

# Action on climate-linked migration and displacement

Empowering refugee and migrant led organisations



Robert Bosch  
Stiftung



CLIMATE AND  
MIGRATION  
COALITION

The Robert Bosch Stiftung commissioned Climate Outreach to provide an analysis of the role of refugee and migrant led organisations in the climate change debate, with a regional focus on Africa, the Middle East and Europe.



## About Climate Outreach and the Climate and Migration Coalition

**Climate Outreach** is a team of social scientists working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change. Since our founding we have worked on the connections between climate and human migration, among several other key climate change issues.

Through our research, practical guides and training, we help organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences, in order to build the social mandate for climate action. We have more than 15 years' experience working with a wide range of international partners, including central, regional and local governments, international bodies, academic institutions, charities, grant-giving foundations, faith organisations and youth groups.

Our work on the connections between climate change and human mobility has focused on working with civil society organisations to empower them to advocate for the rights and welfare of people on the move due to climate change impacts. We created the **Climate and Migration Coalition** to provide a platform for organisations to engage with climate-linked migration and displacement. Through partnerships, we provide training, insights and resources that build these organisations' capacity to engage with climate-linked mobility. We also engage in policy work around climate-linked mobility, focusing on advocacy on the rights and welfare of people at risk of displacement.

## About the Robert Bosch Stiftung

The **Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH** is one of Europe's largest foundations associated with a private company. It works in the areas of health, education, and global issues. With its charitable activities, it contributes to the development of viable solutions to social challenges. For this purpose, the Foundation implements its own projects, enters into alliances with partners, and supports third-party initiatives.

Since it was established in 1964, the Robert Bosch Stiftung has invested around 1.9 billion euros in charitable work.

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**Cover:** Nigerian women left by their husbands who migrated in search of a better life have formed a cooperative to practice organic farming. *Photo: [Stephan Gladieu/World Bank](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*

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Geo bags being used as part of a Flood and River Bank Erosion Risk Management Investment program in India.  
*Photo: © ADB/Asian Development Bank*



# Executive summary

The Robert Bosch Stiftung commissioned Climate Outreach to provide an analysis of the role of refugee and migrant led organisations in the climate change debate, with a regional focus on Africa, the Middle East and Europe. This report outlines the potential opportunities, benefits and entry points to supporting refugee and migrant led organisations to engage in climate change projects and advocacy.

Our investigation explores the potential for refugee and migrant led organisations to become active participants in the political and policy debates about climate-linked mobility. To understand this, we spoke to 12 representatives from refugee and migration organisations who have started working on the issue, to understand both the motivations for, and barriers to, undertaking this work. Through these interviews we have distilled the common driving or motivating forces that pushed these organisations to begin working on climate-linked mobility, as well as the common barriers and challenges that constrained their work.

This report also contains an analysis of the wider global context, based on Climate Outreach's 15 years of experience working on climate-linked mobility, and the latest academic research. The analysis points to key global trends in climate-linked mobility and explores the ways climate change holds the power to reshape existing patterns of migration and displacement. We analyse the current political and policy regime governing climate-linked mobility, to provide insights into potential points of strategic intervention. In addition, we examine the current role civil society organisations—and specifically migrant and refugee led organisations—play in these political and policy processes.

Based on this analysis, combined with our experience working on climate-linked mobility, and the insights from the interviews, the report offers a series of **recommendations for strategic intervention by funders in this space:**

- 1 Widen the field of organisations working on climate-linked mobility
- 2 Fund organisations that are at different stages of their thinking and development on climate-linked mobility
- 3 Fund southern organisations to turn their work into international advocacy
- 4 Create a supportive structure for organisations new to the space
- 5 Support individual champions while they create internal organisational consensus
- 6 Encourage northern climate and environmental organisations to collaborate, but listen to southern partners
- 7 Fund a diversity of approaches, but play to existing strengths
- 8 Offer long-term, flexible funding, especially to southern organisations
- 9 Show leadership

These are designed to specifically engage with the concerns raised by refugee and migration organisations, and with the ways in which climate change may fundamentally reshape patterns of mobility in the coming years. They focus on how and where to direct funding to achieve key strategic impact in this arena. The recommendations also focus on how to sustain and grow established work by refugee and migration organisations, as well as nurture new entrants into the space and help them start working on climate-linked mobility.

These interventions could re-shape the debate about climate-linked mobility. The interventions could also push the issue up the political agenda and make refugee and migrant voices central to the debate. This new political traction could accelerate many of the policy processes designed to address climate-linked mobility, and ultimately lead to better outcomes in terms of welfare and legal protection for the most vulnerable.

