

THE CLIMATE CHANGE–HUMAN TRAFFICKING NEXUS



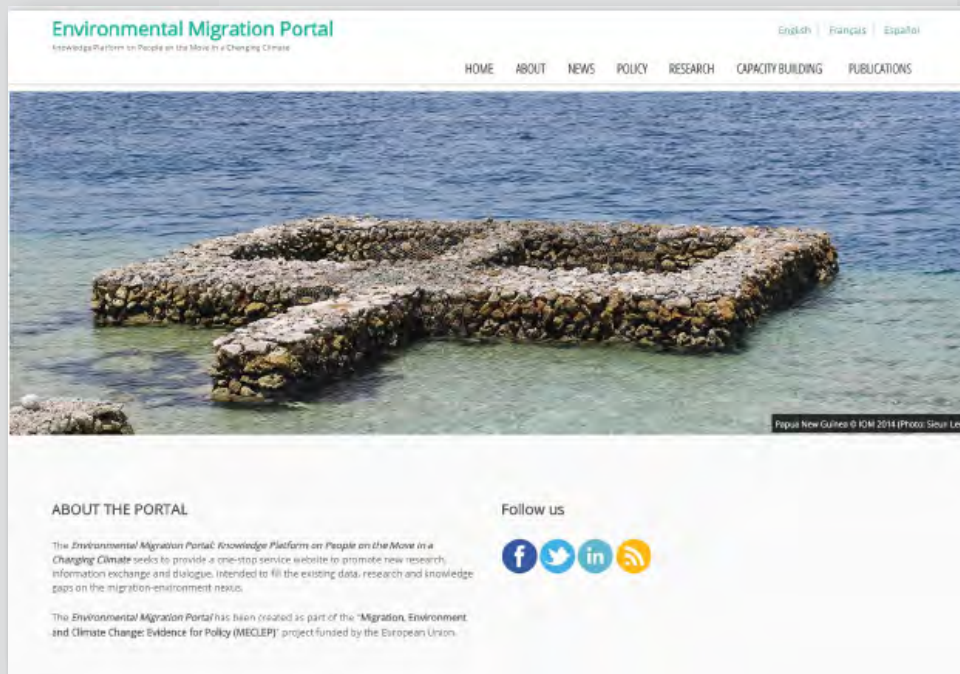
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The UN Migration Agency

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THE CLIMATE CHANGE—HUMAN TRAFFICKING NEXUS

Climate change increases the risk of natural disasters and places a strain on livelihoods; it exacerbates poverty and can potentially cause situations of conflict and instability. These conditions, when combined with a mismatch between demand for labour and supply and the proliferation of unscrupulous recruitment agencies, increase high-risk behaviours and other negative coping strategies among affected populations. This may include resorting to migrant smugglers, which in turn makes them vulnerable to trafficking in persons (TiP) and associated forms of exploitation and abuse. The impact of climate change, however, is rarely considered as a potential contributor to human trafficking in global discussions or national-level policy frameworks,¹ and the nexus remains relatively underexplored.

In the absence of academic studies or policy documents on the topic, anecdotal evidence from field practitioners reflected in grey literature indicate that sudden- and slow-onset events both impact human trafficking, although some distinctions in their effect can be drawn:

- **Sudden-onset disasters** can cause unexpected loss of land and lives, and destruction of means of livelihoods, instantly plunging those without safety nets into poverty. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, displacement is likely to occur, giving space for traffickers to operate and exploit affected people, their desire for safety and search for means of income to help restore their lives. This may lead to either a sharp rise

in human trafficking if the region already witnessed TiP or the creation of a new “hotspot” for human trafficking. The effect of sudden-onset events on TiP is often more clearly evident in comparison to the impact of slow-onset events.

» Irregular Migration

Many displaced persons who see irregular migration as the only viable option to pursue better opportunities may seek assistance from human smugglers, placing themselves at risk of many of the forms of exploitation that are commonly associated with trafficking, such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage, as well as organ removal.

