

## 17<sup>TH</sup> OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

“Migration management and its linkages with economic, social and environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security in the OSCE region”

### SECOND PREPARATORY CONFERENCE

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#### “Migration and the Environment”

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will try to accomplish two objectives today: first of all to briefly introduce the IOM perspective on the links between migration and the environment, with a particular emphasis on the implications for human security, and secondly, outline how we see the way forward.

The environment has always shaped human mobility as people have historically left places with harsh or deteriorating conditions. In recent years however, the growing certainties regarding the realities of climate change brought increased attention to the linkages between the environment and human mobility.

Already in the 1990s, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted that "one of the gravest effects of climate change may be on human migration".<sup>1</sup> Successive reports of the IPCC and other publications on the impacts of climate change have lead most of us to recognize that environmental migration will dramatically increase over the next decades, as a result of such factors as the rising intensity of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, spreading of droughts, changing rainfall patterns, etc.

So, we can expect environmental factors to be increasingly determining the nature of human mobility in the future as well as its humanitarian and human security dimensions. Although there is a broad consensus that environmental migration will be growing, there is a real gap in terms of reliable estimates of the current or future migration triggered by environmental factors. The available estimates vary from 50 million to 1 billion<sup>2</sup> people moving for environmental reasons by the middle of the century. Such disparity among the available figures indicates that what we have is ‘guesstimates’ rather reliable figures. The most widely cited figure is 200 million people displaced by environmental factors by 2050. To provide a better idea of the scale, this figure equals the current estimates of the total number of international migrants worldwide<sup>3</sup> and is ten-times the number of IDPs and documented refugees. This clearly illustrates the challenge climate change is expected to present to the humanitarian action and migration management.

One of the reasons for the difficulty in establishing better estimates of environmental migration is the complexity of the relationship between environmental factors and the movement of people.

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<sup>1</sup> *IPCC First Assessment Report* (1990) at p. 103, para. 5.0.10.

<sup>2</sup> See, Norman Myers (1993) “Environmental Refugees in a Globally Warmed World”, *BioScience*, 43 (11), pp. 757-761; and Christian Aid *Human Tide: The Real Migration Crisis*, May 2007.

<sup>3</sup> IOM (2008) “Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy” *World Migration Report 2008*, p. 2.

## **What is the nature of this complexity? What types of movement are linked to environmental factors?**

The evacuation of people in face of a fast-approaching hurricane; a subsistence farmer heading for the city because her yields have been declining year after year; the movement of nomadic peoples with the seasons; a drought-affected village putting together money to send some of its young men to a neighbouring country for temporary work; the relocation of entire populations whose territory is threatened by rising sea levels – all these are possible and actual examples of “migrations” related to environmental factors.

Such manifestations of the link between migration and the environment throw up a number of questions, for example: Who moves, for how long and where? Will they come back? Who does not move and why? When is migration a choice, when a necessity? Do the answers to these questions differ depending on the severity of environmental degradation? If yes, can we say at which stage an individual will decide to move? Will this move be voluntary or forced?

Already from these questions it is obvious that we are dealing with a complex issue. What we need is to see the “big picture”: the environment can be a driver of migration, sometimes a predominant one, but more often than not it is a complex combination of causes that determines whether – or not – someone moves. And just as the environment is one among many factors driving migration, migration is just one possible response to the pressures exerted by the environment. An individual who decides to – or is compelled to – migrate will take this momentous step based on a whole host of considerations: how can I secure my income and livelihood? What are my networks? And most importantly: what are my alternatives? In the complex picture of the migration-environment nexus, economic, social and political factors are just as likely as environmental factors to form pieces of the puzzle.

Given the multi-causality of migration, drawing a line between voluntary movements and forced is highly challenging. With the exception of displacement caused by natural disasters, the distinction between forced and voluntary environmental migration is blurred. Through a progressive worsening of conditions, a “tipping point” may be reached, when the decision to move is not yet “forced”, but it is also not voluntary. One may think of environmental migration is a continuum from clear cases of forced migration to clear cases of voluntary migration, with a very large grey zone in between.

