

Sachdokumentation:

Signatur: DS 5128

Permalink: www.sachdokumentation.ch/bestand/ds/5128



Nutzungsbestimmungen

Dieses elektronische Dokument wird vom Schweizerischen Sozialarchiv zur Verfügung gestellt. Es kann in der angebotenen Form für den Eigengebrauch reproduziert und genutzt werden (private Verwendung, inkl. Lehre und Forschung). Für das Einhalten der urheberrechtlichen Bestimmungen ist der/die Nutzer/in verantwortlich. Jede Verwendung muss mit einem Quellennachweis versehen sein.

Zitierweise für graue Literatur

Elektronische Broschüren und Flugschriften (DS) aus den Dossiers der Sachdokumentation des Sozialarchivs werden gemäss den üblichen Zitierrichtlinien für wissenschaftliche Literatur wenn möglich einzeln zitiert. Es ist jedoch sinnvoll, die verwendeten thematischen Dossiers ebenfalls zu zitieren. Anzugeben sind demnach die Signatur des einzelnen Dokuments sowie das zugehörige Dossier.



**EUROPE
MUST
ACT.**

MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

**People On The Move In A Time Of
Climate Crisis**



**Topic of the
Month Europe
Must Act
2025**

Index

<i>An Introduction to Climate Change and Migration</i>	3
<i>Climate Displacement in Europe</i>	4
<i>Transpastoralism and Sedentarisation in East Africa</i>	7
<i>Flooding in Lebanon</i>	9
<i>Ethiopia's Climate Emergency</i>	12
<i>Final Thoughts: Migration As A Solution</i>	14

An Introduction to Climate Change and Migration

Climate change or *climate crisis* refers to **long-term shifts in weather patterns and temperatures** and can be driven by natural causes or human activities. Climate scientists showed that since the 1800s human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels, have been a main force behind climate change and rising global temperatures. Severe effects of the climate crisis are felt continuously more- one of these being displacement- with an increased concern among researchers, policymakers, and the general public with regard to the link between climate change and forced migration.

Since 2020, there has been an **annual increase in the total number of displaced people due to climate disasters** compared with the previous decade[1] and in 2023 alone, 7.7 million people were living in internal displacement because of such calamities.

Although not all natural catastrophes might be climate-related, as climate change makes extreme weather events more frequent and intense, people are expected to be forced to migrate increasingly as a consequence of climate induced hazards.

In fact, the Institute for Economics and Peace estimates that around 1.2 billion people could be displaced by 2050 due to climate crisis.



Image sourced from [Markus Spiske](#) on [Unsplash](#)

UNHCR reveals that **the majority of people affected by climate-induced displacement move within the boundaries of their countries**. However, climate change-related disasters force people to move across borders as well. The lack of protection rights for those displaced by environmental factors is a key issue in the context of cross-border migration related to climate change, due to the absence of a legal framework for “climate refugees”.

[1] Apap, J., & Harju, S. J. (2023). The concept of ‘climate refugee’: Towards a possible definition. European Parliament.

Even though it is a phrase often used colloquially to refer to persons forced to move for climate-related reasons, there is **no legal definition for “climate refugees” in international law**, as the 1951 Refugee Convention does not cover the concept. Therefore, people who migrate forcibly in this context are not able to apply for asylum under the Convention on the basis of climate-related hazards, and states are not obliged legally to provide protection as well as grant entry onto their soil.

In spite of this gap in international law, some regional refugee laws might provide protection. Both in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration and in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention, a refugee is defined as someone who fled their country as a result of “events seriously disturbing public order”; climate change-related disasters might be interpreted as such events.

While climate change is a global phenomenon and affects all regions around the world, its impact hits harder on those who contribute least to it. According to the World Inequality Database, North America and Europe are responsible for around half of all carbon emissions since the Industrial Revolution[2]. Nonetheless, low income countries bear the brunt of climate change, considering that the communities living there have fewer resources to respond and adapt to its adverse effects.

Besides these inequalities between geopolitical regions, climate change is likewise interconnected with social discrimination within a country. Even in the richest countries, natural catastrophes affect the poorest and the marginalised the most, as they lack resources to recover from their aftermath.

Here, we examine the dynamics of climate-related displacement in diverse cases and, finally, explore how climate crises can disproportionately impact populations already displaced, compounding their vulnerabilities.

[2] Chancel, L. (2022). Global carbon inequality over 1990–2019. *Nature Sustainability*, 5(11), 931–938. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00955-z>

Climate Displacement in Europe

In this section, we explore climate displacement in Europe to see what we know so far about this increasingly pertinent topic.

