



PRESS RELEASE

The impact of climate change on migration: response options at the political level – English Summary of SVR Annual Report now available

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. In its 2023 Annual Report, the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) examines the impact of climate change on migration patterns. To respond effectively to climate change-induced migration, the entire spectrum of migration policy instruments should be used. With three innovative instruments – a climate passport, a climate card and a climate work visa – the German Federal Government could assume a pioneering role in the international response to climate change and migration. Now a summary of the SVR 2023 Annual Report published in May 2023 is available.

Berlin, 09 October 2023 The fight against climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Research shows that climate change-induced alterations in the environment and extreme weather events exacerbate not only existing social, economic and political pressures, but also increase the pressure to migrate. Presenting the SVR's 2023 Annual Report, SVR chairperson Professor Hans Vorländer explains: "Climate change-induced migration takes place predominantly within national borders, or across short distances, for example to a neighbouring country. Many countries of the global South are especially badly affected. This is due not only to their geographical location, but also to the fact that they have fewer financial resources to draw upon for adaptation measures. To address this situation, it is essential to find fair solutions for especially vulnerable individuals and countries."

But it should not be assumed that climate change is creating an entirely new and clearly definable form of migration. Rather, climate change acts as an underlying factor across the spectrum of existing migration patterns. Climate change-induced alterations in the environment and extreme weather events exacerbate existing problems in the countries of origin and as a result, can trigger migration. "If we are unable to halt climate change, then on the one hand climate migration will continue to increase. On the other hand, the consequences of climate change can inhibit migration or even prevent it, for example when people lose the resources they need to migrate at all," adds Professor Birgit Leyendecker, deputy chairperson of the SVR. In terms of politics, migration should therefore be facilitated as an adaptation strategy, while in parallel strengthening the 'right to remain'. So that affected individuals are not forced to leave their place of origin, investments are needed, for example in funding better climate protection measures or effective disaster preparedness on the ground.

The entire spectrum of refugee and migration policy instruments should be used

In terms of practical politics, the SVR recommends using the entire spectrum of migration policy instruments. "Migration and refugee policy options need to become an integral part of the climate policy agenda. There is no time to lose," says Professor Vorländer. In the case of sudden events, it would make sense to use refugee policy measures such as the granting of humanitarian visas, temporary legal protection or the suspension of repatriations to affected countries and regions. Migration should also be understood and facilitated as a proactive way of responding to slow-onset environmental change; here, the use of migration policy instruments such as work visas would be more pertinent. In this context, existing agreements on the free movement of persons at a regional level have also proved to be very helpful in facilitating climate change-induced migration as an adaptation strategy. For example, remittances to family members in the country of origin can help to compensate for reduced incomes, or enable investments to support adaptation to new environmental conditions.



Germany should take a leading role in the international response

“Although climate change and its consequences are a global challenge, nation-states still have an important role to play,” explains Professor Vorländer. “This is especially true when it comes to shaping climate migration, as the regulation of migration is still largely a matter for national governments. There are difficulties in establishing multinational and international agreements in this context, and the SVR therefore believes that fast and efficient measures can best be put in place at a national level. If such measures are found to work well at this stage, they can then go on to serve as models for regional and international programmes.” To meet the challenges of climate change-induced migration, the SVR is proposing three instruments to political decision-makers in Germany: a climate passport, a climate card and a climate work visa. “We understand these three residency instruments as offering graded solutions to a range of different situations, according to how strongly countries of origin are affected by climate change,” summarises Professor Vorländer.

Responding to challenges with three migration policy instruments

The idea of creating a climate passport was originally put forward by the German Advisory Council on Global Change. The SVR's proposal, as set out in the Annual Report, builds on the original concept, adding more details and making it more specific. The climate passport would be offered to people from countries that are losing their entire territory as a result of climate change. These individuals would be granted a permanent right to remain. The climate card is designed for individuals who need to leave their country temporarily as a result of environmental devastation; with a broader scope of application than the climate passport, this instrument would require a country-specific quota, and would represent a temporary leave to remain modelled on humanitarian admission programmes. Use of the instrument would be conditional upon adaptation measures being implemented in parallel in the respective countries of origin, so that a return would be possible in the long term. The climate work visa, which could be used as a mean of offering easier access to the German labour market, would be applicable to a limited contingent of people from countries still to be named, similarly to the Western Balkans regulation. The aim is to open up new perspectives to people affected by climate change through alternative sources of income. “The climate work visa is a particularly innovative instrument. Up until now, there have been hardly any international migration programmes that can help to regulate migration as a consequence of slow-onset climate change. There are regional free movement agreements that apply indirectly to some extent. But the climate work visa could make regular migration possible in an international as well as a regional context,” says Professor Vorländer.

Migration policy as one element of a greater overarching strategy

The measures from the spectrum of migration policy recommended by the SVR are to be understood as building blocks in a larger overarching strategy. The consequences of human-created climate change demand a swift response from all tiers of politics and in many policy fields, but also from the economy and society. “The decisive factor will be how quickly and to what extent CO₂ emissions can be limited worldwide. Besides migration policy approaches, this overarching strategy must include an external climate policy that incorporates migration policy aspects, along with a development policy that includes adaptation measures, support for countries in managing internal migration - empirically shown to be the most dominant form of migration – and disaster relief,” underlines SVR deputy chairperson Professor Leyendecker. “Countries with high CO₂ emissions and that consume many natural resources have a special responsibility to act fast to reduce their CO₂ emissions and to support other, disproportionately affected countries when it comes to climate protection and the necessary adaptation measures. This support needs to be both financial and technological.”



More topics in the SVR Annual Report 2023

- Forecasts and scenarios on climate change-induced migration
- The potential and limitations of a global governance in relation to climate migration
- Shaping climate change-induced migration in a regional context

The SVR Annual Report Summary 2023, Core Messages and the Press Release can be downloaded here <https://www.svr-migration.de/en/publications/annual-assessment/annual-report-2023/>

For the German publications related to the SVR Annual Report 2023 please refer to this link: <https://www.svr-migration.de/presse/jahresgutachten-2023/>

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About the Expert Council

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration is an independent and interdisciplinary body providing research-based policy advice. Its reports aim to assist those bodies responsible for integration and migration policy, as well as the general public, in their opinion-forming processes. The interdisciplinary Expert Council comprises a total of nine Researchers: Prof. Dr. Hans Vorländer (Chairperson), Prof. Dr. Birgit Leyendecker (Deputy Chairperson), Prof. Dr. Havva Engin, Prof. Dr. Birgit Glorius, Prof. Dr. Marc Helbling, Prof. Dr. Winfried Kluth, Prof. Dr. Steffen Mau, Prof. Panu Poutvaara, Ph.D., Prof. Dr. Sieglinde Rosenberger.

For more information, go to www.svr-migration.de