

# Science for Environment Policy

## Time to act on climate change induced migration

**A recent report presents a series of recommendations for how the EU could address the complex issue of climate change induced migration.** There is now sufficient evidence to show that environment-related migration is occurring, and the time is right to put recommendations into practice, the report's authors argue.

**Climate change has important implications for migration;** for example, drought can degrade livelihoods and weaken people's ability to cope with poverty and conflict. The report highlights the fact that the vast majority of the world's climate-induced refugee population currently stay within their home regions — and therefore the combination of population growth, the increase in the quantity and intensity of extreme environmental events and a lack of adaptive capacity will put increasing pressure on their homelands.

The EU has recognised the problem of [climate change](#)-related migration. For example, its 2013 document '[Climate change, environmental degradation and migration](#)' highlights the need for further analysis and says a comprehensive migration policy should consider environmentally triggered migration. The EU has also funded a number of research projects to improve our understanding of the issue.

The new think tank report says that the time has now come to put research evidence into practice and develop suitable policies. A holistic policy approach is needed to tackle the multi-dimensional nature of human movement in response to environmental degradation, it reasons.

It is difficult to develop well-designed policies that address this challenge because the links between climate change and migration are very complex. Furthermore, there is currently no legal definition of an 'environment-related migrant'. The issue is further complicated by unresolved questions of who is accountable and financially liable for climate-change-triggered migration.

However, complexity is not a reason to avoid tackling this issue, the report argues. It is also unlikely that large numbers of people will permanently move to Europe solely for climate-related reasons.

Women are seen as especially vulnerable to climate change's effects in many countries, because a lack of resources, education and decision-making powers, among other reasons, can restrict their mobility. However, the authors also make the point that some forms of migration reduce vulnerability. For example, there is evidence that some farmers in climate-stressed countries move to cities during periods of water shortage to find temporary work. The report's authors believe that the EU should take a leading role in addressing the phenomenon. They recommend that EU funding streams should create mechanisms for people to move from vulnerable areas and EU policies relating to environmental migration should give vulnerable groups special consideration.

The authors also recommend that language is considered carefully in institutional communication dealing with migration, as choice of words can express an opinion. For instance, calling someone an 'immigrant' or an 'emigrant' or a 'climate refugee' all have different implications, and may either reinforce or deconstruct negative stereotypes about migrants.

The authors emphasise that it is sensible to focus on preventing displacement in the first place. However, this should not be the sole focus of migration policy, which should also consider sharing the responsibility of migration in affected regions.



September 2015  
Thematic Issue 51

Migration in response  
to environmental  
change

Subscribe to free  
weekly News Alert

**Source:** Ammer, M.,  
Mayrhofer, M, Randall, A. &  
Salsbury, J. (2014) *TIME  
TO ACT - How the EU Can  
Lead on Climate Change  
and Migration*. Brussels:  
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.  
Available from:  
<http://eu.boell.org/en/2014/06/12/time-act-how-eu-can-lead-climate-change-and-migration>

**Contact:**  
[sylvia.brugger@eu.boell.org](mailto:sylvia.brugger@eu.boell.org)

**Read more about:**  
[Climate change and energy, Sustainable development and policy assessment](#)

The contents and views  
included in *Science for  
Environment Policy* are  
based on independent,  
peer-reviewed research  
and do not necessarily  
reflect the position of the  
European Commission.

To cite this  
article/service: "[Science  
for Environment Policy](#)";  
European Commission DG  
Environment News Alert  
Service, edited by  
SCU, The University of the  
West of England, Bristol.