» Trafficking in camps/camp-like settings

Specific attention must be given to the risk of TiP in camps/camp-like settings established to shelter those displaced by natural disasters. As examples from the Asia–Pacific region show, these settings attract criminal actors and can become targets for human traffickers. Sometimes, affected families or individuals may also resort to trafficking or collude with traffickers in order to earn money.²

- **Slow-onset events** are also associated with an increase in TiP. Populations engaged in natural resource-based livelihoods that are affected by events, such as coastal erosion, sea-level rise and glacial retreat, may take proactive measures to diversify their income. Migration is one such strategy to diversify livelihoods, implying that slow-onset

¹ The Vatican, however, is the only entity to have acknowledged the nexus between human trafficking and environmental issues. From 21–22 July 2015, the Vatican organized a meeting titled “Modern slavery and climate change: the commitment of cities” as a part of the symposium on “Prosperity, people and planet: achieving sustainable development in our cities”, which brought together over 70 mayors (available from www.news.va/en/news/in-the-meeting-on-climate-change-and-modern-slaver). In the outcome declaration, mayors committed to “building ... the resilience of the poor... and reducing exposure to climate-related extreme events and other... environmental shocks and disasters which foster human trafficking and dangerous forced migration” (see www.pass.va/content/dam/scienze/sociali/booklet/declaration21july2015.pdf).

² A. Poncet et al., “A country made for disasters: environmental vulnerability and forced migration in Bangladesh”, in: *Environment, Forced Migration and Social Vulnerability* (T. Afifi and J. Jäger, eds.) (Springer, Berlin Heidelberg, 2010), pp. 211–222.



Fishermen in Shyamlapur, Bangladesh, fish about 22 kilos of fish per day and sell it on the local market in Cox's Bazar. © IOM 2016 (Photo: Amanda Nero)

events can drive outmigration. Traffickers are likely to recruit in such source areas of climate migrants, but also at their destinations, such as in urban slums. On the other hand, when irreversible damage due to slow-onset events occurs (such as in the case of land erosion or repeated droughts), households may face increased debt and poverty. Increased desperation may push affected populations into the hands of criminal actors, and even into colluding with them, as seen in instances of men selling their wives or other female relatives³ or parents selling their children⁴ in order to cope with the losses associated with a changing climate. Although it can be a challenge to establish that slow-onset climate change contributes to increased TiP, there is enough anecdotal evidence

to support the presumption that it will occur and responses should be developed accordingly.

- Climate migrants that move to nearby cities often set up in urban slums. Without savings (sometimes lost due to natural hazards), an education or advanced skills and limited access to gainful employment, these migrants have minimal bargaining power to assert their rights and can become easy targets for exploitation. For migrants engaged in domestic work or in the construction sector, this issue is commonplace. Some studies report that women are especially vulnerable as incidents of women originating from climate vulnerable areas being duped by “agents” is frequent. The agents promise employment but instead sell vulnerable women to brothels where they are sexually exploited.⁵

³ R. Sharma, “Trafficking in women and children in India: A situational analysis in Maharashtra”, *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 2(2):85–100 (2007). Available from www.sascv.org/ijcjs/renusharma.html

⁴ P.M. Nair and S. Sen, *Trafficking in Women and Children in India* (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005).

⁵ T. Anderson, M. Shamsuddoha and A. Dixit, *Climate Change Knows No Borders* (ActionAid International, 2016).

- Many industries that are vulnerable to human trafficking or labour exploitation also have a detrimental impact on the environment and contribute to climate change.⁶ In Asia, they often lie at the root of supply chains that connect the global economy. There are numerous, well-documented cases in which environmentally damaging extractive industries are underpinned by large numbers of migrant workers in forced labour situations. In South-East Asia, the lucrative palm oil industry is heavily dependent on less-than-ethical recruitment of foreign labour, as well as coercive labour practices.⁷ This industry exemplifies the link between forced labour associated with modern slavery, industrial-scale and often unregulated logging and the widespread destruction of (the Bornean and Sumatran) rainforests.
- Further research is also required to understand the differential impact that climate change has on men, women, boys and girls and how this relates to human trafficking. In general, women and women-headed households are perceived as vulnerable to trafficking, alongside children displaced or orphaned during natural disasters.⁸ While men are more likely to be subjected to forced labour, women and children may be coerced into prostitution or exploitative domestic work. Current evidence, however, emphasizes the risk faced by women, and incidents of trafficking of men and boys for labour purposes from areas affected by natural disasters are not as commonly reported.

Examples of the climate change–human trafficking and smuggling nexus from the Asia–Pacific region

With over 4.2 billion people, Asia–Pacific is the world’s most populous region. A high rate of human mobility further characterizes the region, as internal migration – alongside international movements – is on the rise in Asia. Existing migration channels witness increasingly “mixed flows”, i.e. the concurrent movement of people with varying motivations and multiple statuses, including economic migrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking.

