Cross-border and internal environmental migration in South Africa – deciphering the complexities of the changing policy landscape

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Introduction

- Issues of migration from other countries into South Africa and internal migration (often rural to urban)
- How is environmental migration being addressed by South Africa’s policy and legislative framework?
- Implications of far reaching recent changes in policy landscape.
IOM’s working definition of environmental migrants:

“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 habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad”
Migration into and within South Africa

- Mixed and irregular **migrant flows into South Africa** – environmental factors can contribute
- Migrants entering South Africa – primarily use asylum seeker system

- **Internal migration** often overlooked
- Trend is from **rural to urban** - one of reasons is environmental pressures
Refugees and migration policy

• Key points
  – Tighter and more restrictive public policy position on asylum seekers
  – Refugees Act (1998); Refugees Amendment Act (2017); White Paper on International Migration (2017)

• Implications for managing cross-border migrants
  – Who will house asylum seekers who have nobody to take care of them? Questions regarding proposed asylum processing centres
  – Migrants can only work in formal sector
Disaster management policy

• Key points
  – Disaster response activities aim to reduce impacts of a disaster
  – Disaster Management Act (2014); Disaster Management Amendment Act (2015); National Disaster Management Framework (2005)

• Implications for managing environmental migration
  – SA policy on disaster management primarily deals with rapid onset disasters
  – Challenge of actualising effective local government and transboundary involvement in disaster management
Climate change policy

• Key points
  – Climate policy framework - vision for effective climate change response

• Implications for managing environmental migration
  – Recognising climate change as a reality that needs to be understood and managed rather than prevented and ignored
  – Local government implementation remains a challenge
Development and planning policy

• **Key points**
  - South Africa’s planning policy and legislative framework at national, provincial and local levels of government

• **Implications for managing environmental migration**
  - No mention of environmental migration/migrants
Conclusions and way forward

• Need for
  – a balanced discourse on MECC issues between different stakeholders
  – local government capacitation in terms of disaster management, climate change adaptation, rapid urbanisation
  – mainstreaming of environmental migration into relevant components of national policy framework
  – a national policy on environmental migration
Thank you

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