



MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE

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research, policy and practice worldwide

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Introduction: Navigating migration policy shifts in a time of profound uncertainty

Marie McAuliffe, Richa Arora and Jenna Nassiri¹

Global systems are undergoing rapid transformations, driven not only by environmental, geopolitical and technological change but also by sharp pivots in international policy and multilateralism. One such pivot continues to unfold, as the United States undertakes a comprehensive review of its foreign policy objectives and international aid delivery, which commenced in early 2025.² While the findings and implications of this review are still emerging, analysts agree that we are likely to witness a dramatic shift in international engagement and funding priorities with profound implications for populations in developing countries directly affected, including most especially the people and communities who receive life-saving aid around the world. Among these beneficiaries are extremely vulnerable migrants, including those who have been displaced from their homes or have been victims of human trafficking networks. The contours of the post-human rights landscape have already been well documented by analysts and researchers for several years,³ although the implications of a hollowed out multilateral system take this to another level entirely.

Amid shifting policy directives and funding realignments, we are in the midst of shifting multilateral cooperation with major reverberations across the global humanitarian and migration landscape. These policy shifts have reoriented humanitarian aid, with the potential to further align it towards geo-security and foreign policy objectives in many countries and regions. In response, actors across the multilateral system will have to explore new models of engagement, partnership and sustainability in an evolving global landscape, including how to leverage frameworks like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

This issue of *Migration Policy Practice* is released amid great uncertainty for international systems and norms, with major implications for how States respond to shocks across a wide range of economic, trade, political, security and development domains. Migration and mobility are deeply embedded within these domains, and the ramifications of upheaval will be felt first and foremost by local communities, including those who are at risk of (further) displacement due to a range of factors, such as conflict, insecurity, disaster and more. The articles in this issue cover a diverse range of topics, including on climate change and environmental shocks: the impact of the Kerala floods on migrant households (Pasricha and Batra), climate-induced statelessness in Small Island Developing States (Aggarwal and Freihardt), the role of development finance in responding to disaster displacement in Asia and the Pacific (Cazabat) and the potential for classifying remittances as climate finance

¹ Marie McAuliffe, IOM; Richa Arora, GiZ; and Jenna Nassiri, IOM and York University.

² The White House, *Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid* (20 January 2025).

³ Imogen Foulkes, "Are we heading towards a 'post human rights world'?" BBC (30 December 2016); Marie McAuliffe, "A 'post-human rights' era is emerging. Here's what it means for migrants – and how to stop it", World Economic Forum (8 April 2024).



(Huckstep and Beynon). Also included are articles on the evolution of civic and political inclusion of migrants (McAuliffe and Lincango), responsible artificial intelligence in migration governance (Beduschi) and the evaluation of reintegration support in the Horn of Africa (Barnett et al.). As the field of migration and the thousands of migration practitioners, policymakers and researchers seek to navigate a rapidly changing landscape, this research and analysis offers an opportunity to critically assess where we have come from, what could be reimagined or set aside in shaping more responsive and resilient migration systems and policies moving forward.

We hope you find this issue insightful.

Marie, Richa and Jenna



Beyond the waters: The impact of the Kerala floods on migrant households and left behind families

Himani Pasricha and Pooja Batra¹

Introduction

The escalating impact of climate change has led to increasingly frequent and severe disaster events, with South Asia being one of the most affected regions. In South-East Asia, extreme weather events like cyclones, floods and typhoons caused the internal displacement of 9.6 million people in 2019, accounting for nearly 30 per cent of global displacements that year and 15 per cent of displacements due to disasters in 2022.²

Kerala, home to numerous large river systems, relies heavily on monsoon rainfall for water availability. However, changing climatic patterns have intensified the frequency and magnitude of flooding, resulting in devastating consequences for communities.³ These floods cause significant damage to lives, property and

crops, disproportionately affecting vulnerable households and livelihoods. Kerala, located at the south-western tip of India, experienced catastrophic floods in 2018 and 2019, with the August 2018 floods being among the most severe in the state's history. Widely recognized for its high quality of life, social equity and exemplary governance, Kerala stands as one of India's most developed states, often known for its advancements in human development.⁴ However, the unprecedented rainfall during the 2018 and 2019 monsoon seasons – 42 per cent above average in 2018 and 123 per cent in 2019, according to the Central Water Commission – caused widespread landslides and devastating floods across the state.⁵ Millions of households were affected, and rivers overflowed across various regions, necessitating the establishment of 12,253 relief camps to shelter 3,415,937 displaced people in 2018 and 1,326 relief camps, which gave shelter to 250,638 people in 2019.⁶

Floods are a powerful driver of migration, disrupting livelihoods, displacing communities and overwhelming essential services. While much of the existing research focuses on migration decisions during or after floods, less attention

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² M. Monirul Qader Mirza, "Climate change, flooding in South Asia and implications", *Regional Environmental Change*, 11(Supplement 1), 95–107 (2011). Also, see Rajib Shaw, Yong Luo, Tae Sung Cheong, Sharina Abdul Halim, Sanjay Chaturvedi, Masahiro Hashizume, Gregory E. Insarov, Yoichi Ishikawa, Mostafa Jafari, Akio Kitoh, Juan Pulhin, Chandni Singh, Kripa Vasant and Zhibin Zhang, "Chapter 10: Asia", in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Hans-Otto Pörtner, Debra C. Roberts, Melinda M.B. Tignor, Elvira S. Poloczanska, Katja Mintenbeck, Andrés Alegria, Marlies Craig, Stefanie Langsdorf, Sina Löschke, Vincent Möller, Andrew Okem and Bardhyl Rama, eds.) (Cambridge, United Kingdom, and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022) and Tushar Dakua, Manisha Kaushik and Vasim Ahamad, "Natural disasters and internally displaced population in India: An analysis from IDMC data", *Man in India*, 103(2–3):65–81 (2023).

³ Vimal Mishra, Saran Aaadhar, Harsh Shah, Rahul Kumar, Dushmanta Ranjan Pattanaik and Amar Deep Tiwari, "The Kerala flood of 2018: Combined impact of extreme rainfall and reservoir storage", *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences Discussions*, 1–13 (2018) and BBC, "Kerala floods: Monsoon waters kill hundreds in Indian state", BBC (18 August 2018).

⁴ National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), *SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018* (n.p., Government of India, 2018).

⁵ See India, Central Water Commission, *Study Report: Kerala Floods of August 2018* (n.p., Central Water Commission, 2018).

⁶ See India, Government of Kerala, Disaster Management (Additional Chief Secretary), State Relief Commissioner, *Kerala Floods – 2018: 1st August to 30th August 2018* (2018) and India, Government of Kerala, Department of Cooperation, Cooperative Alliance to Rebuild Kerala (CARE), *A Sustainable Model for Social Housing*.



has been given to the socioeconomic impacts on migrant households and the families left behind in flood-prone areas and how they recover and cope with the disaster.⁷ Understanding the vulnerabilities and coping strategies of these groups is essential for designing effective recovery and adaptation measures.

This article utilizes data from the Kerala Migration Survey 2020 to explore how the 2018 and 2019 floods affected migrant households in Kerala. The study examines livelihood disruptions, financial strains and access to relief measures, focusing on the socioeconomic challenges faced by migrant families and those left behind. By analysing patterns of resilience and vulnerability, this article aims to provide actionable insights for inclusive disaster management and policy interventions tailored to the needs of migrant households in the context of climate-induced disasters.

Floods and migration

Floods are one of the most disruptive natural disasters, often forcing individuals and communities to migrate, either temporarily or permanently. Acting as a driver of migration, floods destroy homes, disrupt livelihoods and overwhelm essential services. The extent to which individuals can cope with these impacts depends on their vulnerability – the degree of their exposure to risks – and their adaptive capacity, which reflects their ability to recover

and mitigate future challenges.⁸ Flood-induced migration takes various forms, with temporary migration being common during seasonal flooding, as people or households return home once conditions stabilize. However, in cases of extreme or recurrent flooding, permanent migration often becomes inevitable, especially when environments are rendered uninhabitable. Migration patterns are also shaped by geography, with internal migration – movement within the same country – being more prevalent because of its lower cost. In the case of natural disasters, moving internally is seen as one of the most prevalent options for the “trapped population”.⁹ It is also common to see that only some individuals, especially youth, from the household migrate, leaving their families behind in catastrophe-prone areas.¹⁰ Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that analyses the situations and conditions of left-behind families and migrant households.

The experiences of migrant families underscore the need for robust support systems. Integrating migration considerations into disaster management and climate adaptation policies can ensure displaced populations receive the resources and opportunities to rebuild their lives in safe and sustainable environments.

⁷ See Tahmina Chumky, Mrittika Basu, Kenichiro Onitsuka, Md. Lamiur Raihan and Satoshi Hoshino, “How do left-behind families adapt to the salinity-induced male out-migration context? A case study of Shyamnagar sub-district in coastal Bangladesh”, *Sustainability*, 15(3):1–21 (2023).

⁸ See the following papers for the discussion on flood and migration: Clark L. Gray and Valerie Mueller, “Natural disasters and population mobility in Bangladesh”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(16):6000–6005 (2012); Olivia Dun, “Migration and displacement triggered by floods in the Mekong Delta”, *International Migration*, 49(S1):e200–e223 (2011); Thomas K.J. McDermott, “Global exposure to flood risk and poverty”, *Nature Communications*, 13(1):1–3 (2022); Tamara L. Sheldon and Crystal Zhan, “The impact of hurricanes and floods on domestic migration”, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 115 (2022).

⁹ Richard Black, Stephen R.G. Bennett, Sandy M. Thomas and John R. Beddington, “Migration as adaptation”, *Nature*, 478(7370):447–449 (2011).

¹⁰ Himani Pasricha, “Climate-induced migration and the opportunities for youth”, IOM Blog Series: Youth Voices on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (5 June 2024).



This article utilizes data from the Kerala Migration Survey 2020 to analyse the impact of floods on households and examine the various adaptation strategies they employed in response. It explores how migrant households coped with the aftermath, focusing on livelihood disruptions, financial strains and access to relief measures. By identifying patterns of resilience and vulnerability, the article aims to provide insights for more inclusive disaster management and policy interventions.

Kerala floods: Factual insights

The 2018 and 2019 Kerala floods were catastrophic events that highlighted the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters. In 2018, relentless rainfall from August 1 to 30 displaced over 3.4 million people and caused extensive property and infrastructure damage estimated at INR 47,963 crores (approximately USD 6.4 billion). The unprecedented rainfall, which exceeded forecasts by 96 per cent, triggered landslides and inundated 65,188 hectares of land, severely affecting homes, roads, agriculture and public utilities. The following year, in August 2019, Kerala experienced another devastating monsoon, with rainfall 123 per cent above average. This event affected millions across the state and necessitated the establishment of 3,151 relief camps that sheltered over 612,000 displaced individuals.¹¹

The 2018 floods claimed 339 lives, while the 2019 floods resulted in 125 fatalities, with districts like Malappuram recording the highest losses. Infrastructure damage was severe in both years. In 2018, 9,538 kilometres of roads and 510 bridges required repair, costing INR 10,048 crores (USD 1.3 billion), while 3,900 kilometres of roads and 95 bridges were damaged in 2019, with restoration costs reaching INR 164 crores. The power sector bore significant losses in 2018, amounting to INR 8,503 crores (USD 1.1 billion). Housing damages were equally devastating, with more than 800,000 homes impacted in 2018 and another 216,000 houses partially damaged in 2019, requiring extensive rehabilitation efforts.

The agriculture and fisheries sectors were severely affected in both years. In 2018, 59,345 hectares of crops were destroyed, resulting in financial losses of INR 7,357 crores (USD 925 million). Meanwhile, in 2019, over 6,244 hectares of agricultural land required desilting and debris removal, while crop and fish farm damages amounted to INR 5.8 crores. Livestock losses were also extensive, with over 750,000 animals perishing in 2018. Fishermen faced significant challenges across both years, losing boats, nets and livelihoods, with damages in 2018 alone costing INR 143 crores (USD 18 million).

The Government mounted large-scale rescue and relief efforts. In 2018, INR 27,100 crores (USD 3.4 billion) were spent on search, rescue and rehabilitation operations, complemented by the heroic efforts of local fishermen, who rescued over 65,000 people. In 2019, similar relief measures involved compensation for housing damages and support for affected families, amounting to INR 24,507 crores.

¹¹ All data on damages are taken from the additional memorandum *Kerala Floods – 2018: 1st August to 31st August 2018* and from India, Government of Kerala, Disaster Management (Additional Chief Secretary), State Relief Commissioner, *Kerala Floods – 2019 (1st August to 31st August 2019)* (2019).



While existing studies extensively explore the relationship between climate change, disasters and migration decisions, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the experiences of families who remain in the affected areas. These families often face unique challenges, as they continue to live in the same disrupted environment. Understanding how they adapt,

recover and manage their livelihoods in the absence of migrating family members is crucial for developing comprehensive post-disaster policies. By shedding light on this often overlooked demographic, the research contributes to a broader understanding of disaster-induced migration and its complex ripple effects within affected communities.

Table 1. Highlights of the 2018 and 2019 Kerala floods: Consequences and relief measures

	Rainfall	Impact on people	Property damage	Relief measures
2018	96 per cent above forecasted rainfall from August 1 to August 30	3.4 million displaced	INR 47,963 crores (~USD 6.4 billion)	Extensive response to landslides, inundated 65,188 hectares of land; damage to homes, roads, agriculture and public utilities
2019	123 per cent above average during monsoon in August	Over 612,000 displaced; 3,151 relief camps	Not explicitly mentioned	Relief camps for displaced individuals

Kerala Migration Survey 2020

This study analyses the Kerala Migration Survey conducted in 2018 and 2019, focusing on migrant households surveyed after the disaster. Respondents were asked about the floods' effects on their households, their financial and physical capacities, and their strategies for rehabilitation. The survey included migrant households and the families left behind, offering insights into how these vulnerable groups navigated the aftermath of the disaster.¹²

The survey conducted with 1,785 households in 2018 and 2019 assessed the socioeconomic impacts of the floods. The findings reveal that

11.76 per cent (210 households) were affected by floods in 2018, while 9 per cent (159 households) reported being affected in 2019. A significant proportion of these households experienced structural damages, with 41 per cent reporting such issues in 2018 and 30 per cent in 2019. These damages primarily involved disruptions to water systems, electrical installations and sanitary facilities, underscoring the widespread infrastructural challenges caused by the floods.

Among the surveyed households, 1,489 were non-agricultural landowners and 498 were agricultural landowners. In 2018, 4.49 per cent of non-agricultural landowners and 6.38 per cent of agricultural landowners reported damages. By 2019, these figures saw a slight decline, with

¹² The data are from Centre for Development Studies (CDS) (Thiruvananthapuram), *Kerala Migration Survey* (Thiruvananthapuram, CDS, 2020).



3.57 per cent of non-agricultural landowners and 7.21 per cent of agricultural landowners reporting flood-related damages.

Agricultural landowner migrant households faced additional hardships due to crop damage. In 2018, 7.57 per cent of these households reported crop losses, while 13.8 per cent refrained from cultivating crops altogether that year. Similarly, in 2019, 7.57 per cent of agricultural landowner migrant households reported crop damages, while 11.21 per cent did not grow crops during the year.

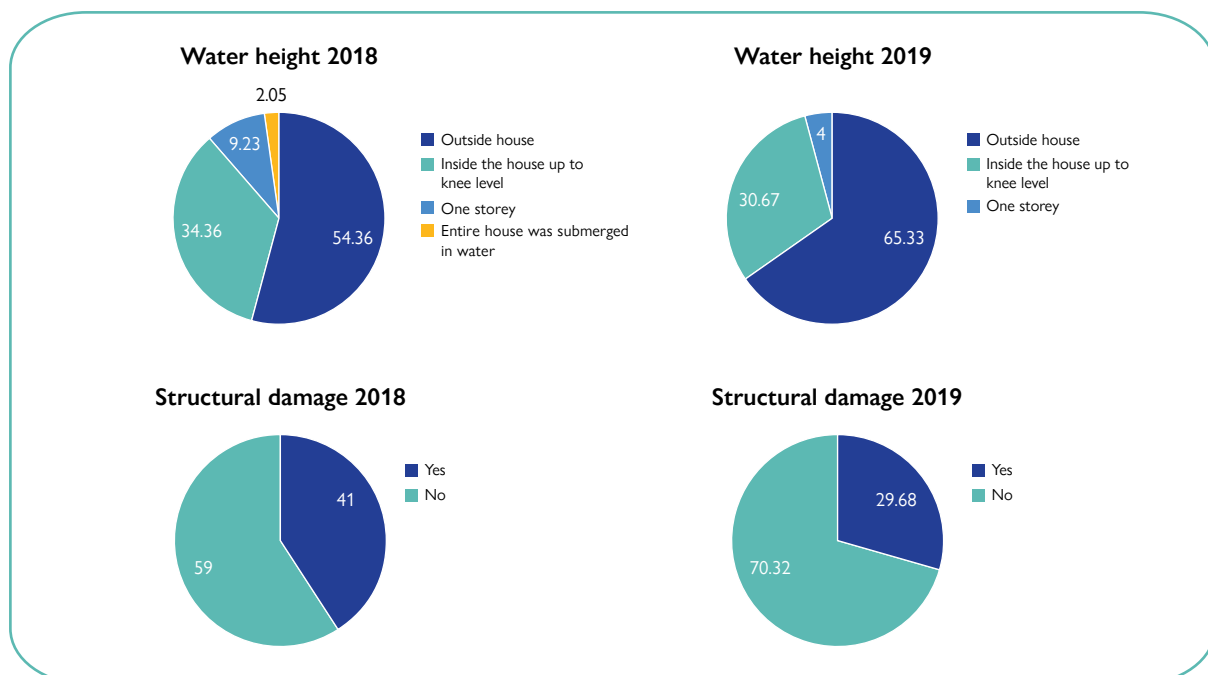
The survey also captured the experiences of 7,144 individuals aged 15 and above who had been either employed or actively seeking employment since June 2018. The results indicate that 28.18 per cent of respondents were affected by the floods in 2018, while 26.26 per cent faced similar disruptions in 2019. Among those impacted, 90 per cent reported a reduction in

working days, with additional impacts including reduced working hours and, in some cases, the loss of employment entirely.

The disruption to employment was substantial, with individuals losing an average of 21 working days due to the floods across 2018 and 2019. Additionally, affected individuals experienced an average of 40 days without work during this period. These findings highlight the profound impact of floods on livelihoods, especially for daily-wage earners and those in precarious employment. The loss of income, coupled with extended periods of unemployment, exacerbates financial insecurity, disrupts access to essential resources and poses long-term challenges to career stability for affected households.

The survey asked households about the provision of relief and rehabilitation services, including who provided them and how they were accessed. These responses shed light on the

Figure 1. Structural damages during 2018 and 2019 floods





coping mechanisms and strategies employed by migrant households during the floods. In 2018, almost 6 per cent of households reported having to relocate due to the floods, while in 2019, this figure decreased to 4 per cent. Displacement was predominantly temporary, with 98 per cent of households in 2018 and 95 per cent in 2019 reporting short-term relocation. On average, households relocated for 14 days in 2018 and approximately 9 days in 2019.

Table 2 presents data on the primary locations to which households relocated during these periods. The majority of households sought refuge either in government-established relief camps or with relatives. In 2018, 31.31 per cent relocated to relief camps, while 62 per cent stayed with relatives. Similarly, in 2019, 27.87 per cent moved to relief camps and 67.21 per cent found shelter with relatives. These figures emphasize the critical role of government relief camps during disasters, as well as the importance of social networks, particularly relationships with relatives, in mitigating the impacts of displacement.

