



# **SAMUEL HALL**

## **AGAINST THE CLOCK**

**Our position on climate migration**

March 2022

# Introduction...

In a collection of thoughts that ran from 1927 to 1940, entitled *Arcades Project*, the philosopher Walter Benjamin summed up the greatest challenge of our time and of the decades to come in one clear sentence: "*The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are 'status quo' is the catastrophe.*"

How to think and act in light of the catastrophe? How to perceive it not only as a risk, but as an anchor point? How to avoid the pitfall of the *status quo*? While the idea of *catastrophe* is often equated with tragedy or disaster, it has another meaning for Benjamin: that of an event that subverts the existing order or goes against the grain of what is expected. Let's make a hypothesis here: fighting global warming today, while the world is still struggling to emerge from the pandemic crisis, means learning from the *catastrophe* to act together, and against dominant ideologies.

The blind belief in technological progress and in the ideology of linear and inexorable progress has perpetuated the illusion that any problem is temporary and any responsibility remote. The pandemic has made us all feel more vulnerable. It brought debates about resilience and preparedness for unexpected disasters "home" for many in Europe and North America.

From this perspective, at a time when the scientific community has established [the aggravating effect of climate change](#) on the emergence, transmission, and contagiousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is no longer possible to imagine the climate catastrophe as something that could happen "if we do nothing" – or if our representatives meeting at the G7, the G20, the African Union, the UNEP summit, or in Davos do not reach an agreement among themselves. Instead, let us trust Walter Benjamin, contrary to hegemonic narratives. Let us act in the present, from the state of emergency, from the catastrophe. Here and now.

For an organisation like Samuel Hall, which has been studying the phenomena of mobility and displacement since its inception, it is clear that the consequences of climate change are felt more severely by some than others. According to IDMC's [Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021](#), there were over 30 million new displacements due to natural disasters in 2020. Most people on the move due to climate-related factors are internally displaced – but others have been or will be forced to cross borders to survive. In November 2021, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees recalled that 90% of refugees under UNHCR's mandate, and 70% of internally displaced people, were from countries "[on the front lines of the climate emergency](#)".



Photo credit: Sean Power

# Introduction continued...

These observations, which are now unanimous, have led to an increase in awareness among donors and governments. More and more academic research project funding is turning to the link between climate impacts and migration and displacement patterns. In partnership with twenty other research institutes and universities, Samuel Hall is contributing, for example, to the [HABITABLE](#) project, funded by the European Union over the period 2020-2024 to identify very concrete and targeted adaptation solutions to the dynamics between climate and migration in Ghana, Mali, Sudan, South Africa, Senegal, and Thailand.

But this increased attention, also present in the media\*, is both a blessing and a curse. It brings much needed discussion — but the narrative is at risk of being hijacked by sensationalists, populists, or nationalists. As humanitarian and development actors sought to secure funding and foster support across the political spectrum, COP26 largely saw climate migration presented as an undesirable "worst case scenario", invoked to shock politicians into taking climate action. [More than one tear should be shed](#) over such a deceptive event. Short-sighted perspectives make the crisis a business case, with politicians intending to "fix climate and manage migration" – and they are obviously not up to the challenge.

So, who can be the actors of change? Of course, there is no single or miracle answer, but our conversations with communities in East, West, and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East confirm that dialogues are often more constructive at the local level. Grassroots movements, activists, socio-economic community actors in local communities, new generations, migrants, and displaced people themselves have shown what real action can be. For instance, a recent study conducted by our teams for IOM and UNEP, in [Baidoa and Kismayo \(Somalia\)](#), shows that climate-induced displaced communities not only have a particularly acute awareness of the disastrous consequences of climate change, but also a very precise idea of adaptive solutions: from territorial governance to reforestation, from waste management to recycling. Sometimes even the local political leaders themselves – like the mayors of Bristol (UK), Los Angeles (USA) or Freetown (Sierra Leone), among many others – are leading the way in community engagement, innovative solutions, and international cooperation. Here and now, they refuse the fatality of families traumatised and excluded by the experience of migration, they promote climate-adaptive programmes, reject the *status quo*, and demonstrate political imagination.

The post-pandemic world will be no different from the one before. Unless we want, desire, act, and think differently. Against the clock. We hope that the following pages spark new ideas and debates within your own homes, organisations, and communities.

**Hervé Nicolle & Nassim Majidi**  
**Samuel Hall Co-Founders & Directors**



\*A *New York Times* feature last summer announced that: "[The Great Climate Migration Has Begun](#)". Climate change "[will create world's biggest refugee crisis](#)"; "[UK warned of 'climate change flood of refugees'](#)"; and "[climate change will stir 'unimaginable' refugee crisis, says military](#)", are just a few examples of headlines that have appeared in newspapers in recent years.

