

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION... FOR DUMMIES!

*Reflections on environmental
migration from the perspective of
international solidarity.*



CARRE GEO & ENVIRONNEMENT

The purpose of this document is to compile the approaches, analyses and positions of different actors (associations, researchers, institutions) on environmental migration.

It is the result of a collaboration started in August 2018 between associative actors, and is part of Carre Geo & Environnement's advocacy activities, for the adoption of an international status for environmental migrants in general and climatic migrants in particular.

Carre Geo & Environnement (CGE)

Created in 2004 by Geography students at the University of Yaoundé 1 (Cameroon), Carre Geo & Environnement works to protect the environment and to promote sustainable development. It has two branches, one based in Cameroon and the other in France. The Cameroonian branch supports local farmers to structure their production units. The French branch contributes – within the framework of UN negotiations on sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity, desertification and migration – by promoting the adoption and implementation of development strategies and policies for marginalized and/or vulnerable segments of the population.

For Carre Geo & Environnement, migration must be approached from the perspective of human dignity, particularly in terms of policies for the reception and/or integration of displaced persons. Simultaneously, work must be carried out to resolve the reasons behind their departure. Since 2015, Carre Geo & Environnement has been advocating – within the framework of the UN climate negotiations and beyond – for the adoption of a legally binding instrument in favour of environmentally displaced persons in general and climate displaced persons in particular.

Migration has always been a human phenomenon and is an invaluable social, cultural and economic contribution. This contribution, though historically recognized, is overlooked as security and economic priorities are favoured. Carre Geo & Environnement has always denounced the implementation of policies to combat so-called illegal immigration, which cause significant violations of migrants' rights. It also condemns the instrumentalization of public development policies to restrict the free movement of people.

The issue of international migration combines several approaches: the rights of migrants in the respect of equal rights; the relationship between migration and democracy; environmental migration; global governance of migration and freedom of movement. The link between these complementary and sometimes contradictory approaches constitutes the reasoning of the social and citizen movements that make up the World Social Forums.

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INTRODUCTION

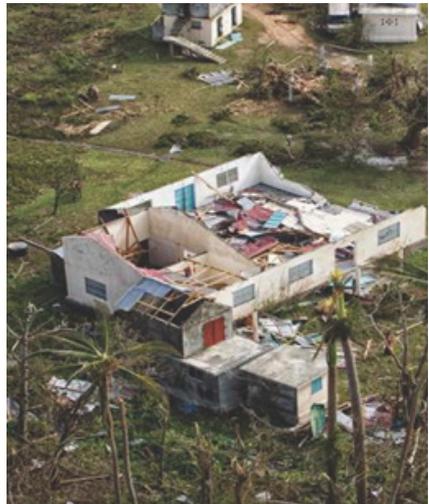
Environmental migration is understood as part of a broad acceptance of freedom of movement and settlement as defined in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹, from a perspective of universal citizenship that guarantees the same rights and opportunities for all.

The environment has emerged in recent years as a major factor for mobility. Climate change has abruptly linked geological time and human history in the medium and short term. Year upon year, the temperature of the planet is increasing. Melting glaciers, delta salinization, rising sea levels and drought are all threats to coastal towns and cities. In urban areas, temperatures are rising, destabilizing urban balance and posing a particular threat to the poorest.

It is important to note that environmental migration often combines several factors. Migration due to sudden or gradual changes

in the environment is combined with social, economic or political factors. Similarly, victims of environmental crises have the same mobility/immobility behaviour as victims of violence. Both face the same settlement issues due to the shared roots of their misfortunes: poverty, insufficient knowledge of distant lands and, particularly, punitive repression of migratory movements by the countries of destination and their “subcontractors” in transit states.

Among environmental migrants, some groups are more exposed to vulnerable situations; this is the case of the most impoverished populations, who are extremely vulnerable to climate change. And yet, these populations do not have the means to migrate. Those who can move within the same country, to another sub-region of their continent, or beyond. These displaced individuals often find themselves unprotected by international law, even



¹ “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State; 2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” UN General Assembly (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights (217 [III] A).



though they are a priority. Indigenous peoples are also particularly vulnerable and are not able to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. They are taking the full brunt of the expropriation of their land for state or private initiatives. These same harmful projects contribute to the deterioration of their environment through the pollution of rivers or soils.