A Somali refugee stands inside a tent with her baby in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia.  
*Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*



# Global context and current civil society engagement

Climate change holds the power to reshape many existing patterns of human mobility. Changing patterns of extreme weather events are already leading to altered patterns of migration and displacement. Scientists agree that many existing weather-related disasters already have the 'fingerprints' of climate change on them.<sup>1</sup> As the severity and frequency of drought, tropical storms or flooding change, patterns of human mobility connected to these disasters begin to change too.<sup>2</sup> These changing patterns present a challenge to every organisation that works with migrants and refugees. The consequences of climate change potentially hold the power to alter how and where these organisations will have to work, who they work with and the forces driving the movement of the people they are hoping to protect.

Communities that already face structural challenges are far more likely to suffer as a consequence of these climate impacts. The ability of a population to cope with accelerating climate change impacts plays a huge role in determining whether or not people are forced to move as a consequence. People facing extreme poverty or living in situations of protracted armed conflict are far more likely to be forced to move by climate-related disasters. Locations that have the financial resources to invest in resilience are far more able to minimise displacement when faced with disasters. Locations with resources to invest in both physical protective infrastructure and robust emergency planning always experience less displacement and recover more quickly. It is very often when extreme weather combines with poverty, poor governance and armed conflict that the most extreme and protracted episodes of climate-related displacement and migration occur.<sup>3</sup>

At an individual, community and household level, discrimination and oppression interact with weather-related disasters. Communities facing ethnic or religious discrimination are often more likely to be displaced and are less likely to receive support from governments to prevent displacement or cope with the aftermath of disasters. People from gender and sexual minorities are similarly more likely to experience rights violations or violence during episodes of displacement. Women are often more likely to die during episodes of disaster displacement than men.<sup>4</sup>

As climate change starts to drive more extreme weather events, the consequences will not be felt evenly. As well as understanding the changes to mobility that climate change will bring about, organisations must also grapple with how these changes will be felt differently across populations, and how they relate to existing structural inequalities.

## Patterns

Several patterns of mobility are likely to emerge and increase over the coming decades as a result of changing patterns of climate- and weather-related disasters.

### Internal displacement driven by sudden disasters

Sudden events like flash floods, tropical storms (hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons) and storm surges will create increased internal displacement. Approximately 20 million people a year are displaced by these kinds of events. Sudden-onset disasters usually create internal displacement

over a short distance, as people seek safety in the nearest possible location. Many people may also be involved in evacuations, during which they will usually be moved short distances to the nearest place of safety. This displacement sometimes leads to more complex patterns of movement. While many people return after the initial disaster, many do not and instead move again to another location.<sup>5</sup> While return remains common at the moment, this may become more and more difficult in the future as disasters increase in severity.

## **Internal migration driven by slow-onset events and livelihood erosion**

Slowly unfolding events like drought and desertification create a different pattern of mobility. As these events escalate they erode rural agricultural livelihoods. As less work becomes available in farming, many people seek alternative employment.<sup>6</sup> For many, this involves moving to a nearby city. This drought-driven mobility tends to be across short distances. Most migrants aim to move the shortest distance possible to reduce costs. This often creates patterns of seasonal and circular movement, as people move between urban and rural locations as droughts worsen or improve. In this context people tend to move individually rather than as an entire household or community. The people who have left frequently send remittances back to their family, and in many cases this additional income provides the family with a financial safety net, helping them survive the drought.<sup>7</sup>

These patterns of climate-linked movement are starkly at odds with much media reporting of the issue. News headlines tend to suggest climate-driven movement will be across borders and from poorer to richer countries. This latter image of climate migrants is often invoked by media outlets to add to apocalyptic narratives about the future. However, the evidence points to very different patterns of mobility emerging.

## **Planned relocation**

Sea-level rise presents a new and unique situation for many communities. The inevitability of rising sea levels has led many communities to begin large-scale relocation projects. Unlike other patterns of climate-linked mobility, these take place in a planned, rather than ad-hoc, manner. Households tend to move together rather than separating, and existing community connections, languages and cultures are hopefully maintained during the move. These relocations almost always take place with the cooperation of local and national governments, and usually require finance from governments or international agencies.<sup>8</sup> Planned relocations can often divide communities, however, and they require extremely careful planning.

