

DISPLACEMENT AND CLIMATE

KEY TERMS

Climate Training



This quick reference guide helps to explain and contextualise some of the key terms relevant to climate change and displacement.

What's in a name?

There are numerous terms used to describe people who have moved from one location to another. These terms are used to reflect specific situations, based on one or more of the following factors:

- ▶ whether the move was involuntary (forced) or voluntary (by choice);
- ▶ the cause of displacement; and
- ▶ whether or not an international border has been crossed.

Some terms have specific meanings under international law or are commonly understood by the international community. Other terms have been developed by individual organisations or academics according to their purpose, mandates and areas of focus. Some organisations have a limited focus on certain categories of people according to their mandate, whereas other organisations may not make these distinctions. It is also the case that organisations may use the same terms but give them slightly different meanings, as reflected in the Glossary further below.

Why does it matter?

For the IFRC, the first priority is to ensure that all people, irrespective of their legal status or circumstances, have their humanitarian needs addressed. The IFRC therefore places less emphasis on labels and legal definitions, and uses broad terms to describe migration and displacement, some of which may overlap, to ensure that different needs and vulnerabilities of groups and individuals are adequately addressed.

Nevertheless, it is still important to understand the different terms used in this area to gain a deeper appreciation of the different contexts and complexities for discussing and addressing climate and displacement. Terminology is also important for the collection of data, which contributes to a better understanding of the scope and scale of climate and displacement issues.

Understanding displacement and climate in the context of human mobility

The movement of people from one place to another, regardless of context or circumstance, is often described as **human mobility** or **population movement**.

In general **migration** is used to describe the *voluntary* or choice-based movement of people from one place to another whereas **displacement** generally describes forced or *involuntary* movement. However, making this distinction in any particular case is not always simple, and there can be *mixed flows* of people or groups which could be considered to fall into one or both categories at different times. The IFRC also uses the term migration as a broad term encompassing both voluntary and involuntary movement, with a focus on those who have crossed an international border.

Displacement and migration can be **internal** (occurring within a country) or **cross-border** (entering into other countries across international borders). These distinctions are often important for determining which legal regimes may apply in particular circumstances. For individuals however, it may be part of a continuum of movement, where people move both within and between different countries.

The term **climate refugee** has also been used in some literature, however this is not an internationally accepted term, because it can easily be confused with the term **refugee** which has a specific meaning within the 1951 Refugee Convention.



Key terms

The following terms are used throughout the module to refer, in shorthand, to quite complex concepts that are described in different ways by different organisations and 'communities'. The descriptions below most strongly reflect the way the 'climate community', including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), approaches these concepts.

It should be noted that the humanitarian community may use different terms (for example, drought is seen as a slow-onset disaster by humanitarians) and that these descriptions are not intended to be conclusive definitions.

