

Policy Briefing

Climate Change and Migration

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Climate Change-Induced Migration in the Horn of Africa

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Executive summary

The Horn of Africa has been facing a wide range of interconnected and mutually reinforcing negative conditions for many years. Recently, climate change-induced migration, either voluntary in nature as an adaptation strategy or through displacement, has become a formidable challenge for these countries. Achieving a resilient society – where people can adapt in place and thrive, or migrate with dignity to areas of higher opportunity – should be an important part of meeting national development goals. It is thus critical to take a long-term perspective on how to reduce vulnerability and make human and socioeconomic development more resilient, in order to reduce the number of distressed people forced to move as a result of climate change.

Introduction

Throughout history people have migrated for a wide variety of reasons. Migration is a common strategy for survival, coping, income diversification, risk management and adaptation for people facing economic stress and adverse conditions. The impacts associated with climate change are already shifting patterns of mobility and will increasingly do so. Climate change-induced migration affects the wellbeing and resilience of people and surrounding systems in complex and evolving ways.

According to a recent study by the International Organization for Migration, least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small-island developing states (SIDS) – which are collectively home to about 1.1 billion people – are among the most vulnerable groups of countries in the world. They are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change owing to structural constraints and geographical disadvantages.¹ In 2016 the 15 countries with the highest levels of vulnerability to natural hazards were LDCs, LLDCs or SIDS.²

The Horn of Africa has been characterised by economic stagnation and instability for decades. The environmental challenge in these countries, compounded by limited institutional capacity, conflict, scarce financial resources to cope with emerging challenges and a high degree of vulnerability to systemic shocks, undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development and contributes to widespread displacement. This policy briefing reviews climate change-induced migration and policy options in the Horn of Africa.

Climate change-induced migration: A multifaceted reality

Climate change, which manifests in environmental shocks and stressors, may result in temporary or permanent migration in affected countries and internationally. However, evidence on climate change as the sole driver of migration is not conclusive.³ Some people migrate to seek better opportunities, reacting to climate change impacts on their livelihoods, their health or their food security, while others are displaced involuntarily as they flee destruction caused by sudden-onset disasters and extreme weather events, often amplified by climate change.

1 International Organization for Migration, *Climate Change and Migration in Vulnerable Countries: A Snapshot of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States* (Geneva: IOM, 2019).

2 Mixed Migration Center, "Weak Links: Challenging the Climate and Mixed Migration Paradigm in the Horn of Africa and Yemen" (Briefing Paper, MMC, February 2020), <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/challenging-the-climate-and-migration-paradigm/>.

3 Maria Waldinger and Sam Fankhauser, "Climate Change and Migration in Developing Countries: Evidence and Implications for RISE Countries" (Policy Paper, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London, 2015).

Although there are few instances of climate change as the sole factor in migration, it is widely recognised as a contributing and exacerbating factor in migration and conflict. It is commonly framed as one factor among many driving migration, alongside population growth, underdevelopment, growing inequality, weak governance, natural hazards, conflicts and violence.⁴ It can exacerbate a wide range of existing, interrelated, non-climate threats, including security, and serve as a catalyst for conflict. It also impacts the political, demographic, economic, social and environmental factors that can drive migration.⁵ Researchers, policymakers and the wider public are realising that climate change will have a larger effect on global migration patterns in the coming decades. In 2018 the World Bank estimated that three regions (Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia) would generate 143 million more climate migrants by 2050.⁶ However, it is also important to acknowledge that migration can be part of a positive, life-saving strategy when planned and well managed.

The Horn of Africa: Displacement, human challenges and climate change

For the purposes of this analysis, the Horn of Africa refers to the eight countries in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region – Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The region covers an area of 5.2 million km² and has an estimated population of over 230 million people.⁷ The economic mainstay of the region is crop production and livestock, which provide the basis for food supplies and export earnings, as well as employment for over 80% of the population. Some 70% of the IGAD region is made up of arid and semi-arid lands, which receive less than 600mm rainfall annually. Farmland accounts for 7%, forests 19% and permanent pastures 28% of the total land area. The remaining 46% is relatively unproductive or marginal land.⁸

Dependency on rainfed agriculture and livestock is high in the region, suggesting a considerable degree of sensitivity to climate variability and change. The Horn is one of the world's most food-insecure regions. Nearly 44% of the population live in areas prone to extreme food shortages.⁹ In the future, the impacts of climate change, as well as growing

4 IOM, *IOM Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change* (Geneva: IOM, 2014), <https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-outlook-migration-environment-and-climate-change>; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Preindustrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Mission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat Of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (Geneva: IPCC, 2018), <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

5 Kumari Rigaud et al., *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2018).

6 Rigaud et al., *Groundswell*.

7 Intergovernmental Authority on Development, *IGAD State of the Region Report – A Popular Version: Formulation of IGAD Strategy and Medium-Term Implementation Plan 2016-2020* (Djibouti: IGAD Secretariat, 2016).

