

NOVEMBER 2024

# Position Statement on Security and Climate Mobility



# About the Climate Migration Council

The Climate Migration Council (CMC) is a group of leaders who share a commitment to putting people at the center of climate action and to accelerating global solutions to climate-related migration. The CMC urges governments across the globe to develop and adopt equitable and inclusive solutions to address climate-related human mobility.

The Climate Migration Council strives to: raise awareness about the importance of climate migration; highlight the urgency of this growing issue and promote unified action toward humane domestic and international policy solutions; and leverage the power of a collective

voice, including leaders in local government, business, national security, advocacy, academia, and faith who share a commitment to putting people at the center of climate solutions.

Because the climate crisis acts as a powerful accelerant to migration patterns, there is a clear need for institutional leadership and new integrated strategies that anticipate and safely accommodate the increasing numbers of people affected by the climate crisis. The CMC steadfastly commits to press leaders and multilateral organizations on this growing issue.

For more information about the Climate Migration Council, please visit [www.climatemigrationcouncil.org](http://www.climatemigrationcouncil.org) or contact [info@climatemigrationcouncil.org](mailto:info@climatemigrationcouncil.org).

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# I. The Habitability Challenge Presented by Climate Change

As climate change reshapes the habitability of large parts of the globe, making it too wet, too hot, or too dry to survive, so too does it reshape where and how people live. Drought, extreme precipitation, flooding, and heat waves contribute to food and water insecurity; flooding and sea level rise reshape neighborhoods and nations; and hurricanes, fires, and other extreme weather events jeopardize the safety of homes at a moment's notice. Each of these climate-related phenomena can cause or exacerbate displacement. Such displacement can, in turn, affect the security of people, communities, and countries by interrupting access to food and water, increasing competition over shared natural resources, spurring backlash against vulnerable migrants and political division and exploitation, increasing recruitment opportunities for criminal or terrorist groups, or straining governance capacity to provide resources and services.

While climate change is profoundly disruptive, threatening billions in the global north and global south, the climate-related movement of people need not be destabilizing if there is preparation for such movement. It is with this understanding that the Climate Migration Council definition of the term security encompasses the breadth of challenges posed by climate. At the core of promoting security is promoting the safety and well-being of the people most impacted—and sometimes displaced—by climate. To do this, the focus must be on stabilizing, supporting,

and ensuring the resilience of affected people, whether they are at risk of climate displacement, already on the move, or would prefer to remain in their homes. Adopting a preventative approach that foregrounds human security is critical, because doing so is the path to getting ahead of other security risks such as crime, economic drain, terrorism, exploitation, or politically motivated unrest.

In proposing a redefinition of security in the context of climate migration, the Security Working Group of the Climate Migration Council is informed by its members' collective breadth of experience navigating some of the most pressing national security challenges of our time. It also benefits from previous efforts advanced at a global level to prepare for climate risks that may hinder peace and drive instability. As professionals, experts, and leaders in national security, the CMC's Security Working Group has seen firsthand that upstream investment in prevention and preparedness can limit humanitarian disasters and crises and avert follow-on security challenges. Commitment to policy solutions such as resilience-building; stabilization of communities close to their site of displacement; and the development of orderly, managed, and more flexible migration channels requires forethought and financial commitment to forestall some of the most damaging security-related impacts that a planet radically reshaped by climate could bring.



## II. Illustrating Climate Displacement

The effects of climate change on human mobility are difficult to quantify given the multicausal nature of most migration. Examples of climate displacement, however, present an idea of the scope and scale of current and future challenges the world faces.

**1. PACIFIC ISLANDS:** Some of the starkest effects of climate change are on display in Pacific Island nations. Tuvalu, a small island nation in the South Pacific, faces existential risks from sea level rise and coastal erosion. NASA has predicted that much of the island will be below the average high tide by the year 2050, transforming the island's habitability and forcing climate displacement that has already begun. Without adequate financing for data-based early warning tools and science-led adaptation measures, sea level rise foretells a humanitarian and migration crisis waiting to occur.

**2. PAKISTAN:** In August 2022, historic flooding in Pakistan displaced nearly 8 million people from their homes, leading to significant humanitarian need. An attribution study by a group of climate scientists in Pakistan, Europe, and the United States found that climate change made the heavy rainfall more possible, and that cyclical drought and flooding will remain a serious concern for Pakistan's future. Financing that serves to relocate homes that are built in floodplains could significantly limit the dire humanitarian consequences, including shortages of water and food, that accompany flooding and prompt massive displacement of people. Such displacement also carries a risk of social unrest and economic shocks in a nuclear-armed state that already struggles with instability.

**3. THE UNITED STATES:** Weather extremes such as heat, storms, and wildfires fueled by climate change have already caused millions of Americans to relocate. In Alaska, where global warming is occurring at a rate more than twice the global average, 31 villages face an imminent threat of displacement due to land collapse caused by river flooding, permafrost thaw, and coastal erosion. While some U.S. federal funding has been allocated to relocate one community of indigenous Alaskans facing land collapse, more financial commitment is necessary to prevent significant disruption caused by displacement.