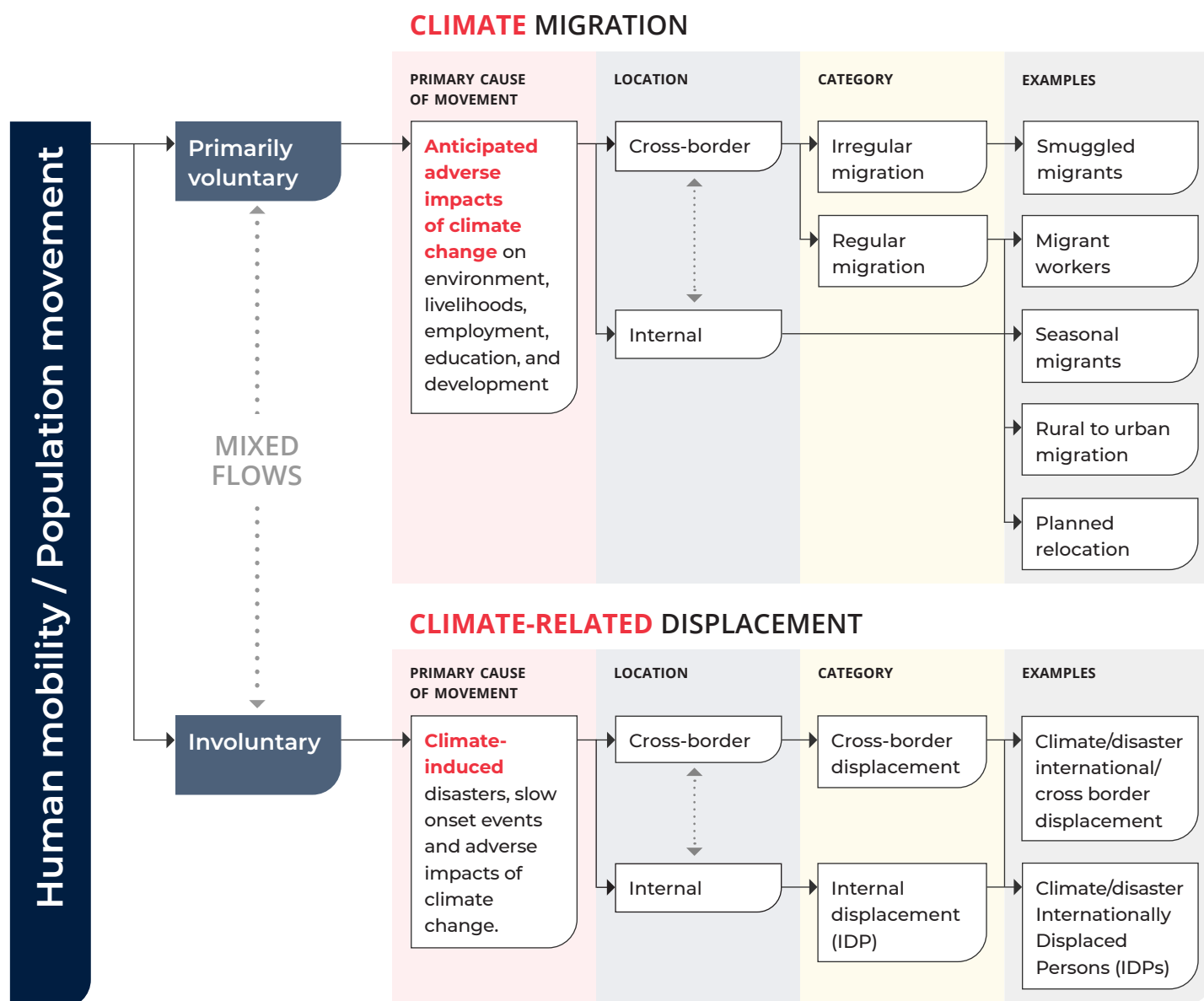
Climate-related displacement	Displacement as a result of extreme weather events, slow onset events and/or other adverse impacts of climate change
Climate-related disasters	Disasters caused by extreme weather events. Eg. storms, floods, cyclones (which, as a general trend, are increasing in frequency and scale as a result of climate change). They are triggers for displacement.
Adverse impacts of climate change	The direct or indirect adverse effects of rising temperatures which can undermine resilience. Eg. adverse impacts on livelihoods, discrimination, poverty, health, availability of resources etc. These are drivers of displacement.
Slow onset events	Caused by longer term changes in weather patterns resulting from climate change. Eg. sea level rise, desertification, loss of biodiversity (many of which are also related to climate change). These can be either triggers for displacement and/or drivers of displacement depending on the context.
Triggers for displacement	Direct/immediate cause of displacement. Eg. climate-related disasters.
Drivers of displacement	Indirectly increases the likelihood of displacement by contributing to the undermining of resilience. Eg. adverse impacts of climate change and slow-onset events.

Climate migration and climate-related displacement

The term **climate migration** is most commonly used to describe voluntary movement across international borders in response to the anticipated impacts of climate change. However this term has also been used by some organisations to include involuntary movement (otherwise known as “climate-related displacement”) and has also been applied to situations of internal movement as well. As such, it could be considered a general term describing the movement of people as a result of climate change.

The terms **climate-related displacement** and **disaster displacement** are specifically used to describe the involuntary movement of people as a reaction to sudden or developing changes in climate or the occurrence of a disaster, including those which are climate-related. Statistically, most people experiencing climate-related or disaster displacement are most likely to be internally displaced, however they do sometimes cross international borders.

The diagram below presents a general understanding of some of the key terms related to climate migration and displacement.



Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

The list below identifies some of the most commonly used terms and the range of different meanings that have been ascribed to those terms by different organisations, institutions or legal instruments.

Human mobility / population movement

Human mobility

“refers to three forms of population movement: i) displacement – understood as the primarily forced movement of persons, ii) migration – primarily voluntary movement of persons, and iii) planned relocation – planned process of settling persons or groups of persons to a new location.” Source: [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#).¹ This term is also being used more widely in climate change instruments, including the Cancun Adaptation Framework.

