



Expert Group Meeting: Population Dynamics and Climate Change

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Climate Induced Migration

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Abstract

The concept of “climate induced migration” deserves close scrutiny: the controversies stirred up by this term are not of a purely semantic nature, but reflect on our perception of and response to migration as a result of changes in the environment. It is clear that the environment has always been a factor in population dynamics, shaping the movement and distribution of people across the planet. People have historically left places with harsh or deteriorating conditions or opted for seasonal or sequential migrations as a livelihood strategy in sensitive ecosystems. The increasingly irrefutable evidence surrounding climate change and its impacts adds urgency to this debate. While precise future estimates in this area are rarely feasible, substantial environmentally-induced population flows are to be anticipated and are likely to have implications for humanitarian action and migration management.

This presentation will reflect critically on the perspectives offered by the two preceding panellists who discuss environmental degradation and climate related disasters, respectively. There is a need to examine the complex causalities associated with environmental migration. Do degradation, disasters and indeed climate *as such* induce migration? What other factors play into this equation? The environment can clearly be a driver of migration, and even the determining one, but more often than not it is a combination of causes that determines whether or not someone moves. This in turn will raise questions about simplistic distinctions between “forced” and “voluntary” migration and the implications such labels have for our responses to different phenomena.

As a result of the complexity of environmental migration, in terms of both its causes and consequences, one may need to steer away from sectoral approaches that view the nexus between migration, climate change and the environment purely through the lens of humanitarian, security or development concerns. A comprehensive framework requires a balanced assessment of the impact of both environmental degradation and natural disasters on population dynamics. Moreover, it needs to be embedded in an appreciation of larger demographic and socio-economic factors that fundamentally influence global and regional population dynamics. Lastly, the adaptation potential of migration should be one of the central considerations when integrating population issues into the debate and strategies on climate change.