

## **Dina Ionesco**

### **How did you first come to be interested in your field ?**

I have obtained through a competitive selection process the position of policy officer (with the charge of the migration and environment portfolio and other policy related areas of work) in February 2011. I worked with IOM since 2004, first involved in the area of migration and development, research, training but followed up closely the topic since IOM's work accelerated on this issue in 2006/2007 etc. I have also lived in Denmark and was there when the COP15<sup>1</sup> took place and followed the event with interest.

### **What is the IOM's official position regarding environmental migration ?**

Environmental and climatic factors have always been key drivers of migration. IOM works on the broader migration and the environment nexus rather than exclusively focusing on climate change. This is due to the abovementioned complexity and multi-causality of environmental migration which makes climate change unlikely to be the sole driver of migration. IOM also stresses the importance of considering the impacts of migration (especially sudden, large-scale displacement) on the environment. In line with IOM's comprehensive approach to human mobility, the Organization pursues three broad objectives in managing environmental migration:

- a) to minimize forced, unmanaged migration as much as possible;
- b) where forced migration does occur, to ensure assistance and protection for those affected and to seek durable solutions to their situation;
- c) to facilitate the role of migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change.

As the world's leading migration agency, IOM has a duty to keep up with the issues that will have serious consequences for millions of migrants and their countries and communities in the near and distant future.

### **How does the IOM define an environmental migrant ?**

IOM working definition of "environmental migrant": "Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad." IOM's working definition is not intended to serve a legal/normative purpose or have implications for the granting of rights. Rather, it represents an attempt to capture the complexity of the issue at hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Investigator's note: <http://www.denmark.dk/en/menu/Climate-Energy/COP15-Copenhagen-2009/cop15.htm>

**In your opinion, for any geographical area where environmental migration is a concern, which of the following two options is preferred and why: an adaptation approach with emphasis on the ability for people to remain in place or a survival solution with emphasis on the ability for people to migrate? Is it possible to choose between the two ?**

IOM works on the broad migration and adaptation spectrum, thus our programmes include activities aimed at the stabilization of populations via offering new livelihoods options allowing people to remain in place (See example of work programme in Mauritius “the Other migrant<sup>2</sup>”) and on activities that can facilitate migration as a possible adaptation option, as well as contribute to the preparedness of people as an adaptation solution. The different options are not contradictory, for instance facilitated migration can lead to increases of remittances that are then invested in the local economy into sustainable green economic activities providing alternative livelihoods in degraded areas.

**Is there any particular region or government that is at the forefront of the environmental migration movement ?**

IOM’s 2012 Migration Initiatives Report notes that in all regions, natural disasters, combined with environmental degradation and climate change, have increased and caused more internal and intraregional migration flows, a trend that is expected to grow in the coming years. Thus, there is a need to progressively reflect this tendency in IOM’s programmatic development strategy, in particular via projects that can bring together environmental, development, adaptation and migration concerns.

IOM and ADB have organized a number of policy dialogues in 2011 that led to the publication of the report Addressing Climate Change and Migration in Asia and the Pacific<sup>3</sup>. The report includes detailed analyses of climate change impacts on migration in Asian sub-regions, highlighting ‘hot spots’. It also shows how governments and the private sector can work together to finance the cost of climate-induced migration. Most importantly, this is the first study to develop policy recommendations to address the phenomenon at the regional level, so Asia Pacific region seems to have advanced in terms of awareness at least in the last years.

Some national examples:

- Guatemala is a country frequently exposed to natural disasters, yet a 2008 IOM study estimates that less than 1 per cent of Guatemalans living abroad have migrated for this reason. Instead, Guatemalans living abroad often support disaster-affected populations back home by sending remittances for reconstruction.
- One of the conclusions of an in-depth IOM study in Bangladesh was that the vast majority of movement in response to environmental factors takes place internally. It was also observed that migration, especially temporary migration, served as a

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<sup>2</sup> Investigator’s note: [http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/the\\_other\\_migrants.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/the_other_migrants.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Investigator’s note: <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2012/addressing-climate-change-migration.pdf>

“safety net” for households affected by sudden-onset events, such as floods and cyclones.

- Different case studies in West Africa have demonstrated that migration is a typical strategy to deal with structural scarcities of rainfall, food and land. However, migration, especially long-distance migration, actually declined during years of severe drought, probably because people could no longer afford the cost of migration.
- In a combination of severe natural disaster, low levels of disaster preparation and pre-existing vulnerabilities, Cyclone Nargis which swept through Myanmar in May 2008, left nearly 140,000 people dead and 2.4 million homeless, resulting in widespread and often protracted displacement for entire communities.

**In your opinion, should the 1951 Refugee Convention be altered (i.e. amended, extended, revised) to include persons migrating due to the effects of environmental shifts – climate change or natural disasters ?**

The IOM’s Chair’s summary of the last International Dialogue on Migration IDM sums up well IOM’s membership position to legal debate on the topic. In 2012, IOM’s membership has selected as a main topic for its IDM “migration in crisis situation”, two workshops will be organized see. These workshops will be the opportunity for IOM members and observers to further discuss informally international frameworks to address migration in crisis situation, this including also the context of natural disasters and climate change.