## **Climate-linked immobility**

Climate change impacts also hold the potential to disrupt established and positive patterns of mobility. Nomadic pastoralist communities may find existing migratory routes disrupted by climate change impacts.<sup>9</sup> People who may wish to migrate as a way of coping with climate change may find that their livelihoods have been degraded by those same impacts to the extent that they no longer have the financial resources to move. This process leads to people becoming trapped in climate-vulnerable locations.

Again, this pattern of movement is at odds with media and public preconceptions about climate-linked mobility. Evidence points strongly towards needing to think about immobility as well as movement. Organisations beginning to engage with this issue will need to consider not only the fact that their work may need to support and protect people on the move due to climate change, but also the fact that they may need to consider the rights and welfare of people who have become 'trapped' by climate change.

## Cross-border migration and displacement

Movement across international borders due to climate change impacts is less likely than internal mobility. This is because people moving in this context usually wish to move the shortest distance possible and may not have the resources or legal right to move internationally. When people do cross borders during weather-related disasters it is often when the disaster has combined with another force, such as armed conflict.<sup>10</sup> When this cross-border mobility does happen, it is most often between neighbouring countries, and is frequently between countries in the global south.

## Impacts on existing refugees and migrants

The impacts of climate change are creating additional challenges for people who are already on the move. Refugee and internally displaced persons' (IDP) settlements are highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. As these events become more frequent, this creates the possibility of people being further displaced from these settlements.<sup>11</sup> Migrants and refugees also risk the prospect of being returned against their will to locations that have been made dangerous by extreme weather events.

## Involvement of refugee and migrant organisations in supporting solutions

Refugee and migrant led organisations are not consistently involved in advocacy around the solutions to climate-linked mobility. There are a number of different policy options available for addressing climate-linked migration and displacement – some of these have seen extensive civil society engagement and advocacy, while others have not.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provides camps and communities that are off the grid with solar lanterns. *Photo: IOM 2014 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*



The solutions to climate-linked migration and displacement fall into a number of different categories and aim to intervene at various different points in order to protect the rights and welfare of people on the move.

## Legal protection

The rights of people who move in the context of climate change are currently poorly defined. People who cross international borders due to climate impacts are not protected from repatriation under existing international law. The rights of people who move internally should – in theory – be protected by their own governments, and by frameworks like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

However, as climate change alters patterns of mobility, it may be that existing frameworks cease to provide the kinds of protection needed in these novel situations. Several proposals have been made to address these issues. Early attempts to create new treaties or to alter the Refugee Convention are now seen as counterproductive or unrealistic. Current legal scholarship points towards a ‘jigsaw’ approach in which a web of smaller bilateral and regional agreements are reached to protect people.<sup>12</sup> The Platform on Disaster Displacement has created a ‘protection agenda’ which sets out best practice for states to follow and outlines existing relevant human rights commitments, but it is not legally binding on its signatories.

Civil society engagement around legal protection has been sporadic. Some campaigns driven by climate change NGOs for a global agreement on legal protection or changes to existing international law have gained media attention but little political traction. More recently, civil society organisations working on refugee and migration issues have engaged more vigorously around global processes, such as the UNFCCC, the events and meetings leading up to the Refugee and Migration Compacts, and the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

However, this engagement has been limited to larger civil society organisations and international NGOs that have the resources to engage with these processes. Refugee and migrant led organisations have remained largely absent from these policy processes.

## Resilience and adaptation

Climate change resilience projects may go some way towards preventing both migration and displacement. Projects to help communities adapt to climate change or provide physical protection against extreme weather events can prevent and reduce mobility. Changes to agricultural practices, such as improved irrigation and crop-switching, can help create resilience against drought. Improved disaster risk management practices can reduce displacement from sudden disasters and enable faster return. However, there are limits to what can be achieved with resilience-building. It is unrealistic to imagine that climate-linked mobility can be completely avoided. Even with adequate funding and efforts to limit climate change, new patterns of climate-linked mobility must be planned for.

Climate change and development-focused civil organisations have been some of the biggest champions of this kind of resilience work. Significant gains have been made, both at practical and policy levels, in terms of deploying funding to help communities adapt. Occasionally these resilience-building activities are presented as a remedy for climate-linked displacement.<sup>13</sup>

Refugee and migrant led organisations have key roles in many resilience building projects. Community-organised disaster risk reduction and recovery projects are a key part of preventing displacement in many vulnerable locations.