# The challenge: defining climate displacement



## Professor Mo Hamza

Professor at Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety at Lund University, Sweden.

People forcibly displaced by slow environmental degradation or extreme and recurring disasters attributed to climate change are an indisputable phenomena with unequivocal scientific evidence. But finding a label for this process, or one that accurately defines such an individual, is still elusive. "Forced Environmental Migrant", "Environmental Displacee", "Eco-refugee", "Climate Change Refugee", and even "Ecological Displaced Person" and "Environmental Refugee-To-Be" with its own acronym (ERTB) are but a few among the myriad of labels. The problem is that each has significant connotations and describes a unique process; each triggers a policy or security response, as well as an emotional response. None so far has a standing in international law.

### THE DEFINITION OF A REFUGEE

A refugee is clearly defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention as someone, "who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion". Attempting to use the refugee label for environmental process has no legal standing in international law, and could potentially dilute the original refugee definition to the detriment of genuine refugee claims.

### Numbers of climate displaced people are another game. The wide range of estimates shows the problem with using different methodologies – with different people counting, and different people being counted.

The most notable issue is equating exposure to climate risks with actually moving. The decision to move is far more complex, and can't be attributed to a single factor. Climatic or environmental factors are but one stressor that interact with and amplify others, from poverty, to poor governance, low adaptive capacity, and overall resilience.

Inaccurate statistics contribute to the securitisation of climate change, bolstering scaremongering narratives about 'floods' of 'climate refugees' coming to the borders of developed countries. Climate induced displacement needs to be humanised beyond statistics and labels. We also need sound legal protection frameworks for people displaced by environmental and climate related factors. So far, there are the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, which covers those who move within national borders — but not those who cross borders, or who make longer journeys. There is also the less visible issue of immobility, or who is left behind.

It is important to avoid the framing of climate change as a security challenge within international relations. Apocalyptic narratives of climate-induced migration contribute to depoliticising climate governance and detracts from collective efforts to find policy alternatives and solutions that capitalize on the positive effects of migration.

### The Numbers Game

UNHCR (2002):	24 million
El-Hinnawi (1985):	50 million by 2050
The Almeria Statement (1994):	135 million
Myers (2005):	200 million
The Stern Review (2006):	200 million by 2050
Nicholls (2004):	50-200 million by 2080
Friends of the Earth (2007):	200 million worldwide by 2050 50 million in Africa alone by 2050
Christian Aid (2007):	250 million by climate change 645 million by dams and projects

What Professor Hamza calls "the numbers game" – estimates of climate migrant numbers from studies conducted in the last 36 years.

# The challenge: data collection and analysis



**Alexandra Bilak**  
IDMC Director

**You have been working on migration and displacement for a number of years. How easy is it to find data around climate migration?**

Data on human mobility in the context of climate change is largely lacking. Because climate change's effects, such as rising temperatures or sea level rise, are slow by nature, it is particularly difficult to monitor the migration or displacement they lead to. Families or even individuals may leave one by one, as opposed to mass movements in the context of conflicts or sudden-onset disasters, and not be recorded by any authority. There is also an issue of insufficient resources to collect this data, and other

methodological challenges such as the difficulty to assess whether a person leaves voluntarily, in search for better livelihood opportunities, or is forced to go because climate change prevents them from surviving in their home area. The answer to this question is crucial to help tailor the support they may receive.

## **What are the priorities for data collection going forward?**

The first priority is to better account for people who move as a result of climate change. If they are unaccounted for, the issue remains significantly underestimated, and does not receive the attention and investments it deserves. This information will also help design better models to estimate the risk of future displacement and plan ahead. It is also important to better understand the way climate change's effects on the environment can trigger displacement or migration: through food or water insecurity, loss of livelihoods or territory, or the increased frequency and intensity of disasters. Preventative measures or responses exist for each of these situations, and IDMC is currently recording examples of successful initiatives from around the world to help affected countries learn from each other in a collective effort to limit displacement in the context of climate change, and mitigate its negative consequences on people and economies.

**“Strong data systems are needed to allow for response and anticipation – there must be a global effort to collect better data and develop new technology that can be transferred to local actors”**

## **Myths dispelled by IDMC's GRID 2021 Report**

**Disaster displacement is short-term.** Growing evidence shows in fact that it can easily become protracted with significant social and economic impacts.

