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New research highlights the escalating impacts of climate change on people's movement and immobility

The increasing influence of climate change on human mobility and immobility, coupled with misleading narratives surrounding mobility, underscores the pressing need for in-depth research into climate-induced migration patterns. Research published in [One Earth](#) has synthesised research priorities for human mobility and climate change adaptation.

Led by Dr Nicholas Simpson, associate at the [African Climate and Development Initiative](#) (ACDI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and a senior research fellow for the Climate and Sustainability Programme at [ODI](#), along with a diverse team of scientists, including ACDI-UCT researchers Drs Petra Holden, Andreas Meyer and Christopher Trisos, the team emphasised the crucial role of understanding how nature-based adaptation influences (im)mobility in relation to climate risks.

As climate change continues to escalate, its impacts on the movement and settlement of people become more pronounced. Extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and resource scarcity are factors driving populations to relocate or become trapped in vulnerable areas. However, alongside these tangible effects, false but influential narratives about mobility often distort public understanding and policymaking.

Drawing on expertise from ACDI's [Towards Equitable & Sustainable Nature-Based Solutions](#) (TES NbS) project, research on climate risk at the [Climate Risk Lab](#) and in-house Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) expertise, the ACDI-UCT experts contributed to highlighting the need to understand how mobility can reduce risk from climate change and under what conditions it can be a potentially effective adaptation option, particularly from a Global South perspective. The team stressed the need for comprehensive research to understand climate mobility, considering not just physical movement but also social, economic, and political factors.

This research, incorporating diverse perspectives, can inform policies to mitigate the impacts of climate-induced migration. Integrating climate action with development efforts, especially in resource-constrained areas, is crucial. Ensuring consistent access to essentials like food, water, healthcare, and education strengthens resilience to climate change. Recognising the benefits of blending development plans with both adaptation and emission reduction is essential for enhancing people's well-being.

Supporting climate-resilient development and addressing climate mobility involves investing in local climate adaptation and community-led solutions. This approach, vital for integrating adaptation into broader development, requires committed financing. Yet, there's a knowledge gap regarding how climate mobility-related actions align with wider development priorities, like health and gender equality, and towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more generally.

Trisos, the director of the Climate Risk Lab and lead author of the Africa chapter for the IPCC AR6 report, said the research underscores the necessity of integrating adaptation into development planning, particularly highlighting the needs of the Global South.

Nature-based approaches (NbA), which protect ecosystems while benefiting well-being, show promise. However, poorly implemented NbA can lead to injustices, restricting access to resources or forcing displacement. Balancing environmental benefits with the needs and rights of local communities is key to successful climate-resilient development.

"We need a greater understanding of the role of NbA (such as conservation agriculture, wetland restoration or sustainable grazing practices) in influencing immobility and mobility decisions concerning the full range of rapid or extreme climate change events as well as slow onset trends from climate change," explained Holden, lead researcher of the TES NbS project.

Holden added: "This research highlights key research priorities for harnessing NbA to support positive mobility, including developing adaptation strategies that consider the full range of NbA and mobility limits for trans-local livelihoods; improving the integration of social science methods in these strategies; understanding appropriate finance mechanisms to support the interplay of NbA and climate mobility in risk reduction; and integrating climate mobility and biodiversity forecasts to anticipate how climate change impacts on biodiversity will interact with mobility and affect NbA."

The urgency of this research cannot be overstated, as climate change increasingly shapes the global landscape and challenges traditional notions of mobility and immobility, said Simpson. "Addressing this complex issue requires interdisciplinary collaboration and a commitment to uncovering the multifaceted realities of climate mobility. Only through comprehensive and balanced research can we develop effective strategies to support communities affected by climate change and build more resilient societies for the future."

[Read the paper](#)

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