



MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

ASIA PACIFIC GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS



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CONTENTS

Introduction	2	Displacement	10
The IFRC's Principled Approach to Migration and Displacement	3	Climate Displacement	10
Migration	4	Disaster Displacement	10
Migration	4	Displacement	10
Internal Migration	4	Durable Solutions to Displacement	10
Drivers of Migration	4	Environmentally Displaced People	11
International or Cross-border Migration	4	Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	11
Labour Migration	4	Relocation	11
Regular Migration	4	Statelessness	12
Irregular Migration	5	Stateless Person	12
Migrant	5	Smuggling and Trafficking	13
Migrant Worker	5	Smuggling of migrants	13
People on the move	6	Human Trafficking	13
Return	6	Exploitation	13
Voluntary Return	6	Terms related to children in the context of Migration and Displacement	14
Forced Return	6	Children remaining behind	14
Returnee	6	Separated children	14
Country of Destination	7	Unaccompanied children	14
Country of Origin	7		
Transit Country/ies	7		
Host Country of Host Community	7		
Immigration Detention	7		
Refugees	8		
Refugee	8		
Asylum Seeker	8		
Asylum	8		
Principle of non-refoulement	9		
Refugee Status Determination (RSD)	9		
Resettlement Country	9		
Person of Concern (POC)	9		

INTRODUCTION

As the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), it is important that the language we use reflects our principles and our values.

Words matter!

In line with our humanitarian mission to prevent and alleviate human suffering, thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world, we need to carefully consider how we speak about the phenomena of migration and displacement and all those affected.

There are many technical nuances to migration and displacement terminology that convey important meaning in terms of legal status. The language used in relation to migrants and refugees in public discourse can contribute to negative attitudes and can serve to obscure the root causes of why people migrate including fleeing persecution, being displaced due to conflict or climate change, or migrating for better opportunities. It is important that the language we use to talk about migration and displacement is technically accurate, and puts the humanity and dignity of affected people at the centre.

It is hoped that this first-ever internal glossary of migration and displacement key terms provides useful guidance to colleagues across the Federation.



THE IFRC'S PRINCIPLED APPROACH TO MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

The IFRC's approach to Migration is strictly humanitarian and aligned with our Fundamental Principles. It focuses on the needs, vulnerabilities and potential of migrants, irrespective of their legal status or category, and is described in detail in the [IFRC Policy on Migration \(2009\)](#).

We use a deliberately broad description of "migrants", to cover all people who leave or flee their home to seek safety or better prospects, irrespective of their legal status. Therefore, while recognising the specific rights of different groups under international law (such as refugees and asylum seekers), it addresses the needs of and risks faced by all types of migrants including migrant workers, stateless migrants, irregular migrants, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

This inclusive description reflects the Movement's focus on needs and vulnerabilities and emphasises that all migrants are entitled to protection under several bodies of law. The Movement does not seek to encourage, discourage or dissuade migration, as this would undermine our Fundamental Principles.

Our action aims to link protection and assistance gaps along migratory routes, and influence better outcomes for migrants in vulnerable situations (as well as their families and the communities who host migrants) at all stages of their journey through humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy.



Migration

Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The movement of a person or a group of people, either across an international border, or within a State, regardless of duration, composition and causes/reasons.

Internal Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence, regardless of the reasons for doing so.

Anyone participating in such movement is known as an “internal migrant.”

📖 REFERENCE

[IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Drivers of Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The factors that influence an individual, family or a group’s decisions to migrate. These factors are often various, complex and interlinked.

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from [IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

International or Cross-border Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The movement of people away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country where they are not a national.

Anyone participating in such movement is known as an “international or cross-border migrant.”

📖 REFERENCE

[IOM, Key Migration Terms](#)

Labour Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Movement of people from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment.

Labour migration includes movement within a country and across international borders.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

IFRC uses “labour migration” and not “economic migration”, to align with the terminology used by the International Labour Organization (ILO)

📖 REFERENCE

[IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Regular Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination.

📖 REFERENCE

[IOM, Key Migration Terms](#)



Irregular Migration

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

There is no universally accepted definition of irregular migration, but it is generally considered to be movement which does not comply with the laws and/or regulations governing the entry to, stay in or exit from a country.