At this juncture, let me note that that in addition to the numbers gap, there is also a terminology gap. There is no universally accepted definition of people moving as a result of environmental factors. “Environmental refugee” has been coined by the media. But it is increasingly recognized by the international community, including UNHCR, that it is a misnomer under international law, in view of the definition of a refugee provided in the 1951 Convention. In an attempt to address this gap, IOM has proposed to its Member States a working definition of “*environmental migrants*” as “*persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions are obliged to leave their homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad*”.<sup>4</sup>

With this working definition, we try to encompass the various complexities mentioned above. The definition acknowledges that environmentally-induced migration can be internal as well as international; short-term or long-term and result from sudden or gradual environmental change. Please also note that this definition covers not only forced migration but also the case

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<sup>4</sup> IOM (2007) “Migration and the Environment”, *Discussion Note*, can be accessed at [http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/evolving\\_global\\_economy\\_2728112007/MC\\_INF\\_288\\_EN.pdf](http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/evolving_global_economy_2728112007/MC_INF_288_EN.pdf)

of migration as a normal, or near normal, adaptation strategy to environmental change, notably at early stages of environmental degradation.

In terms of the mobility patterns, much of environmental migration is temporary and circular. It is also predominantly internal, a smaller proportion is between neighbouring countries, and even smaller numbers migrate long distances. Crucially, IOM has reason to believe that movement caused by gradual environmental degradation will be *as*, if not *more*, significant in terms of patterns and volumes of movement as displacement triggered by natural disasters.

### **What are the impacts of the intersection between migration and the environment? What are the implications for security and human security?**

Although most of the discussions currently focus on the impacts of the environment on migration, effects of migration on the environment is something that also warrants attention. Migration, especially mass migration, can have significant environmental repercussions for areas of origin, areas of destination, and the travel routes in between. Such a two-way connection between migration and the environment can result in a vicious circle: if population movement contributes to environmental degradation in the area of destination, this can result in further onward migration and displacement.

From the vantage point of security, we can say that the relationship between the environmental factors and the movement of people can both affect and be affected by conflict. Inflows of people can lead to increased resource inequality and competition over livelihood factors such as water or land between migrants and the local population, potentially leading to increased tensions and even conflict.

The current research, however, suggests that while environmental stresses and/or unmanaged mass movement of people may contribute to and exacerbate pre-existing tensions, it is not a simple cause and effect relationship. Empirical evidence does not support the view that environmental change creates mass migration flows which will in turn spur violent conflicts. A lot depends on the local context, pre-existing tensions, socio-cultural traditions and dispute-resolution mechanisms as well as a variety of other factors. In this context, it's important to identify and focus our efforts on the potential hotspots - areas with a complex mix of environmental, social and political issues.

Climate change is expected to further exacerbate the situation in such regions. Let me quote here Javier Solana, who in one of his speeches pointed out that "The most appropriate way of viewing climate change is as a threat multiplier: it aggravates the stresses and strains within and between countries. Climate change threatens to overburden those countries and regions that are already fragile and conflict-prone." The highest body for international security, the United Nations Security Council, is currently considering a draft resolution which would recognize the threat posed to international security by climate change.

In addition to conflict, other variables, such as population growth, poverty and governance play a significant role in shaping the outcomes of environmental change for the lives and livelihoods of the affected populations. Overall, the vulnerability of a given population group to the impacts of environmental factors is a combination of ecological and, broadly speaking, social factors. Therefore, countries with particularly susceptible geographies, such as low lying coastal regions, the Sahel Belt and the dry-land regions in Central Asia, and less developed regions on the other, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of environmental change. The adverse effects will be most severe in countries which combine both types of vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the most vulnerable and marginalized groups within these countries – the poor, the elderly, women and children tend to bear the brunt of environmental impacts and require special attention. This was one of the messages that came out of the discussions held on this issue last year by the Greek Chairmanship of the Human Security Network in collaboration with IOM.<sup>5</sup> Environmental pressures exacerbate pre-existing problems and accentuate underlying social fault lines.

One last point on vulnerability: as migration requires economic and other resources, it is a coping strategy not open to everyone. So, typically it is not the poorest and most vulnerable to, say, flood or drought who are most likely to migrate.

To reduce vulnerability we need to expand and improve the range of different options for distributing risks and for coping with environmental changes and pressures. Migration is one of the oldest risk and livelihood diversification strategies used by humans as a response to the changing environment. Migration is used by the communities affected by environmental degradation as a way to diversify sources of income and reduce risk. As an example, until the political instability in Côte d'Ivoire in 1999, drought-prone villages in Burkina Faso regularly and in large numbers sent members of the community to the neighbouring country to work on plantations. Their remittances were invested in schools and hospitals as well as water and irrigation systems.

In addition to helping strengthen and diversify livelihoods through remittances and migrants' investments, return migration in particular can bring new skills and know-how to the areas of origin. In other words, if managed effectively, migration can help to increase the long-term resilience of vulnerable communities; it can be part of the solution not only part of the problem.

This brings us to an important point: attempts to stem migration at all costs may increase rather than decrease people's vulnerability to environmental pressures acting upon them, as such measures effectively reduce the range of options open to the affected communities.