The survey also examined the conditions of relief camps. The government of Kerala reported

that thousands of such camps were established during the floods to provide shelter for displaced households. Over 70 per cent of respondent households described the conditions in relief camps as “good” or “satisfactory”, with camps being equipped with basic amenities. Additionally, more than 50 per cent of households reported receiving essential medical care in these camps, with consistent responses for both 2018 and 2019. These findings highlight the critical need for well-equipped and efficiently managed rehabilitation strategies during disasters.

The impact of floods extends beyond physical damage and economic losses, profoundly affecting the mental well-being of individuals and communities and often termed climate anxiety.¹³ The psychological distress caused by displacement, loss of livelihoods and uncertainty about the future often leaves lasting scars, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. The survey also reports the answers to questions about any psychological distress that migrant households might have to go through. Nine per cent of the households reported that they went through some kind of long-term psychological distress in both 2018 and 2019.

Table 2. Where did the household relocate?

	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Relief camps	31.31	27.87
Friends	1.00	0.00
Relatives	62.00	67.21
Neighbours	3.00	3.28
Others	2.00	1.64

¹³ Maha Akbar, “Over a year after Pakistan floods, survivors battle climate anxiety”, *Stories*, IOM (24 October 2023).



Table 3. Types of psychological distress among the elderly and children

	Elderly		Children	
	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Fear	58.82	57.35	69.07	72.92
Anxiety	2.94	2.94	2.06	2.08
Depression	4.41	4.41	5.15	2.08
Sleeping disorder	6.62	4.41	8.25	9.38
Social detachment	4.41	2.94	2.06	1.04
Feeling insecure	16.18	21.32	10.31	10.42
Others	6.62	5.15	3.09	2.08

The data reveal distinct patterns in the psychological distress experienced by the elderly and children. Fear was the most prevalent response across both groups, reported by 58.82 per cent of the elderly in 2018 and 57.35 per cent in 2019, and by an even higher proportion of children – 69.07 per cent in 2018, rising to 72.92 per cent in 2019. Among children, sleeping disorders were also significant, reported by 8.25 per cent in 2018 and increasing to 9.38 per cent in 2019. Feelings of insecurity increased notably among the elderly, from 16.18 per cent in 2018 to 21.32 per cent in 2019, reflecting heightened vulnerability in the aftermath of recurrent floods. The 222 households reported that their children had missed school because of the floods in 2018 and 2019.

These findings underline the diverse psychological impacts of floods on different demographic groups within households. They also emphasize

the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions, particularly for the elderly and children, to address their specific vulnerabilities and foster long-term recovery.

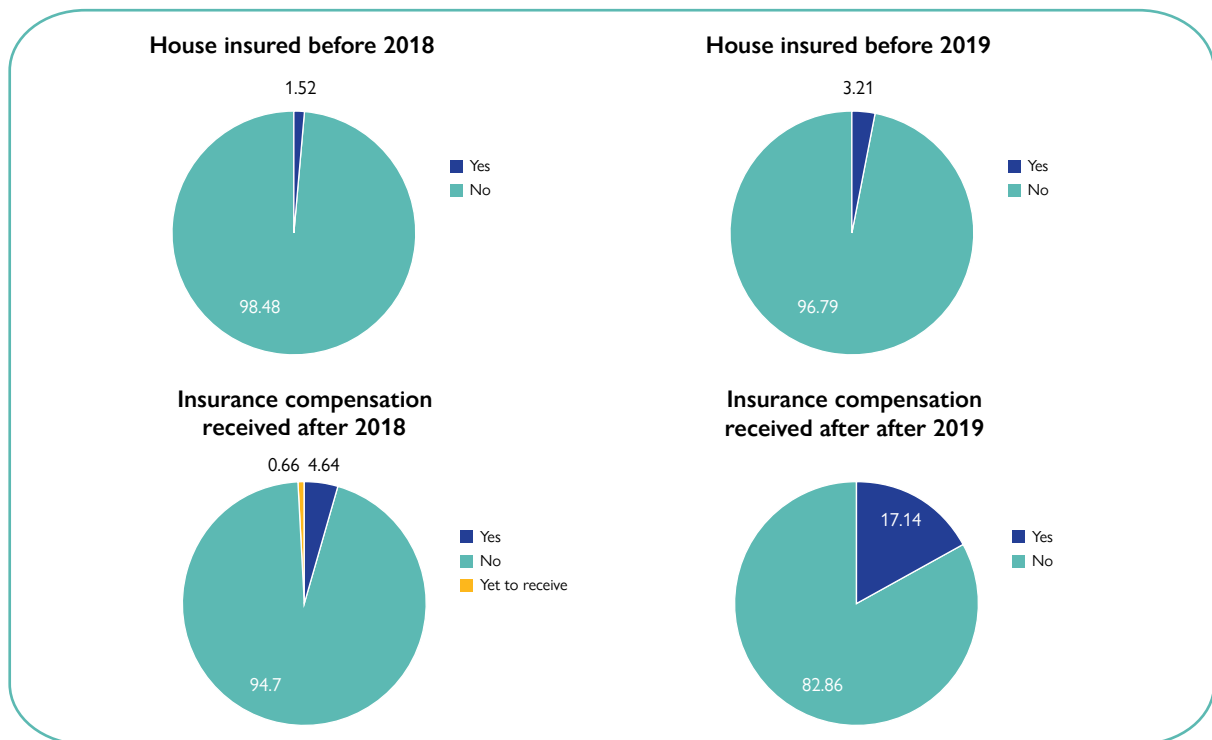
Policy recommendations and conclusion

The 2018 and 2019 Kerala floods exposed the heightened vulnerabilities of migrant households and families left behind. While migrants may escape flood-affected regions, those left behind often endure worse conditions, trapped in areas with damaged infrastructure, disrupted livelihoods and limited resources. These findings highlight the need for disaster management policies that not only address immediate flood impacts but also prioritize long-term resilience.

Strengthening infrastructure resilience is key to supporting families in disaster-prone regions. Investments in climate-resilient housing, roads and utilities can mitigate long-term flood



Figure 2. House insured and compensation during floods in 2018 and 2019



impacts. Restoring livelihoods is also critical, as left-behind families rely on local economies devastated by floods. Employment guarantee programmes focused on rebuilding infrastructure and rehabilitating agricultural land can provide income and aid recovery. Financial support and compensation, especially for agricultural households, are essential as both their income and assets are affected.

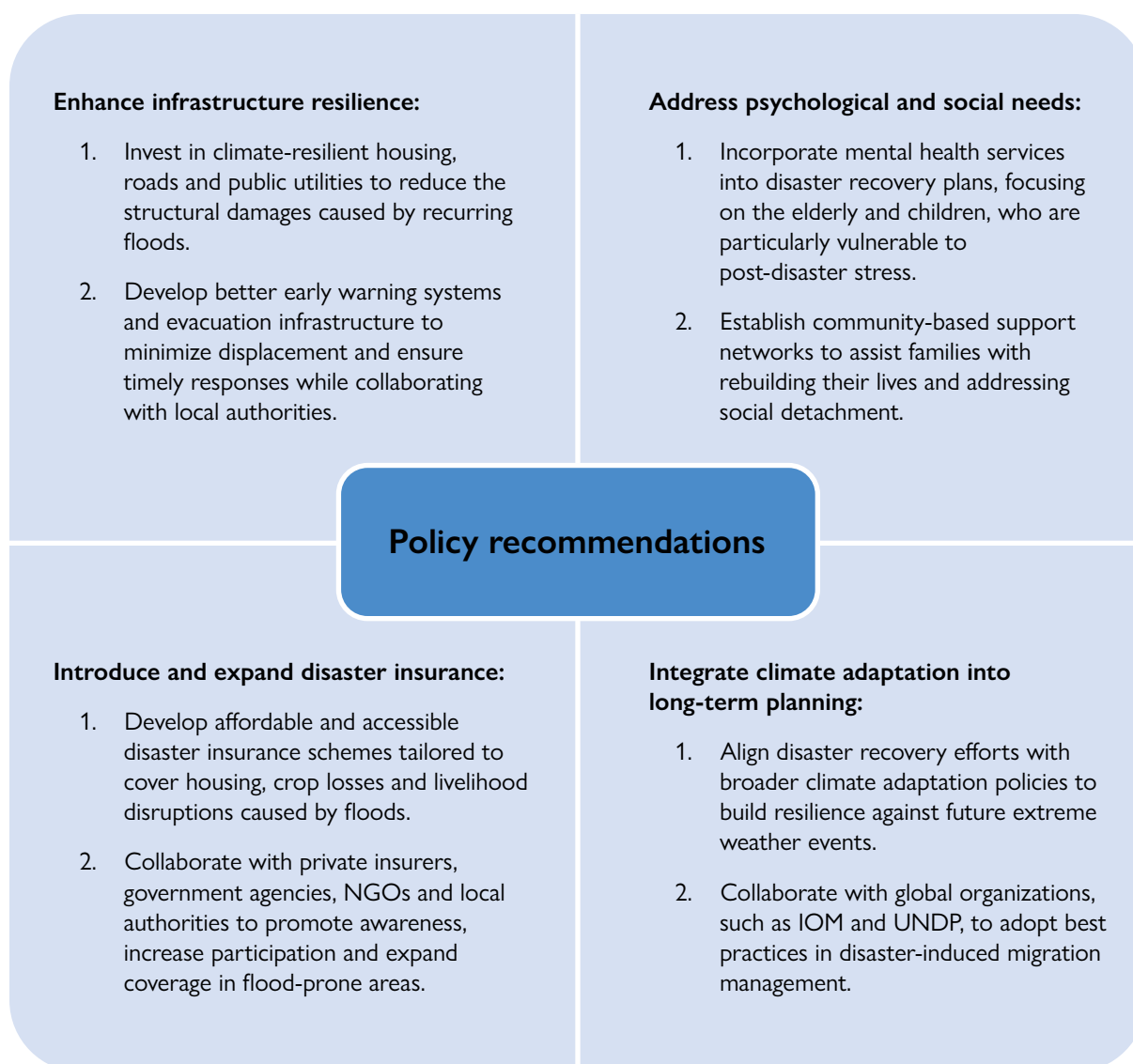
As seen in Figure 2, few households with structural damage had insurance, though coverage increased slightly between 2018 and 2019. Disaster insurance can serve as a crucial safety net. Accessible policies covering housing, agricultural losses and livelihoods will reduce financial strain. Governments and private insurers must expand awareness campaigns and ensure affordable coverage for vulnerable communities.

Local governments and NGOs are key to implementing these strategies. Authorities can identify high-risk communities, streamline relief access and ensure that financial aid reaches affected households. NGOs complement these efforts by mobilizing resources, offering direct assistance, and providing shelter, livelihood training and mental health support. Strengthening collaboration between these entities will enhance disaster resilience.

Addressing psychological distress is equally important. Prolonged exposure to post-disaster conditions heightens insecurity, fear and emotional strain, especially for children and the elderly. Integrating mental health services into recovery plans and establishing community support systems can help.



Figure 3. Policy recommendations



Finally, disaster recovery must align with climate adaptation strategies to break the cycle of vulnerability. This includes resilient infrastructure, sustainable livelihood programmes and comprehensive disaster management frameworks.

In conclusion, while migrant households face disruption, families left behind endure harsher conditions with limited recovery resources. This article examines the impact of the 2018 and

2019 Kerala floods on migrant households and their coping strategies. It underscores the need for inclusive disaster recovery that addresses both groups' unique challenges. Focusing on resilience-building, financial safety nets, mental health support and disaster management policies, and collaborating with local authorities and NGOs can ensure that these communities are not only able to recover but are also better equipped to face future crises.



Safeguarding statehood: A policy framework for addressing climate-induced statelessness in Small Island Developing States

Ankita Aggarwal and Jan Freihardt¹

Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face an existential crisis, as rising sea levels threaten to submerge their territories,² disrupting the foundations of statehood and governance. Traditional internationally accepted systems built on legal frameworks, such as the Montevideo Convention, remain rooted in territorial paradigms and fail to address the realities of disappearing land and displaced populations, leaving SIDS on the brink of statelessness without a clear path to statehood or cultural preservation.³

This article proposes a framework centred on setting up regional governance hubs to reimagine governance of SIDS in a deterritorialized world. Supported by financial mechanisms, multilateral agreements for relocation and dual citizenship frameworks, this framework aims to preserve sovereignty, cultural identity and legal continuity for displaced populations. Drawing on and critiquing gaps in international law, governance theories and real-world adaptation efforts,

this paper bridges theory and practice to offer a bold yet actionable approach to one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Rather than prescribing definitive answers, this article seeks to provide policymakers and academics with tools and intellectual frameworks to rethink governance and statehood and navigate the complex intersections of climate change, displacement and sovereignty.

Gaps in existing legal frameworks

The existential threat posed by climate change to SIDS exposes critical inadequacies in existing international legal frameworks.⁴ Central to these challenges are the issues of territoriality, population dispersion and governance under frameworks, such as the Montevideo Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The territoriality challenge: A physically habitable territory is fundamental to the existence of a sovereign government and, by extension, a State as defined by international law. Climate change directly threatens this essential foundation by rendering SIDS territories increasingly uninhabitable. Rising sea levels, coastal erosion and extreme weather events jeopardize the very essence of statehood for

¹ Ankita Aggarwal is a development consultant and postgraduate in public administration from Columbia University. Jan Freihardt is a Researcher at ETH Zürich.

² Michalis I. Voutsoukas, Panagiotis Athanasiou, Alessio Giardino, Lorenzo Mentaschi, Alessandro Stocchino, Robert E. Kopp, Pelayo Menéndez, Michael W. Beck, Roshanka Ranasinghe and Luc Feyen, "Small Island Developing States under threat by rising seas even in a 1.5 °C warming world", *Nature Sustainability*, 6:1552–1564 (2023); Jon Barnett and William Neil Adger, "Climate dangers and atoll countries", *Climatic Change*, 61(3):321–337 (2003).

³ Michael B. Gerrard and Gregory E. Wannier (eds.), *Threatened Island Nations: Legal Implications of Rising Seas and a Changing Climate* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴ Walter Kälin and Nina Schrepfer, *Protecting People Crossing Borders in the Context of Climate Change: Normative Gaps and Possible Approaches*, Legal and Protection Policy Research Series, No. 24 (Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2012).



SIDS, challenging the core principles upon which the concept of the State is built. While the Montevideo Convention does not explicitly require territory to be land based, it assumes that a State's territory is fixed and physically habitable – a presumption rendered obsolete by the realities of climate-induced territorial loss. This raises profound questions about the legal status of SIDS when their territories become uninhabitable or entirely submerged.

Challenges of population dispersion and governance: The Montevideo Convention's criteria for statehood, which include not only a defined territory but also a permanent population and a functioning government, are further challenged by the geographic dispersion of SIDS populations due to climate-induced migration. Relocation across multiple host countries complicates the ability of governments to maintain cohesive governance structures, provide essential services and preserve cultural identity.

Governance – traditionally understood as operating within geographically cohesive and territorially defined frameworks – becomes increasingly complex when populations are dispersed. This diminishes the operational capacity of SIDS governments to fulfil sovereign responsibilities, raising questions about their ability to maintain international legal status.

The UNCLOS regime further amplifies these vulnerabilities by delineating various maritime zones of jurisdiction, such as the territorial sea, the contiguous zone and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), each measured from a State's baseline, typically defined by its coastline. As rising sea levels alter coastlines, these “shifting baselines” jeopardize the stability of maritime sovereignty for low-lying nations. The resulting

recalculations of maritime zones threaten access to critical resources and undermine the rights of SIDS to assert sovereignty over their maritime territories. Efforts by the Pacific island nations to redefine oceans as territorial extensions highlight this inadequacy of existing legal structures.⁵

Current frameworks, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statelessness conventions, focus on individual cases and fail to address the collective statelessness of entire populations. Similarly, international climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, emphasize mitigation and adaptation but overlook the unique governance and legal dilemmas faced by SIDS due to territorial loss. Funding mechanisms like the Loss and Damage Fund provide reactive solutions that lack the specificity and long-term support needed to address the structural vulnerabilities of SIDS.

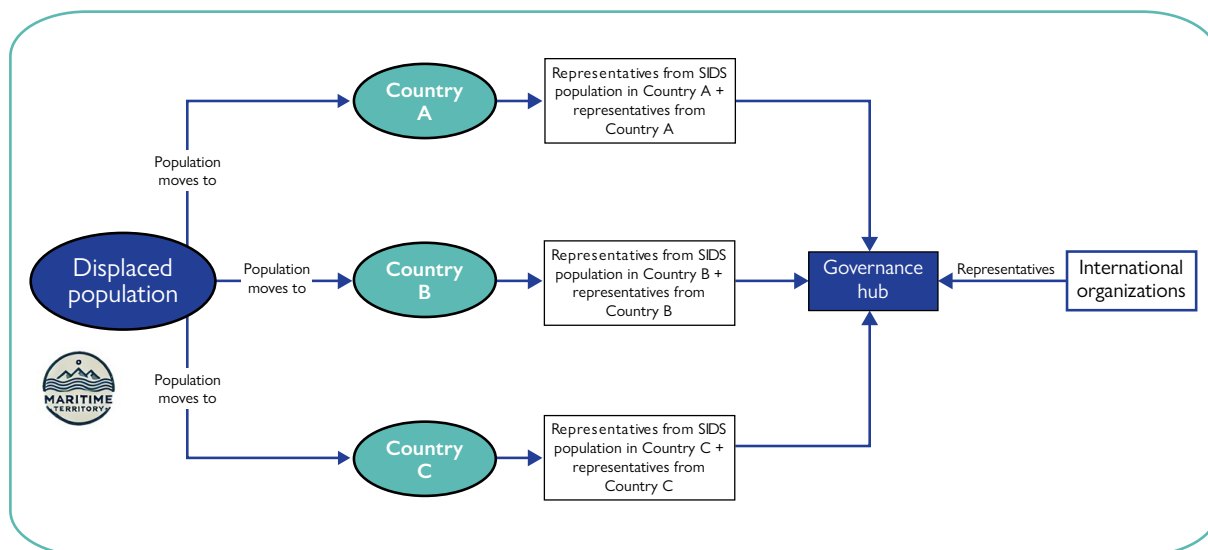
The experiences of nations like Tuvalu and Kiribati exemplify these challenges. Tuvalu's reliance on adaptation projects, such as Japan's J-PACE and FORAM-SAND initiatives, coupled with international treaties like its agreement with Australia,⁶ highlights a dual approach combining adaptation and migration strategies. Kiribati's “migration with dignity” policy illustrates proactive steps to address displacement while fostering expatriate communities. Its subsequent focus on adaptation strategies, such as land development projects, reflects efforts to supplement cross-border migration with localized resilience

⁵ Pacific Island Forum (PIF), *Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise* (2021); Pacific Community, Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division, *Pacific Maritime Boundaries Programme* (1990).

⁶ Daniel Hurst and Josh Butler, “Tuvalu residency and security treaty: What is it and why is Australia doing it?”, *The Guardian* (10 November 2023).



Figure 1. Proposed regional governance hub model for SIDS populations relocated to one or multiple host countries



Source: Created by authors, 2025.

Note: The hub could serve as one chamber in a bicameral system, akin to State or provincial representation in federal structures, with the second chamber elected solely by the SIDS population.

measures.⁷ These cases underscore the urgent need for innovative governance models and legal reforms.

