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**Climate Change Induced Displacement in  
Bangladesh and the National Strategy, 2021**

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## **Abstract**

Millions of people are internally displaced annually in the context of disaster and climate change in Bangladesh. Some are displaced temporarily and some have to leave their habitual residence permanently. Migration has to be the most important action in ensuring human existence. A large section of the displaced individuals remains in precarious conditions for years, sometimes even for decades in their new places of residence. This brings us to the internal debate- can migration in the context of climate change be an adaptation strategy? In 2021, the government of Bangladesh has adopted a National Strategy to address the challenges of Internally Displaced persons, titled National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, 2021. The aim of this paper is to understand the potential of the strategy in reducing precarious existence of the displaced men, women, elderly and children both in the place of origin and in destination. The paper is divided in 5 sections including this introduction. This section defines displacement, draws a conceptual understanding and also provides an idea of data sources used in this paper. Section 2 sets the context of global displacement scenario and juxtaposes Bangladesh into that. Section 3 reveals the situation of displaced population in their new rural and urban destinations in selected hotspots. Section 4 evaluates the National Strategy and its capacity to reduce the precarities of climate induced displaced people. Section 5 draws some major conclusions and suggests some modest recommendations.

Millions of people are internally displaced annually in the context of disaster and climate change in Bangladesh. Some are displaced temporarily and some have to leave their habitual residence permanently. Migration has to be the most important action in ensuring human existence. A large section of the displaced individuals remains in precarious conditions for years, sometimes even for decades in their new places of residence. This brings us to the internal debate- can migration in the context of climate change be an adaptation strategy? In 2021, the government of Bangladesh has adopted a National Strategy to address the challenges of Internally Displaced persons, titled National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, 2021. The aim of this paper is to understand the potential of the strategy in reducing precarious existence of the displaced men, women, elderly and children both in the place of origin and in destination. The paper is divided in 5 sections including this introduction. This section defines displacement, draws a conceptual understanding and also provides an idea of data sources used in this paper. Section 2 sets the context of global displacement scenario and juxtaposes Bangladesh into that. Section 3 reveals the situation of displaced population in their new rural and urban destinations in selected hotspots. Section 4 evaluates the National Strategy and its capacity to reduce the precarities of climate induced displaced people. Section 5 draws some major conclusions and suggests some modest recommendations.

Displacement is defined in this paper as- 'Persons, group of persons, households, or an entire community who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence temporarily or permanently or who have been evacuated as a result of disasters caused by sudden and slow-onset climatic events and processes, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border'<sup>1</sup>. Both slow onset and rapid onset processes contribute to displacement and successive movements<sup>2</sup>.

Strong evidences have emerged which establishes both slow and rapid onset climate change processes contribute to voluntary migration and involuntary displacement. They mostly move internally to rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Some of these studies also demonstrate in cases, climate change may not displace people directly; but it exacerbates various forms of vulnerability which contributes to displacement. Anthropogenic climate change affects most of the community, yet socio economic inequality make marginalised groups more vulnerable to it. Migration is one of the adaptation tools that people use in the face of displacement. Studies have found that through migration economically and socially resourceful households can adapt to the situations of displacement better, compared to those who take part in migration from a preexisting precarious situation. In their new places of residence they may reduce some aspects of their precarity, yet in many other areas their precarious existence continues. This paper aims to locate the precarities of less resourceful migrants in their places of destination. Then it explores if the National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, 2021 has the ability to reduce precarity of these vulnerable groups and help them to adapt to the challenges of climate change.

As early as in 1963, Bourdieu used the term precarity to describe the condition of casual workers (Bourdieu, 1963). Dorre et al., (2006) as well as Rogers and Rogers (1989) saw precarity as conditions of instability, lack of security, and the presence of social and economic vulnerability in diverse economies. Standing (2014) looks at precarity as an

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<sup>1</sup> Defined on the basis of the Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement Within States, 2013 of Displacement Solution.

<sup>2</sup> Slow onset events evolve gradually over years, decades, or centuries, such as sea-level rise and desertification. Rapid onset events are more abrupt, occurring over hours, days, or months, like extreme weather events such as cyclones and heatwaves (UNFCCC Technical Paper, 2012)

emerging class characterized by insecurity across three crucial domains: labour, income and rights. Waite (2009) highlights exclusion from public welfare and struggle for recognition as central to the experience of precarity. Siddiqui et al. (2021) and Parsons et al. (2022) broadened the horizon of displaced migrants' experience of precarity from material or labour precarity to non-material determinants of precarity which are health, education, social relationships and systematic exclusion and invisibility.