A migrant in an irregular situation (an “irregular migrant”) may be:

- 1) Someone who has entered a country without the necessary authorisation (including those without documents, using false documents, or through an unofficial border crossing point).
- 2) Someone who resides in a country without authorisation, i.e., in violation of the terms of a visa/residence permit, including on an expired visa/residence permit, or working on a visa that prohibits employment.)

States are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all migrants on their territory or under their effective control, including irregular migrants. This includes the right to seek asylum.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

IFRC uses the terms “migrant in an irregular situation” or “irregular migrant,” but avoids the term “illegal migrant.”

X TERMS TO AVOID

Illegal migrant
Alien

The term “illegal” should never be used to define migrants in an irregular situation. The term “irregular” is preferable because describing a person as “illegal” is factually inaccurate, harmful (dehumanising and carries a criminal connotation) and against IFRC’s values.

Migrants like any other human being, can never be “illegal”, although they can be in an irregular situation.

Migrant

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A migrant is a person who leaves or flees their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects.

IFRC recognises that migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. Thus, this definition includes, among others, migrant workers, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities.

It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category (with specific associated protection frameworks) under international law.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

Where the IFRC uses the term “migrant”, this may be further explained in a footnote quoting the IFRC Policy on Migration, *“In order to capture the full extent of humanitarian concerns related to migration, our description of migrants is deliberately broad.”*

📖 REFERENCE

[IFRC Policy on Migration \(2009\)](#)

Migrant Worker

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A person who will be or is engaged in paid activity in a country of which they are not a national.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

“Migrant worker” is preferred as it emphasises the work of the person and aligns with language in the UN Convention on Migrant Workers.

X TERMS TO AVOID

Foreign Worker
Economic Migrant
Alien Worker
Labour Migrant

📖 REFERENCE

[International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#)



People on the move

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A neutral and generic term that covers all forms of movement of people (human mobility) within and across borders, including migration and displacement.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

Used in the IFRC website to describe our work on Migration and Displacement: [IFRC Supporting people on the move](#).

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from “Human Mobility” [IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Return

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

There is no universally accepted definition of “return migration”. Return can be defined as the process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning internally displaced people (IDPs) or return from a country of destination or transit to a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees or asylum seekers.

The return can be voluntary or forced. Humanitarian principles in the context of return are upholding safety, dignity and voluntariness.

Voluntary Return

Voluntary Repatriation

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The assisted or independent return to one’s country of origin, based on the voluntary decision of the returnee.

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from [UNHCR Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities](#) and [IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Forced Return

Involuntary Return

Forced Repatriation

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The act of returning a person, against their will, to their country of origin. Generally carried out based on an administrative or judicial decision (i.e., deportation).

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from [IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Returnee

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A person who returns to a place, especially after a prolonged absence e.g., a migrant or refugee who returns to their place of origin. A person may return voluntarily or be deported against their will.

In some contexts, returnees risk becoming internally displaced when they are unable to return to their homes and land due to on-going insecurity or are unable to find a “durable solution” (see item 34) to their displacement.

📖 REFERENCE

[IFRC's Approach to Migration \(e-learning platform\)](#)



Country of Destination

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

“Country of destination” is a neutral and accurate term to refer to the country in which a person intends to conclude their journey.

POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

“Country of destination” is preferred over “receiving country” which connotes a lack of agency on the part of the person migrating.

REFERENCE

[ILO Labour Migration: Inclusive Terminology](#)

Country of Origin

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

In the migration context, a country of nationality or of former habitual residence of a person or group of persons who have migrated abroad, irrespective of whether they migrate regularly or irregularly.

POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

“Country of origin” is preferred over “sending country” which connotes a lack of agency on the part of the person migrating.

REFERENCE

IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration (2019) [iml_34_glossary.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

Transit Country/ies

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The country/ies which are passed through on a person’s journey between their country of origin and the country of destination..

REFERENCE

Adapted from [Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#)

Host Country or Host Community

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A country of community which ‘hosts’ or accepts migrants during their migration journey, i.e., while in transit or temporarily away from place of origin.