Proposed framework for preserving statehood

The central idea of the framework is establishing regional governance hubs (see Figure 1) supported by: (1) multilateral resettlement agreements to secure relocation pathways while balancing needs and interests of both displaced and host populations; (2) a financial system leveraging resources, such as maritime zones and international climate funds; and (3) mechanisms

to ensure continuation of legal identity, such as dual citizenship frameworks.

While practical implementation challenges abound, the goal is not to provide prescriptive solutions but to foster intellectual exploration by presenting a menu of options to inspire radical solutions to the complex challenge of climate change-induced statelessness.

Elements of the proposed framework are inspired by existing research,⁸ recommendations⁹

⁷ Jakob Schou Kupferberg, "Migration and dignity: Relocation and adaptation in the face of climate change displacement in the Pacific – a human rights perspective", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 25(10):1793–1818 (2021).

⁸ Lilian Yamamoto and Miguel Esteban, *Atoll Island States and International Law: Climate Change Displacement and Sovereignty* (New York, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013).

⁹ Michelle Foster, Nicola Hard, Hélène Lambert and Jane McAdam, *The Future of Nationality in the Pacific: Preventing Statelessness and Nationality Loss in the Context of Climate Change* (Melbourne, University of Melbourne, Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness, 2022).



and proposed mechanisms¹⁰ that address aspects of climate-induced displacement. Programmes such as the Loss and Damage Fund and UNHCR initiatives provide valuable foundations for targeted funding and support for vulnerable populations, aligning with global goals like SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Additionally, recent literature explores dynamic ideas, such as the concept of a “nation ex situ”,¹¹ proposing models for continuity of States without physical territories.¹² By building on such initiatives, this framework seeks to enhance their applicability to address gaps in preserving the statehood of SIDS.

Rotational regional governance hubs

A central component of this framework is the establishment of regional governance hubs, consisting of official representatives from key stakeholders – the government of the displaced State, representatives from host countries where displaced populations are resettled, and relevant regional and international organizations. Unlike governance models, which align government, territory and population within a unified physical space, this governance model operates across dispersed locations, where these three elements may be geographically separated. For instance, a displaced SIDS government could retain authority and representation through the hub while its population resides in host countries,

and the territorial claim is maintained as a legal and symbolic anchor in maritime territory.¹³ This allows displaced governments to act as custodians of their people’s rights, cultural identity and statehood, even without direct control over a contiguous physical territory.

The governance hub is not envisioned as a permanent institution but rather as an **adaptive mechanism** that evolves based on the needs of displaced populations and host countries. It serves as an immediate response to climate-induced statelessness, ensuring legal and governance continuity while facilitating integration and statehood preservation. Initially, it functions as a support mechanism, overseeing gradual and structured relocation while maintaining governance continuity for displaced populations. Over time, as SIDS governments negotiate new arrangements, the hub’s role may shift, be scaled down or be dissolved entirely, depending on the decisions of the affected States. Should full relocation occur, the hub could transition into an operational extension of SIDS governance, ensuring the continuity of administrative, legal and diplomatic functions. At this stage, the SIDS population would determine how to adapt their governing structures, ensuring arrangements that reflect both their sovereignty and constructive engagement with host countries.

The **functions of the governance hubs** must reflect the practical realities of their operational context. Rather than delivering traditional services like welfare or security (which will be provided by the host States), the hubs would

¹⁰ UNHCR, “Climate change and statelessness: An overview”, submission, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), to the 6th session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA 6) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Bonn, Germany (1–12 June 2009).

¹¹ Maxine Burkett, “The nation ex-situ: On climate change, deterritorialized nationhood, and the post-climate era”, *Climate Law*, 2:345–347 (2011).

¹² Veronika Bílková, “A state without territory?”, in *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law 2016*, Netherlands Yearbook of International Law series, volume 47 (The Hague, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2017), pp. 19–47.

¹³ Kirsty Needham, “Commonwealth leaders say sinking nations should keep their maritime boundaries”, *Reuters* (26 October 2024).



focus on facilitating cross-border governance functions. These could include:

- Representing the displaced population in legal, cultural and diplomatic matters, thereby maintaining legal identity of the displaced population as well as legal identity of the displaced SIDS as a State;
- Managing shared resources, such as the maritime zones within the SIDS' EEZs, to generate revenue for displaced populations;
- Advocating for and coordinating funding from international mechanisms, such as the Loss and Damage Fund;
- Ensuring the preservation of cultural identity through initiatives like education programmes, language preservation and community cohesion activities.

Comparisons can be drawn to governance systems for minority or indigenous populations, such as the Sámi Parliament in Scandinavia, which operates across national borders to represent the cultural and governance interests of the Sámi people. Such cross-border governance arrangements illustrate how decentralized yet cohesive governance structures can function effectively.

The **rotational aspect of the hubs** is integral to fostering inclusivity and direct engagement with displaced populations. Under this model, each host country would host the hub for a set period, such as one calendar year, after which the hub would rotate to another host country. While this rotational design might initially appear to prioritize physical proximity, its purpose is to ensure distributed responsibility and shared involvement across host countries. However, digital governance tools, such as Tuvalu's

development of a digital State,¹⁴ can complement the rotational system by enabling consistent communication and streamlined operations, regardless of the hub's physical location. By combining physical rotation with digital tools, the model ensures that the displaced population remains connected to their government and that governance structures adapt to contemporary technological advancements. Such rotation, combined with other ways of imagining a deterritorial State, enhances the governing capacity of the displaced State, ensures displaced individuals can access their rights more effectively, fosters social cohesion even without a traditional geographically bounded State, and promotes regional solidarity and cooperation.

The governance hub should be structured as a **complimentary and transitional entity** rather than a sovereign replacement for SIDS governments. For instance, the hub could function as one chamber within a bicameral system similar to the chamber representing States or provinces in federal political structures, while a second chamber could contain representatives elected only by the SIDS population. In such a setup, the hub would operate as a mediating and administrative body, ensuring that the rights and governance of displaced SIDS populations are upheld without imposing a parallel government on host countries. Host countries are given structured participation to ensure they do not feel they are merely hosting an independent government within their borders. However, their influence could be confined to domains directly impacting integration, infrastructure and economic alignment.

¹⁴ Delf Rothe, Ingrid Boas, Carol Farbotko and Taukiei Kitara, "Digital Tuvalu: State sovereignty in a world of climate loss", *International Affairs*, 100(4):1491–1509 (2024).



Supporting mechanisms

Multilateral resettlement agreements

Multilateral resettlement agreements are essential for ensuring that displaced populations from SIDS have access to land to relocate to,¹⁵ services and integration opportunities in host countries. These agreements would require SIDS governments to lead in deciding resettlement locations, potentially leveraging existing bilateral or multilateral agreements as frameworks for negotiation. Such agreements provide legal and logistical precedents for mobility, integration and resource sharing, offering adaptable frameworks for multilateral resettlement scenarios. For instance, the Compacts of Free Association outline how relocation and State cooperation can be embedded in frameworks of mutual benefit. Similarly, the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus) fosters regional economic integration among Pacific nations and could expand to include resettlement and migration cooperation. Bilateral arrangements like the Australia–Tuvalu treaty and the Kiribati–New Zealand Pacific Access Category Visa establish pathways for tailored relocation frameworks that could scale to broader regional governance hubs.

To maintain simplicity and avoid overdispersion, such agreements could be limited to one or a maximum of three host countries. This ensures the governance model remains manageable, facilitates stronger ties between the displaced populations and their host communities, and makes it easier to promote efforts to safeguard

their unique cultures. This approach ensures that the choices are guided by meaningful consultation processes, reflecting the priorities and cultural values of the impacted populations, rather than being imposed externally.

To foster regional solidarity, these agreements can build on initiatives like the Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security (PCCMHS) Programme. While PCCMHS primarily focuses on dialogue and regional collaboration, its importance lies in demonstrating how shared frameworks can facilitate mobility and cooperation across Pacific nations, highlighting the foundational elements needed for more targeted and actionable regional approaches to addressing displacement challenges.

Financial and diplomatic incentives for host countries

Financial resources for multilateral resettlement agreements could be sourced from revenues generated by SIDS through their maritime resources supplemented by international climate finance mechanisms, such as the Loss and Damage Fund. Leveraging and negotiating fisheries and EEZ rights as part of relocation agreements can provide additional economic benefits to host countries while ensuring SIDS retain a stake in the process. This dual approach ensures funding mechanisms are both externally supported and SIDS owned, fostering greater involvement and accountability for SIDS governments.

Incentives for host countries must go beyond financial support. Diplomatic benefits, including increased recognition on global platforms and preferential trade agreements, can further encourage participation. Additionally, partnerships in cultural exchange and

¹⁵ Katrina Miriam Wyman, "Chapter 15: Sinking States", in *Property in Land and Other Resources* (Daniel H. Cole and Elinor Ostrom, eds.) (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2012), pp. 439–469.



capacity-building initiatives, such as training programmes in education, language support, workforce development and conflict resolution, would strengthen collaboration, helping both displaced populations and host communities build mutual understanding and resilience.

By defining responsibilities clearly, such as the provision of housing, health care, education and employment opportunities, these agreements can create a structured framework for resettlement that ensures that even in new locations displaced populations' basic rights and cultural heritage are preserved.

The involvement of international organizations, such as the United Nations, regional bodies and other multilateral institutions, is critical. These entities can create platforms for negotiation, mediate disputes and mobilize resources to address host countries' concerns. They can incorporate incentives, such as long-term infrastructure investments or global acknowledgment of host countries' contributions to addressing the climate crisis. Strategic access to maritime resources or opportunities to strengthen regional influence through collaborative agreements can further increase the bargaining power of SIDS by offering ways to host countries to position themselves as pivotal players in broader regional stability and development.¹⁶

Dual citizenship framework

Dual citizenship offers a potential mechanism to preserve the legal identity and rights of displaced SIDS populations while facilitating their

integration into host countries. This approach ensures that displaced individuals retain their original citizenship while acquiring legal rights in their host countries. However, a significant challenge lies in the willingness of host countries to grant dual citizenship. Historical instances where dual citizenship was extended to migrant or refugee populations – often influenced by international pressure, humanitarian imperatives or strategic agreements – provide valuable lessons.¹⁷ Understanding the legal and political circumstances under which these policies were adopted is critical to designing feasible frameworks for SIDS.

While SIDS populations generally value maintaining their original citizenship, in-depth research is needed to assess host populations' perceptions and address concerns about cultural integration, resource allocation and legal implications. While dual citizenship is an established concept, its application to displaced populations under these unique circumstances introduces challenges that require careful consideration. Early engagement with host countries and international organizations, such as IOM and UNHCR, can facilitate these discussions and ensure that dual citizenship frameworks are developed in alignment with international norms and local contexts.

Tribal sovereignty models from the United States,¹⁸ Canada and other regions provide further insights not just into autonomous legal

¹⁶ Hurst and Butler, 2023.

¹⁷ Peter J. Spiro, *At Home in Two Countries: The Past and Future of Dual Citizenship*, Citizenship and Migration in the Americas Series (New York, New York University Press, 2016).

¹⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "Tribal and native American issues" (n.d.).



systems but also into education, governance and preserving cultural identity within broader national frameworks. While these tribes do not operate under dual citizenship arrangements, their ability to maintain distinct governance structures within a shared legal and political context offers valuable lessons.

Implementation challenges

The practical implementation of this framework faces several complex challenges. Convincing host countries to enter multilateral agreements requires a combination of well-designed incentives, such as access to maritime resources, funding from international climate finance mechanisms, capacity-building support, and potential trade or diplomatic benefits. Even with these incentives, additional backing from the international community and diplomatic pressure from platforms like the United Nations will be essential to foster cooperation.

Aligning the preferences of displaced SIDS populations with those of host communities poses a significant challenge. Existing research highlights that many SIDS populations strongly prefer to remain on their islands,¹⁹ while host communities may resist the influx of migrants due to concerns over cultural integration, resource allocation and preserving local identity. Success will hinge on balancing these tensions by fostering mutual respect and understanding, preserving the cultural identity of SIDS

populations and maintaining social cohesion within host communities. Transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, procedural fairness,²⁰ and support from diaspora networks or cultural exchange programmes will be critical in achieving this balance.

To address domestic opposition in host countries, international organizations such as the United Nations can establish global frameworks that include clear mechanisms for burden-sharing among participating countries. For instance, these frameworks can outline financial contributions from international climate funds, allocate technical resources for infrastructure development and define roles for regional organizations in managing integration processes. Multilateral platforms can also facilitate negotiations to ensure host countries receive tangible benefits, such as long-term investments in health care, education, and housing for displaced and host populations. These mechanisms, coupled with transparent fund management, such as independent audits or shared oversight committees, can help build trust and mitigate resistance among host countries by demonstrating equitable and accountable support structures.

Negotiating decision-making authority within the hubs is another critical challenge. Voting rights must balance equality with practical considerations, such as financial contributions, the size of the displaced population hosted and strategic stakes in the arrangement. Drawing inspiration from examples like the weighted voting systems in the International Monetary

¹⁹ Carol Farbotko and Celia McMichael, "Voluntary immobility and existential security in a changing climate in the Pacific", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 60(2):148–162 (2019); Nikita Perumal, "'The place where I live is where I belong': Community perspectives on climate change and climate-related migration in the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu," *Island Studies Journal*, 13(1):45–64 (2018).

²⁰ Anna Stilz, "Climate displacement and territorial justice", *American Political Science Review*, 1–15 (2024).



Fund and the World Bank, these hubs could implement hybrid models where representation is balanced with contributions to governance and operational costs. Transparency in fund management is crucial. Examples, such as the Green Climate Fund, illustrate how clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms build trust. Additionally, programmes like the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park²¹ and the Coral Triangle Initiative²² demonstrate effective collaborative governance of shared resources, offering valuable insights into equitable distribution and transparent fund allocation. By applying similar principles, these hubs can oversee the sustainable management of SIDS' maritime zones, ensuring economic benefits are channeled back to displaced populations.

To mitigate concerns of disproportionate host country control, the governance hub could adopt a **dual-tiered decision-making framework**, where host countries have influence over domestic integration policies but do not hold authority over SIDS' national identities, self-governance decisions or ability to engage in international relations. International organizations would not have decision-making authority but could serve as observers, mediators, and providers of financial and technical assistance when needed. This ensures that decision-making authority remains with SIDS and host governments while allowing for essential international support in dispute resolution, resource security, and cooperation between displaced populations and host communities.

Finally, operational complexities, including governance and resource management, must be carefully addressed. The rotational governance hub model, for example, will require clear mechanisms for decision-making, equitable resource allocation and transparent fund management. Sustained financial support from global climate funds, bilateral aid and other mechanisms will be critical to ensuring the long-term feasibility of these agreements. Robust institutional frameworks and ongoing international collaboration will be key to overcoming these challenges and operationalizing the framework effectively.

Conclusion

While the framework proposed in this article explores pathways for preserving statehood and governance for SIDS, it fundamentally acknowledges that migration as an adaptation strategy must be accepted and integrated into global responses to climate change. The disappearance of SIDS raises profound legal and moral challenges, particularly the risk of statelessness – a direct breach of internationally recognized human rights. Article 15 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that “everyone has the right to a nationality” and should not be “arbitrarily deprived” of it.²³ In a world centred on the State, the absence of a State denies individuals the basic protections, rights and freedoms essential to human dignity. SIDS face the dual challenge of ensuring sovereignty while securing the rights and cultural identity of displaced citizens.

²¹ For more information, see www.peaceparks.org/tfcas/great-limpopo/.

²² For more information, see www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/.

²³ See also the United Nations 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.



The complexities of this proposal are significant. Details such as awareness programmes for host populations, strategies for fostering inclusivity and mechanisms to address cultural tensions will require careful planning, as nations and organizations engage in substantive conversations. Active local community participation is key to ensuring integration efforts foster empathy and cooperation, supported by public engagement programmes to dispel misconceptions and build unity between displaced and host populations.

Addressing these issues is urgent. While immediate climate crises often dominate global attention, the projected statelessness of SIDS is a pressing challenge requiring proactive action. Countries like Tuvalu and Maldives are already grappling with these questions, making this an increasingly tangible issue. This urgency is driven by the profound legal and systemic changes required to rethink statehood and governance systems entrenched for centuries. Acting now allows time to design carefully balanced frameworks that uphold human rights, cultural preservation and legal continuity, avoiding rushed solutions when the crisis fully unfolds. Establishing these systems before the problem becomes unmanageable ensures a thoughtful and humane response.



Tapping into development finance to address displacement in the context of disasters and climate change: Are the policy foundations in place in Asia and the Pacific?

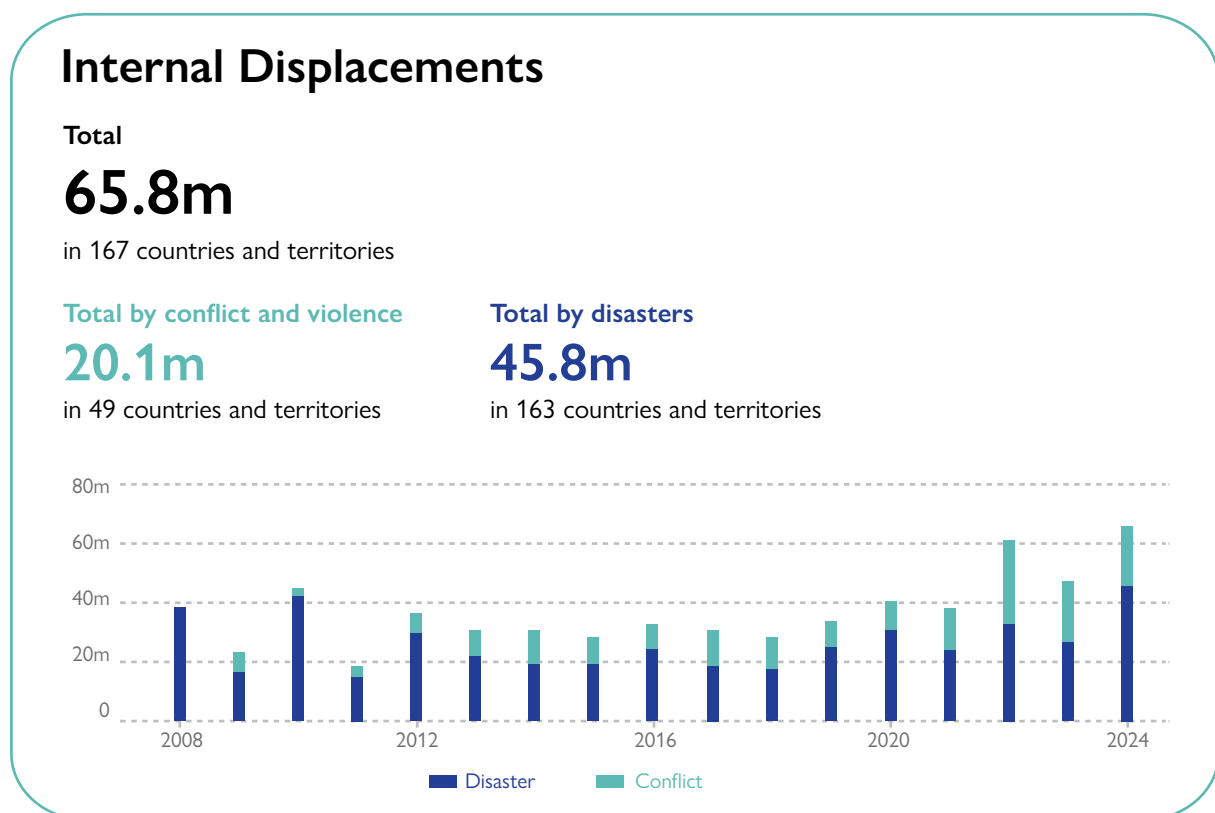
Christelle Cazabat¹

Introduction

Year after year, the number of people living in internal displacement around the world keeps increasing, reaching an all-time high of 83.4 million people at the end of 2024.² Disasters consistently trigger more internal displacements,

or forced movements, than conflicts and violence, and affect more countries and territories (see Figure 1). Asia and the Pacific is the most impacted region with around 75 per cent of the world's disaster-related displacements recorded between 2014 and 2023.