However, in spite of their key on-the-ground activities, the voices and concerns of these refugee and migrant led organisations have been largely absent from political and policy debates about climate adaptation and resilience. Their voices are key to the resilience and adaptation discourse as they will bring a new perspective to the debate – potentially highlighting the fact that mobility cannot be completely avoided, and that migration can, in the right circumstances, be a positive adaptation strategy.

## Migration as adaptation

'Migration as adaptation' proposes harnessing mobility to help people cope with climate change. This concept recognises the fact that many people are already using migration to find work away from drought-impacted areas. Those who view migration from this perspective believe that facilitating migration and supporting migrants to move may be more useful and realistic than trying to prevent migration through in-situ adaptation. Proposed interventions usually involve creating safe, legal migration options that people can use to move away from highly vulnerable locations. At the same time, work opportunities, housing and healthcare are provided at destinations. The conceptualisation of migration as adaptation is in its infancy; it enjoys some recognition from international agencies but has found less support from governments.<sup>14</sup>

Many migrant and refugee led organisations are already deeply involved in projects that are vital to migration as a form of climate adaptation – however, few such organisations would define themselves as engaging with this agenda. Many refugee and migrant led organisations create projects providing health, welfare services, legal advice and employment opportunities to refugees and migrants. They form a vital part of the support system for refugees and migrants. As such, they are key to improving the lives and livelihoods of many millions of migrants and refugees in their new locations. When these migrant and refugee led projects are working with people who have a climate change dimension to their mobility, these organisations are arguably an essential part of making migration as a climate adaptation strategy possible.

Viewing migration as climate adaptation potentially presents refugee and migrant led organisations with a unique opportunity to engage in the climate debate. As actors that are arguably already making migration as adaptation possible, they hold a unique legitimacy in the debate. Refugee and migration organisations are uniquely positioned to advocate on what people on the move would need for migration as adaptation to work. It also flips the debate from one where migration is seen exclusively as a negative and as involving a failure to adapt. Creating interventions, campaigns and advocacy around the concept of migration as adaptation potentially gives migrant and refugee organisations a positive migrant-centred narrative about climate-linked mobility.

# Drivers of – and barriers to – engagement

Our interviews were structured to encourage participants to reflect on the potential for refugee and migrant led organisations to become advocates in the climate change debate. We have organised the insights from the interviews into common themes, to highlight the shared motivations and difficulties faced by the people we spoke to. Organisations in the global south often highlighted very different issues to those in the global north. We've drawn attention to instances where there are important differences.

## Motivations and driving forces for engagement

### Recognition of impacts

All organisations we spoke to said that the potential impacts of climate change on the communities they work with were the driving motivation for starting programming on climate change. Equally, everyone we spoke to stated that the future impacts of climate change and their potential to drive displacement were key reasons for their organisation starting to work on the connections between climate change and human movement. All interviewees expressed their reasons in moral terms, often referring to the responsibility their organisations feel towards people at risk, a desire to seek just solutions and avoidance of suffering.

All interviewees displayed deeply sophisticated understandings of the connections between climate change and mobility. Their understanding of the scale and patterns of impacts was well-rooted in the mainstream academic literature on the topic. Most mentioned key pieces of academic research that had acted as turning points in their understanding of the issue. Several described personal journeys of engaging with the literature about the connections between climate change and human movement. Several spoke about a point of personal realisation, when they made the connection between climate change and human movement and felt individually compelled to push their organisation towards working on the issue.

**Organisations based in the global south** all mentioned the very direct impact climate change was having on the communities they work with. For example, one based in Chad told us about the high levels of drought-driven migration from rural areas into major cities, and the difficult situations the young migrants they worked with faced. Another told us about the work they have carried out supporting people displaced by flooding in Mozambique.

For these organisations, the connections were part of the direct experience of their day-to-day work. The tangible consequences of climate change on the communities they work with were key to their wider work on climate change.

**Several organisations based in the global north** framed their motivation as deeply rooted in the history of refugee rights. They described their organisation's work on climate change in terms of the potential for climate change to disrupt progress in the recognition and welfare of refugees and migrants. One interviewee explained the origins of their organisation's work originating in the assistance of refugees in the aftermath of the second world war, and described how this organisational history and culture had shaped their work on climate-linked mobility.

Several interviewees saw their organisations as being embedded in a long struggle for the rights of people on the move. They saw this period of history after the second world war as being one in which key victories had been made in the protection of migrants and refugees. They explained that they now view climate change as a force that has the potential to disrupt or even undo several decades of progress.

