



The State of Human Mobility at the Nexus of Climate, Food, and Conflict





The past year has fundamentally reshaped the policymaking space at the nexus of climate change, food security, and conflict. Beyond deep funding cuts and significant political shifts in the United States, other traditional multilateral leaders are increasingly looking inwards, spending more on national defense, deprioritizing climate security initiatives, and adopting more restrictive approaches to migration and human mobility.

At the same time, the climate crisis continues to accelerate – just as funding and policy attention is faltering. Climate impacts are reducing crop yields, shifting growing seasons, and challenging food supply chains, [fueling](#) food insecurity and malnutrition, most devastatingly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In 2023, nearly 64.3 million people were internally displaced in 38 countries and territories experiencing food crises, demonstrating a strong overlap between food crises and mobility. Finally, conflict continues to strongly overlap with both food insecurity and displacement, with [70% of acutely food-insecure people](#) living in fragile or conflict-affected countries. An estimated [123.2 million people](#) worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations in 2024.

However, in addition to the oft-cited examples of extreme weather events in Southeast Asia and shifting climates across the African continent, the impacts of climate change are increasingly hitting the United States and Europe as well. [Lethal heat waves](#) and wildfires continue to plague Europe, while the United States is battling a combination of [extreme weather events](#), [hurricanes](#), [heat waves](#), and more.

These nexus challenges are reshaping human mobility across the globe, with complex crises propelling people to migrate as a means of survival and resilience. In the Global South alone, ongoing global climate change and its adverse events [will affect](#) about 143 million people by 2050, leading to various forms of migration and mobility. A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute *argued* that the “impacts of climate change are being felt all over the world, and thus climate-related migration occurs globally. But the impacts are unequal, and the most severe migration and displacement is often occurring in low- and middle-income countries that have made little historical contribution to warming the planet.”

Today, human mobility is less of a distant threat and more of an urgent domestic challenge: what happens when thousands – or even millions globally – are displaced within states in the Global North and Global South due to a combination of climate change, food security, conflict, and other socioeconomic factors?

At last year’s UN General Assembly, members agreed on the “[Pact for the Future](#),” which included concrete commitments toward addressing the root causes of irregular migration and climate change. This included a specific objective to “Maximize the positive contribution of migrants to the sustainable development of origin, transit, destination and host countries and strengthen international partnerships and global cooperation for safe, orderly and regular migration to comprehensively address the drivers of irregular migration and ensure the safety, dignity and human rights of all migrants, regardless of their migration status.”

One year after those commitments, it’s worth taking stock of whether the Pact can be implemented in our new political reality and what pathways – if any – exist to minimize the impact of divisive rhetoric surrounding migration and human mobility and galvanize support for anticipatory action that helps people safely move or stay.

The Status Quo: Figures and Key Debates

It's critical to note that the [concept of "climate migrants"](#) remains both controversial and challenging to define. After all, communities rarely move solely due to a changing climate. Instead, populations on the move often identify a combination of extreme weather events, socioeconomic challenges, political uncertainty, and more, as their push factors. Even so, there is growing data showing that climate is already playing a significant role in migration, such as [recent research](#) linking dry growing seasons in Central America and migration to the United States.

Furthermore, much of the displacement is happening internally among populations in areas with limited government capacity, making it difficult to gather data on who is moving where, when, and why. However, research suggests millions will be on the move, primarily within countries, by 2050. This includes:

- Estimates from the World Bank that [216 million people](#) could become climate migrants within their own countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Eastern Europe and Central Asian regions by 2050;
- Projections from the [African Climate Mobility Initiative](#) stating that the number of internal climate migrants could reach up to 113 million in Africa by 2050; and
- Assessments from [C40 Cities and the Mayors Migration Council](#) noting that up to 8 million people are likely to move to ten major Global South cities (Bogotá, Curitiba, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Amman, Karachi, Dhaka, Accra, and Freetown) by 2050 as a result of the climate crisis.

