FACT SHEET | 1

DISPLACEMENT AND CLIMATE: A SNAPSHOT

IFRC

Climate Training

KIT

Key messages:

- Climate-related displacement is when people become displaced as a result of climate-related disasters, slow onset events and/or other adverse impacts of climate change.
- Climate change contributes to displacement, as a 'trigger' and as a 'driver', although the linkages between them are not always clear.
- Displacement is more likely to occur for individuals or communities with lower overall resilience.
- Climate-related displacement is expected to increase significantly over the coming years, requiring concerted efforts to improve global understanding and action on this complex issue.

Displacement in the context of disasters and climate change has been described as one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of the 21st century.

What is displacement?

Displacement is defined as:

"the movement of persons who have been **forced or obliged** to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters."[1] (emphasis added)

Displacement is therefore characterised by people having to move **involuntarily**, however in the context of climate change making the distinction between voluntary and involuntary movement can be complex and not always clear cut.

Displacement may occur within a country (**internal displacement**) or people may travel across international borders (sometimes referred to as **international** or **cross-border displacement**).

Displacement may be sudden and brief (sometimes referred to as **acute displacement**). It may be longer term or part of an ongoing cycle of movement (sometimes referred to as **protracted displacement**) which may continue for decades.

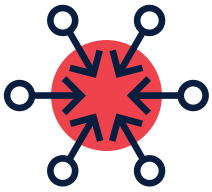
Triggers and drivers of displacement

Triggers for displacement are the direct or immediate cause of people becoming displaced. In the context of climate change, these may be the result of:

- **Climate-related disasters:** rapid onset disasters caused by extreme weather events, which as a general trend, are increasing in frequency and scale as a result of climate change.
- **Slow onset events:** caused by longer term changes in weather patterns resulting from climate change. In some contexts these can also be drivers of displacement.

Not everyone affected by a disaster or slow onset event becomes displaced. Some people may remain in their homes, either by choice or necessity. Others may choose to move voluntarily, due to 'pull factors' such as better employment opportunities or family connections.

Displacement and climate: a snapshot



The likelihood of people becoming displaced depends on many different and underlying factors. These are often referred to as **drivers of displacement**, which indirectly increase the likelihood of displacement by undermining resilience. In the context of climate change, these factors may include:

- **Slow onset events** as described above.
- **Adverse impacts of climate change**: the direct or indirect adverse effects of rising temperatures which can undermine resilience.

Figure 1 shows some examples of the types of drivers that may impact the likelihood of someone becoming displaced by a triggering event.

What are the impacts of displacement?

Displaced people may have the same immediate needs as others affected by disaster or crisis, such as emergency shelter, health and psychological support, access to food, clean water and sanitation. However in other respects their needs may be different, due to the specific impacts of displacement.

Vulnerable groups most affected by displacement

- Displacement disproportionately affects already marginalised and 'at risk' groups, including women, children, the elderly, minority groups and those living with disabilities or serious health conditions.
- Displacement can result in an even greater need for protection against violence, exploitation and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence and child protection.

Urban displacement

- Displacement is becoming increasingly 'urban' with greater numbers of people fleeing to urban centres, requiring different humanitarian and development approaches.

Figure 1 Examples of the types of drivers of displacement, some of which may be caused or exacerbated by climate change

Political/government

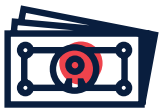
- Poor governance and political instability
- Lack of protection of human rights
- Inadequate land tenure and land grabs
- Inadequate disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response
- People trafficking

Social/cultural

- Tension or lack of social cohesion between different ethnic, caste, religious and social groups
- Conflict, criminality and/or violence between groups
- Gender-based violence
- Marginalisation or discrimination against particular groups, based on gender, disability or other factors

Economic

- Limited livelihood opportunities due to oversupply or increased competition
- Inflation and poverty
- Food insecurity and malnutrition
- Poorly managed development



Environmental/built environment

- Inadequate or unsafe housing and infrastructure
- Environmental degradation and loss of natural resources
- Urbanisation and growing high risk urban area

The impacts of displacement

Cross-border displacement

- Disasters and other climate-related phenomena sometimes drive people to cross international borders, beyond the reach of local support mechanisms and assistance.

Legal rights

- Displaced people are less likely to have access to important identification and ownership documentation, which can delay or exclude them from accessing some types of assistance.
- Displaced people may flee across international borders, and not have access to the same rights, legal protection or services normally available to citizens.

Protracted displacement

- While some people may return to their homes and recover relatively quickly, others may be at risk of longer-term displacement and require ongoing critical assistance well beyond the life-span of a disaster relief and recovery operation.

Cyclical displacement

- Displaced people may end up in a continuing cycle of displacement, where secondary triggers cause them to move frequently, depleting their resources and resilience, requiring more intensive support to find durable solutions.

Host communities

- Displacement can also have a significant impact on the communities that receive and support them. Some of these impacts can be positive, however there is also a risk of over-burdening a host community, placing a strain on limited resources and livelihoods and creating or exacerbating social tensions and inequality.
- Displacement, including climate-related displacement, therefore requires specific consideration before, during and after disasters, to better address underlying risk factors, anticipate and prepare for different displacement scenarios and to take into account the broader issues and needs for host communities and others impacted by displacement.

