



The Gaps in NAPs: More must be done to integrate human (im)mobility into National Adaptation Plans

Sustainable climate adaptation outcomes for people and places require policies that facilitate the ability to move and the resilience to stay. However, research into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) has uncovered significant gaps in how human (im)mobility — which includes displacement, migration, planned relocation, and immobility — is addressed. This short piece looks at how and why human (im)mobility is insufficiently mainstreamed into national climate adaptation planning and identifies opportunities to close these gaps.

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This short article examines the national adaptation planning process within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)), with a close-up look at the integration of human (im)mobility in the context of climate change into National Adaptation Plans ([NAPs](#)). The piece identifies significant gaps in addressing human (im)mobility in adaptation planning and suggests potential measures to address the identified gaps. Human (im)mobility in this context includes migration, displacement, planned relocation, and immobility (voluntary and involuntary).

The research data presented herein updates the findings of a previous study, [Addressing Climate-Related Human Mobility through NDCs and NAPs, State of Play, Good Practices and Way Forward](#), by Mombauer, Link, and van der Geest (Mombauer et al., 2023). This update focuses exclusively on NAPs, not Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). At the time of the original study, a total of 40 NAPs had been finalized and submitted. When the research for this update was completed (February

2024), 53 countries had finalised and submitted their NAPs to the UNFCCC.

Overview of climate adaptation under the UNFCCC

The Conference of Parties meeting in Cancún in 2010 (COP 16) was a significant inflection point in how both human mobility and climate change adaptation are conceptualised and addressed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Acknowledging [for the first time](#) within the UNFCCC the importance of addressing the challenges of “displacement, migration and planned relocation” in the context of climate change, the [Cancún Agreements](#) also established the Cancún Adaptation Framework. The framework included a process to support developing nations formulate and implement National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to address medium- and long-term adaptation needs. It also called on developed nations to scale up climate adaptation funding for developing countries, including through the establishment of the [Green Climate Fund](#). These actions were to be implemented under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (Paragraph 14), or CBDR.

State NAPs were meant to build upon earlier adaptation planning efforts initiated in 2001 (COP 7) to support least developed nations. That initiative involved the development of [National Adaptation Programmes of Action](#) (or NAPAs, not to be confused with NAPs) by least developed countries (LDCs) to help address vulnerability to climate change. However, from the perspective of addressing human (im)mobility challenges in the context of climate change, the NAPA process was a disappointment. Whilst many NAPAs acknowledged that habitat and livelihood loss could lead to displacement and migration, NAPAs generally provided little detail on efforts to support people facing displacement or facilitate adaptative mobilities ([Warner et al., 2014](#)). In instances where mobility was referenced in NAPAs, it was usually framed in a negative light, i.e., as something that needed to be controlled or curtailed.

Nearly a decade ago, suggesting that the NAPA process had been a missed opportunity, several experts (Koko Warner, Walter Kälin, Susan Martin, and Youssef Nassef) called for [better integration of human mobility into the newly launched NAP process](#), encouraging States to adopt measures to “prevent unwanted ‘distress migration’ and

displacement while facilitating beneficial movements that enable better adjustments to the impacts of climate change” (Warner et al, 2015, p.8). NAPs, they argued, could provide policy-makers and practitioners with clear guidance to support “coherence across migration and adaptation policy,” including the relationship between sustainable human development and resilience.

Yet research conducted in 2023 ([Mombauer et al., 2023](#)) and subsequently updated for this short piece shows that more than a decade on since Cancún, with the first iterations of many NAPs now finalized, there remain significant human (im)mobility gaps in State and UNFCCC adaptation planning. Below, we identify these gaps, including some of the contributing factors, in hopes that they can be filled – as States develop new or update existing NAPs in what is intended to be an iterative process. We will also look at related gaps in what had been agreed to at Cancún and elsewhere, particularly concerning climate adaptation funding, and how these intersect to the detriment of communities facing (im)mobility challenges related to climate change.

How migration, displacement, relocation, and immobility feature in NAPs

Of the 53 countries that have submitted their NAPs at the time of this study (all submitted NAPs are available [here](#)), 37 were available in English, nine in French, and seven in Spanish.

