المركز العربي للتعاون الفني في إدارة الهجرة والحدود
The Arab Centre for Technical Cooperation on Migration and Border Management (ACTC-MBM)

أوراق السياسات الأمنية

Security Policy Papers

https://nauss.edu.sa/

ورقة تحليل سياسات أمنية

Strengthening Migration Governance in the Context of Climate Change and Human Mobility in the Arab World

تعزيز حوكمة الهجرة في سياق تغير المناخ والتنقل البشري في الوطن العربي

Key Outputs

- Climate change as a displacement multiplier: Climate change interacts with conflicts, poverty, and environmental degradation, accelerating migration trends across the region. In 2024, more than 17 million people were displaced due to conflicts and 1.3 million due to climate-related drivers. Most of these migration movements occur along internal migration routes, driven by desertification, water scarcity, and declining agricultural productivity.
- Structural gaps in legal protection and border management: The current international legal framework remains inadequate for addressing climate-induced displacement, as it does not recognize climate-displaced persons as a distinct legal category entitled to guaranteed protection. Under these international conditions, Arab states face an international protection system that has not yet adapted to the emerging challenges resulting from the escalating impacts of climate change.



- Proactive intervention is a necessity, not an option: Projections indicate that the number of internal climate migrants in North Africa could reach 19.3 million by 2050 in the absence of urgent interventions.
- Migration that is effectively managed can shift from a security threat factor to a proactive adaptation tool, provided that integrated governance strategies are developed to link climate adaptation plans with border security frameworks and development policies.

CrossMark

1658-8886© 2026. SPP. This is an open access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License.

Abstract

Climate change is rapidly reshaping migration dynamics across the Arab world, acting as a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities such as conflicts, poverty, and environmental degradation. In 2024 alone, more than 17 million people were displaced due to conflicts, in addition to 1.3 million others displaced by climate-related disasters. Projections indicate that North Africa could witness up to 19.3 million internal climate migrants by 2050 in the absence of any intervention.

As climate-induced mobility continues to expand, the legal and implementation frameworks governing climate displacement remain under development and maturation. The international system has taken an important step in this direction through the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which formally recognizes the link between disasters, climate change, and human mobility. The Compact calls on states to strengthen protection measures and expand regular climate-related mobility pathways through the development of national legislation and the activation of regional and international cooperation mechanisms, thereby establishing a more stable foundation for addressing this growing phenomenon.

Climate-displaced persons in the Arab world also face significant challenges, foremost among them the absence of explicit provisions addressing climate displacement within international frameworks such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, in addition to the fact that most Arab states are not parties to these agreements. This may result in substantial gaps in legal safeguards for affected individuals, limiting avenues for

المستخلص

يُعيد تغيُّر المناخ تشكيل ديناميكيات الهجرة بسرعة متصاعدة في منطقة الوطن العربي؛ إذ يعمل مضاعفًا للتهديد، يُفاقم نقاط الضعف القائمة كالنزاعات والفقر، وتدهور البيئة؛ حيث إنه في عام 2024 وحده، نزح أكثر من 17 مليون شخص بسبب النزاعات، إلى جانب 1.3 مليون آخرين نزحوا من جراء الكوارث المرتبطة بالمناخ، وتُشير التوقعات إلى أن شمال إفريقيا قد يشهد ما يصل إلى 19.3 مليون مهاجر مناخي داخلي بحلول عام 2050 في ظلِّ غياب أي تدخل.

ومع تنامي نطاق التنقل الناجم عن تغير المناخ، تظلُّ الأطر القانونية والتنفيذية الناظمة لحركة النزوح المناخي في طور التطوير والنضج، وقد خطت المنظومة الدولية خطوةً مهمةً في هذا الاتجاه باعتراف الاتفاقية العالمية للهجرة الآمنة والمنظمة والنظامية رسميًّا بالصلة بين الكوارث والتغير المناخي والتنقل البشري. وتدعو الاتفاقية الدول إلى تعزيز تدابير الحماية، وتوسيع مسارات التنقل المنظم المرتبط بالمناخ، من خلال تطوير التشريعات الوطنية، وتفعيل آليات التعاون الإقليمي والدولي، بما يُرسي قاعدة أكثر استقرارًا للتعامل مع هذه الظاهرة المتنامية.