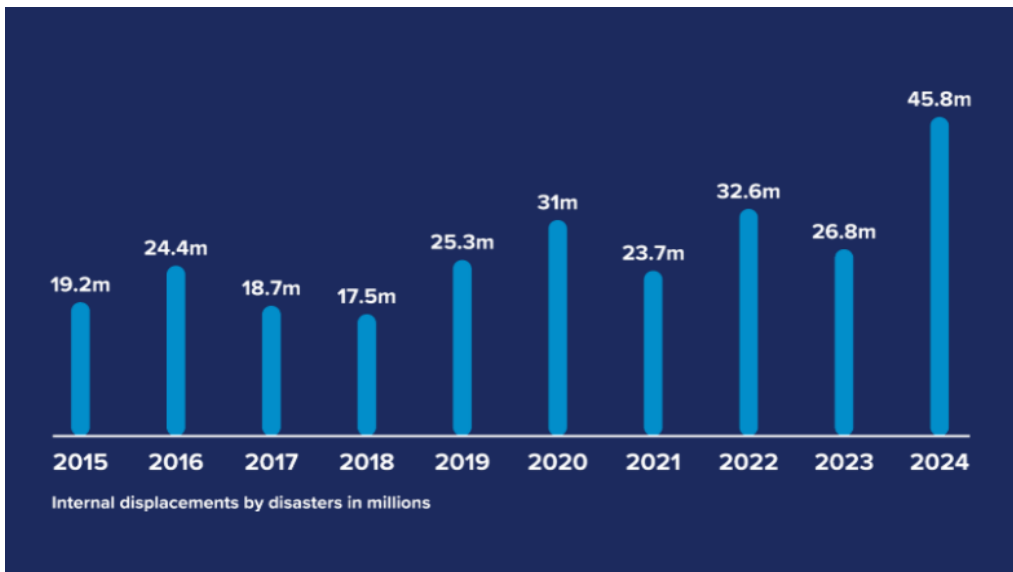
The paper draws from a few empirical studies recently conducted by RMMRU in collaboration with the research and academic institutions of the Europe, the US and the South Asia. They include Safe and Sustainable cities (2018-2019), Just and Resilient Planned Relocation from Climate Change affected areas (2022-2025), SUCCESS (2024-2026) and Adaptation in Urban Locations (2024-2026). This paper mainly draws from the findings of photo-voice research conducted under above mentioned researches.

## **Section 2: Extent of Displacement**

Up to decade of 2010, there were hardly any data on extent of displacement due to slow onset climate change processes. The Groundswell Report 2021, for the first time came up with a projection of slow onset climate (CC) change related internal displacement and migration (Clement et al. 2021). Without concrete climate and development actions, by 2050, slow onset processes of CC could lead to more than 216 m people to migrate within their home countries. 86 million will be displaced in Sub-Sahara Africa, 49 million in East Asia, 40 m in South Asia, 19 m in North Africa, 17 m in Latin America and 5 m in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. 19 m of these 40 million that will take place in South Asia will occur in Bangladesh. Therefore, longer term displacement impact of climate change in the context of Bangladesh can hardly be over emphasized.

Rapid onset processes also lead to both permanent and temporary displacement followed by migration. Global data on rapid onset climate change and disaster induced displacement is gathered by Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). Figure 2.1 provides a decadal data on internal displacement due to rapid onset events. It shows that highest number of displacements due to rapid onset events took place in 2024. As high as 45.8 million people were displaced that year. In 2015, 19.2 million people were displaced. In 2020, it was 31 million and in 2022, it was 32.6 million (IDMC, 2025). IDMC of course cautioned that installing better data collection system by individual countries may have also contributed to such huge increase in number of displaced populations. Nonetheless, the extent of displacement in any case very high.