Climate-driven migration within Europe is not something we commonly discuss or even think about. Nonetheless, in 2024 we've seen devastating events such as flooding, wildfires, water scarcity and landslides, all of which have come at the cost of human life and led to displacement and evacuations.

Recent Extreme Events in Europe in 2024

- Wildfires in 2024 - In particular, this summer saw the displacement of roughly 300 people in Portugal and 1,600 people evacuated in Greece due to wildfires.
- Storm Boris - Flooding caused several deaths and thousands of evacuations across Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.
- Storm Dana - Most recently, we've seen the impact of flooding in Spain. Storm Dana caused widespread damage, as 224 people lost their lives and more than 400 people were displaced.

What happens after?

Multiple entities report on the damage caused by these extreme events, evacuations and of people returning to their homes to find there is little to be salvaged. However, there is little information about what happens after this period, whether people stay and rebuild their lives back home or decide that it's better to relocate.

When it comes to the events of 2024, it is too early to tell how many people will be permanently displaced or relocated. However, there are some previous publications that may help us to understand the situation and extent of climate-induced internal displacement within Europe::

- A report by the IDMC discusses the process wherein 500 households along the Danube River in Austria have been relocated over the past 50 years.
- A study published in Sustainability in 2023 investigates a case in the Ahr Valley, in Germany, where more than 40% of residents had to leave their homes after flooding in 2021. However, the majority returned home, with only a fifth of people moving or planning to do so^[3].
- The EU's Climate-ADAPT organisation describes retreat and relocation as strategies for households and infrastructure in high-risk locations throughout Europe.

[3] Truedinger, A. J., Jamshed, A., Sauter, H., & Birkmann, J. (2023). Adaptation after Extreme Flooding Events: Moving or Staying? The Case of the Ahr Valley in Germany. Sustainability, 15(2), 1407. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021407>

The Human Displacement Monitoring Center also provides data on how many people are being displaced in European countries following climate change-fueled extreme weather events. However, these figures don't provide much detailed information about these people's displacement, how long it lasted etc. demonstrating a lack of in-depth and detailed data at the current time.

Retreat and Relocation

The language used to talk about climate-induced displacement in Europe is notably different.

Framing Displacement

Keywords:

Compensation, ICZM, managed retreat, reconstruction, relocation, settlement, social justice, spatial planning

Screenshot taken from Climate-ADAPT's "Retreat from high-risk areas" adaption option

Across the sources we have consulted, words such as "**Retreat**" and "**Relocation**" are more commonly used to describe the movement of Europeans whereas terms such as "displacement" and "migration" appear sparingly, if at all.

This appears to reflect that:

1. **The focus within Europe is to prepare and mitigate against the risks** posed by climate change. A recent report by the European Environment Agency describes how Europe is not prepared for rapidly growing climate risks, and emphasises the need to act now to develop cohesive measures across Europe that protect people from disasters and the related health risks posed by polluted water systems.
2. The lack of reference to "internal displacement" and "migration" in favour of "relocation" and "retreat" highlights how **we frame the movement of Europeans within Europe differently**. There is an implication that problematic terms such as "migration" are reserved for 'problematic people', in parallel with other linguistic distinctions used when referring to people on the move, such as "expat" vs. "migrant".

Ultimately, there is only a limited amount of systematic study into climate displacement in Europe. But, from the examples highlighted above, what we can say is this:

That there's evidence that some people in Europe are moving/migrating due to the impacts of extreme weather and that further research is needed if we want to understand this movement, these experiences and whether they are or could become more widespread.

Transpastoralism and Sedentarisation in East Africa

In this section we describe one of the ways in which the worsening of sustained climate change provokes a substantial impact on people's livelihoods, leading, in this case, to internal displacement. We will describe how the extension and intensification of droughts impacts on the lives of shepherds, forcing them to move to bigger cities in precarious and unsustainable situations.

Over the past two decades, East Africa has experienced an unprecedented series of consecutive droughts, causing distress among millions of households and affecting pastoralism as a form of life.

This has justified a growing body of research called “pastoralism in transition” which characterizes pastoralism as a dynamic livelihood system which adapts well to change. It has been suggested that the natural state of pastoralism is one of evolution, continuously adjusting to an unstable environment to maintain the resilience of the livelihood system[4].

Pastoralists survive in unpredictable climates, characterized by high variability in inter-annual and inter-seasonal rainfall patterns. In response to these variable conditions, they have historically developed a number of adaptation strategies, which include modifying their mobility patterns and manipulating the age, size, gender-balance and races and species of their herds, so as to maximize access to diverse and changing grazing environments.

