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► Scoping study on promoting labour market reintegration in the context of climate mobility in Pacific Island countries



- ▶ **Scoping study on promoting labour market reintegration in the context of climate mobility in Pacific Island countries**

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Foreword

Pacific Island countries stand at the frontline of the global climate crisis. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation are not distant threats, they are daily realities shaping the lives, livelihoods, and futures of Pacific peoples. These impacts are forcing many to move, whether through displacement, planned relocation, or migration, while also challenging those who remain. In this context, reintegration is not only about returning home, but about ensuring that affected workers and communities can rebuild their lives with dignity, secure decent work, and contribute to resilient and inclusive societies.

This study on Promoting Labour Market Reintegration in the Context of Climate Mobility in Pacific Island Countries provides timely and critical insights into how we can better respond to these challenges. It underscores that climate mobility is not merely about movement, but about people, their dignity, rights, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities and economies, whether at home or abroad.

The findings of this report make clear that reintegration must be at the heart of our collective response. Ensuring that returning migrant workers, displaced communities, and relocated populations can access decent work, social protection, and sustainable livelihoods is essential to resilience in the Pacific. At the same time, labour mobility, if well-governed and is rights-based, can serve as a powerful adaptation strategy, strengthening both individual and community capacity to withstand climate shocks.

This report also highlights that no single actor can achieve these outcomes alone. Governments, employers, workers' organizations, civil society, diaspora groups, and regional and international partners all have vital roles to play. Through tripartite dialogue, whole-of-society engagement, and stronger regional cooperation, we can transform the challenges of climate mobility into opportunities for building just, inclusive, and climate-resilient futures.

The International Labour Organization is proud to contribute to this work through the Pacific Climate Change, Migration and Human Security (PCCMHS) Programme and through our broader Decent Work Agenda. I trust that this report will serve as an important resource for policymakers, social partners, and communities across the Pacific, as we continue to work together to ensure that no one is left behind.



Martin Wandera

Director

ILO Office for the Pacific Island Countries

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A returned migrant worker in front of his new boat.

©Department of Labour Vanuatu.

Executive summary

Pacific Island countries are facing unprecedented challenges due to climate change, including sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and ecosystem degradation. These threats are driving various forms of human mobility including forced displacement, planned relocation, and migration. As these movements intensify, the need for fair, inclusive, and rights-based labour market integration has become increasingly urgent.

This study, conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), as part of the **Pacific Climate Change, Migration, and Human Security Phase II Program** explores how climate-induced mobility is impacting workers across the Pacific and evaluates the barriers and opportunities for reintegrating affected populations, especially returning migrant workers into local labour markets. Using qualitative interviews and a literature review, the report identifies systemic gaps in policy coherence, reintegration support, and institutional coordination across the region.

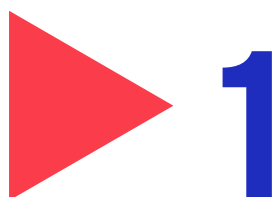
Several regional frameworks, including the landmark **Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility**, and national reintegration strategies in Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and others, are showing promising progress. However, gaps remain in social protection systems, skills recognition, and inclusive governance.

To support these efforts, the report outlines a range of policy, programmatic, and institutional measures aimed at strengthening labour mobility systems and ensuring inclusive reintegration across the region.

This study contributes to the implementation of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility, which advocates for proactive, humane, and sustainable solutions that uphold the dignity and resilience of Pacific communities in the face of climate-induced mobility. While this study provides critical insights and actionable recommendations to strengthen labour market reintegration in the context of climate mobility in the Pacific, it also highlights areas that require further attention. Notably, gaps remain in fully addressing the specific needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, whose intersectional vulnerabilities compound their risk of exclusion. Furthermore, while existing recommendations propose important institutional measures, there is an urgent need to translate these into robust, country-level implementation frameworks backed by financing, data systems, and cross-sectoral coordination. Strengthening fair recruitment practices, embedding labour rights in planned relocation processes, and explicitly prioritizing climate-vulnerable populations across labour mobility schemes are critical next steps to ensure no one is left behind.



A migrant worker at a pre-integration pilot programme.



Introduction

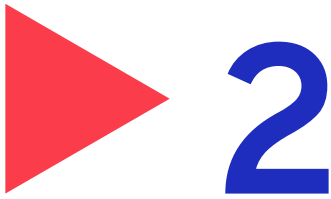
Pacific Island countries (PICs) are among the most ecologically fragile territories in the world. Their vulnerability is unique and multidimensional, encompassing vulnerability to a range of climate events, both slow-onset and sudden-onset, including sea level rise, increased temperatures, ocean acidification, coastal erosion and climate phenomena such as El Niño and La Niña – all of which exacerbate existing systemic vulnerabilities. The geographical characteristics of PICs – such as small land size, widespread island distribution and remoteness from major global markets – reinforce their dependence and increase their economic exposure to external shocks.

Although PICs are responsible for releasing just 0.02 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions, they are among the most impacted countries due to climate change (UNEP 2023). Over the past two decades, various studies have shown that the region will experience rising temperatures, which will lead to a rise in sea levels. This rise is projected to be between 0.18 and 0.59 metres during the period 2080–2099. In addition, extreme weather events are also predicted to increase, including high rainfall, an increase in the number of hot days, and rising ocean acidity. The highly diverse geographical and environmental characteristics of the islands mean that the impacts of climate change will vary from country to country. However, in general, both gradual and sudden climate events have the potential to cause population displacement and migration.

The link between climate change and human mobility in the Pacific region is complex and multi-layered, reflecting intertwined social, economic and ecological realities. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, amplifying the impacts of other factors such as poverty, loss of livelihoods and depletion of resources, which can collectively trigger various forms of displacement and migration, including planned relocation, involuntary displacement and migration as an adaptation strategy.

More than 50,000 Pacific Islanders are already being displaced each year due to climate change and related disasters (UN 2021). Many Pacific Islanders are also believed to migrate in response to the slow onset impacts of climate change, using migration as a form of adaptation. Others are beginning to move in planned relocations of communities facing existential climate risks.