8 IGAD, *IGAD State of the Region Report*.

9 UN Environment, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication – A Synthesis for Policy Makers* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2011), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=126&menu=35>.

populations and declining per capita agricultural capacity, are expected to further threaten livelihoods.

Table 1 indicates the ranking of countries in the Horn of Africa on a range of data related to state fragility and vulnerabilities. In all rankings (state fragility, environment vulnerability and adaptation readiness), these countries tend to fare dismally. Somalia ranks first in the vulnerability and readiness indices and second in the fragile states index. Moreover, the Horn countries are highly dependent on rainfed agriculture and livestock, which makes them vulnerable to climate change issues.

Country	Fragile States Index (2019, 173 countries ranked)	ND-GAIN Vulnerability Index (2017, 181 countries ranked)	ND-GAIN Readiness index (2017, 191 countries ranked)	Inform Global Risk (2019)		Dependence on rainfed agriculture, pasture and livelihood	Exposure to current and future climate change impacts
				Index	Rank (191 countries ranked)		
Djibouti	43	130	155	5.4	34	Low	High
Eritrea	17	172	190	5.2	38	High	High
Ethiopia	23	159	161	6.8	11	High	High
Kenya	25	149	152	6.1	20	High	High
Somalia	2	181	191	9.1	1	High	High
Sudan	8	175	173	7.1	9	High	High
Uganda	20	166	143	6.3	17	High	High

Note: The Fragile States Index, “Country Dashboard”, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/> is derived from thousands of reports and datasets from around the world, detailing the existing social, economic and political pressures faced by states.

ND-GAIN Vulnerability and Adaptation Readiness is based on compiled indicators, with 36 indicators contributing to the measure of vulnerability and nine indicators to the measure of readiness.

INFORM, *Inform Report 2019: Shared Evidence for Managing Crises and Disasters*, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Inform%202019%20WEB%20spreads.pdf> is a composite indicator that identifies countries at risk of humanitarian crisis and disaster that would overwhelm national response capacity. It uses a scale from 0–10, with 10 as the highest level of risk.

Source: Adapted from Mixed Migration Center, “Weak Links: Challenging the Climate and Mixed Migration Paradigm in the Horn of Africa and Yemen” (Briefing Paper, MMC, February 2020), <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/challenging-the-climate-and-migration-paradigm/>

The negative impact of climate change and other environmental stressors on populations in the Horn of Africa is compounded by low readiness or capacity to meet environmental challenges, armed conflict, overpopulation and limited livelihood opportunities. This leads to resource competition, often exacerbated by climate change, which in turn leads to

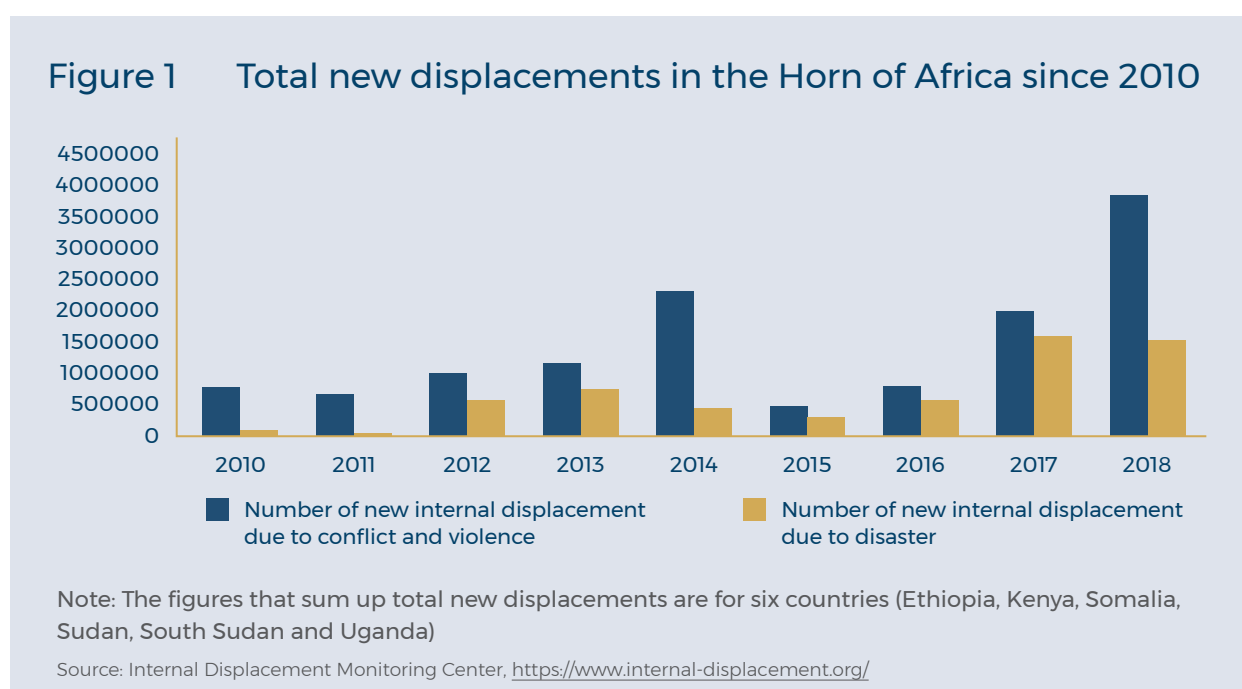
conflict. According to some analyses, resource scarcity intensified by climate change may now be a root cause of conflict and will continue to be so.¹⁰

