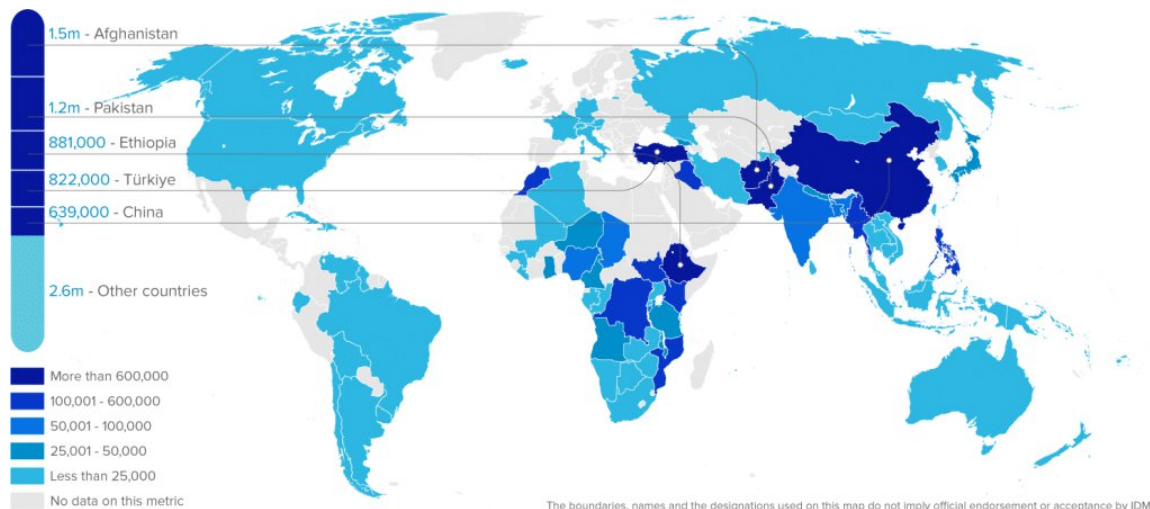


Climate Migration as a Security Threat: Preparing for Displacement Hotspots in the 2030s

Farhana Rashid¹

Introduction

Climate change has emerged not only as an environmental crisis but also as a catalyst for a new spectrum of human security challenges. Among these, the nexus between climate change and migration stands out as one of the most pressing non-traditional security dilemmas of the 21st century. Intensifying heatwaves, floods, sea-level rise, and droughts undermine livelihoods and habitability. For that, people are increasingly being forced to move not by choice, but by necessity.



75.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the end of 2023 globally, 7.7 million were displaced by disasters.

Image: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2024).

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In 2025, many parts of the world faced severe natural disasters. China, India, and the Philippines were hit by strong typhoons and floods, while wildfires spread across the northern hemisphere from the United States and Korea to Spain and Greece. At the same time, earthquakes in Myanmar and Afghanistan worsened the struggles of people already displaced by conflict. These events clearly show that no country, no matter how rich or powerful, is safe from disaster-related displacement. The World Bank's 2021's Groundswell report² found that climate change could force 216 million people across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050. It also predicted that hotspots of internal climate migration could emerge as early as 2030 and continue to spread and intensify by 2050. This report is a reminder of the human toll of climate change. The poorest people in the world who are contributing the least to climate change's causes, are affected by it most. Moreover, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, AR6, 2023) warns that slow-onset climate impacts will converge with existing vulnerabilities, leading to compound risks that include conflict, political instability, and transboundary tensions³. As the world approaches the 2030s, it is imperative for governments, international organizations, and security agencies to anticipate displacement hotspots and prepare strategic responses to the security risks arising from climate-induced migration. This commentary examines the key drivers of climate migration, identifies projected displacement hotspots, analyzes the security threats involved, and proposes frameworks for preparedness to address the multifaceted challenges of climate migration in the coming decade.

The Climate–Security Nexus

² World Bank. 2021. "Climate Change Could Force 216 Million People to Migrate within Their Own Countries by 2050." World Bank. September 13, 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/09/13/climate-change-could-force-216-million-people-to-migrate-within-their-own-countries-by-2050>.

³ IPCC. 2023. "AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023." Ipcc. IPCC. 2023. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>.