- Notably, 85 percent of NAPs (45 in total) reference some type of human (im)mobility.
- Among the referenced types of mobility, migration is the most common, with mentions in 37 NAPs, followed by displacement (36), planned relocation (26), and immobility (2).
- The two countries mentioning immobility, [Chad](#) and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), addressed involuntary immobility in connection with conflicts.
- 35 of those 45 NAPs that reference human mobility also include some form of a human mobility strategy. However, it must be highlighted that most strategies and action plans are relatively broad and, arguably, insufficiently granular for actionable implementation if not connected to subnational, localized, and sector-specific plans and implementation frameworks.

- The predominant strategies and actions concerning human mobility in NAPs can be classified into the following categories: Enhancing data availability and closing evidence gaps; enhancing policy coherence and vertical or horizontal integration; engaging in anticipatory planning and scenario development; strengthening the enabling environment; protecting and supporting people on the move, families staying behind, and host communities; preventing movement through adaptation and resilience-building; and utilizing mobility as an adaptation strategy ([Mombauer et al., 2023](#)).
- Many NAPs aim to reduce displacement and the vulnerability of migrants, displaced people, and refugees. Notably, most NAPs focus on ‘controlling’ or ‘curtailing’ migration, while only a few (e.g., from [Ethiopia](#) and [Benin](#)) include strategies for supporting migration as adaptation.
- Strategies explicitly addressing the needs of ‘involuntarily immobile’ populations (i.e., those unable to move) are absent from all NAPs submitted thus far.

Funding, Understanding, and Implementation Gaps

Here, we will highlight three broad and interconnected gaps that need to be addressed to increase the support of migrants and displaced and immobile populations: Funding gaps, gaps in understanding, and implementation gaps.

Gaps in funding

Gaps in climate finance directly and indirectly contribute to the other two gaps. First, there are significant problems concerning funding for NAP development. Interviews with stakeholders and governments working on NAPs revealed that while pathways exist for countries to secure funding for NAP development and implementation, securing funds is often bureaucratic and time-consuming ([Mombauer et al., 2023](#)). Stakeholders also point out that even when funding is approved, the allocated amounts are frequently too low to adequately support the comprehensive planning and implementation processes of integrating human (im)mobility into NAPs.

As is regularly highlighted in the UNEP’s annual [Adaptation Gap](#) report, climate change adaptation itself has been chronically underfunded. The first [Global Stocktake](#), from COP 28 (2023), also acknowledges that “current levels of climate finance, technology development and transfer,

and capacity-building for adaptation remain insufficient” (para. 81). Moreover, only a fraction of climate finance [finds its way to the local communities](#) where adaptation efforts are needed most. Additionally, very little climate adaptation funding has been granted to [projects directly addressing human \(im\)mobility](#).

Gaps in understanding

Gaps in understanding (im)mobility’s potential role in adaptation have also contributed negatively to how (im)mobility is integrated into NAPs. Reflecting a [sedentary bias](#) at the State level, many NAPs position human mobility and its outcomes as negative or problematic. Many NAPs focus on avoiding or reducing adverse impacts and maladaptive aspects of climate mobility, though there are exceptions. Some countries have included provisions beyond this ‘negative’ view of human mobility, aiming to utilize mobility as an adaptation strategy and strengthen the benefits and potential synergies of migration or relocation (e.g., [Ethiopia](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Benin](#)).

An additional gap in the NAPs is a lack of knowledge about human immobility, both voluntary and involuntary, in the context of climate change. As mentioned above, only the NAPs of Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo address human immobility, referencing it in the dual contexts of climate change and conflict. As highlighted in the report, [10 New Insights In Climate Science 2023/2024](#), immobility is as much of a challenge as displacement. Despite the rising numbers of individuals [unable to move internationally](#) because of resource constraints caused by climate impacts and the [elevated risks](#) faced by immobile people in the context of climate change, this issue is not adequately addressed in NAPs. This oversight may worsen vulnerabilities among immobile populations, impeding their ability to respond to climate-related threats locally. Neglecting the challenges faced by these individuals could hinder national efforts to achieve broader goals of climate adaptation, resilience, and addressing loss and damage.

