



The Jon Knes village is known as the 'floating village' in Cambodia as all of their residents are seasonal nomads who live on small houses built on floating platform. © Muse Mohammed / IOM

Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC)

The surrounding environment, comprising availability of natural resources, biodiversity, precipitation, temperature patterns and exposure to natural hazards, has always been a key determinant for areas for human settlement and consequently, has also influenced migration flows. The adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have increasingly contributed to migration, and future projections of climate change indicate that this trend will continue.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s recently launched Special Report on 1.5 degrees of Global Warming examines the migration, environment and climate change nexus, building on previous analysis included in IPCC assessment reports. While noting that climate change is only one of the drivers of migration, the report specifically identifies out-migration patterns of agricultural communities as correlated with temperature increase. Similarly, it notes that internal migration in island countries is linked to rates of sea-level rise. This evidence has

been acknowledged in global policies, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which established the Task force on Displacement and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular migration. While global level policy frameworks have firmly anchored this nexus and called for integrated approaches to address associated challenges, regional and national policy frameworks have yet to fully develop cross-sectoral responses to this nexus.

The Asia-Pacific Context

Asia and the Pacific is home to over 4.3 billion people, covering approximately 60 per cent of the world's population. The region comprises small island States in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean; archipelagos such as Indonesia and the Philippines; arid countries like Mongolia and the Islamic Republic of Iran; mountainous and landlocked countries spanning the Hindukush-Himalayan ranges such as Nepal and Bhutan; and large river basins and deltas of the Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra covering

China, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

As a function of its size, population and topographical diversity, the region is highly exposed to climate change and natural hazards. Though difficult to generalize across the Asia–Pacific region, frequently occurring sudden-onset disasters aggravated by climate change such as floods and storms have significant impacts on national GDP as countries incur significant losses and fatalities, particularly when the disasters are at their most intense. Slow-onset processes including sea-level rise, coastal erosion, ocean acidification and droughts along with climatic changes linked to precipitation and temperature patterns also have tangible impacts, though harder to measure.

The effect of climate change and disasters on migration is equally significant. Between 2008 and 2017, more than 198.1 million people were displaced by sudden-onset disasters in Asia and the Pacific—accounting for approximately 81 per cent of all disaster displacement in the world. Over 95 per cent of this displacement occurs due to climate and weather-related sudden-onset disasters such as storms and floods. Countries from the region, such as China, India and the Philippines routinely feature on the list of the countries with the highest disaster displacement in absolute numbers. On the other hand, countries with highest relative average annual displacement are small islands, including three (Palau, Vanuatu and Tonga) from the Pacific region.

Although complex to enumerate, slow-onset processes accelerated by climate change combine with other economic, social and political drivers of human mobility. This results in environmental migration which may occur either pre-emptively or in response to loss and damage associated with progressively deteriorating environmental conditions, within a country or across national borders.

Climate projections for the subregions of South and South-East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific are shaped by their respective geographic characteristics. The latest IPCC report identified a range of impacts for the region depending on the degree of temperature rise. This included potential warming of hot extremes in Western and Central Asia and an increase in heavy precipitation patterns across tropical parts of Asia at 1.5 degrees, amounting to flooding at 2 degrees of global warming in South and South-East Asia. The report noted that these climatic changes would particularly impact crop production, food and water security, increasingly