## Connected systems

Several people we spoke to emphasised the way they see the driving forces behind displacement and climate change as being connected. They see current and historical patterns of displacement as having their roots in histories of colonialism and extractivism, and they see climate change as having its roots in the same historical processes. This view was more commonly expressed by smaller organisations that saw their work as rooted in more radical analysis of historical oppression and marginalisation.

For these organisations, working at the nexus of climate change and human mobility makes sense because the driving forces behind both of these issues share common roots, and they see them as having common solutions.

Several people expressed this connectedness as a force that should be driving collaboration and solidarity between migration rights and climate change organisations. They see these connections as forming part of their own motivation for working on the issue, but also as something that could become a compelling reason for other organisations to engage.

## Public salience

**For organisations working in the global north** the public salience of climate change was a key driver of their engagement. This was especially the case within organisations that have a focus on public campaigns and political advocacy.

Several interviewees mentioned the new public salience of climate change. The youth climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion were both mentioned several times by people we spoke to as factors that have pushed climate change up the public and political agenda. Several interviewees said that this renewed public interest had given them the mandate to begin or expand climate change work within their organisation. Other interviewees stated that the surge in public interest meant a feeling had emerged within their organisation that it was no longer possible to be silent on the issue.

Several interviewees told us that this surge in interest and media attention had been more complex. This media coverage has tended to focus on dramatic, fearful narratives of climate-driven mass migration. Several interviewees reflected that this new attention on the issue has been a mixed blessing. However, they argued that speaking out to correct problematic and fearful framings of climate-driven mobility has helped demonstrate the need for their voices and perspectives in the debate.

## Individual leadership

Several organisations told us that their initial work on climate change was driven by individuals in the organisation who were prepared to persistently push the work forward. They stated that it was these individual champions of the work – often acting alone – that cemented the organisation's climate change work, rather than a strategic, organisation-level decision. One interviewee who had pushed climate change work forwards within their organisation reflected that they feared that if they left, the relatively new work might be dropped. We heard several other similar stories about climate change work being held by an individual champion for several years, before eventually becoming part of the official activities and strategy of the organisation.

Several interviewees spoke about personal 'light bulb' moments where they felt they suddenly grasped the implications of climate change. They reflected on the ways this individual moment then drove forward their work within their organisation.

## Barriers and obstacles to engagement

### Lack of dedicated support to work on climate-linked mobility

Every organisation we spoke to stated that funding was a barrier to working on the connections between climate change and human mobility. Many organisations told us that while they had been interested in working on climate issues, it wasn't until grant funding specifically for this work became available that they were actually able to create and deliver programme activities. All organisations pointed to a lack of additional funding as a barrier to expanding their climate change work.

**Organisations in the global north** tended to see lack of funding as a barrier to them doing more work on climate change or to expanding a nascent climate change programme. **Organisations based in the global south** had a more complex view. Several saw working with people directly impacted by climate change as a necessity - they had to carry out this work whether or not funding was available.

A woman and her child escape the flooding of the Sunter River in East Jakarta, Indonesia.  
*Photo: Kompas/Hendra A Setyawan (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)*



## Lack of space to operate amid other players in the field

**Several organisations in the global north** told us they often felt that when working on climate change they were operating in a crowded space. They perceived that a number of large, well-funded and vocal organisations were already highly active on climate change, and at points they had feared they might make little additional impact in the arena. Several interviewees told us they feared their organisation's public-facing work on climate-linked mobility might simply go unnoticed among the activities of bigger organisations with more experience of working on climate change.

Several people spoke about a complex – and at times fraught – relationship with climate change and environmental NGOs. Several participants felt that these organisations perpetuate unhelpful narratives about the dangers of migration, and use refugees and migrants as objects of fear to promote other climate policies. Several people stated that their interactions with climate and environmental organisations had not always been easy.

At a grassroots level, several people we spoke to said that the way climate activist movements such as Extinction Rebellion interacted with grassroots refugee and migration rights groups was problematic. Several people told us they felt that the voices and concerns of migrants and refugee groups were not respected within these circles, and that their participation in those movements was not always possible.

## Political instability

**A number of organisations based in the global south** pointed to political instability as a key barrier to their work. They spoke about the ways that political instability had impacted their climate change and environmental projects; however, it was also clear that these issues were impacting work across all of their organisation's activities.

Organisations based in Sudan and Sierra Leone specifically mentioned how advocacy work had become impossible due to rapidly changing local and national government administrations. They explained how they had started advocacy work focused on climate-linked displacement and resilience, but were forced to abandon this after engaging with government officials became impossible. Another organisation explained that local government funding for one of their projects was suddenly withdrawn, forcing it to stop.