There is no doubt that migration is forced in many instances, and this needs to be reduced as much as possible, but we need to ensure that migration can also be a choice, and thereby a genuine coping and adaptation strategy. Unfortunately, the potential of migration as a mechanism for adaptation and livelihood diversification has not yet quite entered our thinking and policy-making.

### **What are the possible policy and programmatic responses?**

I would propose three key words to characterise the approach we need to move forward on migration and the environment: comprehensive, proactive and cooperative.

With these keywords in mind, we need to address the existing gaps in research, policy and operations.

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<sup>5</sup> Please see <http://www.iom.int/hsnconference>

## **Operations**

There is a clear need to bolster humanitarian action with adequate resources to meet the growing challenge of climate change. Much of what is done in terms of emergency and humanitarian assistance work is essentially reactive. What is needed is a move towards disaster risk reduction measures, including prevention, vulnerability analysis, early warning and preparedness.

Preparedness requires building the capacity of governments and raising the awareness of the potential risks among vulnerable populations. Here's one example of a project implemented by IOM to this end in the regions of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan affected by natural disasters. The aim of the project is to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and communities in planning and preparing for natural disasters. The project develops and implements emergency plans in villages and provides information sessions on the danger and the risk of staying within a disaster-prone zone to residents of at-risk areas. The latter includes in particular information campaigns in schools located in areas most vulnerable to earthquakes.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that when migration happens it is a true choice: to minimize forced instances of environmental migration and to ensure that people have viable alternatives to migration in the areas of origin. We need to look at possible measures beyond humanitarian relief and recognize that this is very much a development issue. Community stabilization initiatives should be considered – initiatives directed towards strengthening the infrastructure, improving access to drinking water and in other ways strengthening the coping capacity of communities affected by environmental degradation. The efforts to increase the resilience of vulnerable populations need to include better management of environmental migration that is already taking place. One of the options in this context is facilitating temporary and circular labour migration schemes with environmentally vulnerable communities and seeking to strengthen the effects of such migration on the development of areas of origin.

A concrete project example of how this can work:

In Colombia, a Temporary and Circular Labour Migration programme enables people confronted with natural disasters such as floods or volcanic eruptions to temporarily seek work abroad. One member of a family usually goes abroad. Structures are in place to make sure that money sent home by the migrants is used to support migrants and their families and the area's recovery. These remittances are channelled, for example, towards housing and educational projects.

## **Research**

Awareness raising and effective proactive intervention require better understanding of the links between the movement of people and various environmental factors. There is a need for innovative research methods to generate credible quantitative estimates and forecasts of environmental migration and to identify hotspot countries for targeted assistance. The Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios (EACH-FOR) project funded by the European Commission and implemented by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in cooperation with a range of partners, including IOM and OSCE, brought us closer to addressing the empirical gap.

Currently, IOM, in collaboration with UNU-EHS and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, is implementing a new research which aims to systematically take stock of existing research evidence in the field of migration and the environment in order to highlight the implications for policy and to prepare the ground work for further empirical and a larger-

scale global programme of work. It will assess the current gaps in migration and environment research and seek to identify innovative methods of analysis and data collection<sup>6</sup>.

**On the policy side**, it is necessary to build coherence at the national and international levels between migration and the environment, including the climate change part of the equation. For the moment, National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) do not include migration considerations. Similarly, national migration management policies do not incorporate environment and climate change considerations. On the international level, implications of climate change for human mobility are not considered within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. There is a need to mainstream environmental and climate change considerations into migration management policies and practice and vice-versa, including in the context of the current UNFCCC negotiations. Furthermore, it is important to also strengthen synergies with the humanitarian and development fields.

### **Partnerships**

Closing the above gaps, moving towards proactive intervention and achieving interdisciplinary coherence will not be possible without regional, international, and global collaboration and coordination. Cooperation which would reach not only across countries, but also across disciplines, incorporating, inter alia, climate science, geography, migration, development studies and health; collaboration involving governments, international organizations, civil society and local communities.

Organizations such as the OSCE have an important role in facilitating such cooperation, promoting holistic and comprehensive approaches to migration and the environment, acting as a catalyst for addressing the existing gaps, including by identifying and sharing best practices, and of course in raising the awareness of the governments and the international community at large of the challenges but also opportunities related to the migration and environment nexus.

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<sup>6</sup> 7 papers will be produced 1) conceptualizing the migration and environment; 2) challenges to measuring the migration and environment nexus; 3) collecting data on the migration and environment; 4) migration and natural disasters; 5) migration and chronic environmental degradation; 6) managing environmentally induced migration; and 7) legal frameworks and policy responses.