Climate migration refers to the movement of people forced to relocate due to sudden or gradual environmental changes linked to climate change. These include extreme weather events like hurricanes, floods, droughts, sea-level rise, desertification, and degraded natural resources etc. The movements may be temporary or permanent, internal or cross-border, and voluntary or forced. Unlike traditional forms of migration, climate migration is often driven by environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, or uninhabitability, making it a distinct challenge that transcends borders and governance frameworks. Migration has long been an adaptation strategy for people. But, there are many disastrous events in many parts of the world that exemplify how recurring climate stressors erode resilience while pushing communities toward displacement. In many cases migration is no longer an option of last resort but a survival imperative.

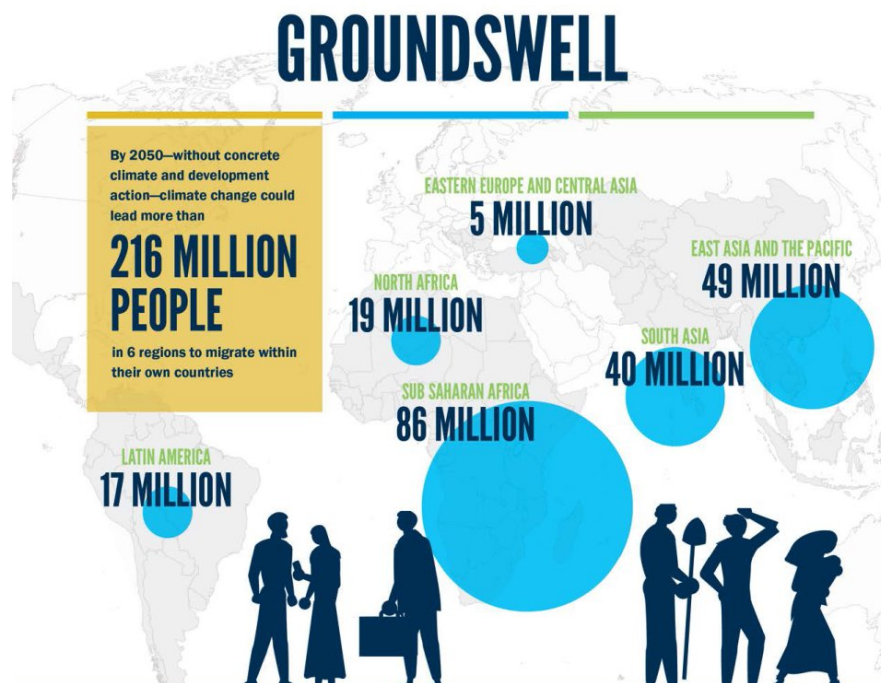
Lately, Climate change has been marked as a “threat multiplier” that intensifies existing socio-political, economic, and environmental pressures⁴. It does not cause conflict directly, but it exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities by straining resource availability and governance capacities. According to the U.S. National Intelligence Council’s Climate Security Report (2021), states with weak institutions and high dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries are at heightened risk of instability arising from climate-driven displacement.⁵ The linkage between climate stress and security is particularly acute in regions where governance is fragile. For example, the Lake Chad Basin, where receding waters have disrupted livelihoods for millions, has become a locus for insurgency and recruitment by extremist groups like Boko Haram. Similar dynamics can emerge in South Asian deltas, the Horn of Africa, and small island developing states (SIDS), underscoring the multi-scalar nature of the climate–security nexus.

Displacement Hotspots Emerging in the 2030s

⁴ “Climate, Peace and Security | Climate Security Mechanism.” 2024. Un.org. December 12, 2024.
<https://www.un.org/climatesecuritymechanism/en>.

⁵ https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIE_Climate_Change_and_National_Security.pdf

The 2030s are projected to be a decade of decisive transformation in the climate-migration-security continuum. The IPCC AR6 notes that by 2030, global warming is expected to reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.⁶ This decade coincides with rapid demographic changes, urbanization, and economic inequality, creating “displacement hotspots” where environmental stress and human vulnerability intersect with each other.



Credit: EarthData

Based on current climate models and socio-economic vulnerabilities, the 2030s will see several regions emerge as critical displacement and security hotspots. Internal displacement will remain the dominant form, but the sheer volume will have cross-border implications. Here are some specific regions that will likely become high-risk displacement hotspots:

1. South Asia: South Asia represents the epicenter of future climate displacement. The region’s dense population, dependence on monsoon-driven agriculture, and extensive coastal settlements make it highly vulnerable. Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan face critical risks from sea-level rise in coastal areas, glacier melt in the Himalayas affecting water supplies, and recurrent floods and

⁶ IPCC. 2023. “AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023.” Ipcc. IPCC. 2023. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>.

droughts. Bangladesh alone could see tens of millions internally displaced or forced to migrate abroad by the 2030s, compounding existing pressures on urban megacities.⁷ Bangladesh and the low-lying Sundarbans in India face mass displacement from rising seas and increasingly severe, rapid-onset events like cyclones. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre consistently highlights high disaster displacement figures for this region.

