

CALL TO ACTION

Climate change, cities and forced migration: Advancing knowledge, action and collaboration

Forced migration is the human face of the climate crisis, and cities are often sanctuaries for many migrants. Cities and urban areas can be sites of freedom, equality and solidarity. Many cities take up responsibility for all humans on their territory, guaranteeing basic human rights of shelter, health care, food and education. We must work together to enable cities to be sustainable, social and democratic homes for both residents and new arrivals alike.

Climate-forced migration results from slowly developing changes and immediate crises alike. It puts pressures - many different though some the same - on cities around the world. The body of science and knowledge around climate-forced migration continues to grow, as does attention to it within city halls, national capitals and international organizations. On the occasion of COP26, we share key points that resonate within our cities, crucial actions we are committed to taking, and further steps needed to enable robust action at the local level.

Migration in a warming, urbanising world: facts, projections and geographies

- Most climate-forced migration will be primarily within national boundaries, with people moving to or between cities. Some 21.5 million people per year on average over the past decade have had to flee their homes due to storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, and other weather events. According to some estimates, by 2050, some 200 million people will be forced to leave their homes for climate-related reasons.
- For most climate-forced migration, climate change is a contributing rather than singularly causal factor. The rise of sea level is expected to become the key driver of climate-forced displacement.
- Entire nations in the Pacific Ocean are facing complete destruction, threatening their sovereignty, rights, and cultural heritage. Developing countries and vulnerable communities will be the hardest hit.
- Many of our cities are in some of the most affected regions: coastal and dry areas of Africa; river systems of Asia; the interiors and coasts of Mexico and Central America; the Caribbean; and low lying islands in the Indian and Pacific oceans. More than 800 million people live in coastal areas that are less than 10 meters above sea level. Most big cities are coastal cities. Almost two-thirds of the world's cities with populations of over five million are located in areas at risk of sea level rise. New research shows that some 150 million people - from Bangkok to Calais, Lagos to Miami, Montevideo to Shanghai, and more places in between - are now living on land that will be below the high-tide line by 2050.

Our Cities: what we're seeing

- We mayors, particularly of African cities and towns, are witnessing climate-forced migration. In some cases, the decreased viability of agricultural livelihoods due to changes in weather patterns—reduced rainfall, droughts, and extreme-heat events, for example—is pushing rural populations into cities. In other cases, increased flooding, rainfall, and rising sea levels are directly impacting human settlements and forcing populations to migrate, including from other cities. Many migrants come to our cities from nearby low-lying areas situated close to water bodies that are rising and threatening existing structures. Many communities within our cities, including those in informal settlements where new arrivals often settle, are experiencing consistent flooding that forces residents to move, resulting in increased housing insecurity and poor social determinants of health.

- Climate-forced migration is having an immediate impact on our cities. It is putting pressure on infrastructure and services—including schools, roads, and health clinics. It is affecting biodiversity, as migrants move into mountainous areas, leading to deforestation and potential landslides, while fast-growing informal settlements along coastlines are leading to the destruction of mangroves, a reduction in biodiversity, and pollution of the ocean. Additionally, there are impacts on cultural heritage, such as indigenous cultural and spiritual practices and culturally significant landscapes, as well as citizens' sense of identity.
- Our cities are located in the global north and south, and are experiencing climate-forced migration across borders in different ways. The most affected and vulnerable populations in receiving cities and towns are children, youth, elderly, women, agricultural workers, people living in informal settlements, and disabled persons—those that are being displaced from their homes and communities and are forced to migrate elsewhere. When displaced, vulnerable populations can end up facing barriers in access to food, housing and economic opportunity.