Pastoralists are particularly affected by droughts because of their economic dependence on livestock raising, which is typically done through extensive grazing. Drought conditions result in rapid declines in pasture, making livestock production challenging. The escalating frequency and severity of droughts is challenging the efficiency of traditional coping strategies.

Pastoralist households have to find alternative ways to get by[5]. As climate change impacts worsen, and given that pastoralism constitutes the main livelihood system in East Africa[6], it is expected that millions of people in this region will have to start seeking out alternative livelihoods



Photo by Dwayne joe on Unsplash

[4] Kaye-Zwiebel, E., & King, E. (2014). Kenyan pastoralist societies in transition: varying perceptions of the value of ecosystem services. *Ecology and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-06753-190317>

[5] Woodhouse, E., & McCabe, J. T. (2018). Well-being and conservation: diversity and change in visions of a good life among the Maasai of northern Tanzania. *Ecology and Society*, 23(1), 43

[6] Stavi, I., Roque de Pinho, J., Paschalidou, A. K., Adamo, S. B., Galvin, K., de Sherbinin, A., Even, T., Heaviside, C., & van der Geest, K. (2022). Food security among dryland pastoralists and agropastoralists: The climate, land-use change, and population dynamics nexus. *The Anthropocene Review*, 9(3), 299-323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20530196211007512>

African pastoralism research has focused on sedentarisation: the transition of nomadic households and communities to settled forms of life. This process is increasingly notable as an adaptation strategy in response to environmental stressors. This is evidenced in various contexts in the sub-Saharan drylands, including Kenya, Nigeria and Ethiopia, where migration serves as a mechanism to mitigate the impacts of environmental change[7].



Photo by [Nicholas Gray](#), on [Unsplash](#)

Sedentarisation involves changes in livelihoods, gender roles, dietary habits and vulnerability levels. At the heart of this transition is the pressing need for pastoralists to diversify their livelihood options. Settling in or near established towns is often the only way pastoralists have access to a range of opportunities for livelihood diversification. Urban migration means abandoning pastoralism.

In northern Kenya, many ex-pastoralists have migrated to towns in response to severe droughts; a pattern of climate change provoking displacement in Africa and across the world.

Sedentarised former shepherds will often experience deterioration in their well-being. Key predictors of poorer well-being outcomes include the loss of all livestock, informal housing, and failure to transition into agricultural work, which often results in dependence on casual labour.

Many people continue to experience poor subjective well-being years after these livelihood transitions. These insights suggest the need for livelihood support strategies for this new urban population[8]. It is reasonable to expect that the climate trends towards increasing droughts in Africa will bring more extensive migration to the cities and unpredictable levels of deterioration in the quality of life for large swathes of people.

[7] For Nigeria, see Aremu, T., & Abraham, P. (2019). *Herdsmen on the move: the burdens of climate change and environmental migration in Nigeria*. In *Handbook of Climate Change Resilience*, (Vol. 2, pp. 1225-1235); for Ethiopia, see Gebeyehu, A. K., Snelder, D., Sonneveld, B., & Abbink, J. (2021). *How do agro-pastoralists cope with climate change? The case of the Nyangatom in the Lower Omo Valley of Ethiopia*. *Journal of Arid Environments*, 189, 104485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaridenv.2021.104485>; for Kenya, see Ng'ang'a, T. W., Coulibaly, J. Y., Crane, T. A., Gachene, C. K., & Kironchi, G. (2020). *Propensity to adapt to climate change: Insights from pastoralist and agro-pastoralist households of Laikipia County*. *Climatic Change*, 161(3), 393-413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-020-02696-4> and Pollini, J., & Galaty, J. G. (2021). *Resilience through adaptation: Innovations in Maasai livelihood strategies*. *Nomadic Peoples*, 25(2), 278-311. <https://doi.org/10.3197/np.2021.250206>
[8] Van Duijne, Robbin Jan, Ogara, Dinah, Keeton, Rachel & Reckien, Diana (2024). *Climate migration and well-being: a study on ex-pastoralists in northern Kenya*. *Population and Environment* 46:17.

Flooding in Lebanon

This section examines the impact of climate change on those who have already been forced to leave their homes.

Lebanon has been experiencing extreme events in recent years, seeing an increase in natural disasters since 2010. The Lebanese Ministry has reported three times the number of flood incidents in 2015 and an increase in heatwaves' intensity in 2020[p. 78].

