

Perspectives on Environmental Migration

10 Key Takeaways from the Global Compact for Migration

Ref: Environment, Climate Change, Global Compact By: Dina Ionesco and Mariam Traore Chazalnoël

Following the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, United Nations Member States, for the first time in their history, committed to develop, negotiate and adopt a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).

The GCM is a non-binding cooperation framework that articulates a common set of commitments, on the basis of 23 objectives, for states to respond to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary international migration, and formulates provisions for implementation, follow up and review.

On 13 July 2018, the final text of the GCM was finalized and presented at the United Nations Headquarters at the end of the 6th round of intergovernmental negotiations. This finalized text offers a set of guiding principles, but also articulates concrete measures for action related to border management, documentation, migrant services, capacity building for states, consular protection, skills recognition, mechanisms of portability and building environments for migrants and diasporas to be actors of development.

The text also contains multiple references to environmental migration, articulating a wide and comprehensive understanding of the challenges linked to the environment-migration nexus. Most of the references related to environmental migration are made under Objective 2: Minimizing the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin, which contains a section specifically dedicated to the subject and entitled “Natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation” (Objective 2, paragraphs 18.h-18.l). Furthermore, a few important references can be found under Objective 5: Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration.

10 Key Takeaways from the GCM on Environmental Migration

1. The GCM clearly identifies slow onset environmental degradation, natural disasters and climate change impacts as drivers of contemporary migration.
2. The text acknowledges the multi-causality of migration as environmental drivers interact with political, economic and demographic drivers.
3. The text articulates comprehensive potential responses to address these drivers: design of appropriate measures in the countries of origin to make migration a choice rather than a desperate necessity; disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and disaster response; and facilitation of population movements.
4. The GCM recognizes that climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in countries of origin need to be prioritized to minimize drivers of migration.
5. The text also acknowledges that adaptation in situ or return of migrants might not be possible in some cases and that the strengthening of regular migration pathways (planned relocation and visa options) need to be part of migration management tools.
6. The GCM outlines the need for states to cooperate to identify, develop and strengthen solutions for people migrating in the context of slow-onset environmental degradation (in particular desertification, land degradation and sea level rise) and slow-onset disasters (drought).
7. The GCM outlines the importance of working at the regional level to address environmental drivers of migration.

8. The text encourages policy coherence by highlighting that the GCM rests on a number of global instruments related to climate change, disaster and environmental governance: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Climate Agreement, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
9. The text also highlights the need to take into account recommendations stemming from state-led initiatives with a focus on mobility linked to natural disasters outside of the UN context: the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, and its follow up, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, as well as the Migrants in Crisis Initiative (MICIC).
10. The GCM recognizes the need for

more investments in strengthened evidence, data and research to address environmental migration challenges.

The finalization of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration represents an exciting and important achievement for the governance and management of international environmental migration, both now and in the future. Yet the challenges of translating global policy into national and regional practices should not be underestimated.

Environmental migration remains a relatively new topic, with little stocktaking and evaluation of the effectiveness of existing practices, especially those experiences related to the most innovative commitments outlined in the GCM. What is certain is that achieving the ambitious commitments set out in the Global Compact will be contingent on robust political will, adequate funding resources, and the successful development of new coalitions of actors.



For more information on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) and the links to the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), visit the IOM Environmental Migration Platform. Analysis by Dina Ionesco and Mariam Traore Chazalnoël, Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division, IOM. <https://weblog.iom.int/perspectives-environmental-migration%2%A0%E2%80%94%2%A010-key-takeaways-%2%A0global-compact-migration%2%A0>