In Asia–Pacific, much of the migration is within the region, from rural to urban centres. TiP occurs along the same routes, facilitated by organized criminal groups or networks mainly to India, Malaysia and Thailand. There is also large-scale regular and irregular labour migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries from South and South-East Asia and from South-West Asia to the Middle East and Europe that results in the forms of exploitation commonly associated with human trafficking. Large numbers of victims of trafficking are exploited in brick kilns, fishing boats, manufacturing and the sex sector, in domestic work, as well as on construction sites.

In parallel with this trend of human trafficking, the region faces extreme vulnerability to climate change. Asia–Pacific’s diverse topography, ranging from landlocked mountainous countries to low-lying atolls, increases exposure to a range of natural disasters. These natural disasters, either sudden-onset events like cyclones and floods, or slow-onset events like droughts and sea-level rise (inter alia) evidently affect human mobility; in 2015, 16.3 million people were newly displaced in the region.⁹ Protracted displacement due to disasters, wherein displaced communities live in camp and camp-like settings, is also a common trend in the region. With the increasing evidence that environmental and climate change induces high-risk migration, in cases of sudden- or slow-onset disasters, greater effort is needed to understand the nexus with and implications for human trafficking.

⁶ K. Bales, *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World* (Spiegel & Grau, New York, 2016); United States Department of State, “The intersection between environmental degradation and human trafficking”, in: *2014 Trafficking in Persons Report* (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Washington, D.C., 2014), pp. 52–56.

⁷ E.B. Skinner, “Indonesia’s palm oil industry rife with human-rights abuses”, *Bloomberg*, 21 July 2013. Available from www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-18/indonesias-palm-oil-industry-rife-with-human-rights-abuses

⁸ The Nansen Initiative, *Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change* (2015); International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Assessing the Evidence: Environment, Climate Change and Migration in Bangladesh* (IOM Regional Office for South Asia, Dhaka, 2010). Available from <https://publications.iom.int/books/assessing-evidence-environment-climate-change-and-migration-bangladesh>

⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (IDMC, Geneva, 2016).

- The first time the issue of human trafficking during natural disasters came into the spotlight was after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, when several child protection organizations began to notice an increase in child abductions for “adoption” in Indonesia. Though no cases could be directly attributed, various stakeholders, including civil society, academics and organizations, began to conduct awareness-raising measures in areas at risk of human trafficking.¹⁰ This set a precedent for counter-trafficking efforts during emergency responses to natural disasters and since 2004, organizations including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have monitored trafficking trends and incorporated this issue into its Migration Crisis Operational Framework.
- Field research¹¹ conducted in Bangladesh after Cyclone Sidr in 2007 demonstrated an increased rate of trafficking in affected districts. According to the study findings, criminal networks began to operate in the disaster-affected region, preying on widows, men desperate to cross the border to India to find employment and income, and sometimes entire families. Victims of trafficking were forced into prostitution and hard labour, some working in sweatshops along the Indian border. Some disaster-affected families also began to collude with the traffickers in order to earn money.¹² A study conducted by IOM following Cyclone Aila that struck Bangladesh two years later in 2009 reports similar trends. Women-headed households were identified as especially vulnerable to human trafficking and the associated forms of exploitation.¹³
- Typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines in 2013, affected a part of the country that was already suffering from poverty and high rates of trafficking; with the

landfall of the typhoon, these trends were amplified. As part of the emergency response, IOM monitored the trends in human trafficking alongside sexual and gender-based violence through the use of the Displacement Tracking Matrix, and took preventive measures such as setting up of helplines and conducting awareness-raising programmes to ensure that trafficking trends would not continue in the years following the disaster.¹⁴ To this end, IOM also began implementation of a two-year project “Victim Centered Counter-Trafficking Awareness in Typhoon Haiyan Affected Areas in the Visayas”¹⁵ in the wake of the typhoon. Populations particularly at risk included internally displaced persons (IDPs), women-headed households and children who had lost their parents during the disaster. Nepal faced a similar situation during the Gorkha earthquake in 2015 as it was already considered a hotspot for trafficking. Counter-trafficking measures were also integrated into IOM’s emergency response in Nepal. The US Department of State’s 2016 *Trafficking in Persons* report identifies Pakistani IDPs displaced by floods as particularly vulnerable to human trafficking.¹⁶

- Smuggling of drought-affected migrants from Cambodia to Thailand has also been observed. An assessment study conducted by IOM in Cambodia revealed that villages engaged in natural resource-based occupations, such as fishing and agriculture, were frequently affected by droughts and floods.¹⁷ A related study conducted in the country demonstrates

¹⁰ IOM, *Addressing Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Times of Crisis* (IOM, Geneva, 2015). Available from https://publications.iom.int/system/files/addressing_human_trafficking_dec2015.pdf

¹¹ A. Poncelet et al., 2010. See footnote 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ IOM, 2010. See footnote 11.