How big is the problem of displacement?

Over the past decade, at least

100 MILLION PEOPLE

people were displaced, at a rate that has almost doubled since 2010. This includes people displaced by all types of crises, both cross-border and internal displacement

At the end of 2019 it was estimated that

79.5M

people were displaced by disaster, conflict and violence

Of those,

45.7M

people (more than half) were **internally displaced**

33.4M

people were **newly internally displaced** in 2019 alone, spanning 145 countries and territories

Of those,

24.9M

people were **displaced by disasters**, the highest figure recorded since 2012, and three times the number of displacements caused by conflict and violence

Of those, over **95%** were caused by **weather-related disasters**

Sources: UNHCR, Global Trends 2020; IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020

How does climate change affect displacement?

What is climate change?

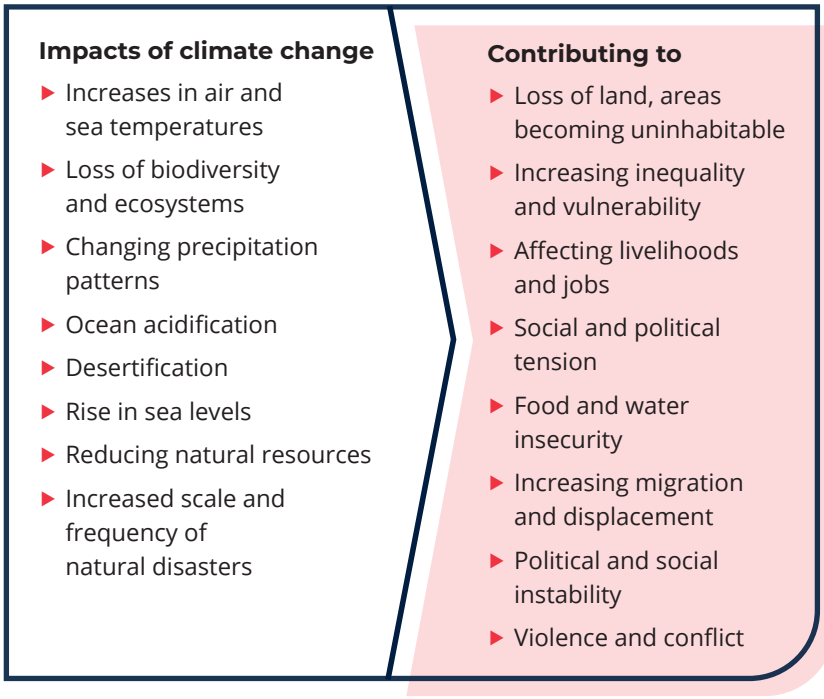
The science is clear: over the last 100 years, the impacts of urbanisation, deforestation, burning fossil fuel and changing agricultural practices, have increased the release of gases such as carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. These are known as **greenhouse gasses**, because they blanket the earth, keeping it warm. However, the overall increase in greenhouse gasses has in turn increased global temperatures, known as **global warming**. Global warming has significant consequences on the world's climate and weather systems, known as **climate change**.

The world has already warmed about 1°C above pre-industrial levels and, at the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, is set to continue. Surface temperatures are expected to pass 1.5°C by around 2040 and the vast majority of scientists have determined that the average global temperature rise must be limited to 2°C in order to avoid catastrophic consequences.

What are the impacts of climate change?

No countries or continents are immune from the effects of climate change. It is associated with unprecedented increases in air and sea temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, acidification of the ocean and a rise in sea levels, which in turn impact on our ecosystems and biodiversity. This places pressure on the natural resources we rely on to sustain life, which can also exacerbate social inequality and create new vulnerabilities, leading to social and political tensions and crises.

Climate change also results in the increasing intensity, frequency and uncertainty of weather and climate-related hazards, shocks and stresses (which also include epidemic and pandemic risks), amplifying existing risks and creating new risks for natural and human systems.



How does climate change affect displacement?

The impact of climate change on disasters and displacement is complex. For non-climate related disasters, such as volcanic activity and earthquakes, there may be no links to climate change. Similarly, frequent climate-related disaster displacement caused by flooding, may be the result of normal cyclical weather patterns and is also not the result of climate change. In other cases however, it may be possible to determine that 'but for' climate change the disaster would not have been as extreme, or may not have occurred at all.

Where these links can be made, climate change may be a **trigger** or a **driver** of displacement, and sometimes both.

How does climate change affect displacement?

Case study: Overview of triggers of displacement in Malawi and Mozambique

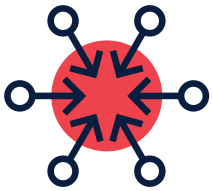
INITIAL TRIGGERS	ACUTE DISPLACEMENT	SECONDARY TRIGGERS	STABLE DISPLACEMENT	DURABLE SOLUTIONS...
Flood Storms and hailstorms Conflict** **Mozambique only	Evacuation centre and camps Host communities Informal camps	Protection and security issues Poor camp conditions Health: disease outbreaks Food security Lack of livelihood opportunities Unsafe housing	Evacuation centre and camps Host communities Informal camps Renting	Returned home to rebuild Purchased land in new area and rebuilding Resettlement camp in new area Migrated temporarily to Mozambique

Source: Danish Red Cross, 2020. Internal Displacement and Triggers of Secondary Movement: A Lookback Study on Malawi and Mozambique Post Cyclone Idai and Cyclone Kenneth.