Figure 1. Number of internal displacements linked with conflicts/violence and disasters recorded in 2024 and historical overview since 2008



Source: IDMC, Global Internal Displacement Database (accessed 26 May 2025).

¹ Christelle Cazabat is Head of Programmes at the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

² IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2025* (Geneva, IDMC, 2025).



Each displacement results in short- and long-term impacts on the welfare and well-being of affected individuals. Protracted and repeated displacements result in even more severe consequences. Climate-induced displacement in Asia and the Pacific results in financial losses estimated at USD 275.5 million per day due to people being unable to continue their usual income-generating activities.³ Displacement also generates a need for temporary housing and social protection, which can affect physical and mental health and prevent access to education and other essential services and infrastructure. When disasters repeatedly displace high numbers of people, or for long periods, financial costs and losses can affect not only individuals but also societies and economies, adding up to significant amounts at the national and regional levels. The effects of climate change are expected to increase the scale, duration and severity of disaster displacements in many parts of the world, making the issue ever more urgent to address.⁴

Across the past decade, from 2014 to 2023, 65 per cent of all disaster displacements in the region occurred in low and lower middle-income countries, 33 per cent in upper middle-income countries and less than 2 per cent in high-income countries. This imbalance shows the role of multilateral development banks in supporting affected countries whose limited resources are

often insufficient to cover the various costs and losses associated with displacement.⁵

In 2022, the United Nations Secretary-General, in the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, called for increased development financing to address internal displacement, as historically internal displacement is overwhelmingly funded through humanitarian interventions.⁶ While examples of initiatives funded by multilateral development banks exist, development finance has yet to be fully harnessed to curb internal displacement. To increase the likelihood for multilateral development banks to support affected governments, they must be able to link their financial contributions to existing policies, such as national development plans, disaster risk reduction or climate change adaptation strategies.⁷ In Asia and the Pacific, several countries feature promising examples of how this can be done. The following article highlights some of them and proposes ways to better integrate internal displacement in policies and development finance.

Methodology

This article builds on research and analysis conducted by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) between 2021 and 2024 on national and subnational-level policies,

³ Asian Development Bank (ADB) and IDMC, *Disaster Displacement in Asia and the Pacific: A Business Case for Investment in Prevention and Solutions* (Geneva, IDMC, 2022).

⁴ IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021: Internal Displacement in a Changing Climate* (Geneva, IDMC, 2021).

⁵ ADB and IDMC, *Harnessing Development Financing for Solutions to Displacement in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines, and Geneva, ADB and IDMC, 2024).

⁶ United Nations, *The United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement: Follow-Up to the Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement* (New York, United Nations, 2022).

⁷ UNFCCC, *National Adaptation Plans* (n.d.).



laws, regulations, legislation, strategies and plans linked with internal displacement in the context of disasters and climate change and developed by governments across different countries in Asia and the Pacific.⁸ Around 100 were found to mention displacement, evacuations or forced internal migration with varying degrees of emphasis – from a simple reference to the inclusion of measures to prevent and respond to the phenomenon. Although this analysis provides a large overview of existing frameworks linked with internal displacement in the context of disasters and climate change in 23 countries in Asia and the Pacific, it cannot be considered to be exhaustive, and other frameworks in the region may include related considerations.

IDMC benefited from the pro bono support of the international law firm DLA Piper's Asia-Pacific regional office whose lawyers supported the identification, translation and analysis of relevant frameworks. Additional research and analysis were conducted for the Asian Development Bank under a technical assistance project.⁹

Overview of the inclusion of displacement in the context of disasters and climate change in national frameworks across Asia and the Pacific

Given the scale of disaster-related displacement in Asia and the Pacific, it is not surprising that most countries in the region consider the issue in their national policies, laws, regulations, strategies and plans. Multilateral development banks and

other donors can base their financial support to affected governments on such frameworks, and approach the issue from several entry points depending on the national context and the government's priorities. Beyond multilateral development banks' specific mechanisms to support countries in emergencies and respond to their most immediate needs through disaster response and recovery projects, the most sustainable and cost-effective interventions for governments and their financial partners are investments in disaster and displacement risk reduction and long-term planning for solutions.

Frameworks across Asia and the Pacific provide plenty of opportunities to ground such interventions in national commitments and plans. Around two thirds of the frameworks analysed included measures to prevent future displacement in the context of disasters and climate change.¹⁰ A similar proportion considered ways to put displaced people on a solutions pathway, such as offering return to their areas of origin, relocation or sustainable integration in their host communities.

Most of the relevant frameworks identified through this analysis focused on disasters (e.g. disaster management plans, disaster response plans, disaster risk reduction plans or policies, laws, acts or standard operating procedures on disasters and emergencies) or climate change (e.g. climate change policies, national adaptation plans and strategies for climate

⁸ See also ADB and IDMC, *Integrating Displacement Considerations in Country Dialogues and Planning: Guidance Note* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines, and Geneva, ADB and IDMC, 2025).

⁹ See www.adb.org/projects/53124-001/main.

¹⁰ ADB and IDMC, 2022.



change resilience).¹¹ These frameworks however often lack solid assessments of the main drivers, impacts and risks of displacement at the national and subnational levels upon which to build concrete recommendations. In the absence of more comprehensive assessments of drivers, impacts and risks, displacement is often referred to in a limited and standardized way; without this targeted analysis, securing related funding would be a challenge. Yet several countries in the region offer examples of disaster or climate change-related frameworks addressing displacement in a comprehensive and inclusive way. That is the case in the Philippines where the National Disaster Risk and Management Plan and the National Climate Change Action Plan describe measures to prevent and respond to disaster displacement and ways to achieve durable solutions for people displaced in the context of disasters or climate change. India's National Disaster Management Plan is another interesting example, which includes proposals for the socioeconomic rehabilitation of affected communities and recognizes the specific impacts of displacement on people with disabilities, children, women and older people.

In certain countries, displacement-specific frameworks were developed, either focusing on displacement in the context of disasters and climate change or encompassing all types of displacement. Vanuatu, which was chosen as one

of the pilot countries by the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, developed a National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement, which is particularly comprehensive and well structured, setting out strategic priority areas for addressing displacement and facilitating the successful return of internally displaced persons, their local integration or their planned relocation. In promoting an evidence-based approach to displacement, it calls for a displacement tracking mechanism to collect disaggregated data on those affected, including the host communities. Bangladesh's 2021 National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-Induced Internal Displacement is another widely referenced example of a comprehensive approach including assistance, livelihood opportunities and improved community infrastructure. The Strategy also emphasizes the importance of addressing the impact of displacement and relocation on host communities by providing them with social security assistance and engaging them in local integration interventions. In 2022, the Government of Bangladesh also rolled out its National Action Plan (2022–2042) to implement the National Strategy on Internal Displacement. Frameworks that specifically focus on displacement are helpful to comprehensively address displacement, enabling multilateral development banks to provide targeted and cross-sectoral financial support.

A few countries consider displacement as part of their national development strategies and plans, but this approach is not common. On rare occasions, displacement was found to be included in sectoral frameworks, such as

¹¹ Displacement-inclusive frameworks were identified in the following countries across Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, Fiji, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.



social protection (in Azerbaijan) or welfare plans (in the Philippines), children-specific plans (in the Philippines), public health (in China) or rural development plans (in Bangladesh).

When displacement-inclusive frameworks are not present in a country, multilateral development banks may base their financial support on international frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and relevant Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Governments can capitalize on country-level interventions and on investments and support opportunities, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks with United Nations country teams (UNCTs) and similar mechanisms with international financing institutions to integrate displacement-related aspects in their broader efforts to deliver on these commitments. Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for instance, the overarching objective of “leaving no one behind” is a strong and broad entry point to consider displaced people, who are often among the most vulnerable groups, in development initiatives. Each of the Sustainable Development Goals further provides opportunities to invest in resilient infrastructure (thereby limiting the risk of related displacement in the future), reduce inequalities within countries (including between displaced and non-displaced people) and much more.¹² Displacement also is clearly positioned in the Sendai Framework for

Disaster Risk Reduction, which can serve as a basis for investments to reduce the number of people affected by disasters (including those displaced).¹³

Towards better inclusion of displacement in the context of climate change and disasters in national frameworks and development finance

This analysis of policy, legal and regulatory frameworks in Asia and the Pacific provides multiple examples of the various ways governments can link their existing priorities in terms of sustainable socioeconomic development, disaster risk reduction and climate change to displacement to increase the probability of securing financial support from multilateral development banks and other donors, including vertical climate funds. This would not only allow them to address the severe consequences of internal displacement on affected people and economic growth but also enable them to deliver on their broader commitments towards sustainable development in a changing climate.

Existing frameworks tend to lack concrete proposals for interventions as a result of data and knowledge gaps at the country level, but sources of information are available to provide at least initial guidance and serve to develop more tailored and impactful approaches. These sources include the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix in countries where the Organization collects data, the IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database, the United Nations Office for the Coordination

¹² United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/1 on [Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (25 September 2015).

¹³ United Nations, [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030](#) (New York, United Nations, 2015).



of Humanitarian Affairs' Humanitarian Data Exchange platform, the UNCTs' annual Common Country Assessment, and assessments of the impacts and risks of internal displacement in the context of disasters and climate change run by several organizations at the global level, including the World Bank, IMPACT Initiatives and more.

As part of their support to member States, multilateral development banks may be in a position to move beyond funding for interventions to enhancing primary data collection, tailoring assessments and advancing policy development to support the efforts of governments to address displacement and advance sustainable development for greater efficiency and lasting impact.

In the context of disasters and climate change particularly, long-term investments in prevention and solutions can be game changers. Multilateral development banks can help address the causes of

displacement, such as disasters or environmental degradation, as well as factors of vulnerability, such as low levels of human development. They can also play a role in improving coordination with other platforms, agencies and mechanisms that can help address internal displacement. They can work alongside national governments to strengthen governance and systems to ensure better prevention, responses and recovery, and accompany governments in ensuring enabling environments for durable solutions. More comprehensive, cross-cutting and inclusive national frameworks making the clear link between displacement and development in the context of disasters and climate change can strengthen the business case for greater resource mobilization needed to reduce future risks and better support affected communities.



Making migration work for climate adaptation: Classifying remittances as climate finance

Sam Huckstep and Jonathan Beynon¹

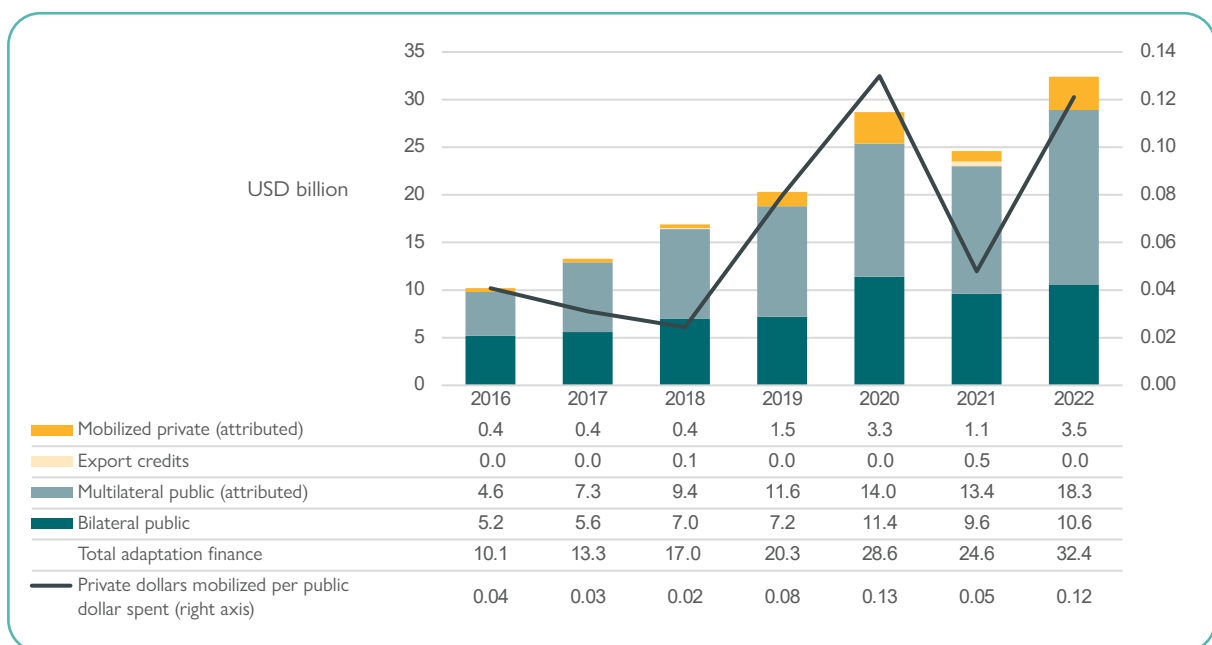
Introduction

Current flows of adaptation finance are highly insufficient. Labour migration programmes, meanwhile, can provide transformative finance. If targeted towards climate-vulnerable households, migration programmes could be a lifeline for adaptation. This article argues that the selection of migrant labour from communities most vulnerable to climate change could be incentivized by counting a portion of their remittance flows as mobilized private climate finance, and that this may have significant benefits.

The adaptation finance shortfall

Climate adaptation is massively underfunded. This situation is expected to continue and to worsen. The 2009 commitment by high-income countries to supply low-income countries with USD 100 billion per year was met with difficulty two years late. Even when met, it provided only USD 32.4 billion for adaptation.² Estimates by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) suggest that low- and middle-income countries' adaptation finance needs will total USD 160–340 billion by 2030 and USD 315–365 billion by 2050.³ This vastly exceeds current flows of adaptation finance.

Figure 1. Adaptation finance provided and mobilized per component, 2016–2022



Source: Adapted from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013–2022* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2024).

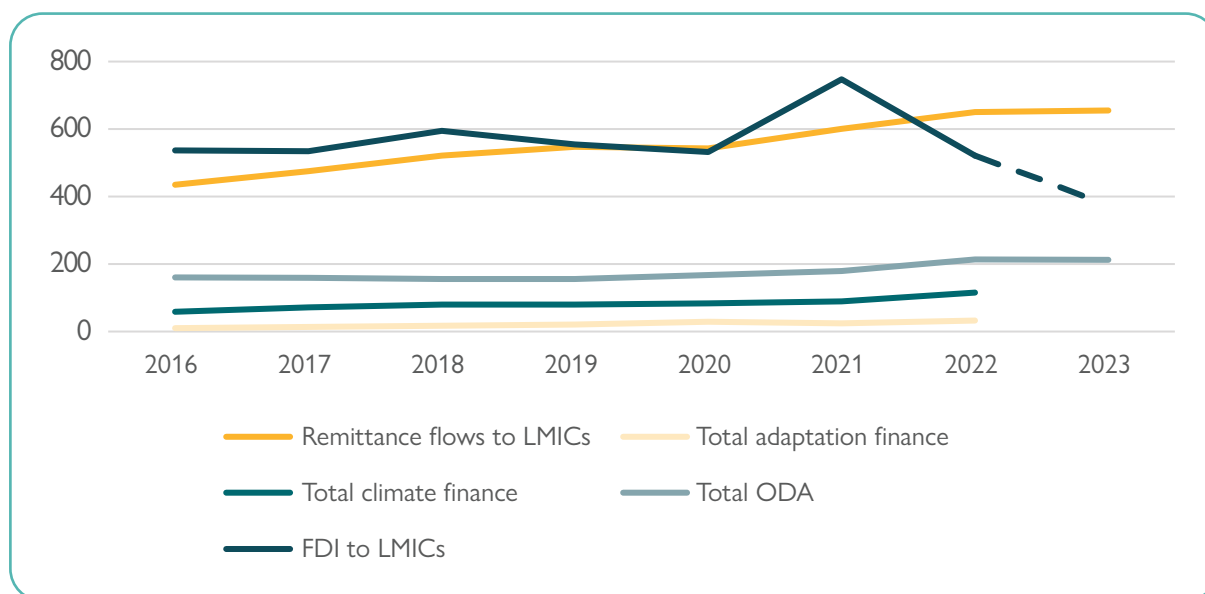
¹ Sam Huckstep is Research Associate at the Centre for Global Development. Jonathan Beynon is Senior Policy Associate for Climate Finance, Europe Programme, at the Centre for Global Development.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013–2022* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2024).

³ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfinanced. Underprepared. Inadequate Investment and Planning on Climate Adaptation Leaves World Exposed* (Nairobi, UNEP, 2023).



Figure 2. Remittances versus other financial flows to low- and middle-income countries, 2016–2023 (USD million)



Source: Huckstep and Beynon, 2024.

Note: The foreign direct investment for 2023 is projected by Dilip Ratha, Vandana Chandra, Eung Ju Kim, Sonia Plaza and Akhtar Mahmood, *Remittances Slowed in 2023, Expected to Grow Faster in 2024*, Migration and Development Brief 40 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2024), and that climate finance figures are only available up to 2022.

The historical failure to provide adequate amounts of climate finance is partly due to lower-than-expected mobilization of private climate finance. Mobilization for adaptation is especially challenging: returns on investment are much lower, hindering private contributions. In 2022, only USD 3.5 billion was mobilized, despite numerous commitments to increase mobilization (Figure 1). The UNEP, notably, argues that much greater mobilization will be needed. They suggest that remittances offer a possible source.