Talking about environmental migration means completely rethinking the development paradigm. The forms of development currently based on cooperation with the countries of the South, through financial, material or logistical assistance, do not provide an appropriate response to environmental migration. This requires a response in terms of international governance.



"Another world is needed"

I. TERMINOLOGY AND FIGURES

A. Terminology

• Should we use the term refugee or migrant?

Refugees, within the meaning of the 1951 Geneva Convention, are those who are “outside their country of nationality, who fear for their lives because of their race, religion or political persecution.” As climate and environmental change are not yet considered as causes of persecution, the term refugee is legally unsuitable.

A differentiation should be made between international environmental migrants who cross a border and internal environmental migrants who do not cross the borders of their territory.

• Should we use the term climatic migration or environmental migration?

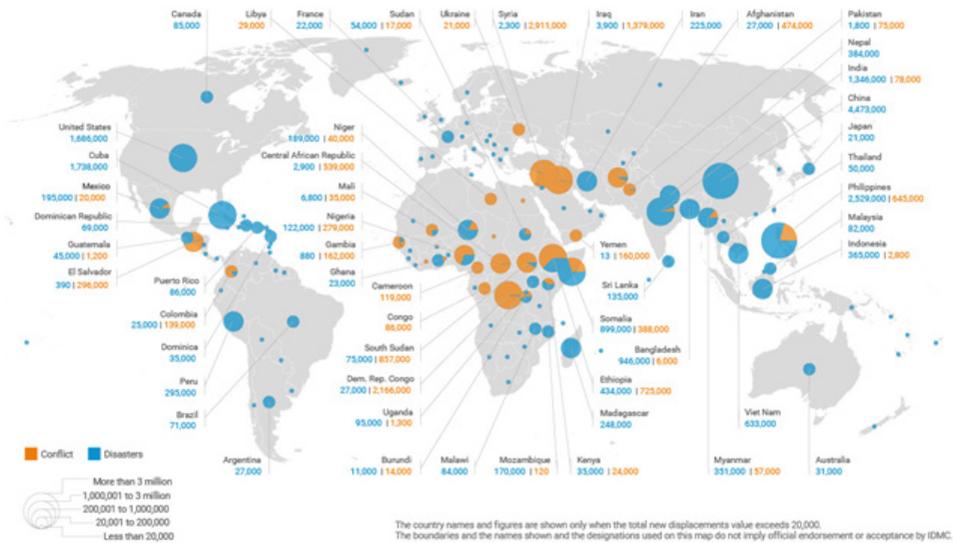
The term “climate” is now being challenged since it would only take into account phenomena due to climate change and therefore due to the increasing average temperatures. Thus, it excludes movement due to state or private initiatives that are harmful to the environment, such as forced land expropriation or industrial accidents.

The term that is more widely accepted is “environmental” as it covers both sudden-onset natural disasters and slow degradation phenomena that can lead to the physical disappearance of a state, for example the Tuvalu Islands. This term also covers environmental disruptions caused by human activity that may lead to population displacement. A first definition of environmentally displaced persons was developed by Essam El Hinnawi for the United Nations Environment Programme in 1985: “those who are forced to leave their place of residence temporarily or permanently because of an environmental disruption (of natural or human origin) that has threatened their existence or severely affected their living conditions”.

The International Organization for Migration uses the term environmental migrants. It defines them as “persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad”.



B. Figures



Map from the 2017 report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) showing displacements due to natural disasters compared to those due to conflicts.

• In 2017 :

Number of new displacements due to environmental risks: 18.8 million
 Of which due to:

- flooding: 8.6 million
- high winds: 7.5 million
- drought: 1.3 million
- geophysical risks: 758,000
- other reasons : 560,500

Forecasts for the future:

"According to estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of climate migrants could reach 200 million by 2050. By the end of the century, it could reach up to 1 billion people depending on temperature increases. These migrations may be temporary or permanent. They are often concentrated in the same country or the same region, but with this increase, international migration will also increase. The regions most likely to be affected by these climate-related migration phenomena are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, most of Central America, parts of West Africa and Southeast Asia." (IOM study, Copenhagen Conference, 2009).