### **Figure 2.1: Internal Displacement by Disaster (2015-2024)**

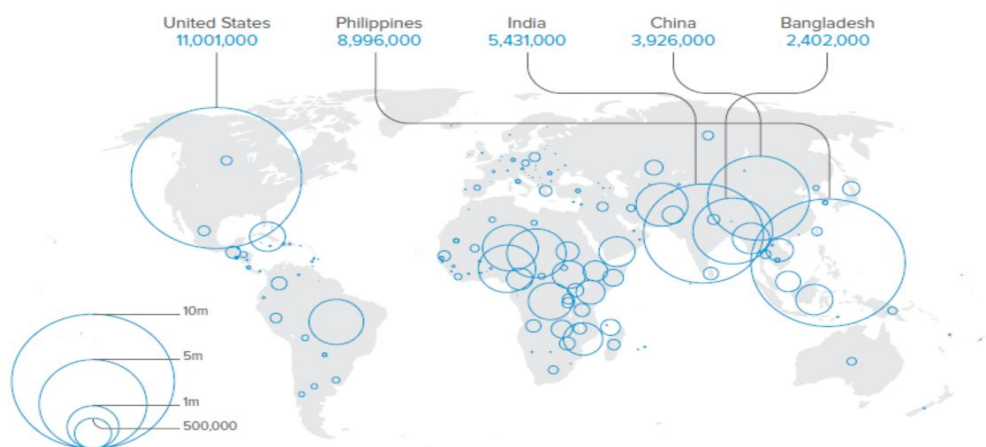


Source: IDMC (2025)

If the South Asian experience is focused, Bangladesh emerges as one of the major countries experiencing displacement. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka to rising sea level, floods, flash floods changing rainfall pattern, heat stress, landslides, drought and desertification. Landlocked Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, in addition to these also face melting snow and glacial retreat. Nepal is affected also by avalanches in mountainous region, severe earthquakes along with flooding. In 2020, when the strongest tropical cyclone hit Bangladesh, 4.4 million people were displaced. In 2009, during the Aila 2 million people were displaced. In 2024, 5.4 million people in India, 2.4 million in Bangladesh, 0.17 million in Pakistan and 1 million in Afghanistan has been displaced due to multiple disasters.

**Figure 2.2 Five Countries reporting the highest figures**

**Five countries reporting the highest figures**



Source: IDMC (2025)

If we consider the global data in 2024, Bangladesh stands as the 5<sup>th</sup> highest country experiencing displacement. 1<sup>st</sup> is the United States where 11 million people were displaced. In the Philippines, the number of displaced populations is 8.8 million. For India it is 5.4, for China it is 2.9 and for Bangladesh, it is 2.4 million.

**Section 3: Nature of precarity**

This section presents the experience of displaced population who moved from their habitual places of residence, in four rural and one urban area. The areas are- Kedarpur of Shariatpur, Padmapukur of Satkhira, Ramgati of Laxmipur, Goalanda of Rajbari and Chattogram city. In each area, around 15 male, female and children were provided with camera and a day long training. They were requested to take photos to identify what they consider as new form of challenges in their areas of new migration by concentrating in three areas- climate change concerns, employment precarity and finally, health precarity.

**Climate change concerns:** Half of the Naria upazila has submerged to Padma River. People from different parts of Naria have moved to Kedarpur. Men and women who participated in the Photovoice research, first migrated to the Shadhur Bazar where the market was located. Subsequently, the marketplace also submerged into the Padma River. Displaced people have moved to Kedarpur. Kedarpur participants identified floods and riverbank erosion as environmental hazards faced in their new settlement. Water logging is another major problem in their area.

Padmapukur is a remote island in the Sundarbans. Displaced people resettled themselves in areas close to sea and beside the *Kholpetua* river. The respondents regularly get displaced due to cyclone, flood and river bank erosion. They resettle in areas close to the sea. New locations are regularly inundated during high tides. They live in thatched homes, concrete sanitary latrines are rare, safe drinking water is scares. It is also difficult to receive weather and cyclone forecasts timely. Participants of Ramgati and Goalanda also took photos of flash floods, floods and riverbank erosion. They have relocated themselves in the unprotected side of embankment of the river Meghna. Displaced persons of surrounding areas of Goalanda are now residing in Goalanda ferry-ghat and close to the railway station. They took photos of their thatched shelters and toilets.

Chattogram city is one of the two mega cities of Bangladesh. A section of the displaced people from different parts of the country including ethnic population of 3 hill districts migrate to this city. 60% of the population of the Chattogram city live in the informal low-lying slums. Water logging and landslides are major problems of these slums. In Chattogram our photovoice research was conducted in Amin Colony, Barrister Colony and Anandabazar slum. The new migrants who resettled themselves in Chattogram city took photos of waterlogging and landslide.

