



Is UK migration policy equipped to respond to internal climate migration?

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Overview

The Basics:

- Domestic climate migrants are people who have been forced to leave their home because of a large-scale environmental event. This has been accelerated by climate change.
- **There are already approximately 40 million climate refugees worldwide** (Biermann and Boas, 2008) but this number is set to increase over the coming decades.
- Flooding is an increasingly important issue in the UK with 1 million British people set to be exposed to flooding by 2100 (Seabrook, 2022). This will lead to an increase in internal migration if not addressed properly.
- Climate migration is often seen as an issue that doesn't affect the UK however this is not the case.

The Problem:

- The problem is that UK migration policy is not equipped to respond to **internal climate migration which is predicted to rise in future due to climate change**
- UK Climate policy is also having little impact on mitigating the effects of climate change which would reduce the number of internal climate migration.
- A major example of this is the village of Fairbourne on the Welsh coastline. In 2014 the local council announced that it wouldn't be able to maintain the villages coastal defences indefinitely meaning that it would eventually become uninhabitable (Gwynedd Council, 2018). This will lead to internal climate migration.

Methodology

- To create policy recommendations on the climate migration policy in the UK, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from secondary sources. The quantitative data was used mainly to provide a better understanding of the scale of the crisis, for instance statistics on the number of climate migrants both current and expected over 10 years, or the areas most affected by migration flows. The qualitative data was more useful in understanding the human experience of climate migration and the effectiveness of policy in providing an adequate response to it.
- For the initial research most of the data was gathered from governmental and institutional websites, such as the official UK government website. International intergovernmental agency websites and think tanks, and especially the UNFCCC and



the IMO, have been consulted for case studies in an effort to ground the policy recommendations in the wider global context.

- The policy brief will evaluate the effectiveness of the National Adaptation Programme (DEFRA, 2018) in addressing the issue of climate migration. It will use the Fairbourne Preliminary Coastal Adaptation Masterplan (Gwynedd Council, 2018) to highlight the gaps present in the current climate policy. Consequently, the Vanuatu National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (NDMO 2018) was used as an example of migration policy to support the recommendation proposed.

Policy Context

The National Adaptation Programme

- In the UK, the current climate change strategy is called *The National Adaptation Programme and the third strategy for climate adaptation reporting* (NAP). Climate related risks are analysed every 5 years and new policy output is created. The most recent NAP report covered areas such as; accessing information, working alongside communities, decisions on land use, boosting resilience and examining flood risk (DEFRA, 2018). In addition, in the CCRA evidence report the ASC identified six priority areas of climate change risks for the UK. **None of these policy recommendations mentioned internally displaced people as a result of climate change.**

Fairbourne, Wales

- Climate migration is often presented as an issue external to the UK. The village of Fairbourne in Wales shows how this is increasingly no longer the case. In 2014 Gwynedd council decided that it cannot afford to maintain the village sea defences indefinitely meaning that unless something changes the residents will have to leave the town by 2054 (Gwynedd Council, 2018). **Despite this announcement being made eight years ago little information has been made public about how the government intends to support the approximately 800 residents** in moving away from Fairbourne. Although 2054 is still over 30 years away, the decision to eventually stop maintaining sea defences is already massively affecting life in the community as it has become impossible to get a mortgage and house prices have fallen dramatically (Gerretsen, 2022).
- Fairbourne is low lying and its risk of flooding like many other places on the coastline is only going to increase over the next 30 years. This has not stopped residents from coming up with their own ideas of how to limit the impact of flooding on the village (Gerretsen, 2022). However all of their ideas are a temporary delay and will not stop the fundamental issue of climate change and over time **internal climate migration will continue to become a bigger and bigger issue in the UK, if not tackled early.**



Case study – Vanuatu

National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (NDMO 2018)

The policy has been put into place in order to target all causes of displacement in the country and **facilitate migration flows within the country by providing a policy framework protecting the communities affected**. The key interventions are:

1. Create institutions that can create coordinated aid efforts
 - a. Access emergency services, police assistance, and evacuation centres in order to ensure the safety and security of the displaced communities
 - b. Establish and ensure access to a legal system in order to protect displaced populations by the risk of eviction
2. Create internal hazard maps and internal migrant tracking systems to ensure vulnerable people do not fall through safety nets
 - a. Guarantee a suitable land and housing for displaced communities through promoting innovative responses to relocation in safe zones, support community-led processes land negotiations for land allocation, compliance with building codes and land owners
3. Develop agencies to respond to the needs of temporary/permanently displaced peoples
 - a. From the day of the disaster to relocation communities should have access to water, food, sanitation, electricity, education, health services, security services and shelter.
4. Develop training and resources for community leaders and transparent information for affected individuals

Policy Options and Recommendations

- **Mentioning climate migration in the NAP**
 - In light of the Fairbourne example we recommend adding a section on climate migration in the next NAP in order to tackle the growing problem of internal displacement in the UK. This new area should identify and propose a plan to monitor the areas at risk of flooding, assess the scale of displacement and focus resources on areas of key concern.
- **Creating a national and local plan for communities at risk**
 - We recommend a more extensive collaboration between national government and local authorities with the aim of creating a more unified protocol to deal with



the migration flows caused by climate change. Taking example from Vanuatu, the government should implement a policy ready to respond to internal migration. Government agencies should have a step-by-step guide ready to help citizens in need. This would create a national plan that can be adapted to local necessities in different areas.

- **Identifying communities and vulnerable people at risk of flooding.**
 - For example by providing extra support to disabled people. During heavy rain, when the threat of flooding increases, government agencies would visit the homes of physically disabled people, for example. This could ensure wheelchairs and specialist equipment for the individual are relocated with them, as well as ensuring they have access to escape mechanisms. This makes long-term adjustment easier for the individual.
- **Working alongside the community in order to ensure that support is easy to access for everyone.**
 - Improving communication between authorities and communities to ensure that the government informs those at risk of the strategies and policies in place to tackle the issue. Make sure information is available on how to access support, and especially ensure vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Conclusion

To conclude, the current UK government should focus more on climate migration alongside its effort to support communities at risk. The NAP is well equipped to respond to the needs of communities but **should expand its focus to also look at domestic climate migration**. Fairbourne, Wales is an example of the escalating risks of climate migration. It is a test of how the country can currently respond to domestic migrants, more assistance is currently needed and a clear well communicated response could improve the lives of the residents of Fairbourne.

Vanuatu had a clear domestic migration policy that would be effective in responding to the needs of internal climate refugees. The government could take inspiration from the planning of Vanuatu and use it to adapt its current approaches to places like Fairbourne. Vanuatu had a very comprehensive policy that had **safeguards for marginalised communities and protection for minorities**. This is essential for the implementation of a domestic migration policy in the UK so everyone has access to government support.



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