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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of African Migrant Workers**

### **Background**

African countries have suffered from several climate change-related shocks. Although Africa accounts for only 1 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, it is the most affected by the repercussions of the climate change crisis.

Repercussions of climate change are manifested by two key phenomena; illegal migration to less affected areas, making it difficult to find suitable job opportunities; and the poor economy, which forced many people to flee the poor living conditions and seek better job opportunities elsewhere.

As is the case in the regions of the African Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, which have been subjected to severe impacts due to climate change that affected the economic situation in the country negatively, causing the migration of its citizens in search of job opportunities and a better life.

In light of the report issued by the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), which focused on “Climate-induced migrations negatively affecting human rights”, we would like, through this contribution, to emphasize the importance of highlighting the rights of migrant workers, whether regular or irregular, as a result of climate changes in their countries of origin.

Elizka Relief Foundation confirms that data on the percentage of African migrant workers on the impact of climate change is very rare and limited, which reflects the need to highlight this issue in particular during the 51st session of the Human Rights Council held in September 2022, in light of the suffering of this vulnerable group from the deterioration of their economic situation and the pursuit of a decent standard of living for all without discrimination, in line with Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (decent work), which guarantees the provision of decent work for migrant workers.

We monitored many violations that violate the right to work without discrimination for migrants in Africa, focusing on the African Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa regions, as follows:

### **First: impact of climate change on the rights of migrant workers in the African Sahel:**

It is worth noting that climate-induced migration, which negatively affects human rights was the focus of the United Nations report on human rights, which was issued on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). In this context, it is possible to highlight climate migration and its impact on the rights of migrants in the African Sahel region, a region that includes Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and the Gambia.

Temperatures in the African Sahel region are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, rainfall is irregular and rainy seasons are diminishing, and at other times and in some countries floods are recurrent, in addition to the suffering of the population in the region from diminishing crops and loss of pastures, which affects the way of living and incomes of the population, as for those who live in cities, especially in coastal areas, they are also at risk with rising sea levels and increasing floods, so many people are forced to leave their countries.

Those who migrate as a result of the effects of climate change often move in the Sahel under conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation and abuse, sometimes lacking legal status, or facing legal or practical barriers to accessing assistance and protection, as well as support networks. Some also face intense pressure to send remittances to their families in their communities of origin that still face climate risks.<sup>(1)</sup>

In Mauritania, fisheries factories recruit Senegalese fishermen under agreements that burden them with high debts for fishing gear, reducing their earnings and their ability to provide for their families at home. A condition is also set for the presence of a Mauritanian citizen on every fishing boat.

In Mali, adolescents and young adults often migrate seasonally from rural areas to cities to engage in domestic labour, a practice that is increasing as agricultural yields shrink due to climate change. In this context, they are often abused, and there is a lack of national programs, policies, and laws that provide them with protection.(2)

## **Second: Effects of Climate Change on Economic Life in Sub-Saharan Africa:**

There are many economic, social, cultural, political, and institutional causes that stimulate migration. In regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, demographic structure and poverty alone have the potential to displace populations. However, climate change and variability is a double factor that interacts with already underlying social and economic factors.

In Nigeria, a country already ravaged by conflict, floods have affected 80% of the country displacing an additional 600,000 people, where already harsh rural working conditions are worsened by climate change, population pressure, and scarcity of fertile land. In which case, internal and regional migration is an adaptation measure to try to improve the economic situation of the individual.

Workers in the agricultural and construction sectors are also particularly vulnerable to heat stress, due to the physical nature of work, low levels of mechanization and prolonged subjection to the outdoors. Indirectly, agricultural workers are further affected by crop failures and thus food insecurity.

Internal migration can be voluntary, viable, and valuable, but the drivers and outcomes can also vary. Internal migration may also be involuntary, i.e. migrants feel they are left with no choice but to migrate in order to provide better living conditions for themselves and their families.

Climate fluctuation is also not by far the sole determinant of migration decisions, but can contribute to making rural livelihoods less attractive by directly exacerbating working conditions for outdoor workers through heat stress. In addition, droughts and floods, in particular, can reduce economic prospects in the agricultural sector.

While cities often offer improved economic opportunities compared to rural areas, large-scale migrations from rural to urban areas may also lead to population pressure and lower living standards in those urban centers, when the ability to absorb migrants and workers is strained.

Availability of employment opportunities, as well as a city's ability to provide transportation, social services, health care, housing, and other critical infrastructure, is a key in determining whether migration is a viable option for adaptation or contributes to urban challenges.(3)

## **Conclusion and recommendations:**

Forced migration due to climate change results in many challenges, as the people of Africa migrate forcibly from their homeland illegally, which poses more challenges, foremost of which is the right to work, especially since their entry to the other country was done illegally, and therefore it is difficult for them to enjoy a fixed-income work.

1. We call for the amendment of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers on which the Committee on Migrant Workers is based and to include forced migrant workers due to climate change, in light of the recent emergence of the climate change phenomenon as an urgent challenge and a regional and global crisis that must be focused on.

2. We call on the governments of the Member States of the United Nations to focus on achieving Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the goal related to the rights of migrant workers, and to develop national programs for this marginalized group in their countries, in line with the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
3. We call on the governments of African Sahel countries to develop human rights-based and community-led national adaptation and mitigation programs in the Sahel, including the development of pathways that enable regular migration as a climate change adaptation strategy.
4. We call on the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation of migrants and the Committee on Migrant Workers to work on issuing a report on the situation of African migrant workers as a result of climate change, and to open the door for stakeholders and member state governments to provide their input on the situation of African migrant workers in light of the climate change crisis in their countries.

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1- Ohchr, Report: How climate change affects the human rights of Sahel region migrants, 11 November 2021,

2- Ohchr, Human Rights Climate Change and Migration in the Sahel, <https://bit.ly/3AfyFCc>

3- Adaptation community, Climate Change and Labor in sub-Saharan Africa, May, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3djCeyl>