The potential of labour migration

The benefits of international labour migration to low-income households are “immediate and huge”, “at least an order of magnitude larger than the income gains from any other development

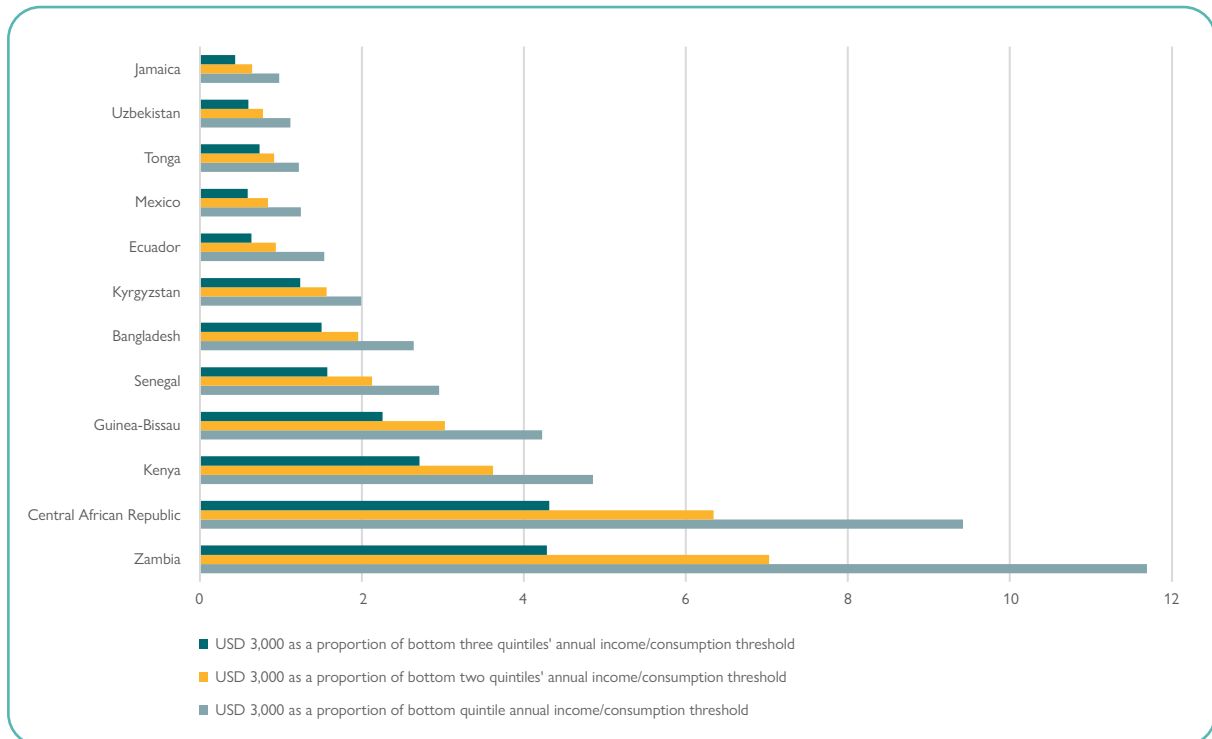
program that has been rigorously evaluated”.⁴ Productivity gains in countries of destination allow hundreds of billions of dollars in remittances to be sent (Figure 2).

For households affected by climate shocks, remittances can be transformative. Remittances can go directly to households, allowing them to respond to their most immediate needs and to invest in new opportunities. They can allow households to maintain consumption during shocks, pay off debts, reconstruct dwellings or proactively reinforce them, diversify income

⁴ David McKenzie, “Poverty, inequality, and international migration: Insights from 10 years of migration and development conferences”, *Revue d’économie du développement*, 25(3–4):13–28 (2017).



Figure 3. Indicative remittance sum (USD 3,000) as a multiple of threshold income or consumption across quintiles, 2022



Source: Data from World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform, version 20240326_2017, 20240326_2011, data set (2024) and Global Change Data Lab, Our World in Data, [Threshold income or consumption for second decile, world, 1990 to 2024](#), data set (2024).

Note: Data used are measured in PPPUSD in 2017 prices (international dollars converted by purchasing power parity to account for differences in costs of living across countries). Note that for Jamaica, Uzbekistan, Tonga and Zambia, the most recent data are from 2021 rather than 2022.

streams away from agriculture or fund health care. In numerous contexts, remittances are found to be a lifeline. Households receiving remittances demonstrate increased resilience to climate shocks and are more likely to invest in ex-ante adaptation.⁵

Despite the enormous gains migration can offer to the most vulnerable to climate change, very few governments have attempted to

provide access to migration to highly vulnerable populations who would most benefit. This is a wasted opportunity. A dollar of aid spent in a poorer country is likely to be more impactful than one spent in a richer country. Migration works similarly: not only does USD 3,000 of remittances (an indicative amount that could be sent by a participant in a seasonal migration programme) represent a much higher multiple of average incomes in poorer countries than in richer countries, but it represents a much higher multiple of incomes in poorer households than in richer households within each country (Figure 3). The impact of migration on poverty and vulnerability could increase if access to it could be brought to the most vulnerable households.

⁵ Sam Huckstep and Jonathan Beynon, *Making Migration Work for Climate Adaptation: Classifying Remittances as Climate Finance*, Center for Global Development Policy Paper No. 343 (Washington, D.C., Center for Global Development, 2024).



The failure to proactively and coherently use migration policy to support development and adaptation is fundamentally due to an incentives mismatch. The transformative benefits of migration to the poorest are a positive externality uncaptured by the government of the country of destination, weighed against the inconvenience of reorienting programmes. Countries of destination therefore remain agnostic as to migrants' countries of origin and the effects of migration elsewhere. Development is seldom a primary concern.

Remittances as climate finance

We propose that where labour migration pathways are deliberately targeted towards climate-vulnerable communities, the remittances generated should be classified as mobilized private climate finance for adaptation. Governments claim to prioritize mobilizing increased volumes of private climate finance. Where this is the case, the proposed change could incentivize greater coherence between migration and development policy. This mobilization would not dislocate or reduce existing commitments: bilateral public finance and mobilized private finance are not substitutable. Instead, it would stretch the effects of scarce bilateral public finance further.

This would also not necessarily entail an increase in immigration. Climate-vulnerable populations are likely to have reduced access to education, making low-skill migration programmes most likely to be suitable. Low-skill programmes are already widely used, especially in agriculture (often using temporary visas). Authors propose that these programmes be reoriented, with expansion a separate consideration. Some previous efforts,

such as the Temporary and Circular Labour Migration programme between Colombia and Spain, indicate that this is achievable.⁶

Eligibility to use climate finance

A project's eligibility to mobilize private climate finance follows eligibility to use public climate finance. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) funding classification guidance specifies that for eligibility for the "climate change adaptation" marker, an activity must:

intend to reduce the vulnerability of human or natural systems to the current and expected impacts of climate change, including climate variability, by maintaining or increasing resilience, through increased ability to adapt to, or absorb, climate change stresses, shocks and variability and/or by helping reduce exposure to them.⁷

A migration programme could therefore only use climate finance if it was deliberately targeted to assist climate-vulnerable populations explicitly in order to reduce vulnerability. (Such a programme would be similar to a cash or cash-for-work programme, many of which have already been classified as adaptation finance.)

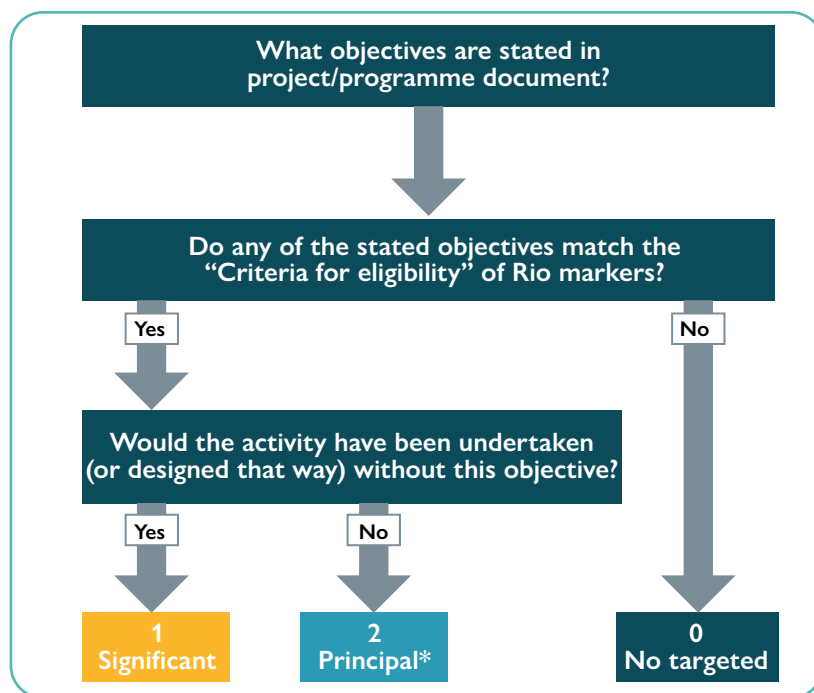
A project using climate finance may obtain either a "principal" or a "significant" score (Figure 4). The score is important in determining the proportion of a project's funding classifiable as

⁶ See Huckstep and Beynon, 2024.

⁷ OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), *OECD DAC Rio Markers for Climate: Handbook* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2016).



Figure 4. Decision tree for scoring an activity against a Rio marker



Source: Adapted from OECD DAC, 2016.

Note: *Assigning a double principal score (e.g. to both mitigation and adaptation) to the same activity should be considered only upon explicit justification.

climate finance and the proportion of mobilized finance attributable to the activity.

- **Principal:** A project in which *adaptation is a principal motivating aim*. The project's financing can be classified as up to 100 per cent climate finance.
- **Significant:** A project in which the climate-related objective is *explicitly stated* but not *the fundamental driver or motivator* for it. A lower proportion of financing is classified as climate finance, typically 30–50 per cent.

The programme proposed would *originate in the need to source workers* but would be *redesigned to deliberately recruit from climate-vulnerable populations*: without the aim of reducing vulnerability by increasing earning opportunities,

it would not be undertaken in this way. Under OECD guidance (Figure 4), it appears a matter of discretion whether such a programme should be marked as “principal” or “significant” (although “significant” will be more likely). Its climate finance coefficient could therefore typically range from 30 per cent to (exceptionally) 100 per cent.

Mobilizing private climate finance

Private climate finance can be considered “mobilized” by a public actor if there is *a demonstrable causal link* between the specific leveraging mechanism used by a public financial actor and the private finance made available for a specific project or programme.⁸

⁸ OECD, *Scaling up the Mobilisation of Private Finance for Climate Action in Developing Countries: Challenges and Opportunities for International Providers* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2023).



Under OECD DAC guidance and current practice, remittances can be considered mobilized private climate finance if they are:

- (1) Directed to highly climate-vulnerable communities in need of adaptation support, *by*
- (2) Deliberately targeted migration programmes which would not have benefited these populations *without*
- (3) Public interventions that are explicitly intended to make support for adaptation a key component, *such that*
- (4) The programme fulfils the Rio marker guidance.

When calculating mobilized finance, the total mobilized is multiplied by the coefficient set under the Rio marker guidance. For a project tagged as “significant” with a 30 per cent coefficient, 30 per cent of private finance mobilized could be considered mobilized private climate finance.

Some approaches to scoring and reporting climate finance have been criticized for “greenwashing”. It is crucial that the proposed migration programme is properly targeted at the most vulnerable to climate change and that mobilization is not claimed falsely. Beyond this proposal, it is critically important to improve and ensure the credibility and integrity of all climate finance reporting.

Assessing mobilization potential

The efficient mobilization of private finance has long been pursued, notably through the failed “billions to trillions” agenda. These efforts have been largely disappointing. In 2022, each dollar of public adaptation finance mobilized only USD 0.12 (see Figure 1).

If countries of destination do prioritize efficient mobilization of private climate finance, the proposed climate-targeted migration programme should obtain higher leverage ratios than alternative investments. Ideally, it should exceed a leverage ratio of 1:1.

Before assessing the mobilization potential of targeted migration programmes, several conceptual points must be considered.

What share of net remittances should be considered eligible for classification as climate finance?

Not all remittances are directly spent on activities typically considered “adaptation”. We argue that *if* programme participants are adequately selected from climate-vulnerable communities, all remittances (net of deductions and after applying the climate finance coefficient) should be classified as mobilized. This recognizes (1) that any resources transferred to highly vulnerable communities will increase adaptive capacity, following the logic of cash programmes funded by adaptation finance; and (2) that distinguishing between “adaptation” and “non-adaptation” activities in settings of high climate vulnerability is very challenging.

How can remittances be measured? Authors suggest that remittances be measured through partnerships with low-cost remittance service providers which participants are required to use. Surveys offer a (less reliable) alternative.

Which deductions must be made? Participation costs to migrants and, possibly, opportunity costs must be deducted from remittance totals. Participation costs include visa costs and airfare and represent money no longer available for adaptation due to the programme. Opportunity costs may need to be estimated and deducted, but



this is not clear from OECD guidance. Deductions reduce leverage ratios but incentivize countries of destination to minimize costs.

The amount of climate finance mobilized through a programme's remittances can be calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Climate finance mobilized via remittances} = \alpha(\beta(\gamma - (\gamma\delta) - \varepsilon) - \eta)$$

α – total number of migrants

β – climate finance coefficient

γ – average amount remitted per migrant: the product of *average percentage of earnings remitted and average earnings* (for which inputs are *hours worked, earnings per hour and tax rates*)

δ – cost of sending remittances, as a percentage

ε – opportunity cost (if applicable under interpretation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) guidance)

η – participation cost

Calculating totals and leverage ratios

The costs of the migration programme must be assessed against remittances mobilized to establish a leverage ratio. In estimates for two programmes, we find that efficient mobilization is possible.

In the case of the pilot programme of Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme, which ran from 2012 to 2014, State expenditure reached USD 1,274 per migrant when upfront costs were distributed beyond the initial cohort. During this period, 3,487 migrants worked in Australia, remitting an average of USD 4,465; from this,

participation and opportunity costs amounting to USD 1,831 per migrant are deducted, giving a post-deduction total of USD 2,634 per migrant. This would, *had the programme targeted climate-vulnerable populations*, give a leverage ratio of public to mobilized private climate finance of 1:2.1 with a "principal" Rio marker and 1:1.05 with a "significant" marker.

Projections for a targeted version of the United Kingdom's Seasonal Worker Visa scheme find similar results across a range of scenarios. Leverage ratios vary from 1:1.4 for a successful pilot programme with a low "significant" Rio marker to 1:10.2 for a highly successful scaled programme with a "principal" Rio marker. If the entirety of the United Kingdom's Seasonal Worker Visa scheme was targeted towards climate-vulnerable populations, between USD 97 million and USD 543 million of private climate finance could be mobilized per year. This would equate to between 2.8 and 15.5 per cent of all private climate finance mobilized for adaptation in 2022.⁹

Why the proposal matters

Adaptation funding to climate-vulnerable countries is currently deeply lacking, with little expectation of improvement. In the absence of such funding, the poorest populations within low-income countries must pay for adaptation from extremely limited budgets. It is crucial that greater finance for adaptation is mobilized. In several ways, programmes redistributing access to higher earnings through international migration can outperform alternative possibilities.

⁹ For full calculations, see Huckstep and Beynon, 2024.



Targeted migration programmes are an efficient use of climate finance. Current mobilization ratios for adaptation finance are around 1:0.12. Targeted migration programmes can stretch scarce climate finance much further.

Remittances go beyond concessionality. Remittances are de facto grants. Around 70 per cent of climate finance is currently provided through loans, often at non-concessional rates. Remittances, by contrast, do not need to be repaid.

Remittances are direct. Conventional climate finance seldom reaches the local level, where it can make the most difference. By contrast, remittances can be transferred directly to the most vulnerable households.

Migration interventions' impacts exceed those of conventional programmes. Conventional interventions are estimated to increase incomes by 20–30 per cent at most.¹⁰ Even a very short period of low-skill work by an international migrant, by contrast, can double *household* income.¹¹

In addition, the proposal may have positive spillover effects on country-of-destination behaviour. The incentive to maximize mobilized private climate finance should encourage the country of destination to:

- Reduce programme participation costs, to minimize deductions;

- Reduce migrant exploitation, to increase remittances;
- Reduce remittance sending costs;
- Reduce taxes on participants' earnings and remittances.

Countries of destination currently often ignore migrants' outcomes. By giving them international credit for higher remittance totals, this could change.

Implementing the proposed programmes

Implementation requires (1) creating a (low-skill) migration programme or adapting an existing programme; (2) identifying countries of origin; (3) targeting climate-vulnerable populations for participation; and (4) preparing programme funding sources.

Creating or adapting a programme. Lack of access to skill development is often a component of climate vulnerability. For this reason, programmes with no, or low, skill requirements are likely to be most accessible to target populations. Programmes in the agriculture sector – often temporary or circular – may best fit these criteria. Where one already exists, it can be adapted.

Identifying countries of origin. Climate finance must be used in 155 “non-Annex I” countries under the 1992 UNFCCC (see Figure 5). Migrants must therefore be selected from these partner countries.

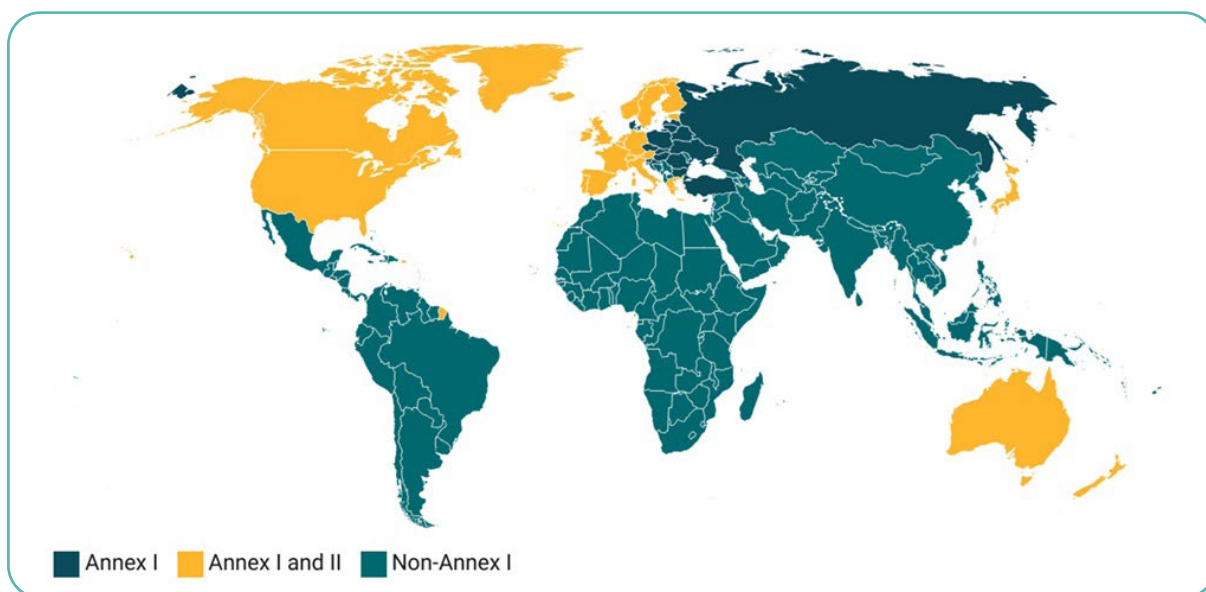
Targeting climate-vulnerable populations. Climate finance cannot be used or mobilized

¹⁰ Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Hannah Postel and Elisa Mosler Vidal, “Poverty, migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Briefing Paper (London, ODI, 2017).

¹¹ Michael A. Clemens and Hannah Postel, “Temporary work visas as US-Haiti development cooperation: A preliminary impact evaluation”, *IZA Journal of Labor and Development*, 6:1–18 (2017).



Figure 5. Countries by United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Annex status



Source: UNFCCC, 1992.

Notes: 1. Created using Datawrapper. National borders are set by Datawrapper.

2. This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

for programmes that do not successfully target vulnerable participants. This requires careful screening in the country of origin. Participants must be selected based on *exposure* (location) and *adaptive capacity* (often associated with wealth). Remote sensing and partnerships with local actors may facilitate effective targeting and recruitment.

Funding. Programme costs will include migrant selection, screening, visa support and support in the country of destination. Some costs must be borne by public climate finance for mobilization to be possible; these may be eligible as official development assistance. Funding should also be sought from private-sector employers benefiting from the programme.

Beyond this, the impact of the programme may be maximized through parallel development

projects in migrant-sending communities. These may include training to improve “climate literacy”, supporting optimal uses of new resource influxes; and projects improving access to credit, reducing local barriers to growth or pooling remittances for public goods. Programmes should also be rigorously evaluated.