**Employment related Precarities:** Photo voice research participants of Ramgati are involved in non-farm agriculture, fishing and small business. In new location, farmers can no longer produce soybean due to increased frequency of flash floods and saline water intrusion. Water logging exposes the domestic animals to different diseases. Household vegetable patches of women are washed out during flash floods. Those who are involved in fishing, their fishing trawlers and nets are regularly damaged during hazards. They do not have access to formal credit for repairing them. Fishing is prohibited in certain months resulting in near starving situation. Some of them would like to change profession but do not have access to information about new vocations and training opportunities. Those who work in shops, experience inundation to market places and their shops, loss of working days, lack of customer during and after the disaster.

Male participants from the Padmapukur work as labourers in fish farms and some also work as boatmen. During cyclones or floods fishes get washed out from the *Gher*. In Padmapukur, women hardly have opportunity to work outside. The male respondents of Goalanda mostly involve in loading and unloading as day labourers in the ferry-ghat and the females work on road maintenance and hotels. In Kedarpur, male interviewees were involved in loading-unloading in river transportation, rickshaw pulling and service and have sent members of

household to bigger cities. In Chattogram both male and female respondents work in multiple professions. Women, underaged and elderlies are the most vulnerable to exploitation, e.g. in scrap sorting warehouses. Fluctuating and insecure incomes of factory workers, fear of eviction, bribes, fines and losses of street hawkers are identified as part of their precarious work condition.

**Health precarities:** Participants of Padmapukur took photos of various types of skin diseases because of their exposure to salty weather. Women experience reproductive health related complications due to exposure to saline water. While elicitation of the photos, they highlighted, unhygienic sanitation, high prevalence of diarrhea, scarce drinking water, absence of health clinic as integral part of their existence. Women in reproductive age and the elderly women showed their concern about the absence of road communication with the upazila Sadar. Only communication is through the river way which takes 1.5 hours. The elderlies, pregnant women, underaged children and persons with disability has to be carried up to the river way if they require treatment. Male and female respondents of Ramgati also identified similar health and hygiene challenges.

Female participants of Goalanda took photos of their toilets which are only surrounded by unusable old clothes. They also have no community clinic in the locality. They self-medicate themselves from local pharmacy. Half of Naria upazila health care centre has gone under the river. The hospital does not have ambulance services. It takes hour and half to reach the district hospital.

In the urban location of Chattogram both men and women frequently experience food poisoning, diarrhea, dizziness, stomach pain etc. On the way to school while passing water logged areas young children regularly get wet. This results in catching common cold, sore throat, fever and tonsil. Those who are employed in scrap sorting are exposed to health hazards. Parents are in constant fear about the exposure of their adolescent boys to drugs. The respondents belonging to Chakma and Marma ethnic communities highlighted uneven access to civic amenities such as gas, water and sanitation have implications for their health. Interesting differences in prioritising type of precarity are quite evident among men women and children. Homestead loss in the place of origin was seen as a major problem by the female participants whereas loss of arable land was identified by the male participants as the major challenge. Female participants identified lack of access to relief, carrying potable water from distant areas in the aftermath of disaster and prevalence of water borne and skin diseases as major problems. The male participants identified lack of access to loan as their major challenge after disaster. In the urban context, for women, lack of privacy while bathing, long queues for using toilets, sexual harassment, lack of childcare facilities are part of their precarious existence. To men, lack of tenure of job, fluctuating income, police harassment and fear of eviction are major threats. Photos taken by children depicted the absence of playground, playing equipment, power cuts during the study etc. Female participants belonging the hill tract communities identified lack of space for spiritual congregation as a challenge.

The above discussion on the experience of precarity of the displaced people shows that precarity not only encompass labour conditions, decent work deficits etc. it can also be expanded to health as a non-material determinant of precarity. The paper have also demonstrated that experience of precarity is not same for all migrants. It varies according to age, sex, ethnicity, disability, religious orientation and geographic locations of the migrants. Therefore, in reducing precarity of the displaced men women and children along with policy change and resource allocation, voices of the displaced should also be integrated. In the

following section, an analysis of recently adopted policy of government is discussed to see its potential in reducing precarity from the lives of the displaced.

#### **Section 4: The National Strategy and the Action Plan**

In 2021, Bangladesh developed a National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management to address the disaster and climate induced internal displacement. Following a right-based approach, its goal is to adopt both preventive and adaptive measures to minimize the scope of internal displacement. The strategy entails a long-term solution through better resource management, urban planning, technological innovations, infrastructure strengthening and sustainable livelihoods for the displaced population (GoB 2021).