Finally, none of the NAPs directly acknowledge [voluntary immobility](#) or include measures to support the right to stay, a critical component of [mobility justice](#), though notably, the [NAP of the Marshall Islands](#) highlights the right of its citizens “to determine their responses to climate change supported by observations, local, indigenous knowledge, and science-based actions” (Marshall Islands, p. 30). Additionally,

[Argentina's NAP](#) mentions strategies to help “root” indigenous communities (Argentina, p.189).

Implementation gaps

The third gap concerns limited implementation strategies within the NAPs directly related to (im)mobility. In the interviews that [Mombauer et al.](#) (2023) conducted with stakeholders and governments, the lack of capacities in ministries was identified as a significant challenge for NAP implementation. These were interlinked with insufficient resources, hindering coordination and contribution from line ministries. Power imbalances and diverging interests among ministries contributed to siloed work, while shifting governments and priorities impeded long-term strategic planning, especially in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning phases. Limited multi-stakeholder engagement and input opportunities were consistently highlighted. Some States didn't include any references to mobility. In interviews, officials from these countries suggested that human mobility in the context of climate change wasn't an issue or a priority, although empirical evidence from those countries suggests otherwise.

Addressing the Gaps in the NAPs

NAPs are meant to be iterative, involving regular updates. As such, there is still ample scope to integrate human (im)mobility more fully into national adaptation planning. However, there is a need for continued funding – not just for NAP formulation and implementation but also for monitoring, evaluating, and updating NAPs as part of this iterative process. Addressing these interconnected gaps to enhance support for migrants, displaced and relocated individuals, and immobile populations requires multifaceted approaches.

Tackling funding gaps necessitates streamlining bureaucratic procedures and expediting the allocation of adequate resources for NAP planning and mainstreaming into policy. Achieving a balanced perspective on human (im)mobility within NAPs entails comprehensive data collection, interdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, examination of case studies, capacity building, and international collaboration to address knowledge gaps. Addressing gaps of understanding entails adopting a balanced perspective on human (im)mobility within NAPs, acknowledging that mobility in the context of climate change is not intrinsically bad or good. It can be both, depending on the

circumstances, which can be influenced by policy. Sustainable outcomes for people and places require policy that facilitates the ability to move and the resilience to stay.

Conclusion

Although climate finance challenges are likely to persist, there is a renewed effort within the UNFCCC to improve climate adaptation finance through the [New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance](#) (NCQG) and other initiatives advanced at COP 28. An enhanced understanding of climate (im)mobility in national adaptation planning could also inform work at the global level and inform metrics for adaptation success in situations of (im)mobility, for example, in connection to the [Global Goal on Adaptation](#) (GGA). While the GGA framework adopted at COP28 does not explicitly mention human mobility, considerations related to migration, displacement, planned relocation, and immobility are vital for several of the agreed-upon GGA targets and could directly inform the development of indicators to be included in NAPs and other national adaptation planning and reporting processes.

Additionally, through the operationalisation of [the loss and damage fund](#) at COP 28, which includes “displacement”, “relocation”, and “migration” in the new fund’s scope, the UNFCCC has essentially created [a third pillar of climate action](#), along with mitigation and adaptation. NAPs could serve as an excellent vehicle for States to advance integrated and compelling visions for how climate (im)mobility can be addressed holistically across both adaptation and loss and damage. The climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, climate mobilities, and development communities should all support and encourage developing nations and their stakeholders in this endeavour.

Walter Kälin has observed, “Climate-induced displacement is [the human face of loss and damage](#)” (p.13). However, loss and damage only occurs [when mitigation and adaptation efforts fail or are inadequate](#). After more than two decades of insufficient progress within the UNFCCC to address mobility challenges related to climate change, isn’t it time for displacement, migration, and planned relocation to become the human face of national adaptation planning – or at least become much more central to how we conceptualise and approach climate adaptation?

NAPs matter because they offer an opportunity to address migration, displacement, planned relocation, and immobility comprehensively, recognizing both the potential challenges and opportunities related to human mobility in the context of climate change. NAPs can be crucial in supporting individuals on the move, those left behind, or those unable or unwilling to move – by contributing to adaptive measures, resilience, development, and actions addressing loss and damage within climate vulnerable communities.

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