كما يواجه النازحون بسبب تغير المناخ في الوطن العربي تحديات كبيرة، في مقدمتها غياب أحكام صريحة تُعالج النزوح المناخي في الأطر الدولية كاتفاقية اللاجئين لعام 1951، فضلًا عن عدم انضمام معظم الدول العربية إلى هذه الاتفاقيات؛ وقد يُفضي ذلك إلى ثغرات واسعة في الضمانات القانونية للأفراد المتضررين، تحدُّ من سبل الاعتراف الرسمي بهم

their formal recognition and the provision of necessary protection. Furthermore, regional cooperation mechanisms remain in their early stages. Nevertheless, with proactive governance, migration can become a tool for climate-change adaptation and resilience-building rather than a source of instability.

Recent legal developments, including an advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in 2025, indicate an evolving understanding of states' responsibilities to avoid returning individuals to conditions involving serious climate-related risks. Accordingly, international migration frameworks are gradually recognizing the need for temporary protection, humanitarian visas, and flexible entry arrangements, thereby improving responses to cross-border displacement caused by climate impacts and disasters.

وتوفير الحماية اللازمة لهم. يُضاف إلى ذلك اقتصار آليات التعاون الإقليمي على مراحلها الأولى، غير أنه مع الحوكمة الاستباقيَّة، يمكن أن تُصبح الهجرة أداةً للتكيف مع تغير المناخ، وتعزيز القدرة على الصمود، بدلًا من أن تكون مصدرًا لعدم الاستقرار. وتُشير المستجِدات القانونية الأخيرة، ومنها رأي استشاري صادر عن محكمة العدل الدولية عام 2025، إلى تطور في التوقعات المتعلقة بمسؤوليات الدول لتجنب إعادة الأفراد إلى ظروف تنطوي على مخاطر جسيمة ذات صلة بالمناخ. وعليه، تُقرُّ أطر الهجرة الدولية تدريجيًّا بالحاجة إلى الحماية المؤقتة والتأشيرات الإنسانية وترتيبات الدخول المرنة، بما يُحسّن الاستجابة للنزوح العابر للحدود الناجم عن آثار المناخ والكوارث.

Introduction

The Arab region is experiencing profound shifts in migration and displacement dynamics, with climate change emerging as a central threat multiplier that exacerbates existing structural vulnerabilities, including conflicts, poverty, and environmental degradation. The region is warming at nearly twice the global average rate, and 2024 was recorded as the hottest year in its documented history, accompanied by severe heatwaves, droughts, and floods that have significantly affected water resources, agriculture, and public health.

As these climate pressures converge with persistent conflicts and economic challenges, the pace of displacement intensifies and its drivers become increasingly intertwined, making climate migration a security issue that requires preparedness and rapid response. The scale of the challenge is reflected in recent figures: more than 17 million people across the Arab world were displaced by conflicts in 2024 alone, while an additional 1.3 million were displaced by climate-related disasters. Projections further indicate that North Africa could witness up to 19.3 million internal climate migrants by 2050 in the absence of effective intervention.

In the face of this escalating reality, international and regional legal frameworks remain in need of further development, as they are not adequately equipped to address the phenomenon of climate-induced displacement. Climate-displaced

people are not recognized as a distinct legal category entitled to guaranteed protection. Within this international legislative gap, Arab states find themselves operating within a global protection system that has yet to adapt to the challenges posed by the growing impacts of climate change, resulting in significant protection shortcomings.

At the level of international financing mechanisms, the global Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage entered its initial operational stages during the twenty-ninth and thirtieth sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), including the establishment of governance arrangements and the launch of the first calls for project financing. However, current financial commitments remain substantially below estimated needs, and strategies for expanding available resources are still under development. Given that the Arab region is among the areas most rapidly affected by climate change, this level of financing underscores the need to better incorporate the costs of climate-related displacement and mobility into funding mechanisms.

Accordingly, this paper aims to analyze these interconnected challenges and review the legislative and implementation pathways that have emerged in the governance of climate migration. It also highlights the potential to transform migration—through appropriate proactive governance—from a source of security threats into an effective tool for enhancing adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change challenges.