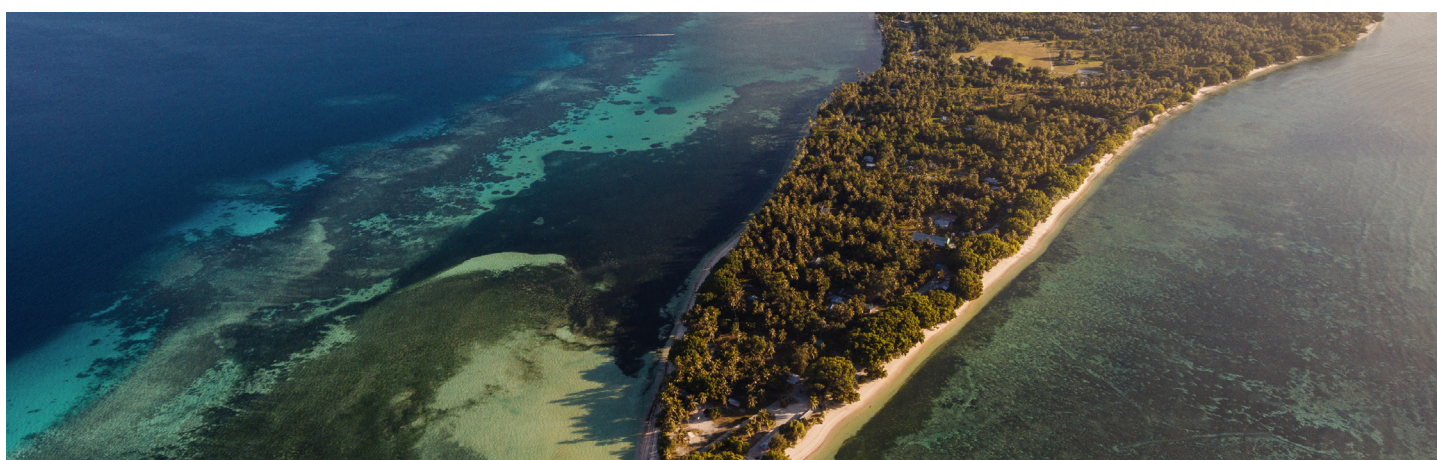
affecting the poor and already vulnerable populations in the region. While projections on sea-level rise are still not accurately defined, there is consensus on the high sensitivity of Pacific Islands to coastal climate change. However, the Pacific is not alone in its exposure to sea-level rise; coastal towns and cities in South and South-East Asia are also expected to experience related loss and damages, calling for the urgent implementation of appropriate adaptation interventions.

Despite increased research and evidence on the role of climate change impacts, disasters and environmental degradation in driving migration trends, there continues to be a limited understanding and information to map and predict scenarios of environmental migration in different geographic regions across the Asia–Pacific. As the recent IPCC report notes, there needs to be increased understanding of how degrees of global warming and slow onset processes affect migration patterns particularly in small islands, as well as the risks and benefits of migration and relocation as a climate change adaptation strategy. An improved evidence base on the MECC nexus in the Asia–Pacific region will enable the development of appropriate strategies to ensure that any challenges are adequately addressed. Similarly at the policy level, there has been growing acknowledgement and integration of the MECC nexus in relevant national policies related to climate change and disaster risk reduction, as evidenced by the recent National Adaptation Plan launched by the Government of Fiji that calls for mainstreaming mobility into climate change adaptation planning. As migration can be both a direct and indirect consequence of climate change impacts, and also has an impact on how communities can adapt to climate change, national, sectoral and local policies and planning need to consider integrating the MECC nexus to ensure a coherent and consistent approach across levels of government and different ministries. To move towards this objective, institutional capacity development should be supported.

As identified by the IPCC in their fifth Assessment Report, 'the climate system may be global in extent—but its manifestations... are regional or local in their occurrence, character and implications.' Similarly, environmental migration trends tend to be regional-specific, shaped by regional geography, migration frameworks and climate change impacts. In order to ensure that the nexus of migration, environment and climate change, particularly as it relates to cross-border migration and influences regional migration trends, is addressed through multi-country partnerships, the

Asia–Pacific region needs to focus on strengthening regional and subregional cooperation and coordination either through existing or new regional and subregional processes. The Pacific region has already demonstrated that this is an issue of regional importance, through acknowledgement in policy frameworks such as the Framework on Resilient Development in the Pacific and declarations by Pacific Leaders, but forums for discussion need to be fostered to encourage meaningful participation and outcomes that will support climate change affected communities. On the other hand, other subregions in the Asia-Pacific still need to make strides to achieve a consensus or acknowledge the interconnectedness of migration and environment, which would indicate that initial discussions of this issue in relevant regional fora would be an adequate starting point.

