

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-166](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The effects of climate change, combined with other factors, may alter human migration trends across the globe, according to the International Organization for Migration. For example, climate change can increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, causing populations to move from an area. Climate change can also intensify slow-onset disasters, such as drought, crop failure, or sea level rise, potentially altering longer-term migration trends.

GAO was asked to review how U.S. agencies address climate change as a potential driver of global migration. For State, USAID, and DOD, this report (1) describes executive branch actions related to climate change and migration from fiscal years 2014 through 2018; (2) examines the extent to which the agencies discussed the potential effects of climate change on migration in their plans and risk assessments; and (3) describes agency activities on the issue. GAO analyzed documents on administration priorities; reviewed agency plans, risk assessments, and documentation of agency activities; and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State provide missions with guidance that clearly documents its process for climate change risk assessments for country strategies. In commenting on a draft of this report, State indicated that it would update its integrated country strategy guidance and will specifically note that missions have the option to provide additional information on climate resilience and related topics.

View [GAO-19-166](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov, or Brian J. Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Activities of Selected Agencies to Address Potential Impact on Global Migration

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2014 through 2018, a variety of executive branch actions related to climate change—such as executive orders and strategies—affected the Department of State (State), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Defense (DOD), including their activities that could potentially address the nexus of climate change and migration. For example, a fiscal year 2016 presidential memorandum—rescinded in 2017—required agencies to develop implementation plans to identify the potential impact of climate change on human mobility, among other things. In general, however, climate change as a driver of migration was not a focus of the executive branch actions. For example, a fiscal year 2014 executive order—also rescinded in 2017—requiring agencies to prepare for the impacts of climate change did not highlight migration as a particular concern.

State, USAID, and DOD have discussed the potential effects of climate change on migration in agency plans and risk assessments. For example, State and USAID required climate change risk assessments when developing country and regional strategies, and a few of the strategies reviewed by GAO identified the nexus of climate change and migration as a risk. However, State changed its approach in 2017, no longer providing missions with guidance on whether and how to include climate change risks in their integrated country strategies. In doing so, State did not include in its 2018 guidance to the missions any information on how to include climate change risks, should the missions choose to do so. Without clear guidance, State may miss opportunities to identify and address issues related to climate change as a potential driver of migration.

The three agencies have been involved in climate change related activities but none were specifically focused on the nexus with global migration. For example, USAID officials said that the agency's adaptation efforts, such as its Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion project in Ethiopia, were the most likely to include activities, such as enhancing resilience, that can indirectly address the issue of climate change as a driver of migration.

A U.S. Agency for International Development Project in Ethiopia Includes Activities to Enhance Resilience That Can Indirectly Address Climate Change as a Driver of Migration



Source: Mercy Corps. | GAO-19-166