These movements have significant impacts on the ability of people in the Pacific to respond to climate change and protect their rights. Rights-based mobility that is voluntary, well-governed and enables labour market reintegration with decent work is likely to help people adapt to climate change impacts. However, mobility without guarantees of decent work could lead to people being even worse-off than they would have been if they had stayed in place.



About this study

This scoping study seeks to build a comprehensive understanding of how climate change-induced mobility in PICs – whether through forced displacement, planned relocation or labour migration – affects workers' prospects for reintegration into local labour markets. The study examines the challenges and opportunities faced by returning migrant workers and affected communities, with particular attention to how reintegration can be made sustainable, inclusive and resilient in the face of climate-related disruptions. It also considers the implications for labour rights and broader socio-economic conditions, both for those who move and for those who remain, and provides context-specific policy recommendations to support PICs in strengthening labour market reintegration as a central response to climate mobility and its multi-dimensional impacts.

The study is grounded in an extensive body of Pacific-focused literature, regional research and previously conducted studies that examine the intersections of climate change, human mobility and labour rights. It builds upon and complements existing evidence, drawing directly from the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility, the Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security (PCCMHS) programme and other regional policy frameworks. Anchored in ILO frameworks, including the Decent Work Agenda, the ILO Fair Recruitment Guidelines, and the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition, this study not only contributes new empirical insights, but also reinforces and advances established regional and international commitments to uphold the dignity, rights and resilience of Pacific Island communities facing climate-induced mobility.

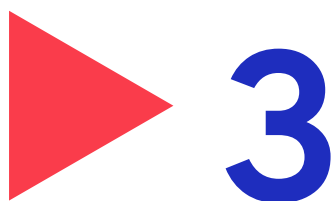
Methodologically, the study combined desk research with an innovative digital ethnography approach¹, using a whole-of-society framework to capture a wide variety of perspectives. Participant selection was done in consultation with the ILO and followed a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. Interviewees included:

- government officials from Pacific countries;
- representatives of employer associations and trade unions;
- human rights and women's rights leaders;
- faith-based and diaspora group leaders in Australia and New Zealand; and
- civil society organizations supporting migrant workers' rights.

The interviews took place over a 45 days period and were mostly conducted online, generating over 50 hours of data. Some participants interviewed more than once to secure further insights.

The study contributes directly to advancing the objectives of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility in order to support proactive, humane and coordinated responses to climate-induced mobility across the Pacific region.

¹ As per Forberg and Shilt 2023.



Objectives of the study

The objective of the study is to examine the dynamics of labour market reintegration in the context of climate mobility in PICs, with a view to identifying existing practices, challenges and policy gaps, and to generate evidence that can inform strategies for promoting sustainable employment and resilient livelihoods. The study will also provide recommendations to support policy development and programme design to strengthen reintegration outcomes.

The study aims to conduct an in-depth evidence-based analysis of how climate change exacerbates social and economic vulnerability, particularly among vulnerable groups, and to examine the implications for access to decent work at the national and regional levels. This analysis is expected to not only identify direct impacts, but also to unravel the structures that exacerbate social inequalities in the context of increasingly intense climate change.

Further, the study is aimed at identifying the various structural and operational challenges faced by migrant workers affected by climate change in terms of sustainable reintegration, as well as developing concrete, applicable policy recommendations based on the principles of decent work, social justice and sustainable development. With this approach, the study aims not only to respond to short-term needs, but also to lay a strong normative and institutional foundation for sustainable reintegration as well as long-term protection of the rights of migrant workers in the Pacific region.

The study also aims to design a resilience approach based on ILO's international labor standards, making the principles of just transition, expansion of access to decent work and strengthening social protection systems central elements in the process of labor market reintegration in the face of climate change dynamics. This study positions human mobility not merely as a passive consequence of vulnerability, but as an active adaptation tool that can strengthen the social and economic resilience of communities in the Pacific region.

Gender and intersectionality dimensions in the context of climate mobility are often overlooked in policy formulation and programme implementation in the Pacific region. Consultation results indicate that women, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and other minority groups face greater structural barriers in accessing safe and dignified adaptive migration pathways.

In the context of labor mobility, women often bear a double burden, both as migrants and as breadwinners for the families they leave behind. Gender-based violence, discrimination in access to decent work, and limited economic opportunities are real challenges faced by this group (UN Women 2023). Lack of attention to these dimensions can deepen existing inequalities and hinder the effectiveness of migration-based adaptation and reintegration programmes. Therefore, the adoption of a human rights-based approach that mainstreams gender equality and social inclusion principles is an absolute necessity.

 4

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Climate mobility is a conceptual term that refers to the entire spectrum of human movement triggered, either directly or indirectly, by the impacts of climate change. This concept encompasses various forms of mobility, including forced displacement due to natural disasters, labour migration to enhance resilience or as a means of adaptation, and planned relocation of communities to avoid long-term risks to human safety and well-being.

This mobility is not merely a response to real environmental risks, but reflects multidimensional interactions between social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. Every decision to move or to stay is driven not only by environmental change, but also by structural factors such as unequal access to resources, community adaptive capacity and underlying socio-economic vulnerability.

In this context, climate mobility is seen as an integral part of human rights-based adaptation strategies. Effective policy interventions in the context of climate mobility must ensure that human displacement strengthens community resilience, expands access to decent economic opportunities and ensures respect for the human rights of individuals and communities as a whole.

4.1. Labour mobility

Labour migration can be used to boost resilience in communities through the generation of remittances, the transfer of knowledge and skills, and the development of networks that can lead to entrepreneurship and new markets. Well-managed and rights-based labour mobility and adaptation policies can provide opportunities to boost resilience and enhance development while reducing the risk of future displacement.

4.2. Planned relocation

Planned relocation refers to the process of permanently moving communities from areas threatened by climate change to places deemed safer and more sustainable. Unlike spontaneous displacement, which is emergency-based, planned relocation is carried out through a systematic planning process that involves meaningful consultation with affected communities and is grounded in respect for human rights.

