**Contribution of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons’ HRC56 thematic report on climate change and internal displacement**

In its latest Global Report on Internal Displacement, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported [32.6 million disaster displacements in 2022](https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/), the highest figure recorded in a decade. Out of these, 31.8 million resulted from weather-related hazards, including floods, storms, droughts, wildfires, landslides and extreme temperatures. As part of its global mandate to monitor internal displacement, IDMC has identified examples of planned relocation processes in various countries and analysed relevant national policies and initiatives. This contribution highlights some findings from this work in response to the key questions laid out in the Special Rapporteur’s call for inputs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Human rights impacts of planned relocations**

The definition of planned relocations as a *planned process in which groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or places of temporary residence, are settled in a new and safer location, and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives* is intended to describe situations in which relocated people’s will, dignity and human rights are respected and protected as much as possible, in a context of threats to their security and well-being resulting from the effects of climate change and disasters. While examples of processes that are led successfully do exist, the term “planned relocation” is also used in situations that only partially include careful and inclusive planning, and the safe, assisted and lasting relocation of affected people.

In several countries of West Africa, for instance, the term can also refer to processes that qualify more as evictions, when communities are forced to leave their homes built on flood prone areas or at imminent risk of coastal flooding or erosion, without proper consultation and necessary support to accompany their move. In such cases, the safety and security, livelihoods, housing rights, physical and mental health of affected people can be jeopardized.

Ensuring the sustainable livelihood of relocated communities is an essential challenge for authorities undertaking planned relocation processes. In India, for instance, the Uttarakhand government organized in 2023 the relocation of over 120 families of Joshimath town to Pipalkoti in Chamoli district, as part of the first phase of a plan to help the residents of this town affected by ground subsidence. However, there has been much [resistance from people to relocate](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/joshimath-residents-reject-relocation-to-faraway-area-101706035471348.html), citing loss of livelihoods as the main barrier. Residents do not want to move too far away from their hometown, which is the gateway to pilgrimage sites upon which much of their income depends.

In the Kingdom of Tonga, a community from Atata island who had been affected by the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in January 2022 was relocated by the government to the main island of Tongatapu, and received newly built homes of better quality than the ones they previously had.[[2]](#footnote-2) A few months later, each family had planted a garden, and said they were now trying to regain a sense of normalcy. However, the community still struggled to secure decent livelihoods in their new homes. They used to live off fishing, using rainwater and solar power for their everyday needs, while in their relocation site fishing is no longer feasible, and they have to pay for utilities. While the government helped them set up bank accounts so that they could receive grants to start new livelihoods, their transition to a cash-based economy has been difficult.

Relocated communities in Tonga, Fiji and other Pacific Island States often mention their very strong attachment to their land of origin, and preference to return or stay even in the face of repeated disasters and environmental degradation. Separation from homeland and community can have severe consequences for relocated communities’ psychosocial well-being.

**Legal, policy and institutional frameworks**

Some countries have crafted their own legal and operational frameworks to support the sensitive and dignified relocation of at-risk communities. IDMC’s [Global Repository of Good Practices](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practices/) highlights some of these frameworks in details, presenting what makes them comprehensive, inclusive or innovative. One of the most frequently identified success factors for such frameworks is the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders and of affected communities themselves in their development and implementation.

The [Somali Regional State Durable Solutions Strategy 2022-2025](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=82) includes as one of its 3 strategic objectives relocation to rural and urban areas through appropriate, multi-sector, comprehensive planning for durable results. The Strategy is accompanied by an action plan, one of the priority actions being community participation focused on empowering communities to be able to define and drive the solutions they prefer. The framework is highlighted as a promising initiative because of its comprehensiveness and the broad stakeholder engagement process that led to its development in 2020, including government entities, UN agencies, NGOs and community representatives.

[Bangladesh’s National Strategy and Action Plan on the Management of Disaster and Climate Induced Internal Displacement](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=26) is another well-known example of comprehensive, inclusive and innovative framework which includes plans to develop sectoral programmes for the creation of conducive environments for safe, voluntary and dignified relocation/resettlement of people internally displaced in a context of climate change.

