



MIGRATION,  
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

West and Central Africa carries a long history of human mobility, which is considered as a strategy to improve livelihoods, especially in the context of environmental degradation and climate change. Besides being a region particularly vulnerable to sudden onset events such as **floods**, West and Central Africa is also exposed to **land degradation, water scarcity** and **coastal erosion**. The region is also expected to be the most impacted by an overwhelming [urbanization](#) in the next two decades (UNEP).

In the region, people move internally, intra-regionally, continentally and internationally. About 9.8 million international migrants move around in West Africa, according to UNDESA's latest estimation in 2020. According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), 90 to 95% of international migration from West and Central Africa occurs within West and Central African borders.

As of December 2020, DTM counted 7.5 million persons living in internal displacement in West and Central Africa, including 824,000 displaced by disasters according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). In West Africa, **floods** were with **wind storms** the most important cause of disaster displacement, displacing 276.000 people in Niger, 279.000 in Nigeria and 20.000 in Burkina Faso. According to DTM, **floods** were the main factor of displacement in 2020 in The Central African Republic. But as important as they may be, these figures do not consider migration that is induced by slow onset events. Droughts, desertification, deforestation, water scarcity, rising sea levels, coastal erosion have increased in occurrence and severity over the last few decades due to the adverse effects of climate change, compelling people directly and indirectly to leave their homes in a region – West and Central Africa - where 80% of the population depends on natural resources for their livelihoods (OCHA). These changes also affect herders in their transhumance, a common practice across West and Central Africa: bushfires for instance force herds to change their route or delay their travel (DTM). The region is also considered by the United Nations to have the highest rate of urbanization in the world by 2050, and particularly in the coastal areas, where 1/3 of the region's population is concentrated and which contribute 56% of the regional GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

From an economic perspective, agriculture, 25% of GDP in 2018 (ADB 2019), is a sector which is heavily dependent on seasonal labor migration. Generally low-skilled, these seasonal migrants are themselves farmers whose livelihoods depend on rain and therefore are extremely vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Therefore, the essential role of these migrants in terms of local food security and economic growth needs to be further highlighted, as well as their protection guaranteed when they are on the move and livelihood solutions supported back in their territories of origin.

Last but not least, Sub-Saharan diaspora is one of the most dynamic in the world, with 46 billion USD of remittances in 2018. In the region, [diaspora contributes](#) to the resilience of entire territories and is a key actor when it comes to post disaster recovery.







# IOM'S APPROACH FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

**Why does it matter** (to consider migration in the context of environmental degradation and climate change)?

1. Migration is an adaptation strategy to Environmental degradation and Climate Change
2. Migration and Environment have in common the notion of resilience.
3. Migrants are key players in resilience and the sustainable development of territories.
4. Agricultural workers are very often migrants originating from climate vulnerable areas.

IOM's Office for West and Central Africa works to promote an inclusive and sustainable migration management and to mitigate the environmental drivers of migration in the region. IOM is promoting a holistic approach, through policy dialogue, knowledge production and concrete action with the migrants. IOM is acting at sub-regional, national and local levels to promote a shared understanding of and find solutions to environmental migration and disaster displacement.