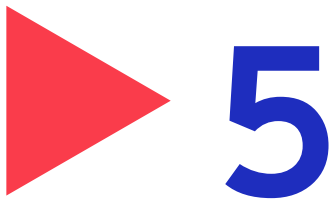
Effective relocation must guarantee that the rights to adequate housing, land and resources are fully protected, and that the preservation of the cultural and social identity of communities is prioritized. In addition, relocation must provide equal access to productive employment, quality education, health services and sustainable livelihoods in the new destination area. Active community involvement in all stages of planning and implementation is an absolute prerequisite for ensuring the social legitimacy of the relocation process. Adequate resource support,

long-term political commitment and a legal framework that guarantees the protection of community rights are also crucial factors in ensuring that relocation becomes an opportunity to build a more sustainable future, rather than merely being a mitigating measure against environmental threats.



Migrant workers take part in a pre-integration pilot programme.

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Background: Climate change and mobility in the Pacific

Over the last three decades, climate change has intensified the range of sudden-onset and slow-onset hazards faced by Pacific Island communities (IOM and ILO 2022). When the Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise was issued in 2023, Pacific Island Forum leaders reiterated that the threats and adverse impacts of climate change and sea-level rise were “defining issue threatening the lives, livelihoods and well-being of Pacific peoples, communities and countries”.

The interconnectedness between climate change and labour mobility is highly nuanced in the Pacific, as it is in other global regions. Several regional frameworks on climate change and migration have previously articulated links between climate change, natural disasters and the movement of vulnerable Pacific communities, including the [2016 Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific](#) and the [Boe Declaration on Regional Security](#). The [Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility](#) acknowledges the intricate link between climate change and different forms of human mobility experienced by Pacific peoples due to the increasing impacts of sea-level rise, extreme weather events and environmental degradation.

This study draws from [Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security \(PCCMHS\)](#) programme terminology and refers to “climate mobility” as an umbrella term encompasses the distinct types of movements observed in the context of climate change in the Pacific, namely displacement,² planned relocation³ and migration⁴. In addition, the study also acknowledges a fourth strategy: “staying in place”, which underpins the fundamental right for Pacific peoples to remain in their homes and countries with safety and dignity. Although the migration options available to Pacific people – including regional seasonal worker schemes – almost always reflect economic reasons for migration, the influence of climate change on migration opportunities is increasing in prominence, and it can be assumed that climate change has become a factor for migration, despite migrants not being able to articulate this explicitly (Weber 2015). It is also likely that climate mobility will follow established migration pathways, although it is important to note that most Pacific communities want to remain in their homes and continue to build their adaptive capacities and resilience so that they can do so with dignity.

Various studies and programmes have tried to narrow the gap in understanding the link between climate change and labour mobility in the Pacific. The PCCMHS programme, delivered through a partnership among UN agencies,⁵ the Platform on Disaster Displacement and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, recognizes

² Displacement: Defined by the PCCMHS as forced movement which can take place internally or cross-border.

³ Planned Relocation: Defined by the PCCMHS as the movement of households or communities which implies a permanent transplanting of communities and their assets in another location.

⁴ Migration: Defined by the PCCMHS as being undertaken voluntarily, for example, rural-to-urban movement or cross-border labour migration undertaken as a form of adaptation.

⁵ Namely, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the ILO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

labour mobility as a critical adaptation strategy for PICs in providing economic opportunities for those people who have the option to migrate for work, for example, through migrant worker schemes in the Pacific. The PCCMHS sees labour mobility as an opportunity for Pacific migrant workers to develop their skills to alleviate some of the pressures of climate displacement. The PCCMHS approach emphasizes “human security” when managing climate-driven mobility and ensuring that the rights and well-being of Pacific migrant workers are protected at all times. Using a collaborative partnership approach, the PCCMHS programme has focused on enhancing governance frameworks for labour mobility and building a solid evidence base to inform policies and frameworks encouraging labour migration and to support Pacific communities’ strengthened resilience and labour migration options.

The need to allow Pacific people to migrate safely and to work and live with dignity in receiving countries and communities is urgent. Whether or not labour migrants, relocated communities and displaced persons are explicitly articulating climate change as the reason for their movement, it is more imperative than ever before that sustainable and well-managed labour migration and mobility are prioritized for Pacific communities. This includes collaborative engagement by Pacific governments and regional and international stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, and workers’ and employers’ organizations. Strengthened recommendations on promoting socio-economic labour market reintegration for Pacific migrants in the context of climate change, as well as policy priorities around the re-integration of returnees, are critical to ensuring access to decent work. This scoping study will use a combination of methodologies to formulate practical recommendations relating to labour market access and reintegration in the Pacific context.

5.1. Importance of labour market reintegration in the context of climate change

It is widely recognized that migrant workers face significant challenges upon migrating and when returning to their home countries, especially when these processes are unplanned or forced. Reintegration is the process that enables individuals to rebuild the economic, social and psychosocial connections necessary to sustain life, livelihoods and dignity in their home countries and to participate in civil life (IOM 2019). Without clear and comprehensive policies, migrant workers and other returnees will find it difficult to sustainably reintegrate.

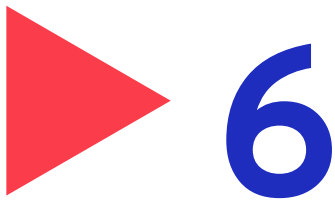
Effective reintegration requires access to resources and opportunities. This includes the ability to build a sustainable and dignified life, as well as guarantees of equal rights. Decent work is a key element of reintegration to prevent poverty, discrimination or other forms of unsafe migration.

The impacts of unmitigated climate change could threaten businesses and employment simultaneously. However, these negative impacts can be mitigated through sound planning and policies in the field of employment. Pacific countries need evidence-based approaches to ensure that reintegration includes economic and social aspects, including labour market reintegration.