**It affects all people in similar ways.** In reality, different groups experience different impacts.

**Small-scale events are not a major concern.** In fact they have a significant relative impact on individuals and threaten local development gains.

**Disaster displacement can be understood and addressed in a compartmentalised way, chronologically and by sector.** Converging drivers and compound events actually mean that such responses can generate new risks.

**Only people forced from their homes suffer the negative impacts of displacement.** In fact, those who remain in place can be equally affected and in some instances even considered displaced.

Read the full 'Global Report on Internal Displacement' online here:  
[www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021](http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021)

# The challenge: addressing policy failures



## Julia Blocher

Project Lead, Potsdam Institute for Climate Research

### What challenges are policymakers facing when it comes to effective responses to climate migration?

In the past two decades, policymaking on human mobility in the context of climate change has made a remarkable amount of progress. Many key developments to address migration, displacement, and planned relocations have taken place at both the international and regional level.

**“Societies should embrace the potential role of migration as a positive, transformative force that can contribute to confronting modern-day challenges, and not as a sign of failure to adapt to those challenges.”**

Nevertheless, there is a persistent disconnect between the evidence base and the policy discourse on this topic. There is growing restrictiveness and selectiveness when it comes to the treatment of migrants, which contributes to governments remaining focused on addressing climate change as an external force that may augment the so-called “root causes” of migration. This goes against evidence that people often invest in migration to proactively manage livelihood risks that they face related to changing conditions. Observed reductions in levels of migration can indicate a scarcity of resources — rather than indicating improved capabilities to deal with livelihood risks.. Too often, migration policies do not adequately consider the diverse realities and preferences of migrants themselves.

### Key international and regional policy developments

At the international level, landmark initiatives have included the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility in the UNFCCC; the Santiago Framework for Loss and Damage; the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly & Regular Migration; the UNFCCC Warsaw International Mechanism Executive Committee, Task Force on Displacement and the Platform for Disaster Displacement. At the regional level, good practices that could be replicated around the world include the work of the Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme, and Fiji’s Planned Relocation Guidelines.

### What do you hope to see more of in the future when it comes to policy response?

Research and policy should continue to move beyond macro-level perspectives, to explore the multiple factors influencing [im]mobility trends. Policy development should take into account historical, contextual, community-level, and even individual-level factors that influence vulnerabilities in the face of a changing climate. In order to do this, we can no longer be blind to differences within communities and within households that influence who is able to migrate — including socio-economic status, gender, age, ableness, position in the household, social connectedness, and more. These factors influence who is able to benefit from migration and who is left behind, figuratively and literally.

A better understanding of how migration can serve as an adaptation in response to climate change — and, conversely how migration can be maladaptive — will support better-tailored policy solutions. Societies should embrace the potential role of migration as a positive, transformative force that can contribute to confronting modern-day challenges, and not as a sign of failure to adapt to those challenges. At the same time, climate mitigation and adaptation efforts must be rapidly ramped up to ensure migration remains a choice, and a safe choice, for climate-vulnerable people.

# The challenge: where there's a will, there's a (local) way

Local authorities are on the frontline: they are closest to communities, have a better understanding of their needs and aspirations, and will be the first-responders to natural disasters provoked by climate change. Local leaders are therefore best placed to design policies that promote climate resilience and adaptation, and to mobilise local community action. As rural communities are increasingly forced to leave their homes as a result of drought, flooding, and other environmental-factors, cities see an influx of displaced people seeking employment, accommodation, and access to services. The interplay between urbanisation and climate change has been at the heart of recent Samuel Hall research.

On a personal level, we have seen first-hand that municipal authorities can be more agile, responsive, and receptive than national counterparts. The mayors of Lille and Paris amongst countless others were active supporters of Afghan resettlement schemes; helping to facilitate evacuations for at risk Afghans following the Taliban take over. Over a decade, we are proud to have developed productive relationships with municipalities across all the regions we work in – and have found many to be changemakers in the true sense of the word.

One initiative that acts as a model for international cooperation between local leaders is the Mayors Migration Council. We first encountered them through their [Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response](#); we worked with the Jalalabad local authorities on the Afghan city's inclusion in the project. From COVID-19 response to climate resilience, the group is a powerful advocate for local leadership with a precedent for making things happen.

## Global Mayors Taskforce on Climate Migration

The [C40-MMC Task Force](#) is a mayor-led initiative to accelerate local, national, regional, and global responses to the climate crisis and human mobility in cities.