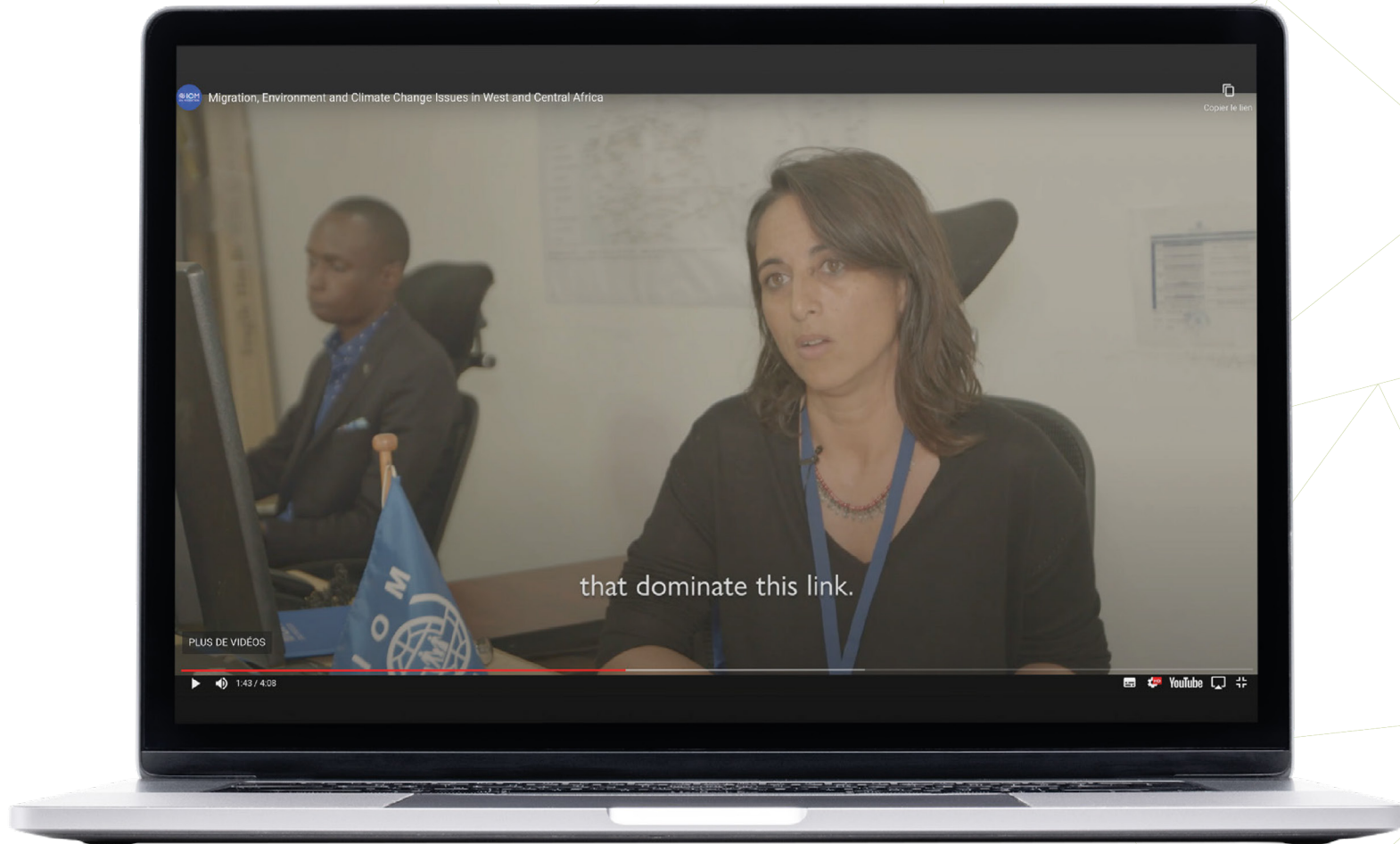
In line with IOM's Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC), as well as with IOM's Regional Strategy for West and Central Africa , and in collaboration with its Member States, observers and partners, IOM is committed to:

- Minimize forced and unmanaged migration as much as possible;
- Contribute to the development of more inclusive and sustainable policies;
- Develop evidence on issues related to the resilience of communities and their territories;
- Invest in community-based livelihoods initiatives;
- Strengthen the capacity of governments in migration governance related to environment and climate change;
- Engage diaspora in green economy and nature-based solutions.

IOM's portfolio of projects in West and Central Africa combines evidence-based policy projects with livelihood community-based activities on topics such as diaspora engagement, pastoralism, gender and

natural resources, green jobs, waste management, agroecology, agroforestry and coastal resilience, labor migration, or water and migration.

Video on [IOM approach in West and Central Africa](#) (4 min.)



# POLICY WORK AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

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Partnership and policy dialogue are key to design long-term recovery and should build on existing initiatives and accompany the necessary operational response to the multi-dimensional crisis the world is facing. In West and Central Africa, where communities and economies are particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change, IOM has been committed to contribute to a comprehensive policy intervention, at several levels of governance and in alignment with the commitments made in the Global Compact of Migration, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

At regional level, IOM co-chairs the **Regional UN Network on Migration**, which is in discussions on having a thematic priority on migration and climate change. IOM is also supporting ECOWAS in reviving and strengthening the **Thematic Working Group of the Migration Dialogue for West Africa on Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration**. Moreover, alongside the Regional Collaboration Centre of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), IOM is also part of the Secretariat of the **UN regional Working Group on Climate Change, Environment, Security and Development in West Africa**. The objective of this Working Group is to combine the knowledge and expertise of its members to promote an integrated and harmonized approach to climate change risks, in coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), by linking regional policy development with local and national actions. Additionally, IOM is taking part in The Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, an unprecedented global partnership launched by the AU Commission, UN, and World Bank and joined by the academic, practitioner, policymaking, and philanthropic communities to generate political momentum, common policy agenda, and resources for harnessing the potential and addressing the challenges of climate-forced mobility in the African continent. ACMI will advance data-based comprehensive solutions to support people-centered adaptation to climate mobility; protect those on the move; and further the resilience of African communities confronting the climate crisis with focus on the challenges and opportunities of climate mobility at the regional and local levels. Last, IOM has been appointed Coordinator of the **Migration Action Group of the 9th World Water Forum**, which will be held in Dakar, March 2022.