Specifically for PICs, it is crucial to have integration policies that include access to decent work in countries of origin and destination, not only for those facing climate disasters but also for seasonal migrant workers who have worked abroad. Support for entrepreneurship, skills recognition and job creation in their home countries will enable them to contribute significantly through skill transfer, investment and community development.

The narrative on climate change and migration has conventionally been framed in terms of vulnerability, with an emphasis on forms of population displacement resulting from environmental or socio-economic pressures. However, there is now growing attention being paid to the potential contributions of climate-affected migrants and to policies designed to generate positive impacts from climate-induced mobility. Labour market reintegration is critical for migrant workers to successfully contribute to these processes.

Displacement is often seen as a temporary phenomenon, although in reality it can be recurrent or prolonged. Therefore, adaptation planning needs to take these dynamics into account, and relocation may become a necessity.



Challenges and barriers to labour market reintegration in the context of climate mobility in Pacific Island countries

While the concept of climate mobility is still relatively new, it is widely regarded by stakeholders as both highly relevant and urgent. There is broad recognition of the growing visibility of climate-induced mobility; however, study respondents indicated that the connection between climate change and labour migration as an adaptation strategy remains insufficiently understood. This highlights the need for more robust policy development and a clearer conceptual framework, particularly in designing transnational labour policies that effectively respond to the evolving impacts of climate change.

Stakeholders across the Pacific region have expressed a strong understanding of the complex challenges associated with labour market integration and reintegration in the context of climate-induced mobility. Insights gathered from key informants spanning government institutions, civil society, employer organizations and trade unions reflect a deep awareness of the structural and socio-economic constraints that hinder the full and inclusive integration of climate-displaced and mobile populations into national and regional labour markets, either abroad or upon return.

The following challenges were identified:

Limited recognition of skills and qualifications

Returning migrant workers often face difficulties in securing employment that reflects the skills, experience and qualifications they acquired abroad. Training and education systems in countries of origin are frequently misaligned with local labour market needs, as many migrants are trained to meet the requirements of destination countries. There is a clear need for mechanisms that bridge this gap and for systems that formally recognize prior learning and work experience, including those gained through informal or non-academic channels. Successful models from Fiji and Vanuatu include skills certification initiatives, financial literacy training and entrepreneurship support, which often involve private sector engagement.

Inadequate support for social and community reintegration

Social reintegration remains a critical yet under-addressed dimension of return migration. NGOs emphasized their role in providing psychosocial support and fostering community engagement through local partnerships, such as with churches and women's groups. Governments also acknowledged their responsibility in facilitating awareness campaigns and reintegration programmes. Diaspora organizations have acted as key enablers by mentoring returnees, sharing success stories and creating networks that encourage reintegration at the community level. Such efforts help to reduce stigma and to foster inclusion.

Restricted access to social protection and services

Access to essential social services, such as healthcare, welfare schemes and legal assistance, remains limited for many returning migrants. In most PICs, social protection coverage is minimal, and often restricted to provident fund contributions with little to no provision for maternity benefits, accident insurance or disaster relief. Stakeholders highlighted the urgent need for governments to establish comprehensive policies that safeguard returnees' access to basic services throughout the migration cycle. Examples from Tuvalu revealed that inadequate healthcare infrastructure poses significant challenges for returnees. In Fiji and Vanuatu, cases of unprepared reintegration have led to instances of exploitation and additional socio-economic strain on families.

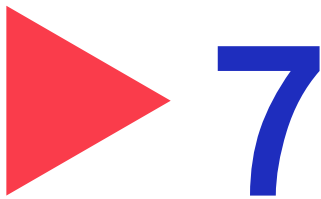
Financial vulnerability and debt burden

Financial instability is a recurring challenge, often deriving from debt incurred during the migration process. Positive practices have emerged, where employers and workers' representatives collaborate to offer financial literacy training before departure and after return. NGOs also emphasized the value of including family members, particularly women, in financial management workshops, as this has been shown to improve debt management and the use of remittances for productive purposes.

Broader cross-cutting barriers

Several overarching issues affect labour market integration across all types of climate mobility, including:

- language and communication barriers, particularly for migrants in foreign labour markets;
- discrimination and social exclusion, which disproportionate impact women, youth and persons with disabilities;
- limited access to legal services and financial systems, both in sending and receiving countries; and
- lack of institutional follow-up, which results in fragmented and unsustainable reintegration support.



Labour market integration challenges by type of climate mobility

7.1. Internally displaced populations

Internal displacement – which is often triggered by sudden-onset disasters such as cyclones or volcanic eruptions but can also be the result of slow-onset environmental degradation – presents acute challenges to labour market integration in the Pacific.

Key issues include:

- loss of livelihoods and economic insecurity due to damage to agriculture, infrastructure and local markets;
- social and cultural dislocation, including loss of traditional networks and loss of customary land;
- lack of culturally sensitive programmes offering solutions;
- inadequate institutional capacity to provide comprehensive support in host communities; and
- increased vulnerability of specific groups, notably women, youth and persons with disabilities during post-disaster recovery.

The 2015 Cyclone Pam displaced approximately 65,000 people in Vanuatu and serves as a salient example of the cascading impacts that climate disasters can have on labour and livelihoods. Respondents emphasized the need for skills training and livelihood support for displaced individuals to sustain themselves in temporary locations.

Good practices identified include:

- Community-based and culturally sensitive approaches to relocation and reintegration, involving traditional leaders and respecting customary rights.
- Involvement of civil society and the private sector in providing services, as the support needed by affected communities is diverse and includes the need for services ranging from trauma counselling and healthcare to services addressing gender, protection and livelihood issues.
- Integrated pre-disaster planning that incorporates both evacuees and host communities to ensure alignment of needs and expectations.

- Multi-agency coordination, such as the collaboration among Vanuatu's Department of Labour, Department of Climate Change and National Disaster Management Office, which resulted in the 2018 National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement.

7.2. Planned relocation

Planned relocation, especially in countries such as Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, raises a distinct set of integration challenges, often exacerbated by the relocation of entire communities across different social, cultural and ecological landscapes.