Established by C40 Cities (C40) and the Mayors Migration Council (MMC), it is guided by the mayors of Barcelona, Bristol, Dakar, Dhaka North, Freetown, Houston, Los Angeles, Lima, and Milan.

During COP26 the group presented '[The Global Mayors Action Agenda on Climate and Migration](#)', with calls to action centred around urban resilience, inclusion, and transformation. With a focus on localised decision-making and funding, the group are passionate about inclusive and equitable action that puts people at the centre of climate conversations.

Funded by Robert Bosch Stiftung, the group also announced the Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Climate Action – which will support five cities in sub-Saharan Africa with a total of one million U.S. dollars.

## Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr OBE: Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone

Aki-Sawyerr is spearheading innovative climate mitigations and adaptations: from the introduction of Africa's first 'Chief Heat Officer' to monitor heat waves, to the 'Freetown the Tree Town' campaign, which will see 1 million trees planted over three rainy seasons. To date, 550 000 have been planted – but there is also a focus on growth, with every tree having a unique identifiable number that is tracked by a tree tracker app. Over 600 newly created 'Tree Growers' are paid monthly based on the growth of the trees – which they record and upload to the app using smartphones.



**“We shouldn't have donors and the international community creating programmes for anyone. There is a place for partnership – but the ownership, the leadership, needs to come from the community.”**

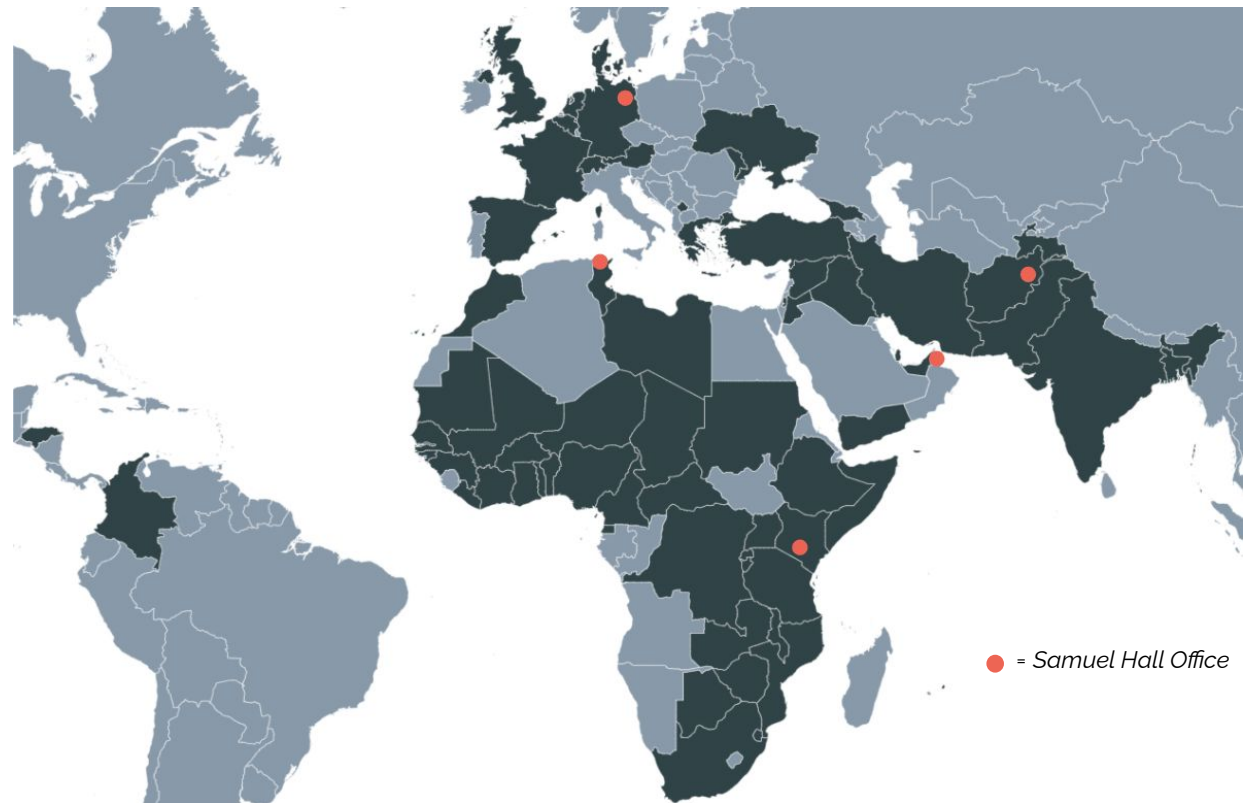
# The context: complex and climate vulnerable geographies

Samuel Hall insights are based on first-hand experience. We have conducted 300+ projects in 60+ countries over 10+ years – including some of the world's most complex and challenging contexts. It is no coincidence that many of these countries are considered most vulnerable to climate change.