The IOM forecasts between 25 million and 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050. The World Bank's Groundswell report published figures in March 2018 based on micro models developed using the cases of Mexico, India and Ethiopia, and then extrapolated them to continental groups. This document estimates the number of climate-related migrants within South America, South Asia and Africa at 143 million. These migrations can take place within a country or take the form of cross-border movement, often between countries of the South.

The link between climate change and population movements is clearly established in the IPCC's comparative forecasts. An additional half degree of warming, between 1.5°C and 2°C, would have significant impacts. This would lead to an increase in the average temperature over most of the land and ocean, the rise of extreme temperatures, torrential rains in some regions and an increased risk of drought and rainfall deficits in others. A warming of 1.5°C would cause sea levels to rise by 26 to 77 cm by 2100, while a warming of 2°C would add an additional 10 cm. Ten million people would then be forced to abandon their homes and workplaces. The drop in cereal crop yields would be much greater at 2°C, especially for the countries with the lowest greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Environmental aspects are already a deciding factor for many migratory routes which are often labelled as economic.



II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

From an international solidarity perspective, we can identify four main historical approaches to environmental migration.

A. Revision of the Geneva Convention

Today, there is no defined legal status, either at a national or an international level. The Geneva Convention does not consider environmental migrants as legal refugees.

For some, it would be appropriate to extend the scope of current legislation advocated in the Geneva Convention. Assuming that human beings are aware that their industrial activity at the current level causes irreversible damage to the planet, which also leads to the destruction or inhabitability of land, they should be aware of their responsibility for the influx of environmental migration. As a result, people displaced by these disruptions would be victims of political persecution. As such, these migrations would be subject to the framework defined by Article 1.A of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

The amendment of Article 1 of the Geneva Convention would make it possible to legally establish the definition of a “climate refugee” and thus to grant this term international legitimacy within a convention signed or ratified by 150 UN Member States.

This proposal is rather obsolete and does not have strong support today. The current convention is not being respected and the scope of international law is being further restricted by national legislation. To attempt to change the Geneva Convention would mean taking the risk of opening a Pandora’s box allowing increasingly isolationist governments to reduce the protection of individuals guaranteed by the text as it stands.

B. Creation of a new status

Various NGOs are calling for the creation of a new legal status in order to preserve the rights of individuals, particularly for internally displaced persons from the same continent or sub-region. This status would affirm migrant’s rights to choose their host country. Since 2015, Carre Geo & Environnement has been carrying out advocacy work within the framework of the UN climate negotiations for the adoption of an international status for climate refugees.

Recognition of this status would result in the adoption of a new convention that should guarantee fundamental rights for victims of environmental disasters. This new convention should also fill the legal void of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which, in

its definition of refugee, does not address environmental grounds for protection. The negotiating framework for this convention is now the UN climate negotiations, COPs, where a dedicated panel on population displacement is responsible for pushing forward negotiations within the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.

In 2008, researchers from CRIDEAU and CIDCE (University of Limoges) proposed a draft convention on the international status of environmental displaced persons. This convention proposes the creation of a body attached to the United Nations to ensure the

proper implementation of the status: The World Agency for Environmental Displaced Persons (WEDA). This institution would be divided into four parts: a high authority, a global environment facility (GEF), a scientific council and a secretariat.

Categorization risk

The multiplication of statuses would facilitate categorization at a time when the distinction between political, economic and climate refugees is not easy as the causes of migration are often multifactorial. By ignoring the specificities of these populations, we also risk missing the most vulnerable populations, both in our discourse and in our assistance. They have no possibility of claiming national, regional or international protection.