Mayors for migrants: Our Multi-Level Call to Action

Local Action

- As mayors, we will lead in building awareness and knowledge. Climate-forced displacement and migration are not yet under serious discussion in our cities. We are all undertaking significant steps to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. And we are undertaking mitigation actions, some of which are focused on the reduction of carbon and other greenhouse gases, as well as on green and just job creation. Yet awareness must be raised on the intersection of these challenges. Migrants, especially women and youth, can play an important role in making our efforts inclusive, as can intergenerational dialogue.
- To advance such awareness, we must build better data and knowledge about the intersection of climate change and migration. Where appropriate, we will invest in local data collection and engage in evidence-based urban planning that recognizes climate-forced migration and the need for adaptation and resiliency planning. At the same time, we must respect and work with indigenous communities in protecting natural resources and building resilience to climate-change impacts and advance community engagement. In that respect we welcome the Race to Resilience campaign launched at the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021 that aims to catalyse action by non-state actors that builds the resilience of 4 billion people from vulnerable groups and communities to climate risks in urban, rural and coastal areas by 2030.
- Our fellow local leaders have called for raising awareness among local communities regarding the value of cultural assets and heritage, including indigenous and subsistence practices, and protecting them as part of local adaptation strategies. The local leaders that utilize participatory budgeting and planning are better equipped to tap into this local knowledge. These knowledge building efforts must be advanced in collaboration with regional and international networks of mayors and cities, as well as national governments.
- We must harness the potential of urban-rural circular migration to help strengthen vulnerable communities and regional economies, while reducing the impacts on urban infrastructure from climate-forced migration. Such local economic efforts should be part of an overall inclusive departure and arrival policy, based on a development coalition between the local authorities, the market and the commons.
- Addressing climate-forced migration should be recognized at national, regional and international levels, as a credible measure of adaptation, allowing access to funds/grants assigned for climate action and disaster risk management to finance migration-related

resilience and adaptation projects, as well as inclusive relocation programs. Artificial policy distinctions should not create barriers to enabling local solutions.

Global Advocacy and Partnerships

- We urge all actors of the international community, particularly governments and international organizations, to advance their policies on climate-forced migration, by taking action locally and engaging in key multilateral fora.
- We welcome the efforts of the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative in harnessing the potential of mobility in the context of the climate crisis and support its engagements to address climate-forced migration and displacement in the continent. In this regard, we reiterate the importance of city perspectives and local contributions to ensure sound policy design and well informed planning strategies, grounded in local socio-cultural contexts, in support of affected and vulnerable communities. And we welcome the establishment of the C40 Cities - Mayors Migration Council Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration that will include and amplify the voices of migrants and diaspora communities affected by climate change. Recognizing that we strengthen our voice through collaboration, we as the Uniting Mayors Coalition commit to work with the C40-MMC Task Force in partnership to advance these efforts together and harness the power of our joint global advocacy.
- We will continue to collaborate with and support the advocacy work of civil society and expert organizations, including through multi-sectoral partnerships and science-policy collaborations to accelerate effective and sustainable action on climate-forced displacement and migration. In doing so, we will work not only with large initiatives, but also with small coalitions and networks that drive agendas forward from the ground-up.
- We urge the international community to ensure that the nations facing existential threats as a result of the climate crisis are able to re-establish themselves and maintain their sovereignty, collective identity and cultural heritage in a safe and adequate location.
- We will build fiscal capacity by pooling resources from private, public, non-profit, and government partners. We recognize the importance of the private and philanthropic sectors in driving mitigation and adaptation efforts. We need to harness these resources, to address climate-forced displacement and migration. And we will look beyond local and national governments to international institutions, philanthropic non-profits, and private investors to empower local leaders to proactively prepare for climate displacement and migration. Funding should be utilized to finance not only city-wide planning but also community-led projects.
- Regional financial facilities for parts of Africa and Asia must be developed and dedicated to financing adaptation, development and resilience programs to mitigate the impacts of climate-forced migration, as well as extending technical support and assistance to affected countries. As local leaders focused on local governance, we at times require additional capacity to access new funding sources. Supporting administrative capacity in cities is critical to identifying and tapping fiscal resources.