The National Strategy draws on international good practices Sendai Framework, UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Nansen Initiative. The strategy covers all phases of displacement and durable solutions. It also provides an institutional framework to operationalise the strategy. By 2022, the concerned ministry, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MODMR) has also rolled out an action plan (National Action Plan, 2022-2042) to implement the National Strategy. Along with the MoDMR, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), and Ministry of Land (MOL), include twenty-four other relevant ministries.

The Strategy and the Action Plan are inclusive to all sections of the society (ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, geographic location etc.) (GoB 2022). Both of these documents plan for creating infrastructure, maintaining the vital eco-system, reducing scope of displacement and out migration. At the same time, they outline adaptation programmes to accommodate new migrants in urban and rural out migrants' locations. The strategy and the Action Plan suggest pathways for decentralisation of urban growth centres and plan for safe and sustainable cities inclusive of new migrants. The emphasis is on better understanding displacement risk to support decision making through disaggregated data reflecting the specific needs of groups of displaced people.

#### **Main Features of the National Strategy, 2021**

**Prevention:** The Strategy emphasises Prevention based on the appreciation of the fact that many forms of displacement can be averted or minimised. Anticipatory preventive measures reduce costs by 75% in comparison to recovery investments. To minimise displacement, five areas are identified in the National Strategy. These are: 1. Generate knowledge to understand risks; 2. Ensure adequate investment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation; 3. Strengthen disaster risk governance; 4. Creation of decent employment through promoting and encouraging decentralization of urban growth centres; and 5. Disaster- climate risk responsive land use planning with identification of highly vulnerable zones. 44 targets are set to achieve the goal of prevention of displacement. Relevant rights in this respect are: 'non-discrimination and equality', 'right to safety', 'right to life', 'right to development', 'right to shelter', 'right to work', 'right to participation', and 'right to information'.

**Protection During Displacement:** The Strategy highlights strengthening humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to improve the protection of displaced persons. Two major areas of work in this respect are 1. management of emergency response and 2. protection of fundamental rights of the displaced during displacement. Both the subsections designed in the National Strategy are based on the MoDMR's standing order on disaster (Revised SOD-2019). 38 targets are set under these two subsections to achieve protection during displacement. Relevant rights of the displaced include: 'non-discrimination and equality',

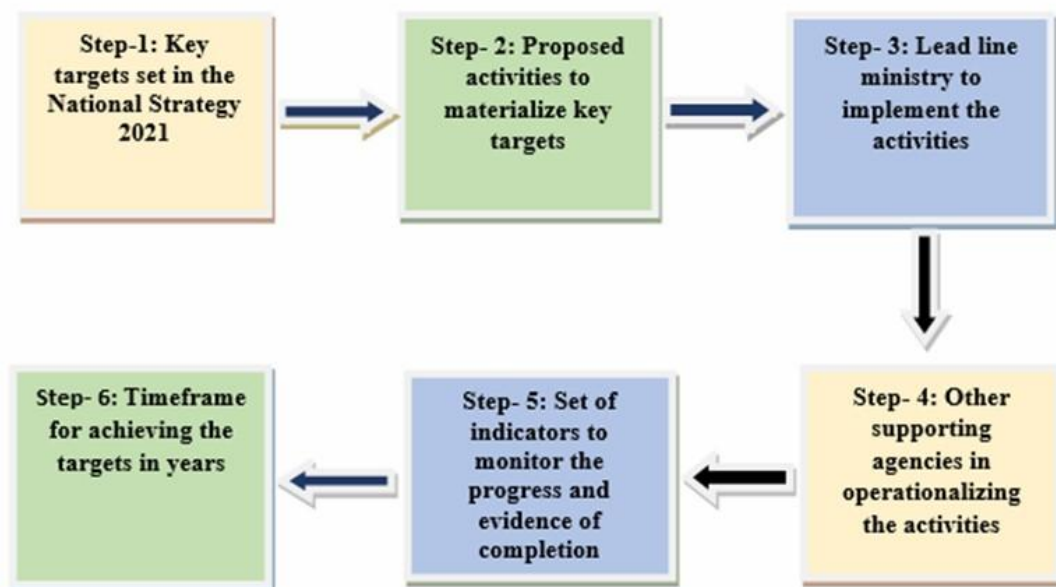
'right to life', 'right to physical and moral integrity', 'right to liberty and security', 'right to the freedom movement and residence', 'right to adequate housing and access to land', 'right to livelihood', 'right to water, food, clothes, and education', 'right to healthcare', 'right to reproductive health', and 'right to protection of the family'.