Commonly cited challenges include:

- loss of traditional livelihoods and difficulties in adapting to new economic environments;
- cultural loss and tensions with host communities;
- insufficient coordination and inclusive planning, particularly in government-led relocation efforts;
- lack of access to decent work for all sections of the population; and
- lack of inclusive integration policies.

Good practices identified include:

- Environmental and livelihoods support are critical to integration, as is the social and cultural support of affected communities, which is often provided by faith-based groups and other private sector actors.
- Inclusion of women at all stages of planning process, as gender-tailored approaches are critical for successful integration

In March 2023, the Government of Fiji launched its Planned Relocation Guideline, which sets out standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the implementation of relocations. This document is designed to address the relocation of communities negatively affected by climate change, in line with Fiji's Climate Change Act. The SOPs aim to prevent, minimize and address losses and damage caused by adverse climate impacts, and adopt a human-centred and human rights-based approach. Respondents praised the Fiji Relocation Guidelines and its SOPs for their emphasis on gender sensitivity, social protection and community engagement. However, gaps remain in terms of inclusive participation, particularly from non-state actors. Planned relocation frameworks, such as Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines, should explicitly incorporate the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, ensuring livelihood restoration, fair wages, skill matching and access to social services to support economic inclusion and human dignity.

7.3. Labour migration

Labour mobility including participation in seasonal worker programmes and other cross-border schemes has become a prominent pathway for adaptation to climate change. However, substantial challenges remain in ensuring that this mobility translates into sustainable, equitable and decent work outcomes.

Key barriers identified include:

- All the actors are not involved meaningfully. Limited consultation and inclusion of community stakeholders in the design and monitoring of seasonal worker schemes is an impediment.
- Inadequate access to social services in both sending and receiving countries, including healthcare, legal assistance and financial inclusion.
- Cultural and language barriers, which hinder integration and access to rights.

- Lack of attention to gender-based harassment and gender-based violence.
- Insufficient pre-departure preparation, particularly for rural and outer island populations.

Respondents also underscored the gendered dimensions of labour migration, noting that women face a disproportionate burden, both as workers and as among those who remain behind. Gender-based violence, job stereotyping and lack of economic alternatives for women were raised as significant issues requiring targeted interventions.

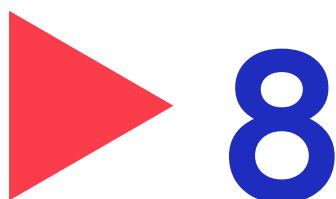
Good practices identified include:

- The Vanuatu Labour Mobility Working Group, which exemplifies inclusive governance by engaging civil society, development partners and government representatives.
- Samoa's use of District Councils in recruitment for the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (New Zealand) and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, ensuring transparency and local responsiveness.
- The "Famili i Redi" Programme in Vanuatu, which provides holistic pre-departure training for migrant workers and their families, focusing on financial literacy, communication and family preparedness.
- The Workers Ready, Investment Ready pre-integration pilot programme in Vanuatu, which aims to prepare workers to maximize their opportunities both abroad and at home.
- Governments in Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga have also taken proactive steps to negotiate bilateral labour agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to protect workers' rights, and are also engaged in the continuous review of recruitment practices to improve transparency and accountability.



A returned migrant worker in front of his newly built climate resilient house.

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Key stakeholder engagement for reintegration of workers in the labour market

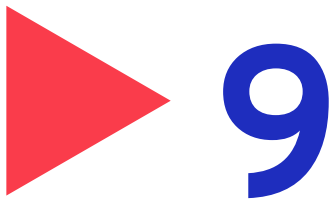
As noted above, the study included the voices of key respondents composed of government officials, NGOs, diaspora members, workers' and employers' representatives and PCCMHS programme implementing agencies, including the ILO, the IOM and regional organizations. Depending on the stakeholder and their level of engagement in the labour mobility space, the answers and insight shared on reintegration varied.

Government representatives alluded to their roles in developing reintegration policies and ensuring compliance with international labour standards, as well as their engagement with development partners, including the ILO, in various regional programmes and implementation of projects to advance awareness-raising and advocacy of policies that would protect their workers upon their return from seasonal work. There is a lot of work being progressed in the Pacific region, and governments are very engaged with the various partners and stakeholders.

NGOs, on the other hand, spoke more to human rights and the fair treatment of returnees, and each highlighted how they contribute to supporting communities in receiving their workers back, and discussed the community-based projects they have implemented to support returnees.

Diaspora representatives, including regional NGOs with experience supporting seasonal workers, act as mentors, and advocate for reintegration initiatives (supported by sending and receiving countries). Pacific workers are dependent on diaspora communities, and there were many examples shared where seasonal workers even turned to diaspora members for financial assistance. It was a common reflection that support from respective diasporas was very critical for returnees and reintegration schemes, including in relation to setting up small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), training and other capacity-building.

Workers' and employers' representatives highlighted their role in ensuring that there is transparency in worker contracts and that reintegration support is included in worker agreements.



Key policy frameworks: Global, regional and national

At the global level, the ILO provides a comprehensive policy framework grounded in international labour standards and operational guidelines to guide responses to labour mobility, including climate-induced displacement. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda – built on the four pillars of employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue – anchors these efforts and emphasizes the importance of both protection and reintegration for displaced workers and migrant workers. Core instruments such as the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), highlight how access to decent work and reintegration into labour markets are vital in crisis contexts. The ILO's 2015 Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies further embed labour migration and reintegration within climate adaptation strategies.

Complementary global initiatives strengthen this framework. **The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)** explicitly recognizes climate change as a driver of mobility and calls for policies that ensure migrants, including those displaced by environmental factors, have access to decent work and opportunities for sustainable reintegration. Similarly, the **Global Compact on Refugees (2018)** underscores the importance of self-reliance, skills recognition and labour market inclusion in achieving durable solutions. These commitments are aligned with the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, particularly **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on decent work and economic growth** and **SDG 10 on reduced inequalities**, which together promote inclusive labour markets and fair migration governance as essential for resilience and sustainable development.

