

# Disaster and climate-induced migration and displacement



**Fact sheet**  
**November 2019**



## Background

Disasters displace millions of people every year, with the majority of displacement occurring in Asia-Pacific. Climate change is expected to increase disaster displacement and influence migration dynamics as the impacts of environmental hazards become more intense, especially in developing countries. Unsustainable development patterns, including poor urban planning, insufficient provision of social services, rapid urbanization, poverty, and conflict are all significant drivers of disaster displacement. Certain groups, particularly poor people living in high-risk areas, are more vulnerable to displacement during and after disasters. Displacement uproots people from their lives, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and exposing them to new social, economic and physical risks and challenges in unfamiliar environments. However, at the same time, migration can serve as a vital adaptation strategy for millions of highly vulnerable people.

## Areas of work

SEI's work on disaster displacement aims to shed light on who is being displaced by disasters and why displacement occurs. It investigates and seeks to address the underlying and emerging drivers of disaster displacement, including those related to land rights and access to natural resources. We analyze the short and long-term impacts of disaster displacement related to both slow and rapid-onset risks in the Asia-Pacific region, and assess the opportunities and challenges of existing displacement policies and strategies, such as planned relocations. This work is situated within the broader field of human mobility that includes other voluntary and involuntary population movements linked to disasters and climate change, such as internal and cross-border migration. Through research and engagement, we contribute to the implementation of displacement-focused international agendas and frameworks, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. This work is aligned with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction's call for inclusive and rights-based approaches to disaster risk reduction (DRR).

A more collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to addressing disaster displacement that considers regional and context-specific needs is essential. SEI continues to work toward increasing knowledge and informing decision-makers working on displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, and to ensure that the voices of displaced people are heard for more equitable, resilient and sustainable outcomes for all.

## Selected projects and activities

**Transforming Development and Disaster Risk:** SEI researches the impacts of planned relocations of fishing communities in the Philippines displaced by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and explores the consequences of these relocations for their livelihoods. We work with local-level stakeholders, including government representatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics, to

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improve DRR policy and practice by addressing trade-offs inherent in decision-making processes and striving for more equitable solutions, including in planned relocation.

**Displacement-induced displacement:** This project explores the secondary effects of disaster and climate-induced displacements and relocations, as well as the circumstances underlying redistribution of vulnerabilities for 'host' communities that are often overlooked in displacement and resettlement processes. It illustrates how communities previously living on lands where relocation sites are to be built may be displaced in order to construct housing for other populations that have been displaced by disasters or climate risks, raising issues of land rights and inclusion in displacement and relocation processes.

**Floods and mobility in Southeast Asia:** SEI researchers contributed to two chapters in the book *Living with Floods in a Mobile Southeast Asia: A Political Ecology of Vulnerability, Migration and Environmental Change*. The book explores human experiences in the region with flooding, displacement, migration and mobility. SEI's chapters explored the impacts of floods on poor urban migrants in Metro Manila, Philippines, in addition to the lack of livelihood opportunities within government-led disaster response programmes. SEI also details in the book the different sources of vulnerability underpinning migration in flood prone areas of Lao PDR, highlighting the contingent nature of this vulnerability on ethnicity and historical and current development policies.

**Internal displacement and the role of law and policy:** Working with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights (RWI), SEI is co-editing the book *Protecting Persons Displaced in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change in Asia Pacific: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Law, Policy and Practice in Ten Countries*. This volume details disaster displacement cases in each covered country, highlighting the role of law and policy in preventing displacement and the need for protecting those that are displaced, as well as proposing durable solutions.

**Disability and displacement:** SEI collaborated with local disability organizations and academics in Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines and Australia to build a stronger evidence base on displacement and impacts of disasters on people with disabilities. We work to strengthen the empirical evidence base in regard to the challenges people with disabilities face when displaced, including in accessing safe and inclusive emergency shelters. This work includes collaboration with local and national governments towards more inclusive DRR and disaster response for people with disabilities.

**Study on migration, desertification and land degradation:** Migration has always been used to cope with the impacts of Desertification, Land Degradation, and Drought (DLDD), yet when it is forced or involuntary, it can contribute to further environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities. To counter the negative effects land degradation has on migration, SEI and the International Organization for Migration contributed to a study commissioned by parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on the role that UNCCD implementation can play in addressing the drivers of migration, including DLDD.

**Partnering with key displacement actors and networks:** Recognizing the need for a multi-stakeholder approach, SEI is a member of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, and has developed partnerships with key actors working in the fields of disasters and displacement. These include the International Organization for Migration, the Asia-Pacific Disaster Displacement Working Group, and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights. These collaborations help to better align efforts and create opportunities for shared learning. Joint activities include the co-hosting of a roundtable on disaster displacement and supporting national researchers to explore rights-based approaches to disaster and climate-induced displacement.

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Managing disaster and climate-induced migration and displacement is one of three impact areas being pursued by the International Centre of Excellence on Transforming Development and Disaster Risk (ICoE-TDDR), which is hosted by SEI and the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk Programme (IRDR). Find out more about the ICoE-TDDR here [www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/tddr-final-may2019.pdf](http://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/tddr-final-may2019.pdf).

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