Climate Change and Migration Trends in the Arab World

Extreme weather events have become an increasingly significant driver of displacement across the Arab world. Recent disasters, such as the 2023 floods in Libya and the monsoon storms in Yemen, have forced thousands of people to leave their homes. Internal displacement caused by natural disasters reached approximately 1.3 million people in 2023, further aggravating existing crises, including the drought-induced famine in Somalia. National disaster management systems are often unable to keep pace with these developments, leading to repeated appeals for international assistance.

Slow-onset climatic changes, such as desertification and water scarcity, are also gradually reshaping migration patterns, particularly in rural areas that depend on agriculture and pastoralism. Countries such as Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia continue to experience persistent drought conditions, resulting in rural population decline and increased migration toward urban centers. Rising sea levels also threaten coastal populations, particularly in Egypt's Nile Delta. The World Bank estimates that North Africa could witness up to 19 million internal climate migrants by 2050, contributing to rapid urbanization and increasing pressure on urban resources.

Climate-related migration flows can be monitored and early warning systems may be strengthened through new analytical approaches that process traditional migration data by developing real-time indicators and improving policy-planning capacities across the region.

Climate change rarely acts in isolation; rather, it amplifies other migration drivers, including conflict and poverty. For example, prolonged droughts contributed to rural-to-urban migration in Syria before the outbreak of the civil war, while many young people from Niger and Mali moved northward as agricultural livelihoods deteriorated. Climate pressure functions as a threat multiplier, increasing human mobility when combined with instability or economic hardship. Effective policies must therefore integrate humanitarian assistance, development initiatives, peacebuilding efforts, and climate adaptation measures.

Climate migration remains predominantly local in nature. Most movements occur within national borders or toward neighboring countries, as displaced populations typically seek destinations where cultural or family ties already exist. Furthermore, the concept of "climate refugees" lacks formal legal recognition, while restrictive border policies, such as those implemented in Europe, limit opportunities for cross-border migration. As a result, migrants often remain in, or move to, North African countries that are themselves increasingly affected by climate change.

Rapid urban growth, exacerbated by climate-driven migration from rural to urban areas, has contributed to the expansion of slums and informal settlements surrounding major cities. These areas are frequently exposed to environmental hazards and lack access to basic services, thereby increasing vulnerabilities for newly arrived populations. Urban planning and infrastructure investment are therefore essential to strengthen resilience and prevent social tensions associated with overcrowding. Addressing both the causes and consequences of climate-induced migration will help create sustainable opportunities for migrants and host communities alike.

Overall, climate change is significantly influencing migration patterns across the Arab world, and policymakers must adapt to these evolving realities.

Implications for Border Management

People displaced due to climate change do not enjoy a clearly defined legal status under international law, as existing international conventions do not recognize environmental factors as grounds for protection. In the Arab region, climate migrants are often regarded as irregular migrants, which frequently results in limited protection and restricted rights for affected populations. Regional policies also face substantive challenges in addressing climate-induced displacement, given the relative novelty of the phenomenon and the accelerating pace at which it is occurring. Border management procedures therefore require the development of appropriate standards for responding to mobility resulting from environmental events and natural disasters. The absence of such standards can push some displaced persons toward irregular migration routes, increasing their vulnerability and further complicating their humanitarian circumstances.

Border areas and host communities also face additional pressures arising from climate-induced displacement, particularly in regions already affected by resource scarcity. Such migration can place

significant strain on local infrastructure and social cohesion, underscoring the need for targeted support measures in affected areas. Unlike Africa's Kampala Convention, there are no binding regional agreements governing climate-related mobility in the Arab region. Instead, responses often rely on temporary and informal arrangements, which may lead to inconsistent and fragmented policy outcomes.

Vulnerable groups, including women, children, and persons with disabilities, face heightened risks during climate-related displacement. However, border policies frequently fail to provide adequate protection for these populations. While some countries have begun implementing targeted measures, broader efforts remain limited. Moreover, migration is still rarely regarded as a climate adaptation tool within policy frameworks, despite the fact that facilitating regular migration pathways could help alleviate economic pressures and strengthen resilience in affected communities.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration encourages such approaches; however, the programs currently available across the Arab world remain limited in scope and implementation.