The [Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP) 2017-2030](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=27) was developed through an inclusive engagement process involving stakeholders at the local, national regional and international levels, with the aim of providing high level strategic guidance on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters, in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development. One of the priority actions is to strengthen the capacity of national and sub-national authorities to protect individuals and communities that are vulnerable to climate change and disaster displacement and migration, through targeted national policies and actions, including relocation policies. Another priority is assistance for relocation from high-risk areas.

Still in the Pacific region, [Vanuatu’s National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=24) is another globally recognised policy for its comprehensive approach to addressing all aspects of the response to displacement. It was developed through a consultative process that included displacement-affected communities. In communities where the risk of hazards is too severe for successful adaptation or mitigation measures, the policy outlines steps for temporary or permanent relocation “so that movement takes place with dignity and with appropriate safeguards and human rights protections in place.”

[Fiji planned relocation guidelines - A framework to undertake climate change related relocation](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=28) were developed in 2018 and establish the overarching principles to guide planned relocation, breaking the process down into three key stages: making the decision to relocate, planning and implementation. The guidelines state that relocation should be a last resort when all adaptation options have been exhausted. They require that the process is rights-based, community-led, transparent, sustainable and implemented in accordance with the international covenants on civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. They also set out a livelihood-based approach to avoid negative impacts on communities that relocate, ensuring the process is sensitive to their needs.

**Engagement of communities and regional and international actors**

As noted above, one of the success factors for planned relocations is the [active participation](https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC_2023_25_years_of_progress_on_internal_displacement_report.pdf) of relevant stakeholders and of relocated communities themselves in the planning and implementation of the process.

In certain cases, affected communities initiate the process themselves, seeking the support or approval of the authorities. The indigenous Caicara people of Enseada da Baleia in Sao Paulo state, Brazil, [managed relocation themselves](https://www.internal-displacement.org/good-practice/?id=21). From the mid-2000s the community advocated for their right to stay and then to leave after coastal erosion made life unsustainable. The state authorities gave them permission to move to a nearby location after a lengthy process in which the community and authorities agreed on a protocol to ensure future relocations would consider cultural preferences and sensitivities. The community rebuilt through collective mobilisation of regional networks, receiving free labour and funds, and are now re-establishing their way of life.

In Panama, an indigenous Guna community on the small island of Gardi Sugdub has been [planning for their relocation](https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/07/31/sea-eating-land-below-our-homes/indigenous-community-facing-lack-space-and-rising) to a safer mainland site since 2010. Rising sea levels have caused the progressive sinking of their island, which has also become increasingly populated. After years of community- and NGO-led advocacy, in 2017, the Panamanian Ministry of Housing and Planning committed to building 300 new homes at a new mainland site already owned by the community. Coordinating the response was difficult for the Ministry, which has invested [more than $12 million since 2019](https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC_2023_25_years_of_progress_on_internal_displacement_report.pdf). The Inter-American Development Bank also funded a school and health centre in the new location.

In Mexico, the community of El Bosque, Tabasco, has had to be evacuated on several occasions, due to the rising sea which has caused more than 60 families to lose their homes, schools and small businesses. For many years, the community publicly stated the need to be relocated, making an urgent call to the three levels of government and the media. On [15 February 2024](https://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/noticia/53878/comunidad-de-el-bosque-logra-primeros-pasos-para-su-reubicacion-pero-preocupan-familias-que-estan-fuera-del-padron/), the Congress of the State of Tabasco unanimously approved the ruling that enables the relocation of the community. El Bosque is the first community recognized as climate displaced in Mexico and going through a community relocation process. The process to get the support of the authorities [has been slow](https://piedepagina.mx/desplazamiento-climatico-en-mexico-llega-a-la-comision-interamericana/): it took 5 years for the community to receive a relocation plan, which has yet to be materialized.

But most examples of planned relocations are actually led and initiated by authorities, as illustrated by situations presented in sections above and below. In Vietnam, the [Hoa Binh Relocation Project](https://publications.iom.int/books/planned-relocation-context-environmental-change-hoa-binh-province-northern-viet-nam), which began in 2010, aimed to relocate 1,200 households from two remote communes in the Northwest region that were identified as facing high risks of landslides, flooding and storms. Lessons from this initiative highlighted the importance of government-led relocation projects to be done in close consultation with the community to avoid adverse effects of forcible displacement.