Global funding for climate change indicates that there is still an imbalance of funding towards climate change mitigation as opposed to climate change adaptation initiatives, although from this, the Asia–Pacific region does achieve a significant share of adaptation funding. However, this funding does not necessarily aim to address or reduce the risk of forced migration in the context of sudden or slow-onset disasters or leverage the role that migration can play in supporting climate change adaptation. Ensuring that affected communities—including those living in areas exposed to sudden onset hazards, slow onset processes and affected by climatic variability, and host communities in cases of relocation and displacement—are supported by appropriate climate change adaptation programmes and social safety nets will be a critical area of work in the region.



IOM's work on MECC in the Asia–Pacific region

IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific covers 40 countries in the 5 subregions of South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, including 33 countries with ongoing activities. The Regional Office, through the regional thematic specialist (RTS) on MECC provides technical support and updates on emerging issues to country offices for MECC project development and implementation and facilitates subregional policy advocacy, capacity-building and project implementation. The MECC RTS works closely with the MECC Division in Headquarters, based under the Department of Migration Management (DMM). The Division also coordinates with other divisions under DMM and the Department of Emergencies and Operations to ensure that there is a synergy between disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and other relevant work streams.

With regards to the MECC portfolio in the region, IOM in Asia and the Pacific works to assess the evidence of

the MECC nexus and supports policymakers to develop and integrate mobility into relevant climate change policy frameworks. This is linked to IOM's work on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation spanning from the national to community level. IOM has worked closely with a range of stakeholders, including Government ministries, regional organizations, UN agencies, academics and civil society to implement MECC related activities in the region.

In order to assess the evidence base on the MECC nexus, IOM has conducted research in Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives under the South Asia subregional project, "Assessing the climate change, environmental degradation and migration nexus in South Asia"; Cambodia, under the national level project "Assessing vulnerabilities and responses to environmental changes in Cambodia"; Viet Nam and Papua New Guinea under the global project "Migration, Environment and Climate

Change: Evidence for Policy (MECLEP)”. In addition, rapid assessments focusing on the role of climate change as a driver of migration have been implemented in Sri Lanka and Fiji, and a study focusing on planned relocation processes and outcomes has been carried out in the Hoa Binh Province of Viet Nam. These research studies triangulate data and information from existing literature alongside data from focus group discussions, key informant interviews and household surveys. Using the Displacement Tracking Matrix, IOM has also collected data in Mongolia to support the Government track rural–urban migration in the context of disasters and climate change.

Using the data gathered through projects across the region, IOM also supports policy development and policy advocacy. Research studies inform policy dialogues, such as those carried out in Cambodia and South Asia. In Vanuatu, IOM supported the Government in drafting the “National policy on climate change and disaster-induced displacement”. In addition, IOM has also provided technical advice to the Government of Fiji to integrate migration into their National Adaptation Plans and reviewed the National Planned Relocation Policies. Policy-based support has also been provided in Nepal towards the development of a Climate Change and Migration Strategy. Besides national level policy initiatives, IOM is also engaged in policy development

related to facilitating regional responses to environmental migration through projects in the Pacific subregion. This is in line with the Organization’s engagement in subregional and regional dialogues that contribute to global policy processes under the UN framework, such as the Asia–Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development; Asia–Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and State-led initiatives like the Nansen Initiative and follow up discussions under the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

IOM’s policy work occurs in conjunction with capacity-building. IOM has organized several regional and national training workshops since 2013. The first ever training for policymakers was held in the Asia–Pacific region; and workshops have also been organized in Nepal, covering policymakers from five countries in South Asia; in Fiji for policymakers from 11 Pacific island countries; and a national-level workshop in the Philippines. All workshops aim to ensure that policymakers are equipped with knowledge and information to factor migration into climate change and related policy planning and aim to bridge policy silos by bringing together policymakers from diverse sectoral ministries and other key stakeholders. The IOM MECC capacity-building programme is based on The Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Training Manual.

