

## UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE

### Secretary-General Background note for the preparatory meeting of the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the implementation of SDG 14

Inputs from the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The following document outlines IOM's proposed contributions to some of the sections of the Secretary-General Background note for the preparatory meeting of the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the implementation of SDG 14.

#### II. Activities, challenges and opportunities for the implementation of SDG 14

##### 1. Status and trends

Migration and displacement linked to the impacts of climate change on the ocean and the degradation of marine ecosystems are already a reality in many regions throughout the world. Climate change-related modifications that affect the global have direct consequences on island and coastal population - the environment, economy and livelihoods of many communities worldwide are already affected. This in turn impacts the migration patterns of affected communities as well as the daily lives of communities receiving migrants.

The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on Ocean and Cryosphere Report (2019) makes several dozen references to the ocean-migration nexus, highlighting the growing visibility of migration issues linked to oceans. Some of the key findings outlined in the report are:

- There is high agreement that climate change can drastically impact the patterns and flows of migration. Changes in the ocean are linked to multiple hazards that impact the health, wellbeing, safety and security of populations in coastal areas. One direct impact of sea level rise and coastal erosion is population displacement.
- Migration can represent an adaptive response to the impacts of climate change on the ocean for coastal populations.
- In some situations linked to sea level rise and warming oceans, relocation of population away from coastal areas could represent the most appropriate response, whilst in other cases, outmigration may become the only viable response. Planned relocations generally seek to reduce long term environmental risks, including sea level rise, and there is robust evidence that such relocations are happening worldwide in coastal areas.
- Globally, it is estimated that sea level rise associated with a 2°C warmer world could submerge the homeland of 280 million people by the end of this century.

##### 2. Challenges and opportunities

## **Challenges**

Oceans contribute to sustainable development and sustainable ocean-based economies, including poverty eradication, food security, livelihoods and decent work. Yet, the impacts of climate change are threatening the oceans, by contributing to rising the sea levels and exacerbating ocean acidification, bleaching of coral reefs and increasing global water temperatures. All these impacts are detrimental to affected communities and individuals' livelihoods, wellbeing, health, safety and food security.

These dimensions are intrinsically linked to the migration of people – whether forced or voluntary – as they can have direct and indirect impacts on the decision and/or the necessity to migrate..

Furthermore, threats to marine biodiversity and their impacts on livelihoods also impact the movement of people. Economic activities, such as fishery or tourism, experience productivity loss in many regions. The least developed countries are generally the most impacted; their coastal infrastructures are more fragile (many are located in areas affected by tropical storms) and populations' subsistence is usually highly linked to fishery. In that respect, some countries face increasing migration of coastal populations to secure alternative livelihoods inland. This phenomenon can cause a loss of cultural and identity landmarks, a feeling of insecurity and the erosion of traditions and indigenous knowledge. Yet, for some communities, migration might be the only solution to escape the nefarious effects linked to marine biodiversity threats.

Looking ahead, it is possible that migration, including planned relocation of populations, will represent the most viable adaptation strategy for many people. These risks call for urgently developing a better understanding of what potential migration scenarios might unfold, and for a serious reflection around potential anticipatory measures.

## **Opportunities**

Protecting and sustainably managing ocean resources is key to provide solutions to migration challenges linked to ocean threats. A more sustainable management of natural marine resources and the implementation of ecosystem protection and restoration projects along with disaster risk reduction initiatives, climate change adaptation policies and creation of alternative jobs can contribute to reducing the vulnerability of oceans resources and communities that depend upon them, thereby reducing instances of forced migration and allowing people to remain where they are.

Conservation, restoration and sustainable management of ocean ecosystems (including seagrass beds, coastal wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs), notably through relying on indigenous know-how, can also contribute to protecting the communities who depend upon them, reinforce their livelihoods and prevent forced migration.

In cases where the migration of people is inevitable, such as when land erodes due to sea-level rise, planned and facilitated migration schemes can be put in place in order to protect affected individuals and communities, including communities who receive migrants.

Current global policy dialogues offer a moment of opportunity to take action on the ocean and migration nexus. Questions of migration linked to oceans are gaining increasing visibility, for instance, during the annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) where several thematic events on ocean regularly include migration dimensions.

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Furthermore, climate migration questions are anchored in the work programme of the UNFCCC, through the work of its Taskforce on Displacement, and in the follow up and implementation of the first global UN agreement on international migration, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). However, there is a need to give more visibility to the ocean-migration nexus and better understand the mobility dimensions linked to threats to oceans and the conservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems.

IOM is working in close partnership with a number of ocean actors, including the Global Ocean Forum and the Ocean and Climate Platform, to support the development of the evidence base and the development of policy responses. Such partnerships will continue to be scaled up as the multi-causal nature of environmental migration linked to the ocean requires building upon the expertise of different United Nations agencies, other non-governmental partners and the migrant communities themselves.

### **Bibliography**

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