In summary, border management and migration policies in the Arab world must evolve beyond traditional frameworks to address the realities of climate-induced migration. This requires balancing security concerns with humanitarian needs while strengthening regional cooperation.

Regional Cooperation Mechanisms

The Arab region does not have a binding regional treaty addressing internal displacement or climate migration, unlike the Kampala Convention in Africa and the expanded Cartagena Declaration framework in Latin America.

The League of Arab States has not yet adopted a binding regional framework to address displacement associated with climate change. Discussions remain ongoing and are influenced by the diversity of national priorities and the complexity of regional considerations. These considerations include issues of sovereignty and the presence of long-standing refugee populations, making consensus on formal commitments particularly sensitive and complex. Nevertheless, the growing urgency of climate change has stimulated new forms of dialogue, such as the joint statement issued by the League of Arab States and United Nations agencies in 2022, as well as the participation of several Arab countries in African initiatives, including the Kampala Declaration on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change.

Non-binding guidelines developed within the framework of the League of Arab States could establish common expectations regarding disaster assistance and best practices, potentially paving the way for future regional protocols.

Representatives of member states, international organizations, and civil society have also participated in the Regional Coordination Committee on Migration to address migration-related issues, exchange best practices, and promote mutual

understanding. Climate change and its impact on migration have become central topics within the Committee's agenda, leading to regular meetings, technical workshops, and the establishment of working groups focused on data collection, policy coordination, and capacity-building. Although the Committee's recommendations are not legally binding, they frequently influence national and regional strategies.

The Committee provides a flexible platform for cooperation that complements mechanisms such as those of the League of Arab States. Its consensus-based approach allows for gradual progress in politically sensitive areas. The Committee's role could be further reinforced through the creation of a specialized climate migration task force and by facilitating coordination among ministries across different sectors. It could also support bilateral arrangements, for example between North African states regarding drought-induced migration, or between Gulf countries and the Horn of Africa concerning labor migration, while providing additional legitimacy through endorsement by the League of Arab States.

Cooperation among Arab governments, United Nations agencies, and civil society organizations has expanded significantly following recent dialogues on climate adaptation, migration, and disaster risk reduction. A notable example is the regional dialogue held in Amman in December 2025, which brought together Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, United Nations agencies, and civil society organizations to integrate climate risks and population mobility considerations into disaster risk reduction and health adaptation strategies.

The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund supported comprehensive and risk-informed migration governance frameworks through joint implementation initiatives in Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. In addition, the Arab Region Climate Change and Migration Dialogues, led by ESCWA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and United Nations partners, have promoted the integration of climate considerations into migration and disaster risk policies, particularly in responding to displacement caused by floods, droughts, and sea-level rise.

Furthermore, the Regional Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab Region (2024–2026), issued by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), documents strengthened governance mechanisms and shared policy frameworks for integrating climate risks.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate a growing commitment to integrating climate adaptation and migration considerations into disaster risk management at both the national and regional levels.

ArabMET provides seasonal climate forecasts. Integrating these forecasts with the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), as well as national migration data and statistics, could significantly improve the accuracy of displacement forecasting. Proposals have also been presented to establish an **"Arab Region Disaster and Displacement Risk Atlas"** to support government planning. Early warning systems could alert neighboring countries and humanitarian organizations to unusual displacement movements, while a regional emergency response roster could enhance crisis management and coordination.

Despite ongoing political challenges, humanitarian cooperation has often produced positive outcomes, particularly in disaster response. The Arab region can further engage in South–South learning initiatives, coordinate with Global South coalitions on climate mobility, and support international legal efforts to clarify the status of climate-related displacement.

Technical partnerships, participation in global agreements, and access to financial resources that may be provided by certain countries could also contribute to financing climate adaptation projects across the region.

Presenting a unified voice in global forums would strengthen the Arab region's position in securing financial support and political backing. The global Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, established at the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties (COP28), should incorporate migration-related costs into its funding priorities. Regional coordination can also maximize the benefits derived from global frameworks, such as the Global Compact for Migration and the African Climate Mobility Initiative.