“A generic term covering all the different forms of movements of persons.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²

Further note:

“The term human mobility reflects a wider range of movements of persons than the term “migration”. The term is usually understood as also encompassing tourists that are generally considered as not engaging in migration. As an example of the emergence of this term, the international organization members of the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility created in the context of the Conferences of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change have started to use the term human mobility to cover all the broad range of types of movements that can take place in the context of climate change (Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility, Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change UNFCCC – Paris COP21 (2015).” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³

Displacement

Displacement

‘Armed conflicts and violence, natural or man-made disasters, but also development or relocation schemes can force populations to leave their homes, leading to accelerated and collective, even massive movements. The displaced populations might seek assistance and protection within their own country, or might find refuge across international borders. Displacement of populations and migration of individuals and groups are distinct but often interrelated phenomena; where they are interrelated, National Societies will strive for a coordinated action that covers both, the displaced and the migrants.’ Source: [IFRC Policy on Migration](#).⁴

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Displacement cont.

“understood as the primarily forced movement of persons.”

Source: [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#).⁵

“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.” IOM adaptation of the definition in the UNOCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, to describe all displacement including cross-border. Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#)⁶

“Situations where people are forced to leave their home or place of habitual residence. Displacement is usually associated with intensive risk, where the occurrence of a disaster event is the primary driver of movement. It can take place within or across national borders.” Source: [CARE](#)⁷

Internal displacement / Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

“Persons or groups 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, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” Source: UNOCHA Guiding Principles.⁸ The RCRC Movement has also adopted this definition in the [Movement Policy on Internal Displacement](#).⁹

Disaster displacement

“occurs when people are forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order to avoid a sudden or slow-onset disaster linked to natural hazards, including those associated with climate change.” Source: [Platform on Disaster Displacement](#).¹⁰

“Situations where people are forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard. Such displacement results from the fact that affected persons are (i) exposed to (ii) a natural hazard in a situation where (iii) they are too vulnerable and lack the resilience to withstand the impacts of that hazard. It is the effects of natural hazards, including the adverse impacts of climate change, that may overwhelm the resilience or adaptive capacity of an affected community or society, thus leading to a disaster that potentially results in displacement. Disaster displacement may take the form of spontaneous flight, an evacuation ordered or enforced by authorities or an involuntary planned relocation process. Such displacement can occur within a country (internal displacement), or across international borders (cross-border disaster displacement).” Source: [IDMC](#).¹¹ Also used in the [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).¹²

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Cross-border disaster displacement	“situations where people flee or are displaced across borders in the context of sudden- or slow-onset disasters, or in the context of the effects of climate change.” Source: Platform on Disaster Displacement . ¹³
Climate-related displacement	Also referred to as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Climate change induced displacement¹⁴▶ Climate change related displacement¹⁵▶ Displacement in the context of climate change¹⁶ These various terms refer to climate change as a cause of displacement persons or include climate change as a hazard as part of disaster displacement. Sources: Various.
Climate refugee	“often being used in the media to define a person displaced in the context of disasters like droughts, sea level rise as well as extreme weather events like hurricanes, tsunamis or earthquakes. This concept does not exist in international law and is not endorsed by the Platform on Disaster Displacement.” Source: Platform in Disaster Displacement . ¹⁷
Phases of displacement	For descriptions of different phases of displacement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ acute displacement;▶ secondary displacement;▶ protracted displacement; and▶ durable solutions see Factsheet 3 on the Displacement Continuum.
Refugee	“someone who: (i) has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group; (ii) is outside his or her country of origin; and (iii) is unable or unwilling (because of the fear of persecution) to rely on the protection of that country, or return there.” Source: Refugee Convention (1951) . ¹⁸ “IFRC recommends the use of the term “refugees” when referring specifically to refugees, as opposed to the term “migrants”, which encompasses all categories of people crossing international borders. It also recommends the use of the expression “migrants and refugees” to refer to “mixed movements”, that is, movements where migrants and refugees are moving alongside each other, using the same routes and means of transport, or engaging the services of the same smugglers.” Source: IFRC report . ¹⁹

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Migration

Migrant / migration

“...persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. Thus, this policy includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law.” Source: [IFRC Policy on Migration](#).²⁰

“encompasses all categories of people crossing international borders”. Source: [IFRC report](#).²¹

“If persons are defined as migrants by virtue of the fact that they move from their own country to another, regardless of the reasons and their needs, then refugees are migrants. If, however, the causes of flight are the defining feature, together with the framework of rights and responsibilities within which the flight has to be managed, then there is a clear distinction between the two categories of persons”. Source: [UNHCR](#).²²