Conclusion

The severe shortage of adaptation finance is a major problem harming the world’s most vulnerable. The failure of countries of destination to use migration to support these same populations, despite the availability of existing programmes with the potential to be relatively easily reoriented, is an intersecting failure. This proposal addresses these two failures, arguing for a small change with major benefits for adaptation. The option should be considered by country-of-destination governments.



Harnessing the momentum: Exploring the rising civic and political inclusion of migrants in a changing world

Marie McAuliffe and Micaela Lincango¹

Introduction

The rise of far-right parties using immigration to stoke societal fears and disillusionment, compounded by artificial intelligence-driven disinformation, underscores the importance of highlighting and facilitating the positive contributions of migrants and migration.² Long-term research and analysis indicate that migration is a significant driver of global development, benefiting migrants, their families, and countries of origin and destination by shaping societies, economies and political systems.³ Despite a growing trend of non-citizen residents gaining the right to vote in local, regional and national elections, and the significant rise in the acceptance of multiple citizenships over recent decades, many continue to downplay migrants' contributions. They inaccurately suggest migrants' civic and political participation is limited.

This narrative is exacerbated by narrower definitions of "migrants", which limit the understanding of the diverse roles they play in society. While the 1998 United Nations Statistical

Commission defines "international migrants" as individuals who have lived outside their country of birth for 12 months or longer regardless of their legal status, some analysts exclude migrants who have gained citizenship in their destination country in its definition,⁴ incorrectly negating the important contributions of migrants who have become citizens of other countries.⁵ This article examines migrants' civic and political participation, with a focus on expanding multiple citizenship and voting rights for non-citizens. It challenges a persistent myth surrounding migration, elections and civic engagement: the notion that migrants do not vote.

Further, the article examines how granting voting rights to non-citizen residents in local, regional and national elections can transform the political landscape, empowering migrants to contribute not only as workers, consumers, taxpayers and business owners but also as active voters. The article is structured in three sections. The first provides an overview of key concepts related to migrants' contributions, with a particular emphasis on the civic-political contributions. The second delves into the growing acceptance of multiple citizenship and its expansion over time. The final section examines the rise of non-citizen voting and its broader implications.

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² Marie McAuliffe, Adrian Kitimbo and Binod Khadria, "Chapter 5: Reflections on migrants' contributions in an era of increasing disruption and disinformation", in *World Migration Report 2020* (Marie McAuliffe and Binod Khadria, eds.) (Geneva, IOM, 2019).

³ Marie McAuliffe and Linda Adhiambo Oucho, "Chapter 1: Report overview – migration continues to be part of the solution in a rapidly changing world, but key challenges remain", in *World Migration Report 2024* (Marie McAuliffe and Linda Adhiambo Oucho, eds.) (Geneva, IOM, 2024).

⁴ World Bank, *Migrant, Refugees and Societies*, World Development Report (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2023).

⁵ IOM, "Chapter 2: Migration and migrants – a global overview", in *World Migration Report 2024* (Marie McAuliffe and Linda Adhiambo Oucho, eds.) (Geneva, IOM, 2024).



Concepts and context

Contributing involves offering something – money, time, ideas, labour or material resources – towards a shared purpose alongside others. Beyond personal relationships, contributions play a vital role in broader societal interactions and engagement. They take place within structural frameworks and social processes that influence and sustain communities, highlighting the interconnected nature of individuals, groups and institutions.⁶

While the focus often falls on their sociocultural and economic roles, migrants also make substantial contributions to civic-political life (see text box for definitions). These contributions can be made through formal and informal channels. Formal avenues of political participation include voting, running for office, voting in referendums, joining political parties, serving on advisory councils and engaging in other arenas of political dialogue.⁷ Equally important are informal avenues, such as participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, volunteering and engaging in other forms of civic activism, which provide host communities and migrants alike with opportunities to influence and shape society.⁸

Regardless of how migrants participate, evidence from different countries shows that migrants can influence policy reform and drive social

Sociocultural relates to different groups of people in society and their habits, traditions and beliefs.

Civic-political relates to participation in civic duties in the context of accepted authority of the State.

Economic relates to aspects concerned with trade, industry or money.

Sources: Cambridge University Press and Assessment, *Cambridge Dictionary* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University, 2019); Gabriel A. Almon and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963).

change.⁹ For example, the Mexican diaspora in the United States has successfully lobbied for loan moratoriums benefiting Mexico, showing how diaspora communities can influence host country policies to support their homelands. Their political participation, whether through voting, advocacy or holding office, has resulted in significant reforms across various policy areas, including migration, education, labour rights and health care, among others. Additionally, migrants' engagement in community-building activities, volunteer work and advocacy organizations can strengthen social cohesion and foster cross-cultural understanding, facilitating their integration.

The extent to which migrants can make civic-political contributions is more heavily

⁶ McAuliffe et al., 2019.

⁷ Lorenzo Gabrielli, Sonia Gsir and Ricard Zapata-Barrero, "Political and civic participation of immigrants in host countries: An interpretative framework from the perspective of the origin countries and societies", in *Migrant Integration between Homeland and Host Society* (Agnieszka Weinár, Anne Unterreiner and Philippe Fargues, eds.), volume 1 (Cham, Switzerland, Springer, 2017).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Richard Zapata-Barrero, Lorenzo Gabrielli, Elena Sánchez-Montijano and Thibaut Jaulin, "The political participation of immigrants in host countries: An interpretative framework from the perspective of origin countries and societies", research report position paper, INTERACT RR2013/07 (San Domenico di Fiesole, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2013); Francis Leslie Seidle, "Local voting rights for non-nationals: Experience in Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium", *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 16:27–42 (2015); Zita Dixon, Melissa L. Bessaha and Margaret Post, "Beyond the ballot: Immigrant integration through civic engagement and advocacy", *Race and Social Problems*, 10:366–375 (2018).

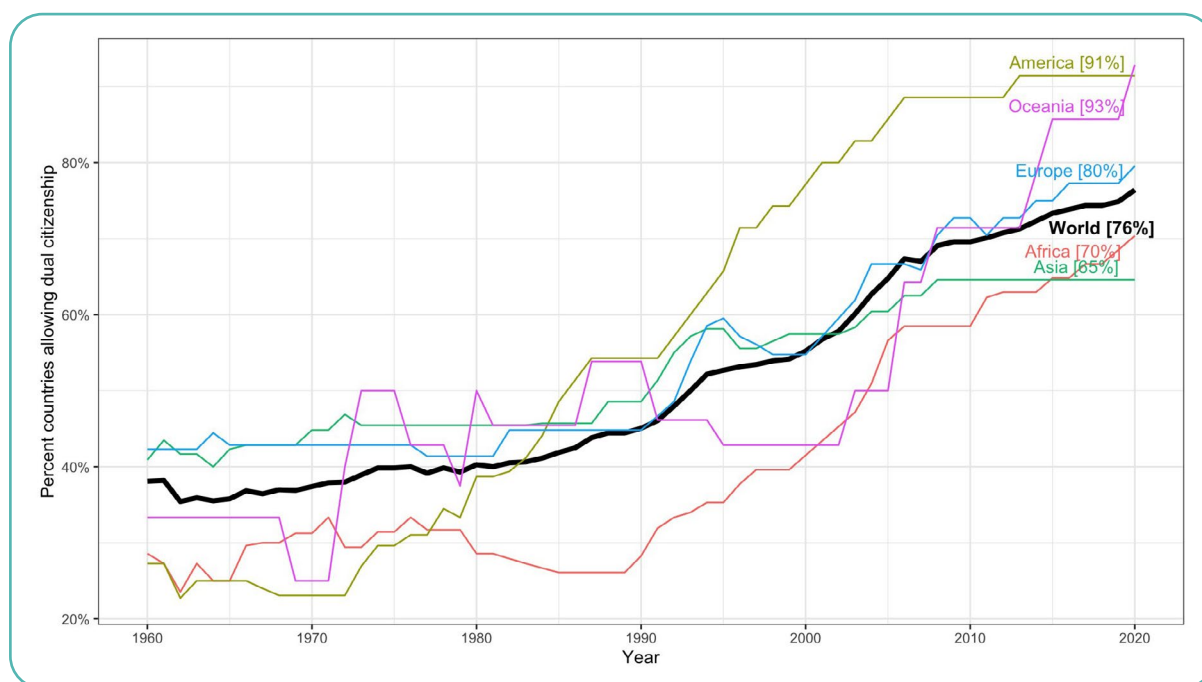


influenced by structural policy settings at national, subnational and local levels compared to their sociocultural and economic contributions.¹⁰ Key factors shaping migrants' civic-political involvement include not only structural settings but also cultural and demographic aspects.¹¹ The growing global trend of recognizing multiple citizenship and allowing non-citizens to vote reflects a shift towards more inclusive political systems that acknowledge migrants' roles in society. The following sections delve into the evolution of these trends.

Multiple citizenship

Multiple citizenship has historically been a source of international tension, particularly concerning which State has the right to provide diplomatic protection to individuals holding multiple citizenships, and the potential for conflicting loyalties when disputes arise between those States.¹² In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, countries sought to reduce instances of multiple citizenship through bilateral treaties and strict citizenship laws. However, changing social norms and jurisprudence regarding the entitlements of emigrants have led to a gradual acceptance of multiple citizenship.¹³

Figure 1. Expatriate dual citizenship acceptance, global trend and by world region, 1960–2020 [% in 2020]



Source: Maarten, 2015.

¹⁰ McAuliffe et al., 2019.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Peter J. Spiro, "Dual nationality and the meaning of citizenship", *Emory Law Journal*, 46(4):1411–1485 (1997).

¹³ Maarten Vink, Arjan H. Schakel, David Reichel, Ngo Chun Luk and Gerard-René de Groot, "The international diffusion of expatriate dual citizenship", *Migration Studies*, 7(3):362–383 (2019).



In 1960, only 38 per cent of countries recognized multiple citizenship, compelling many individuals to forfeit their original citizenship upon acquiring a new one. This disproportionately affected women, who, in many countries, were automatically denaturalized upon marrying a foreign national. In the Netherlands, for instance, women had to forfeit their citizenship acquired at birth if they married someone of a different nationality until 1985.¹⁴ By 2020, however, 76 per cent of countries embraced the concept of multiple citizenship and put limits on the ability to denaturalize their citizens (see Figure 1). While there is a prevailing global trend towards multiple citizenship, the degree of acceptance differs widely among regions and countries, with faster progress observed in the Americas, Europe and Oceania, compared to Africa and Asia.

Acceptance of multiple citizenship enables migrants to maintain strong social, economic and political ties with their country of origin while acquiring the rights and benefits of citizenship in their new country. It strengthens connections between the diaspora and their families, friends and communities. Economically, multiple citizenship can significantly contribute to the development of their home countries through remittances, investments, and the transfer of innovative ideas and technologies. Politically, multiple citizens often retain the right to vote in their countries of origin, empowering them to influence policies and advocate for changes that directly impact their communities back home.¹⁵

Expansion of non-citizen voting rights

Alongside the growing acceptance of multiple citizenship – albeit more slowly – non-citizen voting rights have also increased, reflecting a shared recognition of migrants' vital contributions to civic-political life. The right to vote is a fundamental political right that stands alongside a range of other rights within democracies, holding particular significance because it provides access to shaping political power and influencing the laws and policies of a municipality or country of residence.¹⁶ It symbolizes the recognition of migrants as integral members of the civic community, allowing them to actively participate in the decision-making processes that shape the societies they are part of.¹⁷

The idea of granting voting rights to migrants can be controversial because it challenges the established link between voting, citizenship and geography.¹⁸ However, these connections have historically been malleable. Nations have continually adjusted voting requirements, with eligibility influenced by factors like sex, literacy, age, property, health standards and migratory status.¹⁹ The United States and Chile were among the first to allow non-citizen voting. Some parts of the United States introduced it during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Chile followed suit in 1925.²⁰ Since then, there have been different shifts, yet the trend has been to expand them. Granting voting rights to non-citizens highlights

¹⁴ Maarten Vink, Gerard-Rene De Groot and Ngo Chun Luk, *MACIMIDE Global Expatriate Dual Citizenship Dataset*, Harvard Dataverse, V5 (accessed 4 February 2025) (2020); Dimitry Kochenov, "Citizenship", in *Citizenship*, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2019).

¹⁵ Roland Pongou and Julius Djoulissi Oloufede, *The Economic, Social and Political Dimensions of Dual Citizenship*, Global Economic Institute Africa (GEIA) Research Summary Series No. 2016/002 (n.p., GEIA, 2016); David Leblang, "Harnessing the diaspora: Dual citizenship, migrant return remittances", *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(1):75–101 (2015).

¹⁶ Kess Groenendijk, "Voting rights and political participation of non-national immigrants", Focus Migration Policy Brief No. 26 (Bonn, Germany, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2014).

¹⁷ Ibid.; Kimia Pakdaman, "Spring 2019 journal: Noncitizen voting rights in the United States", *Berkeley Public Policy Journal* (University of California, Berkeley, Goldman School of Public Policy, 2019); Daniel Munro, "Integration through participation: Non-citizen resident voting rights in an era of globalization", *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 9:63–80 (2008).

¹⁸ Vitoria Finn, "Globally, voting rights have increased for immigrants and emigrants" (Migration Policy Institute, 2024).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.



their essential contributions to economic, social and civic-political life while affirming their status as stakeholders in democratic systems. This inclusion strengthens the legitimacy of democratic governance by ensuring that those who contribute to and are affected by policy decisions have a voice in shaping them.²¹

Only a limited number of countries grant voting rights to non-citizen residents in national elections: Uruguay (from 1934), New Zealand (from 1975), Chile (from 1980), Malawi (from 1994) and Ecuador (from 2008). Nevertheless, there has been an increasing trend of non-citizen residents having the right to vote in local or regional elections, with this being permitted in 50 countries by 2020.²² In the European Union, for instance, European Union citizens residing in another European Union country have the right to vote and stand as candidates in local elections under similar conditions to nationals;²³ further, approximately half of all European Union member States also extend these rights to non-European Union citizen residents.²⁴

Non-citizen voting can influence the democratic process and electoral outcomes. It can impact electoral outcomes by potentially increasing voter turnout and influencing the representation

of diverse communities in local governance.²⁵ In response, political parties across various countries within the European Union have included candidates with immigrant backgrounds to appeal to this segment of the population.²⁶ As a result, there is a noticeable increase in the number of municipal councillors who are either non-nationals or of immigrant origin. In Denmark, councillors with third-country backgrounds rose from 3 in 1981 to 51 in 2001.²⁷ In Luxembourg, 14 non-nationals were elected in 2005.²⁸ The Netherlands' 2006 elections saw over 300 non-Dutch councillors elected, including 157 of Turkish and 66 of Moroccan origin.²⁹ In Sweden, foreign-born individuals held 7 per cent of municipal council seats in 2002, doubling from a decade earlier.³⁰

Clear examples of the relevance of non-citizen voting can also be seen in key elections where immigrant voters influenced outcomes. In the Dutch municipal elections of March 2006, immigrant voters turned out in large numbers to oppose the centre-right Government's anti-immigrant policies, contributing to victories for the Social Democratic Party in cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Such instances underscore the role non-citizen residents can play in shaping political landscapes.³¹

²¹ Munro, 2008.

²² Finn, 2024; David Altman, "Two paths towards the exceptional extension of national voting rights to non-citizen residents", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(10):2541–2560 (2024).

²³ European Commission, "Democracy and electoral rights" (2020).

²⁴ Aleksandra Jolkina, "Local voting rights for non-EU nationals in the EU: Democratic principle or earned privilege?" *Routledge*, 14 (2021); Sinem Yilmaz and Alexander Wolffhardt, "Bridging gaps in political participation: Voting rights for third-country nationals and EU citizens in the EU", (Brussels, Migration Policy Group, 2024).

²⁵ Elif Naz Kayran and Anna-Lena Nadler, "Non-citizen voting rights and political participation of citizens: evidence from Switzerland", *European Political Science Review*, 14(2):206–225 (2022); Kees Groenendijk, "Local voting rights for non-nationals in Europe: what we know and what we need to learn" (Washington, D.C., and Brussels, Migration Policy Institute, 2008).

²⁶ Groenendijk, 2014.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nénad Dubajic, "Le vote des étrangers au Luxembourg : Evolution de 1999 à 2005", *Migrations Société*, 114:129–140 (2007).

²⁹ Groenendijk, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.



Conclusion

In an era marked by major geopolitical, environmental, technological and demographic transformations and where the compositions of societies are becoming increasingly diverse and complex, managing migration effectively often involves facilitating the political participation of migrants. Integrating migrants structurally into the civic-political landscape empowers them to contribute to decision-making processes, strengthens democratic institutions and promotes social cohesion.

Migrants' civic and political participation is often underestimated, with persistent narratives suggesting that they do not engage in voting or other forms of political activity. However, evidence from various countries presented in this article challenges this perception. For instance, non-citizen voters and candidates have

increasingly influenced elections in Europe, with examples from the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark showing significant engagement in municipal and regional governance.

Despite these contributions, misconceptions persist, largely due to narrow definitions that exclude naturalized citizens from data on international migrants. As a result, these narratives overlook the many ways migrants shape political landscapes – whether by voting, advocating for policies or running for office. With voting rights for non-citizens expanding worldwide, as well as the increasing acceptance of multiple citizenships, migrants' influence on policy and elections is becoming increasingly visible, reinforcing their active role in democratic processes and dispelling the myth that they do not vote.



Responsible artificial intelligence in international migration management: Legal and practical considerations

Ana Beduschi¹

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including generative AI, have become increasingly prevalent in the daily lives of millions of individuals worldwide. Therefore, it is not surprising that governments use AI technologies, including generative AI, to streamline workloads and increase efficiency in migration processing.²

AI is understood here as “a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments”.³ Generative AI is a subset of AI technologies which “create[s] new content ... based on their training data and in response to prompts”.⁴ Generative AI enables the creation of various forms of content, including text, images, videos, music and software code.

Some States have disclosed the use of AI, including generative AI, in international migration management. For example, Australia has acknowledged using AI to identify potential fraud in visa applications and support staff productivity and generative AI to synthesize and analyse large volumes of documentation.⁵ Canada has also been using AI to triage visa applications.⁶ Germany has utilized AI for identity management, including face, speech and dialect recognition; name transliteration (i.e. the conversion from one alphabet to another, such as from Arabic to Roman alphabet); and mobile phone data analysis.⁷ The European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum recognizes the use of facial recognition technologies in the context of the Eurodac regulation.⁸

However, not all States have publicly acknowledged *whether* and, if so, *how* they use AI in international migration management. Regarding the first point – whether States are

¹ Ana Beduschi is Professor of Law at the University of Exeter, Law School.

² See, for example, Marie McAuliffe, “AI in migration is fuelling global inequality: How can we bridge the gap?” World Economic Forum (2023).

³ European Parliament and European Council, Regulation 2024/1689 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act), Articles 3–1 (13 June 2024).

⁴ Philippe Lorenz, Karine Perset and Jamie Berryhill, “Initial policy considerations for generative artificial intelligence”, OECD Artificial Intelligence Papers No. 1 (2023).

⁵ Australia Department of Home Affairs, “Freedom of information request – FA 24/05/01409” (2024).

⁶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “CImm – question period note – use of AI in decision-making at IRCC” (2022).

⁷ Germany Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, “Identity management” (n.d.).

