

POLICY BRIEF: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION IN IRAQ

BACKGROUND

Iraq has been named the fifth-most vulnerable country to climate breakdown, affected by soaring temperatures, insufficient and diminishing rainfall, intensified droughts, sand and dust storms, desertification and flooding. In addition, water policies in neighbouring countries have shrunk vital water sources, while rapid population growth and inefficient water use propel a demand for more water. Without preparation and planning, the sweeping scale of environmental change is likely to be devastating and may force Iraqis to relocate in order to survive. At the end of 2021, IOM recorded approximately 20,000 people displaced due to water scarcity (looking only at 10 of Iraq's 19 governorates), while a 2018 study by NRC found that 1 in 15 households had a family member forced to migrate in search of work in drought-affected areas. Urgent and coordinated action is needed to avert the emerging crisis associated with climate migration.

This year presents several critical opportunities for Iraq to leverage international and national policy processes in order to access, allocate, and advocate for financial resources, technical support and capacity-building, and technological transfer to address the challenges associated with climate migration.

This policy brief identifies opportunities for action and outlines key messages and recommendations.

THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REVIEW FORUM

The International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), the inter-governmental body responsible for reviewing progress on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), will hold its inaugural conference on 17-20 May 2022. The IMRF will conclude with an inter-governmental Progress Declaration, which will provide member states with an important framework for future action and advocacy. The Declaration will provide a vital entry point for advocacy on the part of less-resourced countries (such as Iraq) to strengthen their access to financial resources, technical support and capacity-building, and also to frame its own policy commitments – this is being done through the Policy Pledge Initiative. Advocacy and policy action

should build on the Declaration, which is expected to acknowledge that the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation drive migration, and that efforts to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change have been insufficient, including in climate finance, leaving clear gaps in preparedness.

COP-27

The 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-27) will take place from 7-18 November 2022 in Cairo and is particularly strategic since this year it will focus on strengthening financial (and other) resources for less-resourced nations, and its location in the MENA region will also help draw attention to Iraq. The risk and impact of climate migration should form a critical component of these discussions, as foreshadowed at the COP-26, which committed to scaling up action, support, and finance to avert, minimize and address climate displacement.

IRAQ'S GREEN PAPER

The Government of Iraq is preparing a national 'Green Paper', intended to assess and implement measures to mitigate the impact of climate change and support Iraq's net-zero transition. Currently, the Green Paper does not recognize climate migration as a risk or identify actions to prepare for, mitigate, potentially benefit from, or leverage the contributions of migrants themselves. These are important omissions since mitigating and addressing climate-induced displacement requires specific actions and sufficient resources.

IRAQ'S NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION

The Government of Iraq finalized its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2021 and provides the umbrella policy for climate change work in Iraq. While the commitments in the NDC are commendable, climate migration is not addressed, which undermines the allocation of resources and actionable commitments to mitigate and address climate migration.

IRAQ'S NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN

In 2020, the Government of Iraq started the process of developing a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) as a means to identify areas for resource mobilization, analyse and address gaps in institutional capacity, and build awareness of the NAP within and outside Iraq. The NAP planning process offers the chance to ensure that migration, displacement and planned relocation are fully addressed as both potential challenges and potential opportunities.

INTER-MINISTERIAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON MIGRATION AND NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN IRAQ

In 2020, the Government of Iraq established a Technical Working Group on Migration to implement the provisions of the Global Compact for Migration. The Technical Working Group endorsed the National Strategy for Migration Management in October 2020. It noted that there is currently no contingency planning for climate migration and recommended addressing this issue in the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy. As the key institutional pillars for implementing the Global Compact for Migration in Iraq, the Technical Working Group and National Strategy are vital resources to engage in policy decisions and planning related to climate migration. The Technical Working Group is also pledging to broaden its membership to include a representative from the Ministry of Environment. This pledge is being championed by the Government of Iraq delegation to the IMRF and signals that climate migration needs to be addressed through a whole of government approach.

Under the Technical Working Group on Migration, the Government of Iraq established an Economic Affairs Taskforce which is mandated to address 'migration as a source of sustainable development' as part of the National Migration Management Strategy. The Taskforce validated the issue of climate migration as a priority in its internal workplan. It noted the need to mainstream migration management into government activities that address environmental degradation and climate change. The Taskforce offers an important forum for policy decisions and coordination related to climate migration in Iraq.

ROLE OF THE UN NETWORK ON MIGRATION – IRAQ

The United Nations Network on Migration (UNM) was created in order to ensure effective, timely and coordinated support to Member States for the implementation of the

GCM. Climate change and migration is a priority of the UNM in 2022. In Iraq, the UNM can play a key role in advocacy and action:

- Provide effective and coherent support in the implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM
- Support UN agencies and the Government of Iraq prepare key messages for the IMRF and COP-27
- Advocate for the inclusion of climate migration in Iraq's Green Paper and future NDC discussions
- Support UN agencies to prepare joint submissions on climate migration for Iraq's Green Paper and future negotiations on Iraq's NDC
- Support UN agencies and the Government of Iraq to track, analyse, and share knowledge on climate migration and techniques to address this, which can also contribute to net zero efforts and reducing environmental degradation.

KEY MESSAGES ON CLIMATE MIGRATION

The following messages offer the basis for strategic engagement on the topic of climate displacement and migration at the IMRF, COP-27, Iraq's Green Paper, and future discussions on Iraq's NDC.