“An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students. Note: At the international level, no universally accepted definition for “migrant” exists. The present definition was developed by IOM for its own purposes and it is not meant to imply or create any new legal category.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²³

Further notes:

“Two approaches are generally adopted to define the term “migrant”: the inclusivist approach, followed among others by IOM, considers the term “migrant” as an umbrella term covering all forms of movements; the residualist approach excludes from the term “migrant” those who flee wars or persecution.” Source: [J. Carling](#).²⁴

Regular migration

“Migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²⁵

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Irregular migration

“Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²⁶

Further notes:

“Although a universally accepted definition of irregular migration does not exist, the term is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they migrate irregularly does not relieve States from the obligation to protect their rights. Moreover, categories of migrants who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels can also include refugees, victims of trafficking, or unaccompanied migrant children. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that States are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution, conflicts or generalized violence. In addition, refugees are protected under international law against being penalized for unauthorized entry or stay if they have travelled from a place where they were at risk (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137, Art. 31(1)).” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²⁷

Sometimes the term “illegal” migration is used, however the preferred more accurate term “irregular” should be used instead.

Forced migration

“Forced migration is the non-voluntary movement of a person in order to escape armed conflict, a situation of violence, violation of his or her rights, a natural disaster or a man-made disaster. This term applies to refugee movements and forced exchanges of populations between states.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²⁸

“A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion.”

Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).²⁹

Further notes:

“While not an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons (including those displaced by disasters or development projects), and, in some instances, victims of trafficking. At the international level the use of this term is debated because of the widespread recognition that a continuum of agency exists rather than a voluntary/forced dichotomy and that it might undermine the existing legal international protection regime.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³⁰

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Forced migration cont.

“In studying forced or involuntary migration — sometimes referred to as forced or involuntary displacement — a distinction is often made between conflict-induced and disaster-induced displacement. Displacement induced by conflict is typically referred to as caused by humans, whereas natural causes typically underlay displacement caused by disasters. The definitions of these concepts are useful, but the lines between them may be blurred in practice because conflicts may arise due to disputes over natural resources and human activity may trigger natural disasters such as landslides.” Source: [Migration Data Portal](#).³¹

Internal migration

“The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³²

Further notes:

“Internal migration movements can be temporary or permanent and include those who have been displaced from their habitual place of residence such as internally displaced persons, as well as persons who decide to move to a new place, such as in the case of rural–urban migration. The term also covers both nationals and non-nationals moving within a State, provided that they move away from their place of habitual residence.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³³

“In order to capture the full extent of humanitarian concerns related to migration, our description of migrants is deliberately broad: Migrants are persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. Thus, this policy includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law.” Source: [IFRC Policy on Migration](#).³⁴

Further notes:

“Migration within one country can lead to situations similar to international migration, especially if the migrants are subject to discrimination. For such situations, many recommendations of this policy will be useful. In other contexts, migration within one country is part of the general labor mobility, for example due to urbanization. In this case, support to migrants will fall under our general humanitarian action.” Source: [IFRC Policy on Migration](#).³⁵

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Climate migration

“The movement of a person or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³⁶

Further notes:

“a subcategory of environmental migration; it defines a singular type of environmental migration, where the change in the environment is due to climate change. Migration in this context can be associated with greater vulnerability of affected people, particularly if it is forced. Yet, migration can also be a form of adaptation to environmental stressors, helping to build resilience of affected individuals and communities.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³⁷

Environmental migrant

“A person or group(s) 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, [Ninety-Fourth Session Discussion Note: Migration and the Environment](#), [IOM International Dialogue on Migration \(no. 18\) Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration](#); IOM, [Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change](#).³⁸

Further notes:

“There is no international agreement on a term to be used to describe persons or groups of persons that move for environment related reasons. This definition of environmental migrant is not meant to create any new legal categories. It is a working definition aimed at describing all the various situations in which people move in the context of environmental factors.” Source: [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).³⁹

People smuggling / smuggling of migrants

“the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”. Source: [Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants \(2000\)](#).⁴⁰

Statelessness

“individuals who are not considered citizens or nationals under the operation of the laws of any country.” Source: [Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons \(1954\)](#).⁴¹

Further note:

‘A person’s citizenship and nationality may be determined based on the laws of a country where an individual is born or where her/his parents were born. A person can also lose citizenship and nationality in a number of ways, including when a country ceases to exist or a country adopts nationality laws that discriminate against certain groups.’ Source: [UNHCR](#).⁴²

Glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings

Human trafficking / people trafficking	<p>“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” Source: <u>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.</u>⁴³</p>
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