## Internal resistance

**Organisations based in the global north** told us about the many internal and organisational challenges they encountered working on climate-linked mobility. No participants told us they faced active hostility from within their organisation as regards working on climate change; however, many told us that other staff and board members were resistant.

Several interviewees said that other staff had shown great understanding and sympathy for their desire to have the organisation work on climate-linked mobility. However, they did also state that significant resistance came from staff when the question of the organisation's time, resources and focus were raised. This resistance usually centred on how new work on climate change might detract from other work areas, or complicate the public perception of their strategic focus. Other interviewees spoke about encountering resistance from staff and board members on the basis of not having the internal expertise to deliver climate-related work, or other organisations being better placed to deliver this kind of work.

It should be noted that, given the selection criteria for participation in this research project, all interviewees within this sample had eventually overcome any internal obstacles and taken at least the first steps towards working on climate-driven mobility.

## Competing priorities, especially in crises

**Several organisations in the global north** told us about how it was difficult to justify devoting staff time to climate-linked mobility when they and their partner organisations were also dealing with more immediate, life-threatening crises. Several people reflected on the tension they felt between trying to work on immediate threats to life and rights, while also trying to work on more long-term threats, such as climate change and environmental degradation.

**In contrast, several organisations in the global south** explained that their work dealing with crisis situations was inseparable from their work on climate change. These organisations were more directly engaged in humanitarian situations on the ground, some of which had a climate change driver. Other organisations saw the environmental resilience projects they were engaged in as being a vital part of preventing future displacement crises. For these organisations, the impacts of climate change were more immediate and tangible, and they therefore saw less distinction between work on climate change and on their other activities.

## Lack of materials and training

Several interviewees told us that a lack of specific training resources held back their initial work on climate-driven mobility. Specifically, they stated that it had been difficult to find appropriate materials that they could use internally with other staff to help them understand the connections between climate change and human mobility. The issue seemed to be a lack of materials and training that were pitched at the right level for their internal use. In fact, some interviewees said they felt overwhelmed by the volume of reports and documents on the issue, and struggled to find resources that were useful and appropriate to their situation.

## Staff fatigue and mental health

Several people we spoke to raised issues around staff stress and mental health related to working on climate change. This tended to be expressed in terms of additional work pressure that might result from a new strand of work. However, some interviewees also raised issues about the ways working on climate change had impacted their own mental health. Several people spoke about the existing stress they face working in humanitarian crises, and the additional pressure that focusing on climate change might bring.

# Options for strategic intervention

Resourcing organisations to work on climate-linked mobility is essential, and we are unlikely to see progress without new funding. Based on the interviews conducted and our experience working in this space for over a decade, we outline several options for engagement for funders working in this space. The recommendations are designed to help refugee and migrant led organisations participate in the policy and political debates around climate-linked migration and displacement. They are designed to amplify and extend existing work and best practice we identified in the interviews, and encourage new refugee and migrant led organisations to begin working in this space.

**We believe that the potential impact of these interventions could be significant. Delivered at scale, these interventions could mean:**

- refugee and migrant led organisations become a respected part of the climate change debate. This potentially accelerates action on climate change by presenting a wider and more diverse range of voices advocating on the issue.
- climate-driven mobility rises up the public and political agenda, driven by the activities, projects, advocacy and outreach of refugee and migrant led organisations. This increase in political traction could accelerate many of the existing policy processes designed to address climate-driven mobility, many of which are currently moving extremely slowly.
- the public and political discourse around climate-driven mobility comes to reflect the values and priorities of refugee and migrant led organisations. This would help to re-frame the debate about climate-driven mobility and make it an issue primarily concerned with the rights and welfare of migrants.

## 1 Widen the field of organisations working on climate-linked mobility

Additional funding specifically for refugee and migrant led organisations to work on climate change would certainly increase the number of organisations and quantity of work carried out in this space. However, we also outline a number of more specific recommendations that we believe would target and direct this funding to maximise long-term impact.

Migration and refugee organisations hold a unique position in the debate about climate-linked mobility. As groups connected with people on the move, they are respected voices regarding the concerns, welfare and rights of people most at risk. As such, it makes sense for these organisations to work specifically on climate-linked mobility, rather than more generically on climate change. The strength of migrant and refugee led organisations is likely to lie in changing policy and public discourse around climate-linked mobility, rather than on wider climate issues such as emissions reduction or renewable energy.