Climate as a trigger for displacement

- Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of disasters. More than 90% of natural hazards are now considered to be climate-related and are displacing more than 20 million people each year, including floods, storms, wild fires, extreme winter conditions and landslides.
- Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, increasing salinity of soil and groundwater and desertification are just some of the ways climate change can also render areas uninhabitable, to the point where communities are forced to leave their homes, either as part of a **planned relocation**,[2] or in response to immediate risks.

Climate as a driver of displacement



- It is estimated that 80% of the world's displaced people (regardless of the cause) are in countries affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition, which is linked to climate change and other disaster risks.
- The effects of climate change on the availability of resources disproportionately impacts poorer people and communities in low socio-economic areas, making them more vulnerable to displacement when faced with a triggering event.
- Climate change has also been found to contribute to urbanisation, as people relocate from climate-affected rural areas. Urbanisation in turn can increase exposure and vulnerability to climate risks in cities, particularly in growing informal settlements around urban areas.
- The impacts of climate change on health and livelihoods are also likely to exacerbate social tension and pre-existing inequality for women, children, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged social groups such as ethnic minorities, increasing their risk of displacement.

Scaling up action on climate-related displacement

The challenges ahead: scaling up action on climate-related displacement

Changes in climate have already been driving migration and displacement around the world. The experience of climate-related displacement also varies dramatically in different contexts. Consider, for example, the different in needs and issues facing communities impacted by:

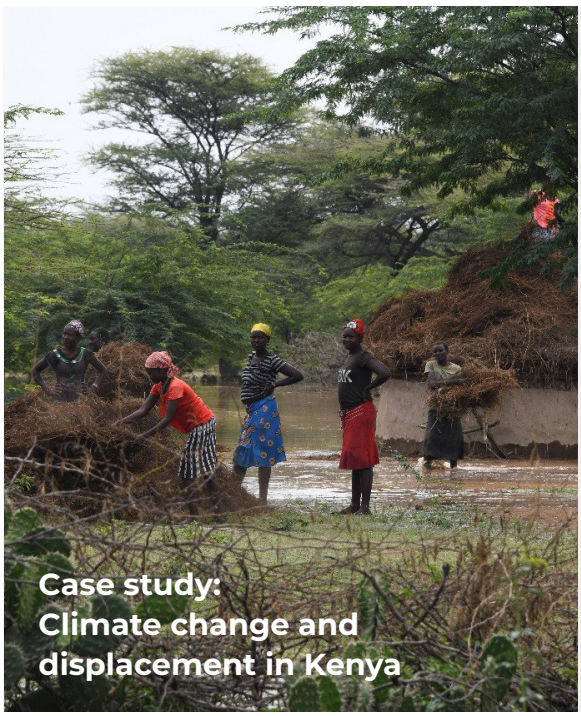
- sea level rise in the Pacific;
- dzuds in Mongolia;
- the intersection of drought and conflict in Afghanistan;
- the loss of livelihoods in Sahel; and
- extreme storms and floods in Bangladesh, India and Philippines.

Combined with a growing population, the situation is expected to worsen significantly in the years and decades to follow, unless the underlying causes of climate change and displacement are addressed.

It has been estimated that by 2050:

- over 143 million people will be at risk of being internally displaced in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America due to slow-onset impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise, glacial retreat, desertification, and land and forest degradation;
- extreme weather events will continue to grow in frequency and intensity, driving millions more from their places of residence, in some cases across borders; and
- floods, droughts, famines and hurricanes, could push the total number of permanently displaced people as high as 250 million people.

Communities, organisations and governments must scale up preventative action and preparedness efforts to respond to the complex climate and displacement challenges that lie ahead.



Case study: Climate change and displacement in Kenya

- In Kenya droughts, conflicts (resource-based, political and terrorism), disease epidemics (human and livestock) and flooding is the major cause of deaths, destruction of property and displacements. The most affected areas are the Northern and Eastern regions of the country. Pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and subsistence farmers living in the arid regions (roughly the upper 70% of the country) are highly vulnerable to prolonged droughts and to rain-induced floods. During droughts, pastoralists are often forced to migrate to grazing grounds further away from their homelands. Land grabbing in pastoralist areas is an increasing concern and often occurs with government's consent.
- Blocking of pastoralist migration routes greatly reduces mobility and makes pastoralists even more vulnerable. Coastal areas, Kisumu area and part of the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) are especially prone to seasonal flooding. Severe rains and floods also increase the risk of epidemics such as diarrhoea and cholera.

Source: Partners for Resilience / Kenya Red Cross

Image: Baringo flooding, Kenya, July 2020 / Kenya Red Cross

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2 See other Fact Sheets for more information about planned relocation.

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