¹⁴ IOM, 2015. See footnote 13.

¹⁵ IOM, Victim-Centered Counter-Trafficking Project is launched in Tacloban City (IOM Philippines, Manila, 2014). Available from www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/Victim-Centered-Counter-Trafficking-Project-is-launched-in-Tacloban-City.pdf

¹⁶ US Department of State, 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan* (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Washington, D.C., 2016). Available from www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2016/258837.htm

¹⁷ G. Oudry, K. Pak and C. Chea (eds.), *Assessing Vulnerabilities and Responses to Environmental Changes in Cambodia* (IOM, Phnom Penh, 2016). Available from www.environmentalmigration.iom.int/assessing-vulnerabilities-and-responses-environmental-changes-cambodia



This community in Sirajganj, Bangladesh, is affected by river erosion. Many people were displaced several times due to the river erosion.
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that these drought-affected families from agricultural villages are more likely to migrate.¹⁸ As indicated in the IOM assessment study, these migrants tend to take illegal and often unsafe pathways as they are deemed easier and cheaper than migrating through regular channels. In fact, respondents to the IOM survey described instances of securing job opportunities through brokers, who would lead them to cross the forest into Thailand by foot, where they would be required to sleep and stay without nourishment for days before reaching their final destination. This could lead to situations of abuse and exploitation.¹⁹

- Droughts have particularly devastating effects on households engaged in agriculture as they reduce yields necessary for subsistence and sometimes

entrench farmers in debt traps. In India, successive droughts across the country²⁰ have forced people to migrate – usually to nearby cities – in search of work. Community-based organizations report traffickers who tend to recruit during tough times: before the harvest or during periods of drought.²¹ Men are trafficked to work in brick kilns while women are coerced into prostitution;²² incidents of children being sold by destitute families to work in the construction sector have also been reported.²³

- Primary industries that require huge manpower to extract natural resources have weak protection mechanisms, leading to situations of abuse and exploitation that can be understood as

¹⁸ Emerging Markets Consulting, *Economic Targeting for Employment: A Study on the Drivers Behind International Migration from Cambodia and the Domestic Labor Market* (USAID, Washington, D.C., 2016). Available from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00MB44.pdf

¹⁹ IOM, 2016. See footnote 18.

²⁰ Reports of trafficking from drought-affected regions of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Assam are common.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, 1995 as cited in Nair and Sen, 2005.

²² R. Chandran, “Trafficking risk rises as villagers flee India’s worst drought in decades”, *Reuters*, 26 April 2016. Available from www.reuters.com/article/india-drought-trafficking-idUSL5N17S2WI

²³ Nair and Sen, 2005. See footnote 6.



River in Udaipur region of Nepal during the dry season. Due to sedimentation in the Udaipur region intensified by heavy rains and deforestation, rivers are becoming shallower and broader, contributing to floods during monsoon. © IOM 2016 (Photo: Amanda Nero)

human trafficking. While majority of the victims of trafficking in Asia–Pacific in 2015 were employed in fishing vessels, the logging industry and palm oil industry are also known to heavily exploit migrant workers. Since 2005, IOM has assisted 120 victims of trafficking from the palm oil industry in Indonesia; this figure is not representative of the number of victims of trafficking in the palm oil industry, which is expected to be higher as the absence of mechanisms to contact workers on remote plantations prevents the provision of assistance. Victims of trafficking supported by IOM reported that debt bondage, confiscation of documents and physical abuse were commonplace.

- In South-East Asia, overfishing and the depletion of fish stocks in the Gulf of Thailand in the 1990s resulted in fishing companies requiring more long-haul, and often illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing operations

in the Indonesian archipelago and the Pacific. Unappealing to most Thai fishermen who increasingly had other employment options, the fishing sector began to source its labour force from neighbouring Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar, who often endure high levels of exploitation at sea. A joint IOM study with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2014²⁴ found trafficked fishermen, in addition to the high risk of injury, worked the longest hours, for the longest period of time, and were the least likely to be paid, when compared with people trafficked into the other sectors studied: agriculture, construction, domestic work and prostitution.

²⁴ C. Zimmerman et al. *Health and human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion; Findings from a survey of men, women and children in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam* (IOM and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2014). Available from http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/steam_report_mekong.pdf

Addressing human trafficking in the context of climate change and natural disasters

These incidents of human trafficking in the wake of sudden- and slow-onset disasters demonstrate the necessity of a planned response to address this cross-cutting issue. In general, there needs to be an acknowledgement that human trafficking can be an unintended but direct consequence when migration occurs in the absence of government support and management, after disasters or in the face of slow-onset events.

