

# ENHANCING PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANTS AND COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTERS IN THE PACIFIC REGION



## Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security Regional Policy Dialogue, September – November 2020

Towards a rights-based response in the Pacific to climate change-related mobility

### CLIMATE CHANGE, HUMAN SECURITY AND MIGRATION IN THE PACIFIC REGION

Climate change is recognized as an existential threat in the Pacific, impacting both human and national security. It is intensifying a range of sudden-onset and slow-onset hazards to which Pacific communities are exposed, particularly in low-lying atolls. Climate change and disasters interact with underlying political, socio-economic and environmental conditions to shape existing mobility patterns in the region. Yet, the link between climate change and mobility is not easy to delineate. The nature of the forms of mobility (migration, displacement and relocation) and where they fall along the spectrum of voluntary to forced movement are not always clearly demarcated.

### REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

Along with several global policy frameworks on climate change, disaster risk reduction and migration, core initiatives in the Pacific, such as the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* and the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP)*, reiterate the need to protect those most vulnerable to climate related displacement through targeted national and regional policies, including regional labour migration schemes. Notwithstanding these achievements, there remains an absence of an agreed upon framework or arrangements between Pacific Governments to address climate change-related mobility in its complexity, including implications on human rights.

### REGIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) facilitated the Regional Policy Dialogue as part of the joint-UN agency programme on the *Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security (PCCM-HS)*. The platform brought together representatives from Pacific Island Countries and other stakeholders from civil society, academia, diplomatic missions, and development partners.

#### Regional Policy Dialogue Participants

Countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

Partners: British High Commission Suva, New Zealand High Commission Fiji, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, UN Resident Coordinator Office MCO Samoa, PCCM-HS (ESCAP, ILO, IOM, OHCHR, PDD, PIFS) & Technical Advisory Group.

Six virtual sessions were dedicated to policy discussions with the following key objectives:

- Examine how climate change and disasters affect mobility trends in the Pacific Islands;
- Examine the challenges and opportunities to enhance protection of people migrating in relation to climate change;
- Discuss relevant initiatives at the global, regional and national levels and outline options for a Pacific regional approach.

#### [Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security \(PCCM-HS\) Programme](#)

The *Enhancing Protection and Empowerment of Migrants and Communities Affected by Climate Change and Disasters in the Pacific Region* (or PCCM-HS) Programme is a three-year initiative implemented from 2019 to 2021 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the lead agency and supported by UNESCAP, International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

## RIGHTS-BASED REGIONAL RESPONSE

A thorough review of existing global, regional and national policy and legal frameworks, structures, systems and processes relevant to climate mobility was conducted to identify the opportunities for a regional response. At the **national level**, capacity constraints, land use and access, public financing, evidence-based policy, safe migration pathways and service priorities were identified as national priorities. **Regional agreements** such as the *FRPD* and *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* were noted as anchor points to devise targeted national and regional policies aimed at protecting the most at-risk groups. **Global policy frameworks** on climate change, disaster risk reduction and migration such as the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* were assessed against the protection gaps under international human rights law, refugee law, human rights and migrant labour conventions.

Together, the Dialogue achieved key outcomes:

- Learning and exchange on national policies and measures addressing climate change-related mobility
- Identification of opportunities to close the policy and legal gaps to enable protection of the Pacific communities most prone to the impacts of the climate change
- Strengthening of commitments to conduct consultations at regional, national, and sub-national levels to ensure that the regional framework is inclusive of all voices, respectful of national experiences, and anchored in existing political processes.

The Dialogue also highlighted the need to develop legal and policy frameworks to **protect the rights and dignity of all people**: those who are staying, moving in anticipation of harm, and are displaced. To that end, core principles and potential modalities of a rights-based regional approach were delineated for the Pacific.

Among the core principles is taking an **evidence-based and contextualized approach** through inclusive consultations and review of diverse issues and existing processes. A collective regional response can facilitate sustainable financing, capacity building opportunities, and

the development of safety nets for time-bound scenarios. Moreover, regional initiatives and research can help distinguish types of mobility in the region, generate statistics, finding synergies where the greatest impacts can be achieved through regional actions. Enhanced information flow will raise the profile of vital implementation actions that is required and foster inter-agency cooperation and joint-advocacy efforts.

The regional response needs to **align with national strategies and regional processes** and could be anchored to the FRDP, Boe Declaration Action Plan, Pacific Resilience Partnership Technical Working Group on human mobility, and the 2050 Strategy. Guided by these frameworks, the regional response can consider a number of **potential modalities**, such as a regional declaration, a non-binding legal and policy framework, a combination of regional approach and non-binding framework, a joint statement or Communiqué, and so forth.

## WAY FORWARD

Given the positive outcomes of the Regional Policy Dialogue, ESCAP plans to host a second series of dialogue in 2021 to guide and review the development of the regional response and associated outcome documents. Structured consultations at the regional, national, sub-national and local levels supported by PCCM-HS implementing agencies with relevant stakeholders and working groups will provide inputs to the 'zero' draft of the framework for regional collaboration on climate change-related displacement, migration and planned relocation for consideration by States. Through a regional response, Pacific Island Countries can not only plan ahead for mobility challenges posed by climate change but also set an example to the world as such a regional response would be the first of its kind in guaranteeing protection of people on the move as a result of climate change.

### Proposed Timeframe of Next Steps (2021)

- January: Discussion on the next steps with PIFS senior management
- January – March: Civil society consultations
- January – June: National consultations
- July – December: Regional consultations