2. Sub-Saharan Africa: The Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, and parts of southern Africa face worsening droughts, desertification, and food insecurity. These conditions are already driving pastoralist and farming communities to migrate toward more viable areas. People often cross national borders, leading to tension and conflict over scarce resources. In the Groundswell Report's prediction, this region is projected to experience some of the world's highest levels of internal climate migration by 2050. The Sahel region spans from Senegal to Sudan. It epitomizes the intersection of climate stress and conflict. Recurrent droughts, desertification, and loss of arable land are pushing nomadic and agrarian communities southward in search of viable livelihoods. The Sahel's fragility stems from its governance deficits and pre-existing conflicts. As pastoral groups move into farming zones, disputes over grazing rights and water access escalate, feeding communal violence.

3. Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are on the frontline of existential climate risks. Countries such as the Maldives, Kiribati and Tuvalu are facing existential threats due to sea-level rise. It's leading to possibilities of entire populations needing relocation. This poses unique challenges with respect to sovereignty, cultural preservation, and international law. The IPCC warns that some low-lying islands may become uninhabitable before 2050 due to chronic flooding and saltwater intrusion.⁸ Unlike internal migrants, populations in these states face the prospect of cross-border displacement without an established legal framework recognizing them as "climate refugees."

⁷ "Climate Migration—Deepening Our Solutions." n.d. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/climate-migration-deepening-our-solutions/>.

⁸ IPCC. 2023. "Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report." IPCC. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf.

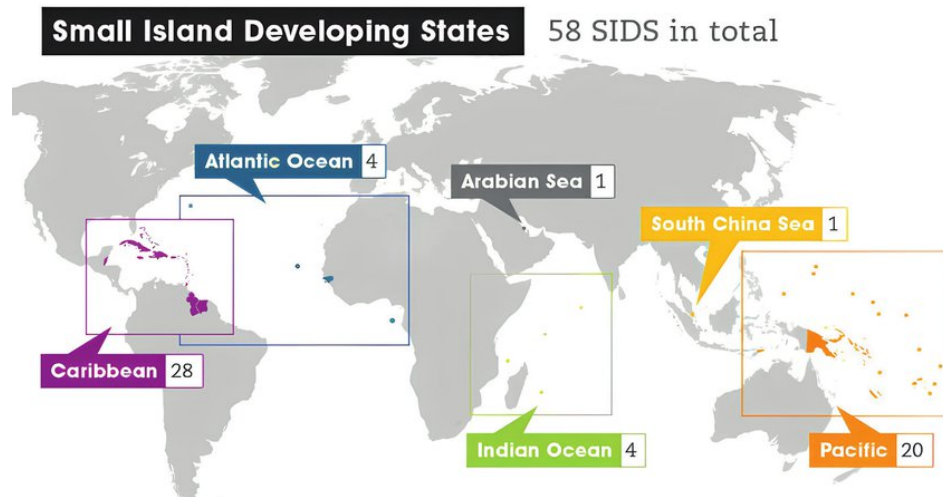


Image: The Sustainable Agency

4. Latin America: The Central American region, particularly the Dry Corridor (Corredor Seco) and its vulnerable coastal zones, is one of the most critical climate migration hotspots globally. Dry Corridor is a tropical dry forest region highly vulnerable to shifting climate patterns, which directly undermines the primary livelihoods of its inhabitants. The primary countries affected by the Dry Corridor are Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (the Northern Triangle), along with parts of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Similarly, megacities such as Jakarta, Lagos, and Manila are becoming climate-vulnerable “hot zones.” Jakarta is sinking at an average rate of 10 cm per year. The government is already planning the relocation of its capital an unprecedented example of pre-emptive adaptation. By 2030, several coastal metropolises will face parallel pressures which might challenge national security and development planning.