This does not mean that limitations on the freedom of movement are prescribed; any actions taken by governments or other actors to limit movements should be avoided at all costs, as they may in fact compel affected communities to use negative coping strategies, such as resorting to the use of smuggling networks. Measures should be put in place to facilitate mobility as a coping strategy, so

that movement occurs in a manner that is safe, orderly and dignified, i.e. without the risk of abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

Similarly, responses to human trafficking should take into consideration the contribution of climate change in creating conditions conducive for trafficking. Any steps taken to enhance economic and social well-being as a means to mitigate the risk multipliers of trafficking should hence be sustainable and recognize climate impacts. Data collection and research on trafficking trends should also include an assessment of environmental conditions and climate impacts on livelihoods, particularly if this appears as a primary driver towards trafficking or smuggling.

The following table provides an overview of possible interventions before, during and after disasters, and where available with examples of related activities implemented by IOM in the Asia-Pacific region.



A little restaurant in Udaipur, Nepal, run by one of the many locals who have lost their houses and land because of river flooding. “The problem of flood is never ending here. When there is heavy rain, the river erodes the land. The largest river, Trijuga, is also there. There is a huge problem of flood in this region.” © IOM 2016 (Photo: Amanda Nero)

	Recommended interventions	Examples from IOM
Before	Monitor trends related to TiP, particularly in areas vulnerable to or affected by disasters and climate change	
	Awareness campaigns on human trafficking and environmental change in migrant source areas especially among local leaders and government officials where traditional livelihoods have been devastated by climate change	
	Build capacity of governmental and non-governmental institutions to respond effectively to the challenges posed by human trafficking and associated forms of exploitation of vulnerable migrants if a sudden- or slow-onset event occurs	
During	Registration database for all displaced persons in camps; camp to be established according to established guidelines for a secure environment (proper lighting, SPHERE distances to refuse, latrines etc. to minimize walking distances for vulnerable populations), contact with local civilian police and with a referral mechanism for sexual and gender-based violence and TiP	These principles are mainstreamed into all of IOM's emergency response.
	Assist in the identification and protection of victims and support the strengthening of context-specific comprehensive protection mechanisms, especially with respect to the protection of unaccompanied migrant children	Following Cyclone Aila in Bangladesh in 2009, IOM supported the creation of a coordination platform at the local level, implemented protection and counter-trafficking activities and continued to monitor IDP settlements.
	Integrate TiP awareness into camp coordination and camp management activities	IOM emergency response to Typhoon Haiyan mainstreamed these principles. Again, after Cyclone Aila, anti-trafficking awareness-raising activities were initiated by IOM. This included training for community leaders, community meetings, 70 drama shows and 6,000 posters highlighting the dangers of trafficking, which were conducted and distributed in affected communities. The drama shows were attended by up to 500 people at each event. A video documentary prepared to raise awareness at a national level of the relationship between environmental disasters, displacement and trafficking was also produced.
	Monitor the outflow of vulnerable populations by setting up screening desks at strategic exit points	
	Counter-trafficking orientation for police, military and local government officers in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Protection Cluster; and co-organizing capacity-building trainings for government and non-governmental organization partners on victim identification, referral and assistance with UN partners and other relevant stakeholders	
	Awareness campaigns on human trafficking in migrant source areas coupled with employment opportunities (such as cash-for-work programmes) to enhance effectiveness.	

After	Mainstream context-appropriate victim protection models, as well as capacity-building activities that were developed and expanded during the crisis into more sustainable migrant management frameworks	Through a two-year project, “Victim Centered Counter-Trafficking Awareness in Typhoon Haiyan Affected Areas in the Visayas”, IOM Manila aims to improve access to referral channels through targeted awareness-raising activities, strengthen service provision and enhance direct assistance to Haiyan-affected victims of trafficking.
	Support governments to ensure durable solutions for displaced populations, including sustainable livelihood opportunities particularly for those whose livelihoods have been destroyed by the natural disaster through trainings and community workshops	
	Support policymakers and practitioners to mainstream climate change issues into relevant trafficking standard operating procedures and to plug policy gaps related to the human trafficking and climate change nexus	



Organic fertilizer is being introduced to replace the industrial ones. Local farmers, such as those from Udaipur, make the organic fertilizers with cows and goats, urine and excrements and dried leaves. © IOM 2016 (Photo: Amanda Nero)



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