⁸ European Parliament and European Council, Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 of 14 May 2024 on the establishment of ‘Eurodac’ for the comparison of biometric data in order to effectively apply Regulations (EU) 2024/1351 and (EU) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 2001/55/EC and to identify illegally staying third-country nationals and stateless persons and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States’ law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, amending Regulations (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (14 May 2024).



using AI in this area – this paper argues that States should be more transparent, as this would help increase trust in their systems and processes and, ultimately, strengthen the rule of law. Regarding the second issue – how States use AI in this field – the paper reflects on the current advances in AI regulation worldwide and highlights the importance of adhering to international human rights law. Finally, it introduces a framework to support States with the responsible implementation of AI in international migration management.

Transparency and trust in artificial intelligence in international migration management

States should be more transparent about whether they use AI, including generative AI, in international migration management. Transparency is widely recognized as a cornerstone of trust, and this applies equally to the use of AI in international migration management. The connection between transparency and trust is reflected in the work of Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, who define transparency as the “perceived quality of intentionally shared information” and break it down into three core dimensions: disclosure, clarity and accuracy.⁹

Disclosure involves sharing relevant information as much as possible, considering the constraints of the matter at hand, and doing so promptly. It does not necessarily mean sharing all available information – analysing which type of information is relevant to the public involves a degree of

subjectivity. This may include considerations related to public interests and the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. In the context of international migration management, States should publicly acknowledge their use of AI without necessarily revealing sensitive details that could compromise national security or the personal information of migrants.

Clarity demands that the shared information be easily understandable and accessible. In the context of international migration management, this involves sharing information in plain language about whether AI systems are used throughout the different phases of the migration process. This includes information about which AI systems are used, for what purpose, and whether – and the extent to which – they involve human input and assistance. It also entails providing general information on systems interoperability.

Accuracy requires correct and consistent information. When it comes to international migration management and AI, information about the AI systems being used should be kept up to date and in line with the rapid development of the technologies. This information does not necessarily need to be comprehensive or technical, but it should be accurate to inform migrants and the general public about the uses of AI in this context.

Increased transparency is closely connected to increased citizens’ acceptance of AI uses in public

⁹ Andrew K. Schnackenberg and Edward C. Tomlinson, “Organizational transparency: A new perspective on managing trust in organization-stakeholder relationships”, *Journal of Management*, 42(7):1784, 1788 (2016).



services.¹⁰ Transparency can also lead to better accountability, ensuring that decisions are justified and in line with the rule of law. Even in sensitive areas, such as migration, where matters may be closely related to national security imperatives, public authorities should be accountable for their decisions and actions. Accordingly, States should prioritize transparency in AI implementation not only to enhance public trust and acceptance of AI in migration but also to strengthen accountability and the rule of law in their jurisdictions.

Current advances in artificial intelligence regulation and their implications for international migration management

Specific laws and regulations regarding AI have already been implemented or are being increasingly discussed worldwide. For example, the European Union has passed legislation on AI, and the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (hereinafter the Framework Convention).¹¹ China's regulatory regime is also rapidly evolving, including the adoption of measures for the administration of generative AI.¹² Countries such as Brazil, Canada and the United Kingdom have also introduced plans for regulating AI, although their scope and stage of implementation vary

significantly.¹³ At the United Nations level, there is a growing consensus that international human rights law must be respected, protected and promoted throughout the life cycle of digital technologies, including AI.¹⁴

European organizations share a similar view. The CoE Framework Convention establishes that activities within the AI life cycle – from designing to developing and deploying AI systems – must be entirely consistent with human rights.¹⁵ It draws from key principles such as human dignity, transparency, accountability, equality, privacy, and safe innovation to establish specific rules and obligations for public authorities or private actors acting on their behalf. These include promoting equality and preventing discrimination, safeguarding individual privacy and personal data, and providing access to remedies in case of issues with AI systems and harm to individuals.

Admittedly, the Framework Convention allows for an exception in matters related to a State Party's national security interests. Even so, their practice should still be "consistent with applicable international law, including international human rights law obligations".¹⁶ This exception could apply to matters relating to international migration management if these fall within

¹⁰ Laszlo Horvath, Oliver James, Susan Banducci and Ana Beduschi, "Citizens' acceptance of artificial intelligence in public services: Evidence from a conjoint experiment about processing permit applications", *Government Information Quarterly*, 40(4):1–18 (2023).

¹¹ European Parliament and European Council, 2024; Council of Europe (CoE), Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (2024).

¹² Cyberspace Administration of China, *Interim Measures for the Administration of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services* (13 July 2023).

¹³ Brazil Senado Federal, *Bill No. 2338* (2023); Parliament of Canada, *C-27: An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act, the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts* (Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022) (2022); United Kingdom Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and His Majesty King Charles III, "The King's speech 2024", oral statement to Parliament (17 July 2024).

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, "Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development" (11 March 2024); United Nations General Assembly, "The Pact for the Future", draft resolution submitted by the President of the General Assembly, Annex I: Global Digital Compact (20 September 2024).

¹⁵ CoE, 2024, Article 1 (1).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 3 (2).



national security interests. Nonetheless, States would still need to comply with international human rights law, including the rules laid down by the European Convention on Human Rights regarding the right to privacy and the guarantee of non-discrimination.¹⁷

In the European Union, the Artificial Intelligence Act classifies AI systems used in migration, asylum and border control management as high-risk.¹⁸ These are understood as AI systems used by public authorities or on their behalf for the analysis of evidence, determination of risk, examination of asylum and immigration processes, and identification and identity verification regarding asylum and immigration processing.¹⁹ Providers and deployers of high-risk AI systems must adhere to various legal obligations under the Artificial Intelligence Act, including ensuring compliance with data quality standards, producing impact assessments, and establishing and implementing a risk management framework.

However, the Artificial Intelligence Act allows for some exceptions, which has been criticized by human rights organizations.²⁰ An AI system may not be classified as high-risk in the context of international migration management if it is considered not to pose a significant risk of harm.²¹ For example, generative AI used for a specific procedural task or for preparatory tasks will likely not be classified as high-risk AI.

Accordingly, even in cases where national security exceptions apply, States should still uphold international human rights law standards and rules when designing, developing and deploying AI for international migration management. Doing so would reinforce the rule of law and ensure that States fulfil their obligations under international law. States should also ensure that AI is used responsibly and in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of migrants throughout the different phases of the migration process, as discussed in the following section.

A framework for the responsible use of artificial intelligence in international migration management

This framework draws primarily on the imperative of “do no harm”, a well-developed principle in the humanitarian context that is commonly referred to in the field of technology and AI ethics.²² This principle requires consideration of how one’s actions may inadvertently cause harm or create new risks for the populations concerned. This principle should thus be paramount in matters relating to international migration in order to avoid exacerbating or creating new risks for migrants who may already be in a vulnerable situation. This framework also builds on a risk

¹⁷ CoE, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights, as amended) (ECHR), Articles 8 and 14 (1950).

¹⁸ European Parliament and European Council, 2024, Article 6 (2).

¹⁹ Ibid., Annex III (7).

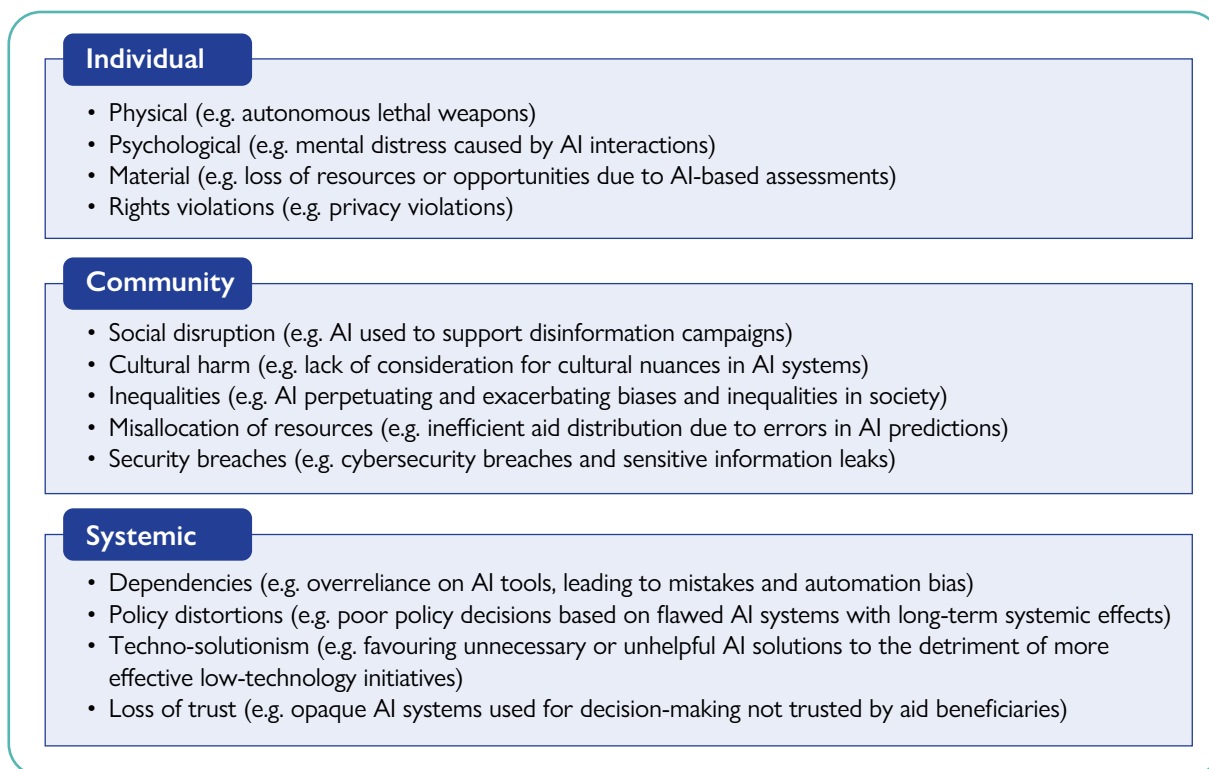
²⁰ See, for example, the #ProtectNotSurveil coalition [statement](#) on the Artificial Intelligence Act.

²¹ European Parliament and European Council, 2024, Article 6 (3).

²² See Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace or War* (Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); Massimo Marelli (ed.), *Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action*, third edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2024); Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Sean Martin McDonald, “Do no harm: A taxonomy of the challenges of humanitarian experimentation”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 99(1):319–344 (2017); Luciano Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).



Figure 1. Harm typology



Source: Author's visualization.

assessment matrix²³ and takes into account the different legal principles and obligations discussed previously.

Harm can be individual, collective and systemic.²⁴ For example, individual migrants may have their right to privacy violated, their personal data exposed or their faces discriminated due

to the use of AI systems in decision-making processes. Collectively, they could also become victims of violence and social disruption when AI is used to support disinformation campaigns that harm migrant communities. This was the case in the United Kingdom in the summer of 2024 when riots and violent outbursts targeting migrants erupted following disinformation shared online.²⁵ More broadly, on a systemic level, any overuse of AI in migration may have various negative consequences. These include creating dependencies, perpetuating biases and errors, promoting excessive reliance on technological solutions, and undermining trust in decision-making processes.

²³ See notably David Leslie, Christopher Burr, Mhairi Aitken, Michael Katell, Morgan Briggs and Cami Rincon, "Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law assurance framework for AI systems: A proposal prepared for the Council of Europe's Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence" (The Alan Turing Institute, 2021); Alessandro Mantelero, "The Fundamental Rights Impact Assessment (FRIA) in the AI Act: Roots, legal obligations and key elements for a model template", *Computer Law & Security Review*, 54:1–18 (2024); CoE, Committee on Artificial Intelligence, "Methodology for the risk and impact assessment of artificial intelligence systems from the point of view of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (HUDERIA methodology)" (Strasbourg, France, CoE, 2024).

²⁴ See also for a discussion of harms in related fields: Daniele K. Citron and Daniel J. Solove, "Privacy harms", *Boston University Law Review*, 102:793–863 (2022); Lorna McGregor, Daragh Murray and Vivian Ng, "International human rights law as a framework for algorithmic accountability", *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 68(2):309–343 (2019).

²⁵ Will Downs, "Policing response to the 2024 summer riots", Insight section, House of Commons Library, UK Parliament (9 September 2024).



Figure 2. Risk matrix

Impact severity: from 1 (insignificant) to 5 (severe)

Likelihood: from 1 (rare) to 5 (very likely)

	1 Insignificant	2 Minor	3 Significant	4 Major	5 Severe
1 Rare	1 Low	2 Low	3 Low	4 Low	5 Medium
2 Unlikely	2 Low	4 Low	6 Medium	8 Medium	10 High
3 Moderate	3 Low	6 Medium	9 Medium	12 High	15 High
4 Likely	4 Low	8 Medium	12 High	16 Extreme	20 Extreme
5 Very likely	5 Low	10 High	15 High	20 Extreme	25 Extreme

Source: Author's visualization.

A risk matrix methodology can be particularly helpful for States undertaking risk assessments to identify, avoid and mitigate such risks of harm at the individual, community and systemic levels. The risk matrix proposed (see Figure 2) follows the risk matrix methodology²⁶ and is based on two axes, focusing on the likelihood of the risk of harm materializing and the impact it would have if it did materialize. Overall risk ranges are based on a scale of 1–25, where 1–4 is low, 5–9 is medium, 10–15 means high and 16–25 means extreme.

Consider, for example, a situation whereby a State may employ AI systems to automate tasks such as migrant identity verification, previously carried

out manually. However, using facial recognition for identity verification may lead to inaccuracies due to the limitations of AI systems in recognizing the faces of individuals with darker skin tones. That could lead to unlawful discrimination of individuals based on race and ethnic origins if no alternative ways to verify their identities were used. On a risk matrix, the likelihood that facial recognition will be inaccurate for recognizing darker skin types could be considered moderate (3) to likely (4) based on available evidence from studies in this area.²⁷ The impact of deploying such a technology, considering its inaccuracies,

²⁶ Leslie et al., 2021; Mantelero, 2024; CoE, 2024.

²⁷ See, for example, Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru, "Gender shades: Intersectional accuracy disparities in commercial gender classification", *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research*, 81:1–15 (2018); Andrew Hundt, William Agnew, Vicky Zeng, Severin Kacianka and Matthew Gombolay, "Robots enact malignant stereotypes", proceedings of the 2022 Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FAccT '22) (20 June 2022).



would be severe (5), as it could lead to denial of services due to the lack of identity verification and potential discrimination. Accordingly, the overall risk would be extreme (15 or 20, depending on whether the likelihood of harm is set as 3 or 4).

In this scenario, alternative methods, such as manual identity verification, a two-step verification process or validation by a human case worker, should be made available to avoid or mitigate the risk of harm. On the risk matrix, the likelihood that facial recognition would be inaccurate for recognizing darker skin types could still be considered moderate (3) to likely (4). However, the impact of deploying such a technology could be considered insignificant (1) or minor (2) if these alternative methods were implemented in parallel. Accordingly, the overall risk of harm would decrease to low (3 or 4) or at most medium (6 or 8).

The risk assessment matrix can thus be used to identify, prioritize, avoid and mitigate risks. If relevant, it can also be used alongside SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and PESTLE (political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental) factors analysis methods. Yet, the “do no harm” principle should be paramount and inform these analyses.

For example, applying SWOT to the hypothetical scenario mentioned earlier, one strength (S) of using AI for migrant identity verification is the ability of AI systems to process large amounts of data quickly, reducing wait times and increasing efficiency. However, a significant weakness (W) in this situation is that AI systems would be processing sensitive data about migrants in potentially vulnerable situations, which could be at risk if cybersecurity measures were not

adequately set up from the outset. Additionally, using AI for migrant identity verification presents opportunities (O), such as freeing up human resources to focus on other critical areas in migration services if AI systems could save caseworkers’ time. However, the analysis should also consider potential threats (T), such as addressing data privacy and legal and ethical requirements for using AI in sensitive areas concerning migration management.

In the context of a PESTLE analysis of the hypothetical scenario discussed, States should consider political factors, such as the opportunity for enacting laws and policies, to support the use of AI in migration services. They should also assess the economic advantages and disadvantages of developing or procuring AI solutions compared to the potential savings in human resources. Furthermore, they should take into account societal factors, including public trust in AI used in this field, as well as technological advancements in generative AI and large language models, ensuring compliance with existing legal and regulatory obligations. Additionally, they should consider environmental factors, such as the environmental impact of energy-intensive AI systems.

Finally, the principle of “do no harm” should be considered throughout the analysis as an overarching aim to avoid causing new harm or exacerbating existing harm to migrants and migrant communities.

Conclusion

As AI technologies, including generative AI, continue to advance rapidly, their use in international migration management is



becoming increasingly prevalent. This paper argues that States should be more transparent regarding whether they use these technologies in international migration management. Transparency not only enhances public trust and acceptance of AI in migration management but also strengthens accountability and the rule of law.

The paper also emphasizes the importance of improving how States use AI in this field and highlights the importance of adhering to international human rights law. This is especially relevant considering the numerous harms and challenges that migrants and migrant communities face, which can manifest at the individual, collective and systemic levels.

Accordingly, States should ensure that AI is used responsibly and in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of migrants throughout the different phases of the migration process. In this regard, the paper introduces a framework to support States in the responsible implementation of AI in international migration management. This framework adopts a principled approach centred on the “do no harm” principle. It encourages States to actively and thoroughly assess whether AI systems, including generative AI, could potentially cause harm or worsen existing situations for migrants and their communities. By integrating elements from the risk assessment matrix, SWOT analysis and PESTLE methodologies, States can be better equipped to more effectively decide how to implement AI in international migration management responsibly.



Evaluating reintegration: The impact of IOM's support for migrants returning to the Horn of Africa

Chris Barnett, Katie Kuschminder, Andrew Pinney, Michael Loevinsohn and Leonora Evans-Gutierrez¹

Introduction

Reintegration assistance to returning migrants is central to return policies, yet there has been little rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness. Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes facilitate the return of migrants to their countries of origin. The EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa (JI–HoA), funded under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, one of the largest European Union investments in migration at EUR 4.9 billion, facilitated reintegration assistance to over 14,450² returnees in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan from 2017 to 2023.

In the HoA, migrants from both the Sudan and Somalia (and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia) tend to migrate through the Northern Route to Libya to go north to Europe.³ Those from Ethiopia generally migrate via the Eastern Route to Djibouti to go to the Middle East, or via the Southern Route to the United Republic of Tanzania, towards South Africa. Migrants increasingly

experience challenges, such as kidnapping, extortion, starvation, abuse or imprisonment, in reaching their destinations, becoming stuck in transit countries, in particular Libya, Djibouti and the United Republic of Tanzania, where they become highly vulnerable.

The JI–HoA was designed to assist migrants who wanted to return to reintegrate into their home country through economic, social and psychosocial reintegration support. The programme provided assistance in several ways. One was general reintegration assistance (GRA), which included reception support, temporary housing, transportation, pocket money, immediate medical and psychosocial aid, and training sessions such as “Start and Improve Your Business” (SIYB) and *kaizen* training (similar to SIYB but with added psychosocial content). Another was complementary reintegration assistance (CRA), which supplemented GRA by tailoring to individual returnees’ needs as determined through reintegration counselling. CRA services encompassed microbusiness support, medical referrals, educational aid, housing, and technical and vocational education training (TVET). In addition, the JI–HoA adapted its approach to address specific challenges, such as providing emergency cash assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia. Finally, in the Sudan, mobile money-based approaches were introduced to streamline microbusiness assistance; and in Somalia a cash-based modality was introduced to enhance economic reintegration.

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² To learn more about the EU–IOM Joint Initiative, see www.migrationjointinitiative.org/countries.