In light of these figures, some political leaders continue to discuss how mobility at the intersection of food, climate change, and security will impact their development goals and security priorities. As governments consider their capacity to implement the Pact for the Future, key debates include:

- *How to mobilize limited domestic and multilateral resources to address such separate but interrelated challenges;*
- *Whether to frame climate change as a driver of mobility - and how to measure its impact; and*
- *The role of multilateral actors given the political shifts in many of the global power brokers.*

Towards Tangible Policy Solutions

In this context, which presents major funding challenges, both the Nexus25 team and other experts have identified pathways in this space to address the nexus of food, conflict, and human mobility. These include:

- *Reducing the drivers of mobility like food insecurity and conflict, to support people staying in place:* Ultimately, investments upstream are the most effective policy option to reduce

irregular migration and support communities that choose to remain in their home regions. Policy options in this space, therefore, include:

- Anticipatory action and early response: [pre-positioning resources](#), [setting up automatic assistance triggers](#) when forecasted levels of drought or price spikes are met, scaling up food or cash transfers during lean seasons or conflict spikes.
- Building rural livelihoods and climate resilience: Investing in [more drought-resilient seeds](#), facilitating inter-community dialogue or peace committees, and ensuring that aid doesn't [inadvertently fuel local tensions](#).
- *Engaging with security actors to understand the security dynamics at this nexus:* Security actors are a crucial piece of the puzzle regarding these challenges, given their roles in border security. Furthermore, there is a risk that irregular migration may spur other challenges within the security sector's mandate, including upticks in trafficking, new conflicts as more people compete for limited resources, and even increases in transnational crime. Therefore, engaging with security actors on these topics could include:
 - Developing a unified risk picture: conducting joint risk assessments and regularly leveraging comprehensive scenario exercises.
 - Capacity building: conducting training on cultural competency and the drivers of mobility, as well as the security risks faced by migrants.
 - Fostering civil-military relationships: [improving the linkages](#) between security forces and civil society organizations, and developing a baseline understanding of missions/mandates.
- *Enabling mobility as an adaptation strategy:* Communities with the resources to move may continue to do so, despite investments and improved local infrastructure at the local level. While policy options in this space are more politically fraught, policymakers and politicians can consider:
 - Humanitarian and temporary protection pathways: [Expanding visas](#) for people fleeing conflicts, food shortages, or other local crises, improving anti-trafficking screening, and funding social support structures.
 - Facilitating temporary and seasonal labor: Ensuring that [labor pathways](#) for much-needed farm workers, [construction](#), care workers, and other employment fields often filled by immigrants remain open.
 - Planning for relocation: [Engaging with communities](#) that will need to move due to the consequences of climate change (such as those impacted by cyclical flooding and sea level rise) and allocating funds to support their transition.
- *Investing in early warning systems to better understand where and how people will move:* Data-driven early warning systems remain critical to anticipating risks and direct funding, identifying patterns of mobility, and mitigating residual security challenges wherever possible. These include:
 - Improving data: Aligning [existing data dashboards](#) like FEWSNET and the IPC food security assessments with other climate forecasts to anticipate potential mobility.
 - Setting thresholds: Linking policy actions (like temporary visa pathways and resource pre-positioning) with agreed-upon data thresholds (such as market prices or IPC Phase assessments), as well as financial resources like the [Financing for Shock-Driven Food Crisis Facility](#).



Next Steps

Absent more action to address climate change, food security, and conflict, both at the multilateral and national levels, human mobility will become an increasingly prominent policy and security challenge in the years to come. Since the signature of the “Pact for the Future” last year, the political will and financial space to address the root causes of irregular migration and climate change have certainly decreased. However, policy options still remain to address mobility at the nexus of climate change, food, and conflict. Even for countries unwilling to prioritize climate action or invest in managed human mobility, pathways like conflict prevention, anticipatory action, and early warning systems have clear co-benefits to national security agendas – if communicated responsibly.

Nexus²⁵ is a joint project of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome and the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) in Washington, DC. The project, led by Dr. Nathalie Tocci at IAI, Erin Sikorsky at CCS and Dr. Michael Werz at the Center for American Progress (CAP), is funded by Stiftung Mercator in Germany. This discussion paper was written as input for the Nexus²⁵ side event at the 2025 New York Climate Week and was prepared by Siena Cicarelli and Erin Sikorsky.

For additional information please visit <https://www.nexus25.org> or contact the Nexus²⁵ team at info@nexus25.org.

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