**Consideration of specific needs of relocated and affected populations**

One of the population groups most affected by the effects of climate change and disasters is [indigenous peoples](https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/when-land-knowledge-and-roots-are-lost-indigenous-peoples-and-displacement/) and communities that otherwise rely heavily on their natural environment for their livelihoods and way of lives. Pacific islanders, as mentioned above, are amongst them. Several other examples of indigenous peoples in the process of planned relocations have been recorded in the Americas.

In [Ontario, Canada](https://globalnews.ca/news/9656123/spring-flooding-northern-ontario-first-nation-evacuation/), the Kashechewan First Nation experiences annual flooding forcing them to be repeatedly displaced. In [2019](https://futuretuktoyaktuk.org/kashechewan), Indigenous Services Canada, the Province of Ontario and the Kashechewan First Nation reached a framework agreement on permanently relocating the community to higher grounds. These [plans are still being finalised](https://www.indigenouswatchdog.org/update/northern-ontario-chief-says-his-community-continues-to-fear-flooding-because-of-neighbouring-first-nation/).

Also in Canada, in[Prince Edward Island,](https://www.communityconservation.net/sea-level-rise-and-lennox-island-pei/) the Mi’Kmaq people of Lennox Island has been steadily losing land, with 200 acres lost due to land erosion and sea level rise within one generation. The community knowns the island will eventually be fully submerged, and are looking for locations to relocate to.

In Guyana, in November 2023 [10 families](https://dpi.gov.gy/10-families-receive-keys-to-new-homes-in-kokerite-village/) from the rural community of Kokerite Village in Region One, who were repeatedly affected by floods, have been relocated as part of the [Hinterland Housing Programme.](https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2024/02/28/30-region-eight-families-to-get-new-homes-through-hinterland-housing-programme/)

As of late 2022, the [government](https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-makes-135-million-commitment-support-relocation-tribal) of the United States of America was planning to award 5-million-dollar grants to several indigenous communities affected by climate change, to support their relocations.

**Recommendations**

Key takeaways from the evidence collected by IDMC and the analysis of planned relocations policies and processes around the world point to the following recommendations for successful planned relocations across contexts:

* Participation of affected communities and other relevant stakeholders, such as local and national authorities, international partners and NGOs, is essential to the development of comprehensive and inclusive policies on planned relocation;
* Consultation of affected communities, including the relocated communities and potential future host communities, is an indispensable requirement to achieve successful planned relocations. Communities should be consulted, and their inputs integrated as much as possible in the planning and implementation phases, as well as in the evaluation of the overall process once completed;
* Successful planned relocations must consider the broad range of aspects that make up individual, family and community lives, going beyond the provision of new land and houses to encompass new livelihoods, access to services, cultural and recreational activities, the protection of people’s human rights, security and well-being;
* Certain groups of people should receive tailored support and attention in relocation processes, including indigenous communities and other communities whose livelihoods and lifestyles are closely linked with their natural environments, but also groups of people with specific needs and vulnerabilities such as people with disabilities, children, older people and minority or marginalized groups;
* While planned relocations are being increasingly discussed, implemented and documented, quality information on the context in which they happen, the policies behind them, their success factors and challenges is still lacking. More efforts should be made to document and share lessons learnt in ongoing processes so that governments and affected communities can build on them for future planned relocations.

1. Building on the [global mapping](https://disasterdisplacement.org/resource/leaving-place-restoring-home/) of over 400 planned relocation cases conducted in 2021 by the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the German Development Agency (GIZ), this contribution focuses on examples that were not already included in the resulting [report](https://disasterdisplacement.org/resource/leaving-place-restoring-home/) and [dataset](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1pDR-t1hVApqJiVk6E5DJ7TN0cOtXJiKvS1w8QIP149o/edit#gid=1611800107). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unpublished research by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the Asian Development Bank, forthcoming in October 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)