Extreme weather events generate massive human and economic losses. During the past two decades alone, they have been directly responsible for over 475 000 lost lives, with estimated economic losses of \$ US 2.5 trillion PPP (David Eckstein, Vera Künzel, Laura Schäfer, 2021).

Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Communities that lack the institutional and financial capacity to cope with high-impact adverse shocks will be forced to adapt to these shocks. Many will do so by migrating.

Estimates by the World Bank suggest that by 2050, without decisive action, sub-Saharan Africa could see as many as 86 million internal climate displacements, with as many as 40 million in South Asia and 19 million in North Africa.



**80%**

Of internal climate migration could be reduced if early action was taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions & promote resilient development\*

**40m**

People could be internally displaced by 2050 in South Asia\*

**95%**

Of new conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries that are vulnerable to climate impacts.\*

**86m**

People could be internally displaced in sub-Saharan Africa alone by 2050. \*

## Climate Change & Conflict

Natural disasters and increasingly erratic and extreme weather patterns such as droughts and precipitation have been linked to increases in the likelihood and intensity of conflict. Both factors reinforce each other: climate change intensifies existing conflict patterns, while countries affected by conflict are less resilient to high-impact climate shocks.



# Priorities for Collaboration

With over a decade of research under our belt, we have built a vast network of local partners, academics, and enumerators that allow us to access some of the world's least accessible contexts. We are proud to be based in the regions we study – and to have over 18 nationalities represented in our permanent team of 60, including many from communities affected by displacement. If our expertise and contextual understanding can support your own priorities, please get in touch. Our own commitments on this important issue include:

## Ensuring the climate perspective is never an afterthought.

We will work with partners to build climate considerations and impact measurement into our research for each new project, as standard. After years of advocating for the inclusion of the gender dimension, it is increasingly rare to encounter resistance from partners – and indeed many research grants and projects now explicitly require this consideration. We hope that the future will see climate take an equal priority for donors, the UN, and NGOs around the world.

## Embracing tough decisions for long-term gain.

We recognise that long-term success when it comes to preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change can represent a trade-off with other goals. Limited resources inevitably mean difficult choices between competing priorities – and short-term humanitarian relief can have (opportunity) costs. We will work with partners to ensure that strategic decisions are based on evidence and conscious of future implications.

## Identifying blockers and convincing skeptics

We will help to shine a light on what works – and what needs more work. Enabling partners and donors to channel resources where they can have the greatest impact, based on rigorous analysis and contextual understanding. Beyond raising awareness, we need work that can generate transformative policy and operational outcomes – this might involve questioning definitions, rethinking approaches, and challenging the status quo.

## Setting the standards for climate displacement

Building on the existing literature and our own research, we will develop toolkits and guidelines for researchers and practitioners working in this field. IDMC, the Hugo Observatory, Mayors Migration Council, and others that we are proud to call partners are leading the way when it comes to addressing some of the key questions around climate migration – both conceptual and practical.

Nonetheless, there is much to be done to address data gaps and methodological issues. We will work with like-minded organisations to set standards around data capture and monitoring that will enable comparative analysis across different regions and over time – without ignoring important contextual variables.

## SAMUEL HALL TOOLS:

1. **Data collection** – documenting the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable populations, including interviews with people who have been displaced by climate change and those left behind.
2. **Regional impact assessments** – better understanding of what it means to respond on a local and regional level, learning from successes and failures to date through comparative analysis.
3. **Strategy development** – building climate-resilient economies, promoting climate migration inclusion in national plans and policies, improved agricultural policies and job creation through the likes of reforestation programmes.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation** – assessing the sustainability dimension of projects and programmes, identifying promising opportunities for action in specific sectors.



Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis



Survey & Sampling Design



Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL)



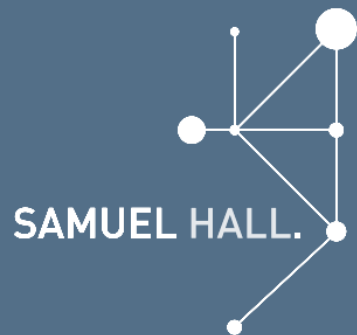
Programme, Policy & Impact Evaluation



Data Collection & Visualisation



Efficacy, Efficiency & Effectiveness Studies



Our research connects the voices of communities to change-makers for more inclusive societies.