In January of this year, the northern region experienced its largest flood in 20 years. Given that the area was home to a large number of Syrian people living in informal settlements, many of those affected were people who had already been displaced due to conflict.

Current Situation in Lebanon

Lebanon is the **highest, per capita, host country for refugees**, with a Government estimate of 1.5 million Syrians (some 785,000 registered by UNHCR) and 11,200 asylum-seekers and refugees of other nationalities. Lebanon also hosts some 550,000 Palestinian refugees and 12 UNRWA camps.

Recent **Israeli military attacks** on Lebanon's southern border have resulted in the killing of over 4,000 people, with thousands of others suffering injuries.

By August 2024, 102,523 people had been displaced from Southern Lebanon. Countless households in the region have lost their sources of income, while hundreds of homes have been destroyed, accompanied by extensive damage to local infrastructure.

After the ceasefire announcement, at the end of November 2024 there has been a mass return of displaced people to southern Lebanon, the Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs, leaving 40,700 internally displaced people in shelters. Prior to the Israeli attacks, Lebanon had also been suffering under its most recent economic crisis since 2019.



Image sourced from [Pexel](#)

January Floods in North Lebanon

In January 2024, the northern region experienced its largest flood in 20 years. After several days of heavy rain, two rivers flooded simultaneously, submerging coastal roads. Villages were isolated and cut off from essential services for days, road blockages cut off access for aid trucks and prevented people from going to work, and crops were destroyed. 10,000 people were affected, including 2,000 Syrians, and flooding damaged 3,000 houses and 850 informal settlements.

Lebanon has seen a number of destructive floods in recent years, with Storm Norma causing widespread damage across the country in 2019, where both local and displaced communities experienced losses caused by the disaster. People living in temporary structures were significantly affected, with more than 360 sites hosting 11,300 refugees, becoming completely flooded, forcing hundreds of Syrian people from their homes.

The Lebanese government is making efforts to conduct research and improve resilience. In particular, the Ministry for the Environment's 4TH National Communication on Climate Change measures the increase in extreme weather events since 2010, explores projected changes for 2050-2100, and provides a vulnerability and impact assessment of climate stressors and projected risks.

In the context of flooding, the table below notes related risks. Among those listed is the increase of water-borne diseases. In particular, the return of cholera outbreaks in recent years has become an added serious health risk[10].

Type of Impact	Climate stressors	Projected Risks
Reduced water availability	Increased temperatures Reduced rainfall and snow cover Increased drought incidences Rise in sea level	Altered seasonal water regimes; and increase up to 30% in winter floods Reduced river flows leading to increased strain on limited groundwater sources in the dry season Increased evaporation of surface water Increased saltwater intrusion/salinization of coastal aquifers
Sea level rise	Increased rise (30-60 cm in 30 years-2mm/ year)	Increased seawater intrusion into aquifers; Increased risk of coastal flooding and inundation; Increased coastal erosion altering coastal ecosystems in natural reserves and elsewhere
Increase in morbidity and mortality	Increased temperatures More intense and frequent heatwaves Increased extreme weather events	Increased outbreaks of infectious diseases; Increased morbidity and mortality from heat and other extreme weather events; Increased malnutrition from droughts and floods; Increased rates of water-borne, rodent-borne, and vector-borne diseases

Adapted from 4TH National Communication on Climate Change [pp. 125-126]

Writing about this year's floods in January, a [UNHCR report](#) noted that:

“despite the risks of flooding, the size of urban settlements had more than doubled in the past two decades, partly due to the influx of refugees from Syria. This urban growth highlighted the complex relationship between population dynamics, lack of policies, and extreme poverty”.

Forced migration exposes people to very vulnerable situations. With extremely high rates of displacement, both internally and across borders throughout the region, more and more people are being left with no other option than to stay in informal shelters.

Temporary structures like tents stand no chance against severe flooding and other climate-related disasters, while other factors like difficulty accessing basic needs and an increased risk of contracting infectious diseases further exacerbate the situation. Extreme climate events will continue to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable communities, as the frequency of these events continues to rise.

Ethiopia's Climate Emergency

In this section, we explore how climate change is exacerbating existing challenges in Ethiopia, highlighting its profound impact on livelihoods, displacement, and the need for urgent climate adaptation measures.

As part of the broader East African context, Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country with over 120 million people, is facing a climate crisis that exacerbates the challenges already faced by its vulnerable communities.