³ Although many Sudanese migrants intend to stay in Libya rather than go to Europe.



The IMPACT evaluation

The IMPACT evaluation aimed to rigorously assess the impact of reintegration assistance provided by the JI-HoA to both inform programming and improve the understanding of sustainable reintegration metrics – specifically, the IOM Reintegration Sustainability Index (RSI).⁴ With few, if any, precedents for impact evaluations of reintegration programmes, this evaluation also sought to establish the standard for future such evaluations.

The evaluation was a hybrid, quasi-experimental design with three components. Component 1 statistically modelled JI-HoA's impact using primary survey data and programme information. The analysis compared RSI scores of returnees (Ethiopia, 778; Somalia, 179; Sudan, 657) with non-migrants (Ethiopia, 280; Somalia, 89; Sudan, 371) at baseline and endline. Constructing a valid comparison group in this context is challenging, as the migration experience changes people, and, by definition, returnees are no longer comparable to those who have not migrated. Even within the population of returnees, a valid comparison would mean that assisted returnees and non-assisted returnees need to have the same profile, return at approximately the same time and return to a similar location. To overcome this challenge, the evaluation developed a “calibration group” of non-migrant respondents based on the assumption that returnees’ RSI scores begin to converge with those residing in their communities.

Component 2 was a natural experiment that assessed the impact of the COVID-linked shock (CLS: the COVID-19 pandemic together with government-imposed restrictions and other shocks such as locust infestations that occurred at about the same time). The natural experiment was based on a survey of 1,843 returnees and focus group discussions. It also assessed the resilience of returnees – their ability to mitigate the CLS’ impact and to recover from it – and the contribution of the JI-HoA to their resilience. A third qualitative research component with over 80 interviews provided further insights.

The study had several limitations. First, the calibration group design compared returnees to non-migrants. While some differences between these two groups might reduce (as returnees reintegrate and feel more secure, and gain similar access to basic services and similar economic opportunities), there are fundamental differences (as non-migrants do not have the lived migration experience and do not have immediate plans to migrate). Second, the duration of the evaluation was limited to the project implementation period, meaning a full assessment of reintegration as a longer-term process was not possible. Third, most respondents were male (approximately 90%, reflecting the population of JI-HoA beneficiaries who were 85–91% male across the countries), which limited gender-specific findings. Fourth, children (under 18 years) were excluded from the analysis because they were relatively small in number and would require a separate study arm.

⁴ IOM has adopted the Reintegration Sustainability Index (RSI) to measure sustainable reintegration using indicators across economic, social and psychosocial domains. Source: Samuel Hall, *Setting Standards for the Operationalisation of IOM's Integrated Approach to Reintegration: Summary Report* (Geneva, IOM, 2017).



The impact of the JI-HoA assistance⁵

The JI-HoA assistance was greatly appreciated by returnees and proved important in enduring the shocks and lessening the deterioration of their well-being during the pandemic. Returnees (especially in Ethiopia) recounted many of the difficult and dangerous situations they had experienced with irregular migration and spoke about the suffering they had witnessed on their journeys.

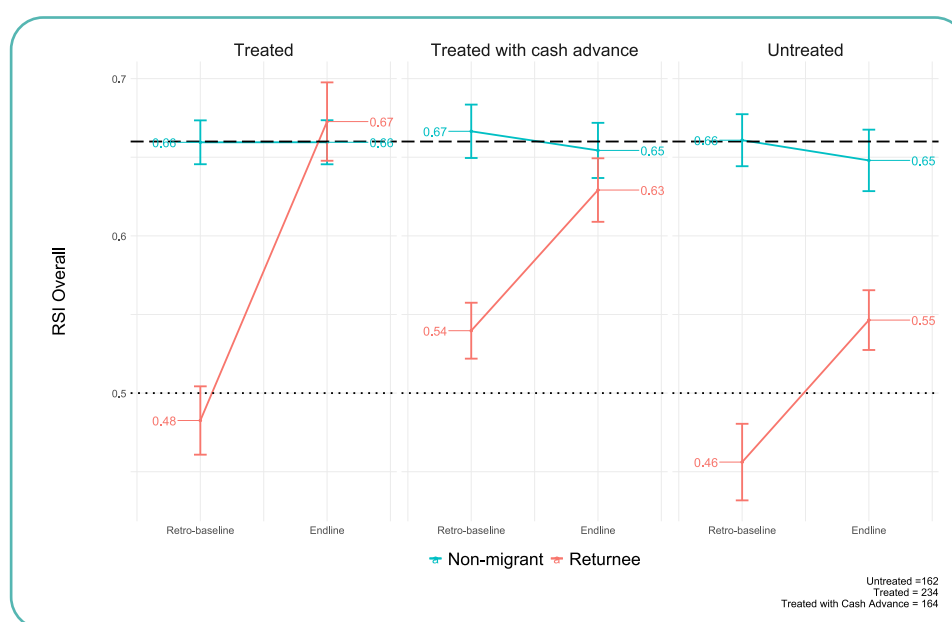
The JI-HoA also sought to achieve sustainable reintegration, which is a significant challenge given the conflicts, instability and natural disasters in each of the three countries. The findings show an overall positive impact of the JI-HoA on reintegration in both Ethiopia and Somalia but not in the Sudan. The evidence is particularly strong in Ethiopia, where returnees'

scores converge with non-migrants' scores by the endline, with returnees having broadly equalized with those who did not migrate. In Somalia, returnees' scores were significantly better at the endline than the scores of their corresponding non-migrants. It is only in the Sudan that the findings are very different, with returnees and non-migrants not clearly improving over time (although returnees' deterioration is either minimal or less than the calibration group).

Impacts of JI-HoA support in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the analysis suggests that the JI-HoA contributed significantly to increasing RSI scores. By the endline, treated returnees (those receiving JI-HoA assistance) performed just as well as non-migrants on the overall RSI, being slightly above the 0.66 threshold⁶ (Figure 1). The untreated (registered returnees, not yet receiving assistance) do not statistically converge

Figure 1. Overall Reintegration Sustainability Index at retro-baseline and endline for matched returnee-non-migrants in Ethiopia



Source: Created by authors, 2025.

⁵ IOM, *Returning Home: Evaluating the Impact of IOM's Reintegration Assistance for Migrants in the Horn of Africa*, IMPACT Study Report #1 (Nairobi, IOM, 2023).

⁶ The RSI threshold of 0.66 distinguishes reintegrated from not reintegrated (dashed line in figures); the JI-HoA's logical framework uses 0.5 (dotted line).



with the non-migrants. Findings from the natural experiment also suggest that other factors may have contributed to the superior performance of the treated cohort.

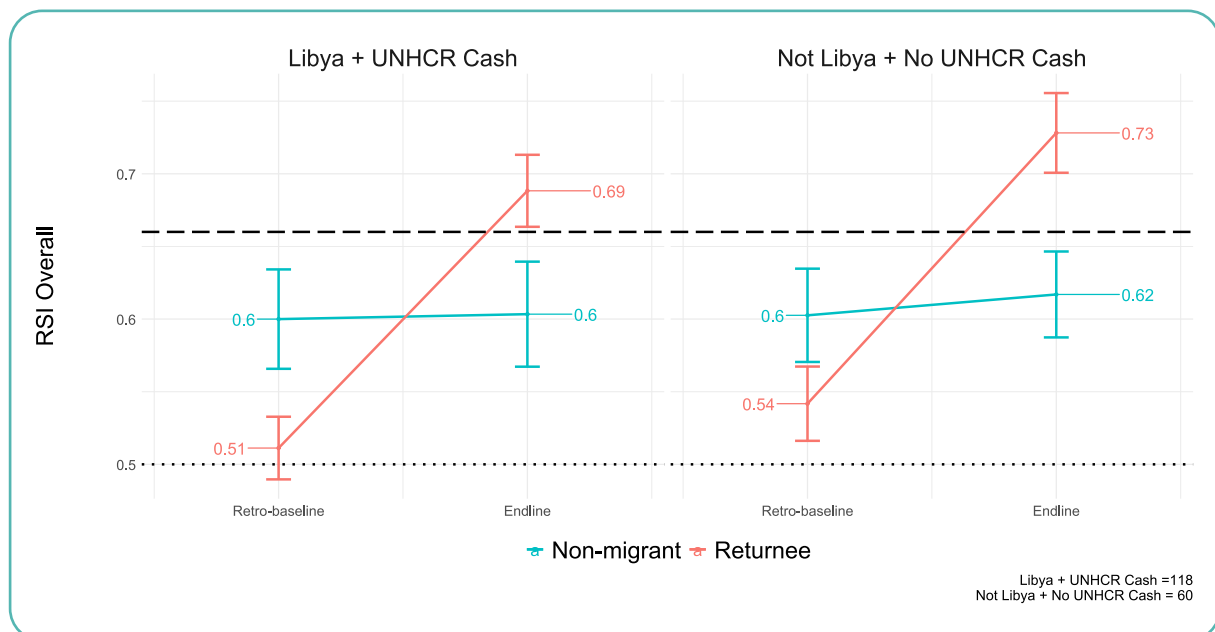
Impacts of JI-HoA support in Somalia

In Somalia, returnee RSI scores increase significantly from baseline to endline, while matched non-migrant scores remain constant (Figure 2). Both Libya and non-Libya cohorts can be considered “reintegrated” against the 0.66 threshold at endline, although there is no statistical difference at either baseline or endline, suggesting that the additional cash support provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to returnees from Libya did not play a detectable role in improving reintegration scores.

Impacts of JI-HoA support in the Sudan

In the Sudan, there is an overall slight decline in RSI scores, but convergence is meaningless, as returnees have higher scores than non-migrants. Based on the qualitative research, both returnees and non-migrants concurred that conditions in the Sudan continued to worsen over the programme implementation years, which, given the outbreak of civil war in the Sudan in 2023, is unsurprising in retrospect. It may be that returnees are not necessarily better off than non-migrants (in contrast to the RSI scores). One possible explanation is the effect of relative deprivation, which has been shown to suppress feelings of well-being.⁷ Qualitative interviews indicate that many non-migrants were now worse off compared to their own past and, thus, were relatively deprived. This may have led to

Figure 2. Overall Reintegration Sustainability Index at retro-baseline and endline for matched returnee-non-migrants in Somalia

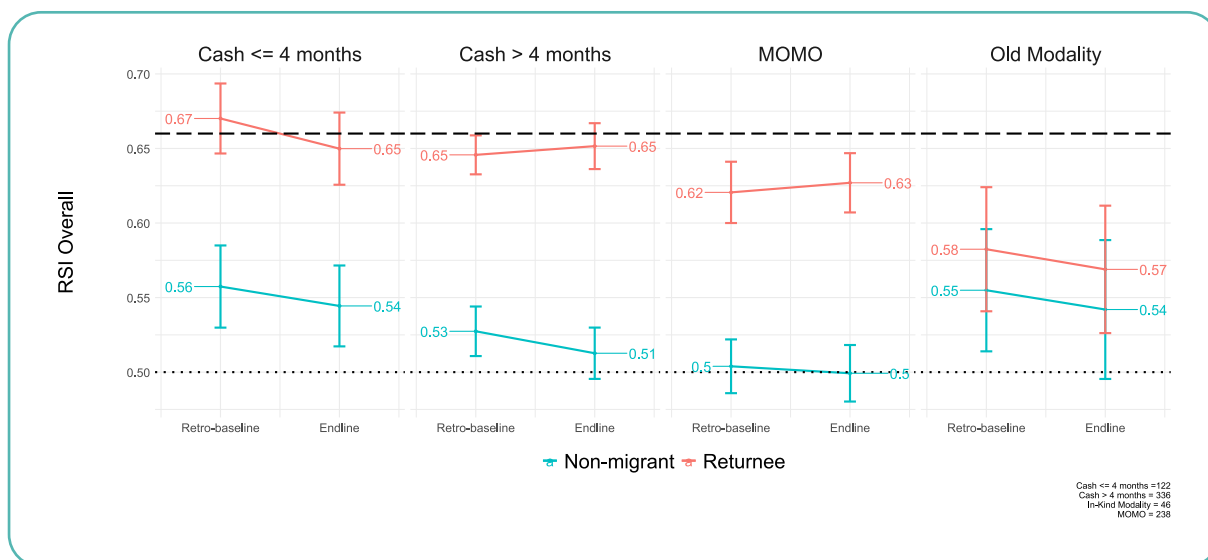


Source: Created by authors, 2025.

⁷ Xi Chen, “Relative deprivation and individual well-being”, *IZA World Labor*, 140 (2015).



Figure 3. Overall Reintegration Sustainability Index at retro-baseline and endline for matched returnee-non-migrants in the Sudan



Source: Created by authors, 2025.

their poor scoring on the RSI. It is not known if returnees were actually better off from their time in Libya or scored themselves higher either due to receiving IOM assistance or, compared to their traumatic experiences in Libya, feeling relative relief and gratitude in returning safely to the Sudan.

Learning from what works

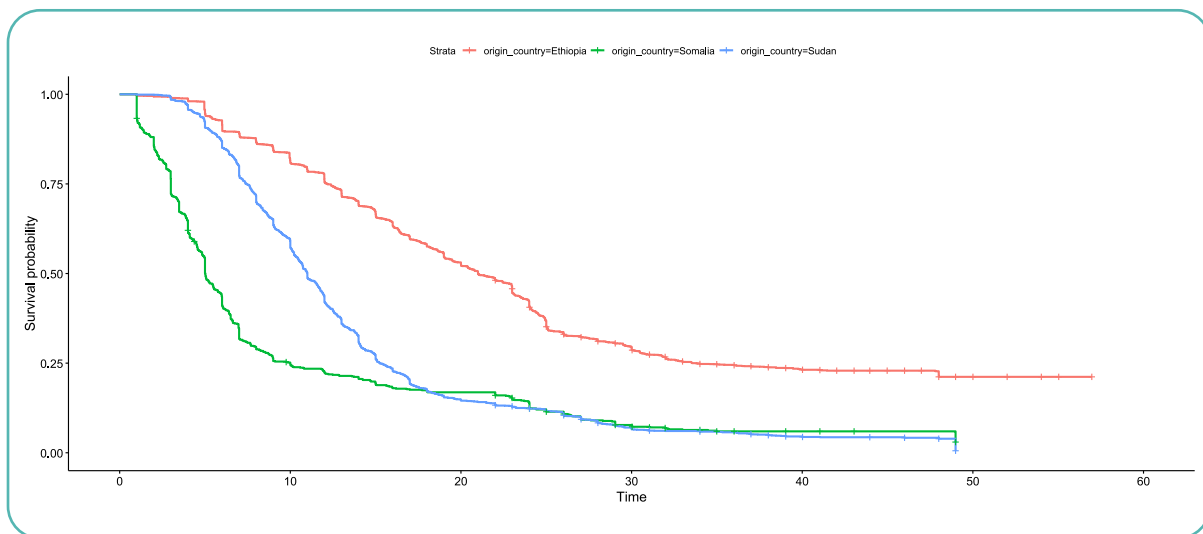
Microbusiness support in both Ethiopia and Somalia led to improvements in reintegration. This is especially evident in Ethiopia, where successful businesses demonstrate a significantly steeper improvement for the economic and psychosocial scores, compared to microbusinesses that are closed, in preparation or struggling. Also, in Ethiopia, those who receive both microbusiness and SIYB training fared better, whereas in Somalia there are few differences between the combinations of microbusiness assistance, TVET and SIYB. In the Sudan, there is no change in reintegration scores and little difference across microbusiness performance.

The timeliness of assistance is critical to its effectiveness. The natural experiment found that the longer a returnee had access to microbusiness support, the better they were able to mitigate the impacts of the CLS on well-being (a key element of resilience). Delivering assistance as achieved in Somalia (median < 6 months since arrival) for Ethiopia (median > 17 months) and the Sudan (median > 11 months) would have given returnees more resources with which to respond to a major shock (Figure 4).

Assistance should adjust to changing conditions and needs. Many returnees reported opportunities where they could limit the CLS, but they could not grasp this because they lacked skills or capital. The natural experiment showed that greater engagement in the agricultural value chains is where assistance could have made a difference, although not a focus of IOM support.



Figure 4. Time to receive microbusiness support by country



Source: Created by authors, 2025.

Considerations for future reintegration support

There is robust evidence that AVRР assistance to stranded migrants in Africa is an important humanitarian and development initiative that reduces vulnerabilities and improves post-return well-being. The findings of this evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention, indicating the need for further funding to stranded migrants that would otherwise be left in desperate conditions in transit countries without the support to return. The findings also show the importance of reintegration assistance to reduce returnees' vulnerabilities post return.

The evaluation suggests several ways to improve AVRР programming:

- (1) First, the findings highlight the importance of adapting reintegration support, including implementors making better use of data to evaluate, adapt and improve delivery. There are examples of this being achieved (e.g. emergency cash provision in Ethiopia),

yet more could be done to address delays in delivery and respond to emerging needs. Admittedly, delays were caused by challenging circumstances, such as COVID-19 and global shortages of certain products, yet also delays were caused by bureaucratic processes that could be simplified (here, cash-based modalities have an important role, especially for the most vulnerable, and can be provided more quickly than in-kind assistance).

- (2) Second, there are elements of the integrated approach to take forwards into future programming, including: (a) the strong evidence of the effectiveness of microbusiness support in Ethiopia and Somalia (and microbusiness combined with SIYB in Ethiopia); (b) the need for continued psychosocial support over a longer period, as highlighted by the qualitative research of returnees' narratives of coping with migration-related traumas; (c) the importance of supporting returnees' own



livelihood strategies, such as in agriculture (as the natural experiment found); and (d) the potential of community-based interventions to support returnee and non-migrant collaboration, helping to reduce social stigmatization and to improve access to services. For example, in both Somalia and Ethiopia, returnees and other community members reported having “a better sense of community” as a result of the community-based reintegration projects. The projects helped raise awareness of negative migration experiences, with opportunities for collaboration.

- (3) Third, reintegration planning needs to take better account of debt and its impact on sustainable reintegration.⁸ Debt negatively impacts the reintegration process, such as by making familial relationships more challenging as well as by increasing the economic hardship of returnees. Potential improvements include: (a) better informing families of when a returnee or family member will arrive while respecting individual returnee decisions and any safeguarding risks; (b) mediation to enhance social and psychosocial reintegration and well-being of the returnee and their family; (c) giving returnees choices in their businesses, with processes to ensure returnees have an influence in this process; (d) debt support for new returnees;⁹ and (e) self-help

revolving community funds in returnees’ communities to provide community-wide access and debt management benefits.

- (4) Fourth, there is a need to develop mechanisms in future programmes that draw on returnee networks to improve communication with (and among) returnees, including those currently “unreachable”. For instance, the natural experiment was able to contact returnees who did not get the full package of support using such networks, demonstrating a potential to extend a programme’s reach.
- (5) Finally, future programmes should allocate responsive funding within monitoring and evaluation workstreams so as to exploit extreme events as tests of programme effectiveness, as well as to conduct ex-post evaluations to assess the sustainability of reintegration over a longer term.

⁸ This suggestion builds on the evaluation’s findings as well as existing IOM studies on the debt of migrants assisted with voluntary return. Sources: IOM, 2023; Samuel Hall, University of Sussex and IOM, *Returning to Debt: Examining the Effects of Indebtedness on Reintegration Outcomes – Final Report* (Geneva, IOM, 2022).

⁹ This has been explored in some countries, such as Bangladesh, with case managers mediating with creditors or family members, or negotiating a different or delayed repayment process.

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