

# Cities, Climate and Migration

## The role of cities at the climate-migration nexus

March 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**C4O**  
CITIES



Mayors Migration Council



## AUTHORS

---

**William Roderick**, Benefits Research Officer,  
C40 Cities

**Snigdha Garg**, Senior Adaptation Research  
Manager, C40 Cities

**Luisa Miranda Morel**, Senior Manager, Inclusive  
Climate Action Forum and Academies, C40  
Cities

**Kate Brick**, Deputy Executive Director, Mayors  
Migration Council

**Maggie Powers**, Head of Policy and Advocacy,  
Mayors Migration Council

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

### Partnership Leads

*C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group*

**Caterina Sarfatti**, Director, Inclusive Climate  
Action Programme, C40 Cities

**Luisa Miranda Morel**, Inclusive Climate Action  
Diplomacy and City Engagement Manager,  
C40

*Mayors Migration Council*

**Vittoria Zanuso**, Executive Director,  
Mayors Migration Council

**Kate Brick**, Deputy Executive Director,  
Mayors Migration Council

**Maggie Powers**, Head of Programs and  
Advocacy, Mayors Migration Council

### Other contributors

**Rachel Huxley**, Director of Knowledge  
and Learning, C40 Cities

Cover photo / Hong Kong (China) - unsplash  
Back cover photo / Milan (Italy) - unsplash



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

//////

**The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that by 2050, there could be between 25 million to 1 billion people moving either within their countries or across borders for climate-related reasons.**

//////

The compounding effects of the climate crisis will continue to drive migration flows over the coming decades. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that by 2050, there could be between 25 million to 1 billion people moving either within their countries or across borders for climate-related reasons.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, nation states and international bodies have begun to recognise this and are working together to define key frameworks such as the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Task Force on Displacement, as well as agreements like the Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact on Refugees.

These frameworks speak to the urgency of climate breakdown and its resulting impact on human mobility and seek solutions to safeguard those worst affected by climate-induced displacement. However, while a step in the right direction, there is still no comprehensive legal framework to define people driven to move by climate, or an internationally agreed and implemented protection mechanism. This lack of protection affects, first and foremost, the people who move and are forcibly displaced. Critically, this also leaves those on the frontlines who face the complex impacts of climate migration – mayors – without the legal, financial or policy support to proactively address the challenges and leverage the opportunities where climate and migration intersect.

Whether cities are the origin, transit point or destination for climate-induced migration, the intersection of climate impacts and migration – the climate-migration nexus – is relevant to them in two fundamental ways. First, because **climate-induced migration flows** affect urban communities, infrastructure, services and socio-economic health. Second, because **local action to mitigate or adapt** to the climate crisis have the potential to advance the inclusion of migrants and displaced people or further entrench their marginalisation and exposure to inequality and risk. Through understanding, planning and delivery of inclusive action at the climate-migration nexus, cities and their residents can be more resilient, more just and more prosperous. This will be particularly critical as they work towards a green, just and inclusive recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic. Mayors are leading the way by showing what equitable and inclusive climate action looks like in practice and by protecting the rights of migrants and displaced people through reception and inclusion policies. But more needs to be done at the national and international level to (1) recognise the experience of cities in responding to the impacts of climate change and (2) support city-led actions at the front line.



## CITIES LEADING IN ACTION AT THE CLIMATE- MIGRATION NEXUS

Mayors and local leaders know that their cities' collective resilience, well-being and economic health hinges on ensuring an environmentally and socially just future for all – including those moving or displaced for climate-related reasons. This means that every resident, regardless of legal status, must be protected and have the tools, resources and pathways to leverage the invaluable assets that they bring to their communities.

Cities such as Anchorage (U.S.), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Bristol (UK), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Houston (U.S.) provide critical examples of city leadership in addressing the challenges and opportunities that emerge at climate-migration nexus by:

- **Taking an inclusive and integrated approach to policymaking:** Using a cross-departmental, holistic approach to policy design and analysis that helps break down silos within the city and includes migrant populations through proactive consultation and engagement. This will help to ensure that policies reflect and respond to migrants' needs and that they have influence over the decisions that affect their lives.
- **Leading inclusive communications and community engagement strategies:** Designing and implementing inclusive, accessible, multi-language communication and engagement mechanisms to ensure all city residents have equal access to critical information, city-led campaigns and initiatives, and city services, regardless of migration status.
- **Ensuring inclusive and equitable service provision:** Implementing actions and policies that facilitate the protection and inclusion of all newcomers regardless of migration status – including those moving or displaced for climate-related reasons – to ensure basic service provision that meets the varied needs of individuals and builds the resilience of the city overall.