As drought-affected communities in the Horn of Africa may lack the resources to engage in long-distance migration, they are more likely to move within their own country or to nearby urban areas. Those experiencing extremely depleted resilience and resources may no longer have the funds to pay for their journey and stay put or move shorter distances to remain close to social networks and their homes, rather than leaving the region.¹¹

Table 2 and Figure 1, respectively, indicate the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2018 and trends in new displacements over 2010–2018 in the Horn of Africa.

Country	Total number of IDPs (conflict and violence) (as of 31 December 2018)	New displacement (conflict and violence) (1 January - 31 December 2018)	New displacement (disasters) (1 January - 31 December 2018)
Ethiopia	2 137 000	2 895 000	296 000
Somalia	2 648 000	578 000	547 000
Sudan	2 072 000	41 000	121 000
Kenya	162 000	10 000	336 000
Uganda	32 000	9 000	164 000
Djibouti	—	—	9 400
South Sudan	1 900 000	321 000	6 600

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/>



¹⁰ MMC, “Weak Links”.

¹¹ Research and Evidence Facility, “Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen” (Research Report, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, Brussels, 2017).

Every year hundreds of thousands are internally displaced owing to conflict, disasters, and/or environmental change. In some cases, environmental displacement may be long term or even permanent if land has become too degraded to support people on their return.

Addressing climate change-induced migration: Policy options

Climate change-induced migration in the Horn of Africa can have substantial development implications and the stakes are high. Achieving a resilient society that adapts to changing environmental conditions is an important part of meeting national development goals. It is critical to take a long-term perspective on how to reduce vulnerability and to increase drought-resilient human and socioeconomic development efforts among the Horn's poorest communities. Such a perspective looks beyond a single drought and/or a single response to consider what, fundamentally, are the causes of vulnerability for communities in the Horn. This perspective would link the specific consequences of climate change with other dynamics of poverty and vulnerability, such as those relating to financial and social capital, lack of developmental infrastructure, and market access. Designing interventions based on this fundamental and far-reaching approach is, essentially, a matter of building the resilience of people, and of economic and environmental systems.

When strategies to build resilience are designed, they should consider potential effects on other vulnerable sectors or communities to avoid the situation where adaptation in one place adds stress in another. With the adverse effects of climate change a threat to all, the countries of the Horn should find ways to collaborate on joint actions and investments. Significant power and responsibility rest with national governments, which will need to considerably strengthen their understanding of climate change and their climate-related policies to address the problems as well as the consequences for various aspects of security. The countries should pursue a diverse range of climate actions, from the national to the local level, and governments should work with the international community and a broad range of donors to develop and implement the actions.

Recommendations

- **Ensure risk sharing and risk acceptance:** weather index insurance is an innovative tool that can develop and complement insurance offerings and give more people access to risk mitigation coverage. As a formal climate-smart toolkit it has the potential to increase agricultural productivity and incomes by allowing smallholder farmers to adapt and build resilience to weather shocks.
- **Increase social protection (SP):** this includes social safety nets, social insurance and labour market measures, and plays an important role in achieving the overarching

objectives of reducing vulnerability and increasing climate resilience. However, SP programmes should not be considered in isolation. Integrating and coordinating SP with climate change adaptation and disaster risk management will address the multiple risks and increasing climate-related vulnerabilities experienced by the poor.

- **Promote livelihood diversification:** policies that include livelihood diversification as a key component of adaptation – including training grants, cash payments to boost local economies and stimulate multiplier effects, investments into small towns as service centres and markets, and adaptation funding as a support mechanism for diversification – can reduce climate change vulnerability.

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Cover image

Internally displaced families stand next to their huts on 14 March 2017 at a makeshift camp on the outskirts of Baidoa, in the southwestern Bay region of Somalia, where thousands of people arrive daily after they fled the parched countryside. (Tony Karumba/AFP via Getty Images)

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