Migration and displacement should be recognized in all relevant policy discussions on climate change. Sometimes, migration is positive adaptation strategy that saves lives and reduces risk; other times, it generates new risks for migrants and their communities. Mitigating and addressing these risks requires specific actions and sufficient resources. Therefore, to ensure adequate resource allocation, climate displacement and migration should be addressed explicitly in national plans (such as the Green Paper and the NDC) and international platforms (such as the IMRF and COP-27.)

Policy action can shape how human mobility is used to adapt to climate change. Communities that cannot cope with the impact of environmental changes are more likely to displace or migrate. This decision to relocate is made based on a combination of factors – environmental, economic, social, political, and demographic – as well as the degree of support available to affected families and communities. The Government of Iraq has the power to reduce risks and build resilience to the effects of climate change. This includes supporting communities to adapt to environmental change and remain in place, to use mobility as a dignified form of adaptation, or a combination of both.

Effective policy action towards climate migration must be holistic. Specifically, it requires four lines of action: (1) Mitigate environmental degradation through environmentally-based solutions, including adaptive and regenerative agriculture, innovative technologies, and improved water management frameworks; (2) Support climate-affected communities to reduce their vulnerability and strengthen their resilience to environmental changes; (3) Support climate migrants to access their rights, develop sustainable livelihoods, and achieve a durable solution; and (4) Increase the resilience of urban centres to growing climate migration.

Support climate-affected communities to adapt and build resilience. It is vital to keep attention on the conditions forcing families to migrate. In Iraq, most farmers operate on a small scale and cannot afford the investments or techniques needed to improve their farming methods to environmentally suited and productive approaches. Efforts to mitigate environmental degradation and enhance adaptation should specifically target those most vulnerable to displacement and migration.

Provide assistance to climate migrants. Migrants are attempting to settle into complex new environments with potentially limited financial and social capital, which affects their ability to access civil and administrative rights, such as access to employment and service provision, policing and/or formal dispute resolution, guarantees on property rights, and voice and agency. This requires a host of assistance, tailored to their specific needs.

Increase resilience in urban centers. Most cities are not well prepared to absorb the recent (and increasing) influx of climate migrants, and residents often share some of the challenges that newly arrived climate migrants face. Therefore, intervening in this context calls for system-wide and area-based actions. Urban preparedness and resilience should be strengthened across areas such as service provision, land use, comprehensive emergency SOPs (of which early warning is a part), urban governance, and infrastructure design. Infrastructure and settlement design should include water recycling as well as solid and liquid waste management using low-cost, sustainable climate and environmentally friendly methods.

Countries with global expertise and resources should extend support to less-resourced countries. The IMRF and COP-27 should catalyze technical assistance from relevant organizations, networks and experts to support less-resourced countries – such as Iraq – that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. In addition, less-resourced countries should be supported with

grants, loans, and private investment to support efforts to adapt to climate change and mitigate the risks and detrimental impact of climate migration.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CLIMATE MIGRATION

The following recommendations are intended to address climate displacement and migration in Iraq. More detailed information plus the rationale underpinning these recommendations is found in the full report.

FOR THE UN AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

- Advocate for the recognition of migration and displacement dimensions in all relevant policy discussions on climate change.
- Improve tracking and analysis of climate displacement and migration through more systematic data collection; inter-agency collaborations; and thematic knowledge products that address the relationship between environmental changes, migration, durable solutions, and urban resilience.
- Invest in building vulnerability profiles for affected locations, based on an agreed set of indicators that reflect the information currently available on vulnerability to climate migration.
- Utilize vulnerability profiles, together with other data tracking, to generate ‘early warning’ of hotspots at risk of climate displacement, and advocate for timely policy decisions. Vulnerability profiles should also inform the work and priorities of national forums such as the Technical Working Group and Taskforce.
- Strengthen the link between national migration forums (such as the Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group and Taskforce) and forums related to climate change. This may involve facilitating inter-governmental engagement; sharing technical knowledge in different forums; and supporting complementarity between the different forums.
- Ensure that civil society and youth, women and community leaders, are meaningfully represented and engaged in the development of water-related policymaking and programming. Familiarize community groups and NGOs with durable and sustainable techniques for adaptation.
- Identify, track, and understand how climate change and climate migration are contributing to new or existing conflicts, and take steps to prevent and/or mitigate conflict risk.

- Offer technical support to the government of Iraq to ensure that Makhoul Dam's adverse outcomes on local communities are minimized. Support the affected communities to develop advocacy groups and to raise community concerns and interests to local and central government institutions.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

- Utilize international and national platforms to catalyze finance for Iraq to meet its commitments to addressing climate change and climate migration, and enhance urban resilience and preparedness.
- Invest in strengthening urban infrastructure and services in cities with a high number (or expected high number) of climate migrants, including water and sanitation, energy, transport and telecommunications, built environment, and health and social services.
- Invest in technical skills-building for individuals and institutions within the government in relation to climate

migration, as well as urban resilience and preparedness.

- Address the public health risks associated with climate change as an integral part of addressing climate migration, including via the National Adaptation Plan and stronger surveillance of climate-sensitive diseases.
- Ensure that any significant decision-making in relation to climate migration, particularly if it has the potential to disrupt or transform life, includes consultation with local communities and their active participation.
- Conduct a thorough cost and benefit analysis of the impact of Makhoul Dam, considering communities and their life situations and existing inventories. Also explore alternative arrangements for managing water resources with less human impact.
- Develop an inter-agency and inter-ministerial coordination, communication, and planning task force that would oversee the Makhoul Dam project, including the cost benefit analysis and community engagement.