IOM MECC approach in the Asia-Pacific region

As the leading agency working on migration, IOM has been actively championing policy, research and operational efforts to address the migration, environment and climate change nexus. The Organization has three core objectives in this area: first, to minimize forced migration as much as possible, enabling affected communities to stay in their areas of origin. Second, to ensure assistance and protection for those affected and to seek durable solutions in case forced migration does occur. In other words, to provide solutions for migrants and displaced persons. Third, to facilitate the role of safe, orderly and regular migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change.



Sigil Bati Shada lives in Jogidha 7, a tiny village in Nepal, where she builds her house in a flood prone area. © Amanda Nero / IOM

In line with this global approach and objectives, IOM's Migration Governance Framework, and the strategy for Asia and the Pacific, IOM's MECC work in the region seeks to ensure that migrants and affected communities are resilient to natural disasters and adapt to climate change.

This will be achieved through four key outcomes:



In order to achieve these outcomes, IOM will continue to ensure that up-to-date research and evidence on MECC is available, including analysis of thematic issues. This may include studies on planned relocation processes and outcomes, gender-specific implications of environmental migration, role of remittances in supporting climate change adaptation. Once relevant themes, geographic areas and MECC knowledge gaps are identified, IOM will work towards conducting research and disseminating the information to relevant partners. In tandem with collecting data, governments and other stakeholders will be equipped with skills to collect data and evidence to monitor environmental migration trends. IOM will design needs-based capacity-building modules and implement related workshops.

To support national policy development, a key priority is to ensure that policymakers have the knowledge and capacity to integrate migration into relevant climate change and developmental policies. At the same time, intersectoral coordination mechanisms need to be established with clear standard operating procedures or guidelines on how to mainstream migration into climate change policies and programmes. This would entail capacity-building initiatives with policymakers, the establishment of a thematic working groups bringing together a relevant stakeholders, and consultations to validate draft SOPs that are developed.

Regional or multi-country processes or platforms for discussion will be key to scaling up national level action at the regional level, strengthening regional partnerships and providing avenues for sharing of best practices and lessons learned. IOM will work towards identifying appropriate forums for such discussions, the key topics for discussion, relevant participants and will provide support to convene meetings.

The final pillar of IOM's MECC approach in the Asia-Pacific region is to ensure that affected communities are adequately supported through climate change adaptation and social protection programmes. This links closely to the work ongoing in IOM under other thematic areas. IOM MECC programmes will support increased resilience to climate change by building skills and disseminating information to affected communities. To achieve this outcome, IOM will prioritize internal capacity-building, undertake donor mobilization and will focus on needs-based project development and implementation.

IOM will continue to work closely with governments, UN agencies, academics and civil society partners to address the MECC nexus at the regional, subregional and national levels.

At the national level, MECC projects in Asia and the Pacific will be carried out in close coordination with relevant ministries, including Ministries of Environment, Climate Change and/or National Disaster Management Authorities. At the same time, to strengthen regional and multi-country partnerships and coordination, IOM will continue engagement with governments via regional forums such as the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

IOM also partners with several UN agencies to implement MECC activities and projects, including UN Environment (UNEP), International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP).

Our collaboration extends to intergovernmental organizations and platforms like the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Platform for Disaster Displacement (PDD); academic partnerships like with Australian National University, TransRe and the Graduate Institute and civil society organizations. Existing partners, along with new partnerships, will continue to be critical in achieving the outcomes identified in IOM's MECC approach in the region.



Fisherfolk from Bantayan Island off the western coast of mainland Cebu, the Philippines, whose livelihood is dependent on natural resources, feel the effects of natural disasters and conflicts more than others. © IOM / Andrea Empamano