The political and policy space on climate-linked mobility is also at a turning point. Several international processes are reaching key moments and a number of political shake-ups mean that refugee and migration organisations are in a unique position to reshape the debate. Crucially, they are in a position to refocus the debate around migrant and refugee rights, away from the current security-focused narratives that dominate.

## 2 Fund organisations that are at different stages of their thinking and development on climate-linked mobility

Several refugee and migration organisations have long-established programmes of work on climate-linked mobility. Funding these programmes would certainly enable their expansion. However, it is also vital that organisations at the early stages of their thinking and development are supported to enter the space. Without this, we are unlikely to see a growth in the number or type of organisations working on climate-linked mobility.

Our interviews showed that many organisations struggled most during the early stages of their work on climate-linked mobility. Supporting organisations during these early stages of thinking and project development may increase the chances of more organisations establishing and embedding climate change work.

Organisations with longer established programmes also need support to sustain their work. It is these more established programmes that produce some of the most effective and impactful work. Their years of experience mean they are able to navigate the complex research and policy spaces and create tangible results.

Over the time that Climate Outreach has worked on climate-linked mobility, we've seen many organisations move along this pathway from first steps to fully-fledged projects. This points to a need to fund organisations right across this spectrum of experience in order to nurture new entrants into the space, and to sustain established and impactful projects.

## 3 Fund southern organisations to turn their work into international advocacy

Our interviews revealed vital on-the-ground work on climate-linked mobility being delivered by migrant and refugee organisations in the global south. In addition to supporting the delivery of this work, foundations should also consider funding the wider communication of these projects and funding these organisations to engage in political and policy processes around climate-linked mobility. The direct experience these organisations have of the connections between climate change and human movement potentially makes them powerful and persuasive actors in this space.

## 4 Create a supportive structure for organisations new to the space

Organisations that are new to working on climate-linked mobility need more than just money. Based on our interviews, there is clearly a need for a space in which organisations can access training, expertise and resources that are appropriate to their current situation. Without this, they are likely to spend a lot of time trying to navigate this arena alone, and could potentially give up in the early stages of their work.

There are several options for creating this kind of supportive environment:

- Fund peer learning between organisations. Actively seek to fund refugee and migrant led organisations who have established work on climate change to provide training and guidance to organisations that are new to the issue.

- Fund the creation of resources and learning materials that are specifically designed for organisations that are new to the space.
- Provide a package of support, alongside grant funding, that includes guidance, access to experts and connections with potential partner organisations who are already working on the issue.

Our interviews consistently showed that individuals and organisations spent a long time working and building their knowledge – often in isolation – with several describing it as a lonely process. By supporting organisations that are new to the space, this process of thinking and discovery can potentially be accelerated and more organisations will thus be likely to reach a point where they can deliver successful work on the topic. Outside of these interviews we have also seen that many organisations take the first steps towards working on climate-linked mobility, but then stop. This is often due to a lack of a structured and supportive way to engage with the issue and to access the resources they need.

## 5 Support individual champions while they create internal organisational consensus

All of our interviewees talked about the time and energy that went into creating internal agreement and consensus on working on this issue. Offering grants that enable organisations to invest the time required to create this internal organisational agreement would significantly help many reach the point where they can start to carry out project work.

Houses destroyed by Typhoon Haiyan in Palo, Leyte, Philippines.  
*Photo: © ADB/Asian Development Bank*



Our interviews revealed that many organisations went through long periods during which their work on climate-linked mobility was sustained by a sole individual, often working outside their official remit, and often dedicating their own time to the work. We spoke to people who had eventually formalised this work within their organisations; however, from our wider experience, we know of many individuals who did not manage to make this leap. Supporting organisations and working closely with individual staff members hoping to push this work forward could help many cement and formalise their work on climate-linked mobility.

## **6 Encourage northern climate and environmental organisations to collaborate, but listen**

There is certainly potential for collaboration between civil society organisations working on refugee and migration issues and those working exclusively on climate change. The latter have great expertise in the wider implications of climate change, and actively participate in many of the global policy processes governing the issue. However, this collaboration would certainly need carefully directed funding in order to amplify the voices of refugees and migrants within these collaborations. Many interviewees told us they hoped to see collaboration and solidarity between refugee and migration organisations and climate change organisations, and that they saw the issues as being deeply connected. However, several organisations also told us that working in partnership with environmental and climate NGOs had not always been easy.