Within this broader landscape, the ILO has advanced targeted guidance on reintegration. The **Guiding Principles on the Access of Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the Labour Market (2016)** established the need for decent work to support sustainable settlement, while the **Guidelines on Labour Market Reintegration upon Return in Origin Countries (2023)** provide practical direction on making reintegration a viable, durable solution. The **ILO–United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Joint Action Plan (2023)** reinforces this by safeguarding displaced persons' rights to work and social protection, while also supporting host communities. These instruments complement the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work (2019) and the ILO (2021) publication *Protecting the Rights of Migrant Workers in an Irregular Situation and Addressing Irregular Labour Migration: A Compendium*, which reaffirm the importance of resilience, fairness and inclusion in labour market responses. Taken together, this global policy framework highlights reintegration not only as a humanitarian imperative but also as a development strategy – one that is highly relevant for PICs, where climate change is already reshaping patterns of displacement and mobility.

Regionally, the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility represents a landmark effort by PICs to integrate climate change and human mobility into a coherent policy structure. It addresses displacement, planned relocation and adaptive migration, and promotes labour mobility as a resilience strategy – provided it is voluntary, rights-based and supported by access to essential services and decent employment. The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security further support a cooperative approach to managing climate-related mobility and human security risks in the region. Further, the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles, adopted in September 2025, also provide an important foundation, guiding fair recruitment, protection of workers' rights, skills development and reintegration pathways for Pacific labour migrants. In addition, the forthcoming Pacific Guidelines on Sustainable Reintegration, currently under development by the PACER Plus Implementation Unit, aim to enhance the economic and social benefits of labour mobility. These guidelines focus on better worker preparation, safer migration experiences and effective reintegration strategies that are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate.

Nationally, countries such as Tuvalu and Kiribati have taken steps to align their reintegration and labour mobility policies with these global and regional frameworks. Initiatives like Tuvalu's Labour Migrants Reintegration Strategy and Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines illustrate efforts to embed decent work, skills recognition and inclusive development into labour mobility responses. These strategies are not only meant to support migrant workers' return and reintegration but also to foster long-term economic resilience by linking migration cycles to national development goals.

This multi-level policy coherence demonstrates a growing commitment across PICs to ensure labour market integration in ways that are just, inclusive and climate resilient.



A returned migrant worker in front of his newly built climate resilient house.

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 10

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, this scoping study highlighted the urgent need for proactive and rights-based labour market integration strategies in the context of climate mobility across PICs. As communities face displacement, planned relocation and adaptive migration due to the intensifying impacts of climate change, inclusive labour systems and effective reintegration frameworks become vital. The study underscores that while several promising national and regional initiatives are emerging – such as the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility, the Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles and the PACER Plus Pacific Guidelines on Sustainable Reintegration, as well as reintegration strategies in Tuvalu and Vanuatu – significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to social protection, skills recognition and institutional coordination.

Moving forward, a holistic, rights-based, gender-responsive and community-centred approach is essential for achieving sustainable reintegration and to leverage labour mobility as an adaptive strategy. Effective governance, regional collaboration and adherence to international labour standards must be central to policy responses. Ultimately, fostering decent work, social inclusion and economic resilience for all affected populations will not only uphold human dignity but also strengthen the adaptive capacity and long-term development of Pacific communities in the face of escalating climate threats.

Lastly, by integrating international labour standards, ILO frameworks and Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Principles into national reintegration strategies, PICs can ensure that reintegration is not only a return home, but a pathway to resilience, productivity and dignity. What follows are a series of recommendations for governments and other key stakeholders aimed at achieving this positive outcome across the Pacific region as it works to address current and future challenges related to climate mobility.

10.1. Key recommendations

Governance and policy coherence

- Governments should develop or enhance national reintegration strategies that are holistic, rights-based and gender-responsive, incorporating economic, social, psychosocial and environmental considerations.
- Governments and development partners should invest in strengthening Pacific-specific data systems on climate displacement, labour migration and reintegration outcomes, enabling evidence-based policymaking, programme design and monitoring across sectors.
- Align reintegration policies with international labour standards.

- National level frameworks should align with the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and be embedded within broader national climate adaptation and employment policies.
- Strengthen institutional coordination, ensuring policy coherence, and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships for developing effective frameworks that promote sustainable labour mobility and equitable reintegration outcomes.
- Strengthen cross-sector coordination among labour ministries, climate and disaster agencies, social services, and local governments.
- Strengthen bilateral and intra-Pacific labour agreements to address regional skill shortages, promote decent work conditions and expand mobility opportunities within the Pacific, particularly for countries currently underrepresented in existing schemes.
- Embed mobility, climate and labour interlinkages into national policies through evidence-based social dialogue and human rights-based approaches to promote structured and equitable responses.
- Ensure legal and policy frameworks protect the rights of climate-affected populations and promote decent work via whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

Labour rights and social protection

- Ensure fair and ethical recruitment for migrant workers, returnees and displaced communities.
- Strengthen fair recruitment practices in line with ILO guidelines, ensuring transparency, accountability and zero-fee recruitment models that safeguard Pacific workers from exploitation across the migration cycle.
- Promote social dialogue and tripartism in the design and implementation of reintegration policies.
- Strengthen the voice of trade unions, employers' organizations and civil society, ensuring their meaningful participation in reintegration planning and monitoring.
- Support labour market institutions (for example, employment services) to ensure they are equipped to assist returnees and displaced persons in accessing decent employment opportunities.
- Ensure returnees have access to social protection, including healthcare, insurance and social safety nets, by integrating them into national social protection systems.
- Promote financial literacy training and access to microfinance, especially for women and vulnerable groups.
- Labour mobility policies should adopt an intersectional lens, addressing the unique barriers faced by women, youth and persons with disabilities. This should include tailored financial literacy, entrepreneurship, vocational training and protection from exploitation, ensuring that all groups can participate safely and equitably.
- Apply all four pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda – employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue – to reintegration programmes.
- Adopt rights-based labour mobility plans guaranteeing cost-free recruitment, workplace rights, employer transferability, portable social security and adequate accommodation.
- Expedite the ratification of fundamental ILO Conventions and Conventions related to migration.
- Develop bilateral labour agreements incorporating climate risk considerations and worker protections in destination countries.
- Facilitate portability of social protection benefits through bilateral social security agreements.