Climate Migration as a Security Threat

The security implications of climate migration are quite multidimensional. Climate-driven livelihood loss is the first step. Farmers first migrate internally from rural areas to urban regional cities seeking work. When they find limited opportunities, high poverty, and pervasive gang violence, they are then pushed to migrate externally. Large-scale population movements can fuel competition over scarce resources such as water, land, and employment as well. Empirical studies

demonstrate that when environmental scarcity intersects with weak governance, migration can trigger communal violence. For instance, in the Sudan–Chad borderlands, the convergence of climate stress and migration has historically intensified inter-ethnic clashes.⁹ The mass arrival of climate migrants, predominantly as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), overburdens the infrastructure, public services, and labor markets of host communities and cities, particularly in developing nations. Cross-border climate migration may increase irregular migration and human trafficking, as well as complicate border security for states. Large-scale displacement triggers refugee crises with spillover effects on regional stability, humanitarian response capacities, and international relations.

Over the past decade, weather-related disasters have produced hundreds of millions of internal displacements globally. IDMC and IOM reported tens of millions of new internal displacements in recent years, with a notable upward trend in flood- and drought-related moves. The 2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement recorded about 75.9 million people living in internal displacement by end-2023.¹⁰ Many of those displacements are linked to conflict and disasters, and climate hazards are an increasing share of the disaster-related displacements.

Strategic and Policy Recommendations

The 1951 Refugee Convention is insufficient, as it requires persecution. A new, non-binding instrument or a regional mechanism is necessary to grant a specific status and protection to 'environmental forced migrants', facilitating orderly movement and access to aid from organizations like IOM & UNHCR. Moreover, the concept of 'loss and damage' must move beyond financial compensation to include mobility considerations.

⁹ Raleigh, Clionadh, and Henrik Urdal. 2007. "Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Armed Conflict." *Political Geography* 26 (6): 674–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2007.06.005>.

¹⁰ "2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID)." n.d. IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2024-global-report-on-internal-displacement-grid/>.

Given multiple dimensions, a proactive and integrated approach is essential to mitigate the security risks posed by climate migration in the 2030s.

- 1) Governments and multilateral agencies must invest in robust climate and migration forecasting systems to identify emerging displacement hotspots. Data sharing and regional cooperation will be essential to predict and prepare for migration flows.
- 2) The vulnerable communities should be introduced to climate adaptive methods like: sustainable water management, climate-smart agriculture and disaster risk reduction. These models can reduce forced displacement by making livelihoods more resilient.
- 3) To ensure protection and human rights, states must develop clear policies to recognize climate migrants and refugees. This is very crucial because climate migrants are often neglected. International legal frameworks also must evolve to address the unique circumstances of cross-border climate displacement.
- 4) Climate migration demands cross-border collaboration for managing migration flows, sharing resources, and conflict prevention. Regional mechanisms such as African Union protocols and South Asian cooperative frameworks should be bolstered.
- 5) Defense and security agencies should include climate migration risks in their strategic assessments and scenario planning to prepare for potential conflict scenarios and humanitarian emergencies.
- 6) Most important one can be leaning towards nature-based and sustainable solutions. Investing in ecosystem restoration and natural infrastructure can reduce environmental degradation drivers of migration. The World Economic Forum highlights that nature-based solutions can mitigate displacement in vulnerable regions.¹¹

¹¹ Shahzar, Eric, and Shahrukh Shahnawaz. 2025. "How Nature-Based Solutions Are Tackling Climate Displacement." World Economic Forum. October 17, 2025. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/10/nature-based-solution-climate-displacement-global-south/>.



Mangrove trees are a nature-based solution to coastal flooding already being used in the Indus Delta of South Pakistan.

Image: David Clode/WEF

Conclusion: prepare now to avoid crisis in the 2030s

Climate migration in the 2030s represents a major security challenge that requires anticipatory, coordinated, and multidimensional responses. Displacement hotspots concentrated in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Small Island Developing States, and parts of Latin America will test global capacity for humanitarian action, governance, and conflict prevention. Today's proactive policy choices regarding climate migration will secure our future. Ignoring the non-traditional security threat of climate migration is to invite a future defined by resource wars, political instability, and humanitarian catastrophe. If governments and partners invest now in anticipatory forecasting, urban and rural resilience, legal protection frameworks, and regional cooperation, they can convert a potential security threat into managed adaptation and development opportunity. If they fail to prepare, hotspots of displacement will stress institutions, heighten competition over resources, and create openings for destabilizing actors. The time for preparation is over, the decade of action has begun.