**Durable Solutions:** This section is particularly important for those who have already been displaced. Following the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) framework of durable solutions, the strategy commits itself to avoid protracted situations of displacement by ensuring sustainable return. All three types of sustainable return described in the UN Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement have been incorporated. These are: 1. Return to place of origin when the disaster that displaced the families or communities, is over; 2. Local level integration in cases where displaced people have temporarily or semi-permanently resettled themselves; 3. When return or local level integration is not feasible then resettlement of individual families or communities in planned relocation sites. 30 targets are set to achieve the goals of return, local integration and planned relocation. Examples of relevant rights are: 'right to security of tenure', 'right to not to be arbitrarily evicted', 'right to land and rights in land', 'right to property', 'right to privacy', 'right to housing, land and property (HLP) restitution/compensation following forced displacement', 'right to choose one's residence and procedural rights'.

### The National Action Plan (2022-2042) to Implement the Strategy

To achieve the 112 targets of the National Strategy, the National Action Plan suggest step by step implementation plan. In the first step, it presents the key individual targets of the National Strategy 2021, and then (second step) identifies various activities that are required to implement the target. The third step locates the ministry that would lead the implementation of the concerned activities.

**Figure 4.1: Action Plan (2022-2042) for step-by-step implementation of the National Strategy**



Inter-ministerial and inter-agency collaboration is essential for any successful action. Step four, therefore identifies the relevant ministries, agencies, NGOs, INGOs and development partners who would support the lead ministry in implementation. Step five draws necessary

indicators to evaluate the progress and achievement of the implementation process. The last step sets the timeframe. The timeframe shows that some of the activities can be achieved in a relatively short time, but some may require as much as twenty years. The above diagram illustrates implementation plan.

Above discussion on the National Strategy and the Action Plan do propose a framework through which precarious work and living conditions of the displaced in their new destination can be transformed towards a situation where the displaced population can enjoy the same rights and avail same opportunities to adapt with the hardship imposed on them due to slow and rapid onset climate processes. However, it is unfortunate that the National Task Force of Displacement is yet to be established to pursue the National Strategy. Few international organisations, such as Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) have helped the government in implementing some of the aspects of the strategy, particularly in respect to data on displacement and ensuring access to services to displaced people in Satkhira, but no major initiative has been taken by the government. More importantly, the National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050) did not mention climate induced displacement even once, whereas United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), PDD, IDMC and ADB has recognised the document as a global best practice!

## **Conclusions**

This paper amply demonstrates that displacement due to climate change and disaster is happening worldwide. In the context of Bangladesh, both slow onset and rapid onset processes contribute to displacement. If right kinds of measures are not undertaken, 19 million Bangladeshis could be displaced due to slow onset processes by 2050. Again, due to rapid onset processes, from 2014-2023, 14.7 million people were already been displaced. Majority of these displacements are induced by climate change and disaster. Those who are displaced or at the risk of displacement are either forced to migrate or move voluntarily to pre-empt the hardship of displacement. This paper explores the challenges that the displaced people face in their new location. It explained the situation of the displaced in their new destinations under the conceptual framework of precarity. Precarious existence of migrants is explored in three areas. These are- climate stresses, employment condition and health situation in new locations. The paper concludes that the experience of precarity of the displaced people not only encompasses labour conditions, decent work deficits etc. it also includes health and climate change related precarities. The paper has also demonstrated that experience of precarity is not same for all types of new migrants. It varies according to age, sex, ethnicity, disability, religious orientation and geographic locations of the migrants.

The National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management adopted in 2021 is a right based comprehensive document. It addresses reduction of precarity in all three stages of displacement- prevention, during displacement and durable solutions. However, its implementation is extremely weak. Only few components are being implemented under different donor programmes. Government is yet to allocate resources in revenue or development budget for implementing the strategy. The MoDMR has been addressing some of the targets of protection phase under its SOD 2019. The National Adaptation Plan have failed to incorporate the national strategy in country's 27 years plan.

To give climate induced displaced people due attention, the National Task Force has to be established as suggested in the National Strategy. For mobilisation of internal resource, a displacement trust fund needs to be created. Development partners need to perceive

displacement as a development issue, not a humanitarian one. As part of climate justice, Bangladesh requires access to the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Bridge Fund to implement the strategy as part of the Action Plan. In reducing precarity of the displaced men, women and children along with policy implementation and resource allocation, voices of the displaced should also be integrated.

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