- Establish employer feedback mechanisms to enhance accountability and prevent exploitation.
- National policies should explicitly recognize and support internally displaced persons (IDPs), ensuring they have equitable access to decent work, skills training and reintegration programmes alongside international migrant workers and returnees.

Climate change and environmental sustainability

- Integrate the ILO's Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All into reintegration strategies by creating green jobs for returnees in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and ecosystem restoration and by supporting public–private partnerships to build climate-resilient infrastructure and to offer vocational training tied to sustainable livelihoods.
- Recognize climate change as a key driver of unsafe migration, displacement and irregular labour mobility, as outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report and the Global Compact for Migration.
- Labour mobility schemes should integrate climate vulnerability assessments into selection criteria, ensuring that the most climate-affected communities and populations receive prioritized support and access to migration and reintegration programmes.
- Invest in job creation, vocational training, entrepreneurship support and green economy initiatives targeting returnees. Special focus should be placed on sectors such as agriculture, climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable energy, where migrant workers can apply and share acquired skills.
- Factor in ecological vulnerability when planning return decisions.
- Support sustainable livelihood re-establishment through coordinated efforts among governments, social partners, and stakeholders, including public–private partnerships.
- Invest in early warning systems and scenario planning for all climate risks to enhance community preparedness and adaptive capacity.
- Integrate the labour dimension into climate change and human mobility policies to ensure just transitions, prioritizing affected communities with migration potential.
- Foster collaboration between national and local authorities to involve communities in participatory planning for relocation, displacement risk assessment and adaptation-based labour migration, with special attention paid to vulnerable groups.
- Accelerate development of climate-resilient infrastructure to improve community resilience and to generate decent jobs.
- Incorporate the ILO's 2015 Just Transition Guidelines into national reintegration and adaptation strategies, prioritizing green jobs, sustainable livelihoods and environmental stewardship alongside labour market reintegration, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, renewable energy and ecosystem restoration.
- Pacific labour mobility schemes (including seasonal work programmes) and associated development partners should pay greater attention to reintegration, and could enable returning workers to apply their newly acquired skills in agri-marketing, water management, climate-resilient agriculture and renewable energy to strengthen local economies and resilience.

Gender, inclusion and vulnerable groups

- Apply gender-responsive and disability-inclusive approaches, following ILO frameworks such as the [Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–25](#).⁶
- Promote women's leadership in reintegration planning, and address specific vulnerabilities faced by female returnees, including risks of economic dependency and violence.
- Promote gender-responsive planning by ensuring women's participation in all stages of the relocation process.
- Focus on livelihood recovery through decent employment, skills training, microenterprise support and inclusive participation of women and youth.
- Implement gender-responsive migration pathways that eliminate wage discrimination, and take measures to end violence and harassment against female workers.
- Encourage diaspora engagement, community mentoring and storytelling to foster inclusive reintegration.
- Develop tailored responses for planned relocation sites, which require higher levels of sensitivity and community-specific planning. Collaborate with faith-based groups, NGOs, traditional leaders and local governments to tailor reintegration approaches that respect cultural and community values.

Skills development and economic empowerment

- Develop systems to formally recognize skills and experience gained abroad.
- Provide comprehensive reintegration programmes including job placement, vocational training and financial assistance.
- In partnership with social partners, design skills development programmes aligned with green jobs and recognized by both origin and destination countries.
- Ensure access to microfinance, entrepreneurship support and diversified livelihood opportunities in host communities.
- Promote meaningful social dialogue and community participation throughout the policy cycle to reflect social partners' and migrant workers' voices.

Monitoring, evaluation and data use

- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track reintegration outcomes and to inform continuous improvement.
- Use data to inform evidence-based policy adjustments, evaluate effectiveness and ensure accountability in delivering reintegration services.

Mental health and social well-being

- Address the mental health needs of returnees, especially displaced and repatriated individuals.
- Raise awareness of returnees' contributions and combat stigma.

⁶ Gender equality and women's empowerment in the world of work are critical to achieving the ILO vision of decent work for all. The ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022–25 is linked to the relevant SDGs in order to support a fair, inclusive and secure world of work.

Regional cooperation and knowledge sharing

- Negotiate bilateral agreements that ensure portability of social security benefits and outline return and reintegration support.
- Leverage platforms such as the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting to share best practices and to harmonize reintegration standards regionally.
- Facilitate economic development and integrate it into regional plans, exemplified by Fiji's climate recovery efforts.

10.2. Recommendations for Pacific employers and business organizations

- Engage actively in regional labour mobility policy discussions and promote compliance with international labour standards.
- Facilitate access to microfinance and small business development support, especially in rural and relocated communities.
- Support fair, non-discriminatory recruitment and employment practices aligned with international standards.
- Utilize recruitment agencies adhering to fair and ethical practices.
- Foster workplace social dialogue to ensure safe, healthy environments.
- Implement accessible and fair grievance mechanisms without punitive measures.
- Advance just transition principles within private sector practices.
- Integrate just transition approaches in business operations by investing in green jobs and climate-resilient business models that create new employment for displaced and returning populations.
- Develop guidelines and tools for employer engagement in reintegration, tailored to the Pacific business environment.
- Organize capacity-building programmes for employers on climate mobility, reintegration, labour rights and gender-responsive employment practices.
- Engage in public-private partnerships among labour ministries, training providers and civil society organizations to co-deliver reintegration services.
- Explore job creation in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism and circular economy sectors.