IOM is also supporting several countries of the region on evidence-based policy, including Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Niger and soon The Gambia, thanks to the generous support of the IOM Development Fund. In Burkina Faso IOM is developing tools with and for local actors and in the other countries the projects are focusing on national governance of environmental migration and are targeting sustainable

livelihoods and green jobs creation for migrants and youth.

As part of its mission to support governments in the design of data-driven policies, IOM is collecting data on how environmental and climate-related changes influence transhumant herders' decisions in terms of calendar and routes, potentially exacerbating tensions due to competing interests between herders and farmers. This activity is part of a broader project aiming at "Implementing Global Policies on Environmental Migration and Disaster Displacement in West Africa" funded by the French Government with the Platform on Disaster Displacement. Under this same project, and in order to contribute in reducing data gaps hindering the in-depth understanding of the extent of environmental migration and disaster displacement in West Africa, IOM is currently conducting a desk review on labor migration in agriculture in West Africa as well as a review of DTM tools to highlight and enhance environmental considerations in IOM data collections in the region.

Finally, IOM, together with other partners including the Platform on Disaster Displacement and the Kaldor Centre, recently conducted the African [Virtual Workshop](#) Series to develop a research and policy agenda for addressing displacement and migration in the context of disasters and climate change in Africa. The Series gathered researchers and practitioners working across Africa and beyond to plan future research that will advance regional and sub-regional law and policy responses to displacement and migration in the context of disasters and climate change.

All this policy-work is supported by **knowledge production**. Examples of published documentation:

- [Étude nationale sur le lien entre Migration, Environnement et Changement Climatique au Niger \(Genève, 2021\)](#)
- [IOM, Environmental Migration, Disaster Displacement, and Planned Relocation in West Africa, \(Geneva, 2021\)](#)
- [OIM, Étude de base d'analyse du nexus Migration, Environnement et Changement Climatique \(MECC\) dans les communautés les plus touchées en République de Guinée, \(Genève, 2021\)](#)
- [American University, OIM Tchad, et Cluster sécurité, Le Changement Climatique, L'insécurité Alimentaire Et La Migration Au Tchad : Un Lien Complexe, \(2021\)](#)
- [OIM, Intégration du lien entre migration, environnement et changement climatique dans la planification locale au Burkina Faso, \(Genève, 2020\)](#)
- [IOM, Migration and Agroecology in West Africa, \(Geneva, 2020\)](#)
- [OIM, M. Dimé, C. T. Wade, Etude sur les opportunités de création d'emploi favorisant l'adaptation au changement climatique pour les migrants de retour au Sénégal, \(Genève, 2019\)](#)



# NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS WITH THE MIGRANTS

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Long-term and sustainable solutions that give priority to local practices can indeed act as safety nets when the effects of climate change or pandemics take place. The current global system mainly reliant on external inputs has showed to be fragile and unsustainable, which among others can cause major food crisis (World Bank, 2020). In West and Central Africa, IOM is currently focusing on sustainable practices and nature-based solutions aiming at making human mobility a choice, empowering migrants and their families and strengthening migration governance. Nature-based solutions, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits” (IUCN, n.d). In West Africa, migrants have the potential to be part of these solutions and contribute to a sustainable recovery and response.

Through a [reintegration project in Senegal](#) and a diaspora project in Morocco (see IOM video here), IOM has been engaging in agroforestry and agroecology, targeting at the same time climate resilience, food security and job creation. In partnership of the NGO Trees for the Future, IOM has supported 15 returnees in a garden-forest initiative, for which they are being trained by the NGO, but also by an agroecological farm run by a former diaspora member. In a scaling-up process, 50 other migrants and community's members of the same region are being trained on agroecology. Following the same approach, a community-based project is being implemented to tackle the impacts of coastal erosion on human mobility (see IOM video here).

In other initiatives, IOM supports community-based reintegration projects on waste management (Ex. Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire).

Last, in the objective to tackle the multilayered challenges of environment, migration and urbanization in West and Central Africa (see IOM video on [Migration, agriculture and urbanization](#)), IOM implements a research and pilot initiative on 'labor migration and nature-based solutions in urban and periurban agriculture', about to start in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

In order to keep on supporting sustainable and inclusive management of migration and the environment in West and Central Africa, IOM recommends its partners to engage in actions such as:



1. Designing long term programming on action-research that engages youth and migrants on naturebased solutions such as agroecology, urban-agriculture, coastal resilience, waste management, renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, etc.;
2. Strengthening the dialogue with small scale farmers as part of the private sector to promote the protection of migrant workers.
3. Having detailed regional analysis on existing and potential green sectors, skills assessment, and gap analysis to guide tailored and efficient training curricula.