Several examples of bilateral cooperation already exist, including humanitarian corridors between Qatar and Sudan and joint efforts by Iran and Iraq to reduce dust storms. Expanding such initiatives could encompass cross-border resource management and flexible entry arrangements during climate emergencies. Building bilateral trust and establishing predefined rules and procedures are essential for effective crisis preparedness and more coordinated regional responses.

There is also growing recognition that collective action on climate-induced migration is indispensable for strengthening regional stability and resilience.

Recommendations

Establishing a "Climate Mobility Observatory"

A Climate Mobility Observatory should be established under the auspices of the League of Arab States or ESCWA, in cooperation with partners such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Its functions would include:

- Collecting and coordinating data on climate-related displacement.
- Developing early warning systems that integrate climate forecasts with migration trends.
- Publishing annual reports on climate migration hotspots and emerging risks.
- Collaborating with research institutions to conduct in-depth studies and analyses.

Incorporating Climate Migration Into National Planning

- Including human mobility considerations into climate change adaptation strategies and migration policies.
- Updating Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and adaptation plans to address human mobility and resilience-building measures.
- Developing contingency plans for sudden displacement events and reviewing urban and rural development plans.
- Training government agencies to better understand the linkages between climate mobility and emergency response planning.

Strengthening Legal Protection Frameworks and Migration Pathways

- Introducing temporary protection or humanitarian visa schemes for persons displaced by disasters.
- Preparing guidelines for planned internal relocation and resettlement.
- Adopting a regional declaration on climate change and human mobility.
- Utilizing global frameworks, including the Global Agreement on Climate and the Global Compact on Refugees, while strengthening national asylum systems.

Implementing Humanitarian Border Management (HBM) Mechanisms

- Establishing emergency standard operating procedures (SOPs) for managing migrant flows.
- Training border officials on humanitarian principles and raising awareness of the risks of human trafficking.
- Developing reception facilities and strengthening coordination with neighboring countries.
- Prioritizing the protection of the most vulnerable groups and avoiding the detention of migrants affected by disasters.

Strengthening Regional and International Partnerships

- Establishing a regional Arab Fund for Climate Mobility to support resilience-building projects.
- Advocating for the inclusion of climate financing considerations within climate adaptation projects.
- Expanding cooperation with United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, and development partners.
- Promoting South–South knowledge exchange and encouraging greater participation from the private sector.
- Monitoring progress through annual regional review mechanisms.

Conclusion

Climate-induced migration in the Arab world can be managed most effectively through proactive planning and enhanced cooperation. By integrating human mobility considerations into climate adaptation strategies, strengthening legal frameworks, and investing in preparedness measures, the Arab region can transform emerging challenges into an opportunity for enhancing resilience and achieving shared progress.

References

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). Migration and climate change in the Arab region (policy brief). IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa.

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2025a). Positioning the climate change–health–migration nexus in the Middle East and North Africa region: A framework for policy and action. Geneva: IOM.

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2025b). Region on the move: Regional mobility report for the Middle East and North Africa 2025. Cairo: IOM.

Janmyr, M. (2021). Non-signatory states and the international refugee regime. Forced Migration Review, (67).

Kim, K. (2025, January 31). De-securitizing climate migration in ARAB REGION. Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum (ARAB REGIONF).

League of Arab States (LAS), United Nations Economic

and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and United Nations Network on Migration. (2021). The Arab regional GCM review report: Progress, priorities, challenges and future prospects. Arab regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

World Bank. (2021). Groundswell Part 2: Acting on internal climate migration (Middle East and North Africa regional focus). Washington, DC: World Bank.

June 2026

Arab Center for Technical Cooperation in Migration and Border Management

Naif Arab University for Security Sciences

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Keywords: migration governance, migration, border security, climate change

يونيو 2026

المركز العربي للتعاون الفني في إدارة الهجرة والحدود

جامعة نايف العربية للعلوم الأمنية

الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

الكلمات المفتاحية: حوكمة الهجرة، الهجرة، أمن الحدود، تغير المناخ

Production and hosting by NAUSS

Email: MBC@nauss.edu.sa

doi:10.26735/BSIS3967