Funding collaborative projects that are led by refugee and migration organisations could go some way towards changing this balance, and would encourage climate and environmental organisations to adopt a more supportive and listening role. Our experience has shown that placing refugee and migration organisations in key leadership roles within these collaborations and alliances helps to shape the tone and narrative of public-facing messaging of projects. This will begin to change some of the problematic and fearful messaging about climate-linked mobility that is sometimes inadvertently promoted by climate change and environmental organisations.

## **7 Fund a diversity of approaches, but play to existing strengths**

We spoke to organisations who have very different approaches to achieving change, but who all deliver impactful work. Funding should be accessible to organisations who take different approaches – ranging from high-level policy work to public engagement and grassroots activism. Each of these approaches – and many others – form the jigsaw of activities that are needed to achieve change. Over our years of working in this space we've seen impactful work come from unusual and unexpected places.

Funders should seek to support organisations to apply their existing theory of change, values and ways of working to the issue of climate-linked mobility. Funders should also seek to fund a diversity of different approaches, rather than focusing exclusively on one particular approach to achieving change.

However, funders should also play to their own existing strengths by funding organisations whose remit, scale, methods and locations are familiar. Funders hoping to venture outside of their usual 'comfort zone' should seek partnerships with funding organisations that are more familiar with the space they are hoping to intervene in.

## 8 Offer long-term, flexible funding, especially to southern organisations

Climate-linked mobility is not an issue with many ‘quick wins’. Our experience is that the policy arena moves slowly and progress takes time. Public opinion on both climate change and migration often changes in fits and starts. Long-term, flexible funding would allow organisations to pursue goals over a number of years, and to alter those goals as the policy and political landscapes shift.

Several organisations told us they had significantly altered their approach to the issue as political situations had changed. Several had pursued very different ways of working as some became impossible and new opportunities opened up. Funding that allows this kind of long-term, flexible work is likely to be key to achieving progress on climate-linked mobility.

Organisations we spoke to in the global south face an additional set of challenges. Several we spoke to explained how political instability, armed conflict and corruption were making their work harder. These factors point to the need for funding that supports organisations during these difficult circumstances, but also funding that can be deployed flexibly by these organisations as their situations change.

## 9 Show leadership

Foundations must also show leadership on climate-linked mobility. While providing grant funding is vital, foundations can also create progress by showing leadership on the issue. This could involve simple actions, such as publicly stating the importance of the issue, through to playing a convening role for organisations to discuss the topic, or encouraging other philanthropic organisations to begin their own work exploring climate-linked mobility.

## Interview methods

We conducted semi-structured interviews, asking participants to reflect on their work on climate-linked mobility. Our prompting questions asked them to reflect on the processes their organisations went through as they started to work on climate-linked migration and displacement.

Further questions encouraged them to discuss how climate change was affecting their work and specifically how the issue of climate-linked mobility was shaping the strategy and activities of their organisation. We also asked organisations what motivated or drove them to begin working on climate-linked mobility, and the factors that hinder their participation. We specifically prompted participants to reflect on what would enable them to participate more fully in the political and policy debates around climate-linked migration and displacement.

We asked participants to reflect broadly on how climate-linked mobility had shaped the work of their organisations, and the ways in which the impacts of climate change had affected their strategy and projects. We asked organisations to reflect on both the driving or motivating forces behind working on advocacy around climate-linked mobility, and the factors that hinder their work and prevent them from engaging in the political debate around the topic. We asked representatives to talk about how their work engages with the changing reality of climate-linked mobility, and the practical, organisational and personal challenges of working on the issue.

The interviews were all conducted remotely. Most were conducted using Zoom or WhatsApp. Several interviewees who did not have English as a first language also submitted additional written answers where they felt they could express their views more clearly in writing.

## Confidentiality

Most interviewees felt they could be more candid about the issues they faced working in this space, especially when discussing internal organisational issues, if they remained anonymous.

## Definition of refugee and migrant led organisations

The project agreed a working definition of migrant and refugee led organisations as the following:

“refugee and migrant led organisations are to be understood as formal and informal organisations, coalitions, and networks that prioritise meaningful inclusion of refugees in governance, program design, and decision-making.”

## Organisations interviewed

We interviewed 12 organisations between January and April 2021. This selection of interviewees gives us insight into the challenges that refugee and migration organisations face as they begin working on the issue, and how support can potentially be provided to enhance their understanding of climate-linked mobility and build their capacity to work on the issue.

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