REFERENCE

[IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)

Immigration Detention

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The deprivation of liberty for migration-related reasons (e.g., irregular entry or stay in a country).

REFERENCE

[ICRC Policy Paper on Immigration Detention](#)





Refugees

Refugee

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Any person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country.

IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

The legal definition of a 'refugee' is defined in the [1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees](#). Which is also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention. It outlines the legal protection, rights and assistance a refugee is entitled to receive.

In the Asia Pacific region, the following States are parties to the Refugee Convention: Afghanistan, Australia, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Japan, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tuvalu.

REFERENCE

[See Article 1 of 1951 Refugee Convention](#)

Asylum Seeker

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

An individual who is seeking international protection. An asylum-seeker is someone whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined by the country in which the claim is submitted.

IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

All refugees are initially asylum seekers. However, not all asylum seekers will be granted "refugee" status.

Asylum seekers whose refugee claim has not yet been officially recognised are still entitled to protection under relevant international law.

REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Global Report: Glossary \(2005\)](#)

Asylum

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

"Asylum" is granted by a State when it agrees to provide protection within its territory to people fleeing persecution or serious danger.

The right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 14).

IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

Seeking asylum is not illegal and should not be criminalised. However, often asylum seekers are not protected, do not receive humane standards of treatment and face arrest and detention, particularly in countries which do not have laws governing refugees and asylum seekers thus treating them as "irregular migrants".

REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Global Report: Glossary \(2005\)](#) and [Article 14 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)



Principle of *non-refoulement*

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A principle of International Customary Law which prohibits all States from extraditing, deporting, expelling or returning a person to a country where:

- a) Their life or freedom would be threatened
- b) There are substantial grounds for believing that they would risk being subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment
- c) They would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance, or
- d) They would suffer another irreparable harm.

! IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

The principle is binding on all States without exception, and irrespective of whether or not a State is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

📖 REFERENCE

[UNHCR, The Principle of Non-Refoulement as a Norm of Customary International Law \(1994\)](#).
And adapted from [ICRC, Customary Law](#).

Refugee Status Determination (RSD)

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered to be a refugee under international, regional or national law.

States have the primary responsibility to conduct RSD, however, UNHCR may conduct RSD under its mandate when a State is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or does not have a fair and efficient national asylum procedure in place.

📖 REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Refugee Status Determination](#)

Resettlement Country

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A country that offers opportunities for the permanent settlement of refugees, specifically a country other than the country of origin or the country in which refugee status was first recognized.

📖 REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Master Glossary of Terms \(2006\)](#)

X Terms to Avoid Person of Concern (POC)

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A person whose protection and assistance needs are of interest to UNHCR under their mandate, namely, refugees, returnees, stateless people, the internally displaced and asylum-seekers.

! IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

National Societies and IFRC should avoid using this expression to refer to people we are supporting, as it does not accurately reflect the Movement's approach to Migration and Displacement or our definition of migrants.

📖 REFERENCE

[UNHCR Global Appeal, Glossary 2016-2017](#)





Displacement

Climate Displacement

Climate change-induced displacement

Climate change-related displacement

Displacement in the context of climate change

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Terms referring to climate change as a cause, driver of, or contributing factor leading to displacement.

REFERENCE

[IFRC Disaster and Climate Key Terms](#)

Disaster Displacement

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Occurs when people are forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order to avoid a sudden or slow-onset disaster linked to natural hazards, including those associated with climate change.

REFERENCE

[Platform on Disaster Displacement](#) and [IFRC Disaster and Climate Key Terms](#)

Displacement

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The movement of a person or a group of people from their home or place of residence as a result of armed conflict, violence, human rights abuses, disasters, hazards or crises, climate change, development or relocation schemes.

Displaced people are groups or individual people who leave their places of habitual residence, usually due to a sudden impact (or threat thereof), such as an earthquake, flood or conflict, as a coping mechanism and with the intent to return.

Displaced people might seek assistance and protection within their own country as 'internally displaced people' (IDPs) or might seek asylum and international protection outside their country (as refugees).

