunities. For example, to ease the increased burden of care work, childcare services in workplaces and training centres and maternity benefits should be made available.