10.3. Recommendations for trade unions

- Serve as key partners in climate and human mobility discussions and actions.
- Advocate for the integration of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda into all reintegration and climate mobility policies.
- Promote decent working conditions for all workers, including return migrants or those displaced due to climate events.
- Collaborate with governments and employers to facilitate access to vocational training, upskilling and job placement services for returnees and displaced persons.

- ▶ Actively participate in tripartite consultations to co-design reintegration policies and to ensure that climate-affected workers are included in decision-making.
- ▶ Advocate for the rights of migrant workers and returnees and promote fair recruitment of migrant workers and in displaced/relocated communities.
- ▶ Build partnerships with regional trade union bodies, civil society, diaspora groups and international organizations to share best practices, coordinate reintegration support and engage in collective advocacy.
- ▶ Engage in capacity-building and awareness campaigns to raise understanding of climate mobility issues among trade union members.
- ▶ Organize and empower migrant workers, including women, to defend their rights.
- ▶ Advocate for ratification and enforcement of international labour standards.
- ▶ Promote integration of mobility policies into climate change frameworks.
- ▶ Monitor employer compliance with pre-departure and arrival briefings.
- ▶ Support returning migrants and reintegration efforts through Migrant Workers' Help Desks/Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) by providing guidance, legal aid, referrals for psychosocial support and access to essential services.
- ▶ Strengthen and expand Migrant Workers' Help Desks/MRCs at the local and national levels to ensure migrants, returnees and climate-displaced workers have safe spaces for assistance and support services.

10.4. Recommendations for diaspora groups

- ▶ Assist migrant workers and displaced populations in destination countries, supporting integration and reintegration.
- ▶ Establish or participate in mentorship programmes for returnees, especially in areas like entrepreneurship, agribusiness, climate-resilient livelihoods and digital skills.
- ▶ Use social media, community events and faith-based platforms to celebrate contributions of returning migrants and displaced persons.
- ▶ Mobilize diaspora resources to co-fund community reintegration projects, such as training centres, small business grants or agricultural cooperatives.
- ▶ Participate in regional and international dialogues to advocate for fair treatment, social protection and legal rights.

10.5. Recommendations for international organizations

- ▶ Provide capacity-building training to key stakeholders on issues related to climate change and human mobility.
- ▶ Coordinate advocacy on migrant workers' rights aligned with international human rights and labour standards.
- ▶ Support data collection and research on climate mobility through rights-based approaches.
- ▶ Enhance the provision of accurate information and services in order to facilitate safe and regular migration.
- ▶ Provide technical support in policy development.

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Annex 1. Glossary of terms

Adaptation

As defined by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), adaptation refers to adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities. The UNDRR also adds that the broader concept of adaptation also applies to non-climatic factors such as soil erosion or surface subsidence. Adaptation can occur in autonomous fashion, for example through market changes, or as a result of intentional adaptation policies and plans. Many disaster risk reduction measures can directly contribute to better adaptation.

Disaster

Disaster refers to a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.⁷

Disaster-risk reduction

As defined by the UNDRR, disaster-risk reduction refers to the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

Fragility

Fragility is a combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes, including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises or other emergencies.

Gender mainstreaming

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women – as well as of men – an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

Humanitarian crisis

According to the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a humanitarian crisis is defined as a singular event or a series of events that are threatening in terms of health, safety or well-being of a community or large group of people. It may be an internal or external conflict and usually occurs throughout a large land area. A closely related term, “humanitarian emergency” is an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or well-being of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area.

7 ILO Recommendation No. 205, Paragraph 2(a).

Migrant worker

A migrant worker is a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

Preparedness

Preparedness, as defined by the UNDRR, refers to the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions.

Reintegration

There is no universally agreed upon definition of the concept of reintegration. According to the UNHCR (2006, 18): “Reintegration is a process which enables returnees to regain their physical, social, legal and material security needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity, and which eventually leads to the disappearance of any observable distinctions vis-à-vis their compatriots.” The IOM defines sustainable reintegration as the achieved state when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability and psychosocial well-being that make their further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.

Slow-onset emergency/disaster

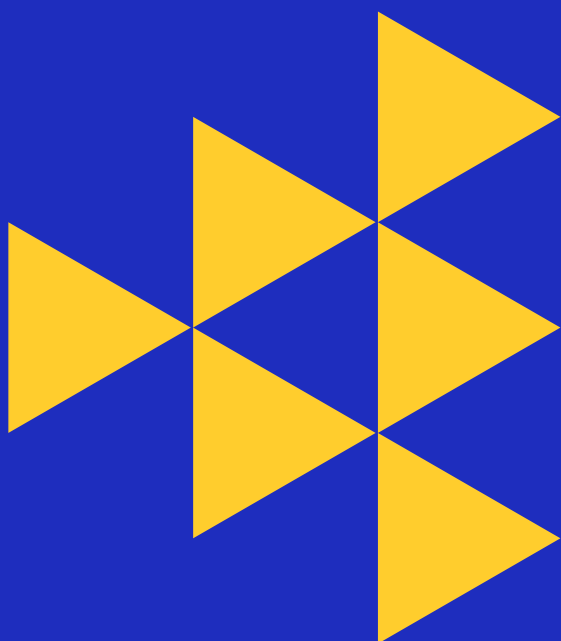
A slow-onset emergency/disaster is defined as one that does not emerge from a single, distinct event but one that emerges gradually over time, often based on a confluence of different events.

Sudden-onset emergency/disaster

According to UNDRR, a sudden-onset or rapid-onset emergency/disaster is a hazardous event that emerges quickly or unexpectedly. It can be linked to meteorological hazards including tropical cyclones, typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards; hydrological hazards including coastal floods, mudflows; or geophysical hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions.

Undocumented migrant worker

An undocumented migrant worker is a person who fails to comply with the conditions provided for them to legally enter the receiving State and to stay legally for the duration of employment pursuant to the applicable laws, regulations and policies of the receiving State. This definition includes a migrant worker who has recently been in employment but is no longer legally employed in a remunerated activity.



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**PACIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE MIGRATION AND HUMAN
SECURITY (PCCMHS) PROGRAMME PHASE II**