REFERENCE

[IOM, Key Migration Terms](#)

Durable Solutions to Displacement

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A "durable solution" is achieved when displaced people no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement, and such people can enjoy their human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement.

There are generally three durable solutions:

1. **Return:** A person returns in safety and with dignity to where they lived before displacement
2. **Local Integration:** A person integrates into the local community in which they find themselves following displacement
3. **Relocation/Resettlement:** A person relocates to or settles in another location or country

REFERENCE

Adapted from [IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons](#)



Environmentally Displaced People

Environmental Migrant

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

People whose movement is decisively caused by sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

These expressions have no official or legal definitions.

There is no international agreement on a term to describe as person or groups of people who move for environment-related reasons.

Avoid the terms “environmental refugee” or “climate refugee.” They are technically inaccurate terms as environmental factors including climate change are not criteria included in the definition of a “refugee” defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from [The Hague Process on Refugees and Migrants – People on the Move: Handbook of Selected Terms and Concepts Version 1.0](#) and [IFRC Disaster and Climate Key Terms](#)

Relocation

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

In the context of humanitarian emergencies, “relocation” may be considered as internal humanitarian evacuations and understood as large-scale movements of civilians who face an immediate threat to life, to locations within the same country where they can be more effectively protected.

📖 REFERENCE

Adapted from [IOM, Key Principles For Internal Humanitarian Evacuations/Relocations Of Civilian Populations In Armed Conflict \(2019\)](#)

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Person or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

📖 REFERENCE

As defined in the [UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#)





Statelessness

Stateless Person

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.

Can occur in both migration and non-migration contexts. Most stateless people have never crossed an international border and spend their whole lives in their country of birth (known as ‘in situ’ stateless).

However, statelessness is also both a cause and consequence of migration. In some cases, a stateless person may also become a refugee if they are unable or unwilling to return to their place of habitual residence due to a fear of persecution as per the definition of a “refugee.”

REFERENCE

Article 1(1) Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons | OHCHR](#)

[IOM, Key Migration Terms](#)





Smuggling and Trafficking

Smuggling of Migrants

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The procurement to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit from the irregular entry of a person into a State of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

! POINTS TO CONSIDER AND TERMS TO AVOID

Smuggling involves crossing international borders and is a transnational crime, although smuggled migrants generally consent to being smuggled (in contrast to trafficked people who are moved against their will).

📖 REFERENCE

[UN, Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime \(2000\)](#)

and adapted from [UNODC, Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons: Differences and Commonalities](#)

Human Trafficking

Trafficking in Persons

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by threatening or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Trafficking may take place within a country or across international borders.

📖 REFERENCE

Defined in the [UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime \(2000\)](#)

and adapted from [UNODC, Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons: Differences and Commonalities](#)

Exploitation

i DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

The act of taking unjust advantage of someone for one's own benefit.

📖 REFERENCE

[IOM, International Migration Law – Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#)





Terms related to children in the context of Migration and Displacement

*Note: According to [IFRC's Child Safeguarding Policy](#) and [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#), a child is anyone under 18 years of age

Children Remaining Behind

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Many parents have no choice but to leave their children when they migrate, and where regular channels for children to join parents later are limited. Nonetheless, many parents make the difficult decision to migrate in order to secure a better life for their children.

To draw attention to these structural challenges, the situation should be explained, when possible.

IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

The expression, “children who remain or stay behind” is preferable to “children who are left behind.”

REFERENCE

Adapted from [UNICEF, Children "Left Behind"](#)

Separated Children

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Children separated from their parents or their legal or primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives.

They may include children accompanied by other adult family members or caregivers.

REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Unaccompanied and Separated Children \(UASC\)](#)

Unaccompanied Children

Unaccompanied Minors

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who is responsible for doing so.

IFRC USAGE / POINTS TO CONSIDER

IFRC prefers the term “children” to “minors” as a more humane term and because “minor” is an administrative and legal term.

In a world where migrants are dehumanized, referring to children as “minors” rather than as “children” has potentially negative connotations and risks their exclusion from the child rights and child protection frameworks.

REFERENCE

[UNHCR, Unaccompanied and Separated Children \(UASC\)](#)



THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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