**4. HORN OF AFRICA:** From 2020 to 2023, drought in the Horn of Africa caused 3.3 million people across Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia to leave their homes in search of more stable food sources, and 22 million more to face serious food insecurity. Russia's war on Ukraine exacerbated the situation with sudden, sharp declines in grain exports from Ukraine and Russia, as well as abrupt increases in fuel and fertilizer prices. Across the globe, climate change increasingly contributes to food and water insecurity that threatens livelihoods, spurs instability, and contributes to irregular migration. Without any option for legal migration to countries where work is available so that they can send remittances back to their families, thousands attempt hazardous irregular migration routes across land and sea, which then become humanitarian tragedies that security and defense actors must navigate.

**5. CENTRAL AMERICA:** The stretch of land across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is known as Central America's Dry Corridor. This area is extremely vulnerable to climate events such as drought, floods, and storms, jeopardizing the region's reliance on agriculture. Agriculture is the backbone of Central American economies, providing both livelihoods and food security, especially for rural, low-income, and indigenous communities across the region. More than 80 percent of the area's smallholder farms are rain-fed, so they are unusually sensitive to climate change. Because so many farmers rely on subsistence agriculture, just one significant flood or drought could jeopardize a family's food security in the long term. In addition to climate events that complicate residents' capacity to rely on agriculture and may force them to migrate, Central Americans point to crime and violence as mobility drivers, which reflects endemic corruption and weak governments. The relationships between climate change, hunger, poor governance, and violence are complicated and refract through other variables, such as injustice and historical grievances, and these vicious cycles lead to pervasive insecurity.

These examples not only foreshadow the eventuality of future, similar events, but are reminders that climate displacement is a challenge that the world is already grappling with. Case studies such as these illuminate the importance of preparedness, investment, and more flexible migration systems that could help communities safely manage climate mobility.

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### III. The Geopolitical Argument for Preventative Action on Climate Migration

A broader and more anticipatory approach to climate displacement can also bolster comparative strategic advantage in an era of fierce global competition for influence. Countries that assist their allies and partners in managing climate risks not only build resilience to climate change and limit potential causes of climate migration and insecurity, but these investments also demonstrate political goodwill and can reinforce strategic alliances.

Further, countries that adopt more flexible and diverse pathways for migration enjoy a comparative economic advantage compared to countries that limit migration. Considering aging workforces in many migrant-receiving countries and the concurrent need to support the green jobs transition, the proactive integration of migrants into society presents a host of strategic benefits such as expanding workforce diversity and increasing skilled and unskilled labor, which can bolster the competitiveness of the entire workforce.

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### IV. Calls to Action

In light of the CMC's commitment to centering the people and communities most impacted by climate change, the Climate Migration Council proposes that security actors in the United States and abroad endorse the following recommendations:

**1. EXPAND** the definition of security to include climate change and its destabilizing effects. A warming planet elevates security risks, including further straining already fragile systems and infrastructures, with increases in migration as both a consequence and a driver. While increased movements of people may feed broader security challenges, such as diplomatic tensions, violent extremism, and political

instability, we underscore that migrants are people, not threats. It is critical to avoid security policies or even rhetoric that dehumanizes people who move in search of better conditions. In this context, the security community must lead with pragmatic steps to prepare for, anticipate, and manage the increases in climate migration.

**2. COMMIT** to innovative financing, stabilizing displaced communities, and supporting resilience and adaptation to climate change. Because most climate-related displacement occurs within borders, locally led solutions should be prioritized.

**3. SUPPORT** an anticipatory approach to climate migration by endorsing flexible, managed, forward-looking migration systems that allow people to safely move, in particular, from areas predicted to be climate hot spots. More durable and safe migration processes can protect migrants' lives, make population flows more consistent and predictable, and also lend comparative strategic and economic advantage to nations that will benefit from leveraging a younger workforce amid aging demographics. Emphasize the benefits of migration as adaptation to climate change. Climate change is an inevitable accelerant to migration, demanding security actors to plan and prepare for this certain movement of people.

**4. INCLUDE** climate migration in risk assessment analyses conducted by government actors. As climate-driven hazards grow more frequent and intense, militaries are regularly on the front line of humanitarian and disaster response and the unrest and violence that can result from a declining natural environment. Security actors must be prepared to adapt to an operational environment in which climate change drives people from their homes, including in hostile nations, allies, partners, and inside the United States.

**5. DOUBLE** down on efforts to mitigate climate change itself. In reducing the contributing causes of climate change, policymakers will also reduce the destabilization threat that climate change poses for all. Mitigation of climate change must not only be front of mind in climate policy conversations, but in every aspect of foreign policy or national security.