**In your opinion, what is the largest obstacle to an agreement on a legal definition for “environmental refugee” ?**

Firstly, it is too simplistic to say that “climate change” alone causes someone to move. It is the impacts of climate change (e.g. on soil fertility, on water availability and quality, on occurrence of natural disasters) in combination with structural social and economic factors (e.g. access to resources, information, opportunities and alternatives; levels of development; governance) that will tip the balance for or against migrating. Secondly, the term refugee has a very specific meaning under international law and centers on a “well-founded fear of being persecuted”. This will not be applicable to situations arising from climate change, bar in a few exceptional scenarios.

There is consensus among concerned agencies, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to avoid terms such as “climate change refugee” or “environmental refugee” as they could potentially undermine the international legal regime for the protection of refugees. IOM has put forward a working definition of environmental migrants, in an attempt to capture the complexity of the issue: “Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”

**In your opinion, which organisation, body, government or group is best suited to lead on advocating for a legal definition ?**

IOM collaborates on climate change and environment with a very large network of partners, agencies, national counterparts, private sector, think tanks, universities, NGOs where the legal definitions are regularly debated, discussed and a lot of collaboration is on-going among all these stakeholders on the subject, without a body having a specific mandate on migration, climate change and the environment legal definitions.

IOM is an intergovernmental organization thus, its membership decides on strategic orientations. The topic has been now discussed in many of IOM's official instances (Council, Standing Committee on Programmes and Finances, IDM etc.) and the membership calls regularly for follow up on this theme for IOM.

**What are the primary factors which motivate a person to migrate as a result of climate change or a natural disaster ?**

Climate change is likely to exacerbate sudden onset disasters (e.g. the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as tropical storms, floods, heat waves) and slow onset disasters (e.g. gradual processes of environmental degradation such as desertification, soil and coastal erosion). Both may result in population movements; however, gradual environmental degradation is expected to cause most environmental migration.

Are these factors equally important across the decision, with regards to the method of migration, the destination chosen, knowing or not knowing people who have already migrated, and the resources used in the migration ?

**What are the common or frequent reasons cited by willing, would-be migrants who nonetheless decide not to migrate ?**

- Lack of opportunities to go abroad (lack of social network, job opportunities, family links etc)
- Lack of assistance to migrate

**Should seasonal migration and/or labour-motivated migration be considered when describing motivations for environmental migration?**

Given the mix of factors that influence migration, yes seasonal migration in particular but also labour migration can be taken into consideration, the analysis should always be extremely careful regarding the complexity of factors and the preeminence of the environment , climate change as a trigger or as an exacerbation of other factors.

**Following the adoption of the “climate-change induced displacement” language in Paragraph 14, Section (f) of the UNFCCC Cancun Agreements, what do you see as the next steps ? Have there been any recent initiatives or programmes implemented as a result of the adoption of this language ?**

Yes, Cancun has made a difference in formally integration migration and displacement into the official text. Durban has also made advances in terms of furthering the adaptation agenda. IOM focuses in the post Cancun context on implementation of the

paragraph 14F. Prior many efforts were focused on policy and advocacy work to bring in migration into the text which was achieved in Cancun.

IOM works for instance on capacity building with states on the subject and give as an example the 2011 International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) on “Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration” (29-30 March, Geneva). Over 250 participants, 80 states represented 16 international organizations and 29 non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academia and the media. IDM Report on “Climate change, environmental degradation and migration” is available<sup>4</sup>.

We organized also a training with Global Social Compliance Programme<sup>5</sup> and International Institute of Humanitarian Law<sup>6</sup>. This two days working seminar brought together over 30 practitioners from countries affected by the impacts of climate change (Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Mauritius, Philippines, Mexico and Vietnam etc.), donors (Norway, United States, Switzerland), international organizations (World Meteorological, UNHCR, Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change), the European Commission, academics (IDDRI) and NGOs (Global Migration Policy) with a scientific, social or legal background. Part of the sessions reviewed legal frameworks, while IOM was responsible for leading discussions on policy options, operational responses and capacity needs.

### **To go further**

IOM collaborates with ADB on migration and adaptation, we organized two policy dialogues:

- <http://www.iom.int/event/adbdialogue> with them in 2011 that lead to the release of the Publication Addressing Climate Change and Migration in Asia and the Pacific. The report includes detailed analyses of climate change impacts on migration in Asian sub-regions, highlighting ‘hot spots’.
- It also shows how governments and the private sector can work together to finance the cost of climate-induced migration : <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2012/addressing-climate-change-migration.pdf>
- IOM engages with the EU (IOM input to EU Consultation on Migration and Climate Change: [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vietnam/documents/consultation\\_document\\_gam\\_07042011\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vietnam/documents/consultation_document_gam_07042011_en.pdf)
- IOM participated in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (14-15 Nov. 2011, Dhaka) This forum led to the adoption of the first ministerial declaration on the topic and shows the commitment of the LDCs to the topic <http://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Dhaka.Declaration.pdf>

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<sup>4</sup> Investigator’s note: [www.iom.int/idmclimatechange/lang/en](http://www.iom.int/idmclimatechange/lang/en)

<sup>5</sup> Investigator’s note: <http://www.gscpnet.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Investigator’s note: <http://www.iihl.org/Default.aspx?pageid=page1>

- IOM participated to the Global Migration Group (GMG) and to the GMG Statement on the impact of Climate Change on Migration:  
<http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/uploads/english.pdf>