In recent years, the country has been hit hard by extreme weather, including droughts and flooding, compounded by ongoing political instability and conflict. These crises have taken a heavy toll on Ethiopia's economy, pushing inflation rates to 28.3% by early 2024, leaving millions of people in extreme poverty.

The country is highly vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, with rising temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns. Experts predict that by the end of the century, Ethiopia's average temperature could rise significantly, increasing the intensity of heatwaves and droughts that already threaten the country's agriculture. Agriculture, the backbone of Ethiopia's economy (accounting for 80% of employment and 75% of exports), relies heavily on rain-fed systems, making smallholder farmers particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.



Image sourced from Canvas

The effects of climate change are already evident:

- **Droughts:** Ethiopia faced its worst drought in 40 years from 2020 to 2022, affecting over 36 million people.
- **El Niño:** The 2023-2024 El Niño phenomenon worsened the crisis, bringing extreme heat, erratic rainfall, and disease outbreaks, including cholera and malaria.
- **Flooding:** In southern Ethiopia, unusually heavy rains triggered severe flooding, displacing thousands of people and causing significant loss of life. In April and early May 2024, flooding affected over 590,000 people, with more than 200 lives tragically lost in landslides. Vulnerable communities, especially in Sidama and Amhara, faced devastating damage.

The climate crisis has also had a devastating impact on **Ethiopia's children**. According to UNICEF, **45 million** children across Eastern and Southern Africa are facing overlapping crises such as malnutrition and disease outbreaks, all worsened by climate change.

In Ethiopia, poor harvests due to droughts and floods have led to rising food insecurity, contributing to increasing rates of malnutrition and stunted growth in children, with long-term effects on health and education.

Severe droughts and flooding have also dealt a blow to **Ethiopia's pastoral economy**, with millions of livestock lost and further worsening food insecurity. The United Nations reports that Ethiopia lost **6.8 million livestock** due to drought, resulting in a **loss of 91 million liters of milk annually**. Many pastoralists have been forced to abandon their livelihoods and migrate in search of survival, echoing the broader trends observed in other parts of East Africa, as we discussed above.

Ethiopia's displacement situation is dire, with the highest rates of displacement in the world:

- Over **4.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2023**, many fleeing due to climate change and conflict.
- **970,000 refugees from neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea** are also placing stress on Ethiopia's resources.

Positive Initiatives

- **CARE International's RIPA-North initiative**, which provides climate and early warning information to households and businesses in Ethiopia's lowland regions, are helping communities better adapt to climate risks.
- **Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project**, funded by the World Bank, focuses on improving the livelihoods and climate resilience of 3 million pastoralists and agropastoralists in Ethiopia, with a focus on job creation, income diversification, and sustainable farming practices. These efforts, along with greater international support, are essential for Ethiopia to build long-term resilience against the ongoing climate crisis.

To address these challenges, Ethiopia needs immediate international support. Along with humanitarian aid to address immediate needs, long-term strategies for climate adaptation are essential:

- Sustainable agriculture: Promoting practices that ensure food security in the face of climate change.
- Improved early warning systems: Ensuring communities are better prepared for extreme weather events.
- Enhanced climate resilience programs: Building stronger infrastructure and support systems to help communities adapt.

Final Thoughts: Migration As A Solution

In our final report of 2024, we delved into the different ways that climate change is connected to people's movement and migration. A consistent theme through many of these cases is that human mobility is part of a solution rather than a problem.

Regardless of whether you say climate displacement, climate retreat or climate refugee, a well-managed migration policy will help to protect those most vulnerable to increasingly extreme weather and climate events. And, while the problem of climate change is multi-faceted and migration can't solve everything, it is an adaptation strategy that we have at our disposal **now**.



Stock Image sourced from [Unsplash](#)



**EUROPE
MUST
ACT.**

***We're volunteers and asylum and migration is a complex topic. This means we try to include a variety of opinions and approaches to a topic. We do our best to research and use our expertise accurately however, we also believe it's vital to encourage healthy discussion and stop misinformation. Therefore we encourage any feedback or constructive criticism of our work.**

SUPPORT OUR WORK
[WWW.EUPEMUSTACT.ORG/MORE-](http://WWW.EUPEMUSTACT.ORG/MORE-ACTION)
[ACTION](http://WWW.EUPEMUSTACT.ORG/MORE-ACTION)

FOR MORE, VISIT:
WWW.EUPEMUSTACT.ORG

Europe Must Act (EMA) is a growing grassroots movement, bringing together volunteers and NGOs to campaign for the humane and dignified reception of refugees in Europe.



**Europe Must Act
2024**