## BEYOND LOCAL PRACTICE: THE LEGAL AND POLICY LANDSCAPE

Cities alone cannot effectively meet the challenges and maximise opportunities that come with the complex dynamics of climate migration. As the international community works to better define and improve frameworks and safeguarding mechanisms around climate migration, mayors must have a seat at the table. This paper identifies a number of potential entry points for cities to play a greater role, alongside national and international bodies in defining and implementing these policies.

**At the national level** these include policies that: establish the right to protection from environmental harm (France, Sweden, Finland, Ethiopia, African Union Nations and Tuvalu); push for national adaptation programmes to consider climate induced migration and the importance of consultative and voluntary relocation and dignified movement (Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu); recognise climate-determined seasonal employment and temporary visas (New Zealand and Costa Rica); and promote financial investment, support and research on the topic of climate induced migration (United States, United Kingdom and Fiji).

**At the international level** there are opportunities for mayors to exercise leadership and undertake joint advocacy by engaging in and leveraging the key international frameworks that address displacement and mobility in the context of climate change, including: the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration<sup>2</sup> and the Global Compact on Refugees;<sup>3</sup> the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals; the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement;<sup>4</sup> the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction;<sup>5</sup> the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework;<sup>6</sup> and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (the 'Kampala Convention').<sup>7</sup>

## REMAINING CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD TO SUPPORT CITY ACTION

Despite much progress in leading action at the climate-migration nexus, cities face a number of challenges at the **local**, **national** and **international** levels. To deliver on strategies that protect and empower those communities that are moving due to climate change, prioritise inclusive climate action, and ultimately lead a green and just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, they need to be further supported and empowered in the following critical ways.

### A SEAT AT THE DECISION-MAKING TABLE

City leaders demand to be included in the creation and design of policies and setting of standards with national and international partners. This includes ensuring that frameworks are informed with local knowledge, championing a bottom-up approach and providing a greater mandate from national authorities to address critical climate challenges, localising climate resilience measures and safeguarding frontline communities within their jurisdictions.

### ENABLING POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS

Stronger and more coordinated cross-departmental strategies from national governments and international bodies are required for cities to do this work effectively. These strategies must provide appropriate resources, frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, informed by city experiences and local knowledge. Enforcement mechanisms – including legally binding international frameworks – must take integrated approaches to addressing the nexus between the climate crisis and consequent migration flows, safeguarding those affected.

### INCREASING CITY ACCESS TO FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

While some financing mechanisms with the potential to support cities have been identified,<sup>A</sup> cities highlight financial and resource constraints that limit their capacity to address climate risks and migration holistically and at scale. National and international funding mechanisms that address climate and/or migration should work to create funding streams that address their intersection and must include city governments as eligible recipients. This includes providing and facilitating investment opportunities and direct and flexible funding to cities to support capacity building, technical assistance and anticipatory planning, not only response and recovery.

Cities highlight a lack of baseline information on climate-induced movement within countries – and specifically to cities – and qualitative data on how urban residents who moved or were displaced for climate-related reasons experience and access city services. Lack of data is a consistent and significant barrier in developing targeted policies and city planning in response to climate-induced migration flows; and more importantly a barrier to preparing to mitigate future climate disasters. Critical research such as the World Bank's 2018 'Groundswell' report,<sup>8</sup> efforts by organisations like the Platform for Disaster Displacement and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, and resources such as the *Satellite Applications Catapult* and *flowminder.org* offer a strong starting point for increasing data on climate migration flows. However, many of these efforts are done at the national level without taking into consideration local needs and perspectives; more needs to be done to link up and build knowledge in collaboration with cities.

<sup>A</sup> e.g. City Climate Finance Gap Fund, national-level climate adaptation funds, the UNCDF Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility and the International Municipal Investment Fund.

## REFERENCES

---

1. IOM, 2008. Migration and Climate Change. IOM Migration Research Series No. 31. Geneva: IOM. <[https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-31\\_en.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs-31_en.pdf)>
2. UNFCCC, 2019. Task Force on Displacement. Website. <<https://unfccc.int/wim-excom/sub-groups/TFD>>
3. UNHCR, 2018. The Global Compact on Refugees. Webpage. <[www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html)>
4. UNFCCC, 2019. Task Force on Displacement. Website. <<https://unfccc.int/wim-excom/sub-groups/TFD>>
5. UNDRR, 2015. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. <[www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030](http://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030)>
6. UNFCC, 2011. The Cancun Agreements – adaption. <<https://unfccc.int/tools/cancun/adaptation/index.html>>
7. Ibid.
8. World Bank, 2018. Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration.