C. Development of legal migration routes

Today the debate is also focusing on legal migration channels such as the introduction of humanitarian visas proposed by certain NGOs and states (New Zealand and Australia) for populations fleeing their countries due to sudden-onset natural disasters or progressive environmental degradation. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration encourages states to introduce specific humanitarian visas and temporary work permits, and promote the creation of private sponsorships, and relocation planning.

Nevertheless, this agreement, adopted in Marrakech in December 2018, is non-binding and its implementation is largely based on the goodwill of states. The current context does not seem to be favourable to the effective implementation of this type of mechanism, contrary to other aspects of this agreement that are more dangerous for human rights (encouragement for registration, no questioning of the criminalisation of migrants or border outsourcing policies).

Some organizations want migration to be seen as a strategy for adjusting to environmental risks, not as a last resort measure. To this end, it is essential for states to establish legal migration channels in the form of visas, humanitarian corridors or the lifting of visa requirements for populations in a situation of vulnerability due to environmental reasons. This will enable people who need to migrate for these reasons to do so in a way that respects their dignity and safety at each stage of their migration journey.

D. The need to define new models of cooperation

Some associations believe that the environmental and global reality requires a global distribution of efforts with a system of subsidies from rich countries to the countries that are affected the most. They demand the urgent establishment of adaptation mechanisms for populations and countries where the effects of climate change are already being felt: hosting, protection and resettlement of entire populations. These mechanisms must be in

line with the principle of climate justice and must be based on both the loss/damage and adaptation criteria defined by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the Global Migration Pact adopted by 191 States within the United Nations in September 2018.



“Freedom of movement is a right for all”

III. ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION: A CHALLENGE FOR CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

Population movements are one of the consequences of extreme weather events and slow-onset events. This damage is addressed – within the framework of the UN climate negotiations – in the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, which was adopted by States at the 19th UN Climate Conference.

The Warsaw International Mechanism is an institutional mechanism, under the authority of the Subsidiary Body for

Scientific and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body for the Implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Its mission is to facilitate the implementation of approaches to address the losses and damages resulting from the adverse effects of climate change. In particular, extreme weather events and slow-onset phenomena in developing countries.



In 2015, at COP21, a special group on population movements was established within this institutional framework. One of its tasks was to develop and adopt, no later than COP24 in 2018, recommendations for the development of comprehensive strategies to prevent, reduce and respond to population movements related to the negative impacts of climate change. The mandate of this group has been extended beyond 2018.

There are two opposing positions:

- NGOs and small island states for whom it is important to advocate for the adoption of innovative, additional and separate financing mechanisms in order to adapt and develop new methods of assistance applying the “polluter pays” principle. These additional financing measures should enable developing countries and small island states to cope with the inevitable and irreversible consequences of losses and damages.

- The members of the “Umbrella group” – non-EU industrialised countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, United States, Israel) – for whom the challenge is to maintain the notion of

“common but differentiated responsibility” and the regulations of the Paris Agreement, rather than the “polluter pays” principle, which reflects the historic liability of industrialized countries.

The expression “common but differentiated responsibility” encourages the emergence of responsibilities while inducing a “dilution of responsibilities” that effectively reduces the responsibilities of industrialized countries.

The “polluter pays” principle is based on climate justice. In fact, diluting loss and damage in adaptation considerations, as was the case at COP24, under the pressure of the members of the umbrella group, is a step backwards in terms of the very principle of adopting the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage in 2013. The latter recognized that loss and damage related to the effects of climate change were distinct from adaptation, leading to the need for states to define financing measures separate from those related to adaptation. This will enable developing countries to tackle the adverse effects of climate change without hindering their ability to develop.



IV. CONCLUSION

Climate change and environmental disasters are accelerating the degradation of the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations, who are also the least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. This degradation of living conditions is therefore due to inequalities in the distribution of wealth. This is therefore an issue of migration and climate justice that must be addressed from the perspective of international solidarity. While these movements in favour of climate justice on the one hand and the rights of migrants on the other are not yet sufficiently aligned, Carre Geo & Environnement and other organizations gathered within the CRID are building a strategy of international solidarity to federate these social movements. This convergence represents a step towards a change in the development paradigm and an opportunity to rethink international solidarity.



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