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# CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

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# Climate Migration

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In human history, environmental degradation, resource depletion, and natural hazards including climate change play a contributing role of important 'push' factors in affecting population movement, often filtered through contexts of economic factors, food deficiency, conflicts, and social inequity. According to Nawrotzki and Bakhtsiyarava (2017), climate extremes such as storms, floods and drought are often traced through the "agricultural pathway", meaning that the impact of climate on migration is moderated by changes in agricultural productivity. Other major impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise on low-lying islands and coastal areas, are having a significant impact on people's lives and their futures.

The term *climate migration* is often used interchangeably with other terms such as climate-induced migration, climate displacement, climate refugees, and climate mobility. There is no consensus about what terminology to use. Terms like climate refugee are popular but problematic since refugee status is strictly defined in international legislation and limited to people crossing an international border and fleeing persecution owing to strictly defined factors such as their race, ethnicity, religion faith, political belief, or membership of a particular social group (Stojanov, et al. 2021).

At first glance, climate migration or movement appears to be a completely different form of migration than, for example, labor migration or political migration, because it is based (at least in part) on different assumptions. Political migration (political persecution, war, conflict) is also forced migration, but the decision to migrate comes very quickly, spontaneously, based on coercion and fear for one's life or the life of family members. In this respect, political migration is similar in the speed of decision-making to the so-called fast-onset displacees who have to leave their homes due to rapid natural hazards such as floods, hurricanes, etc. However, political migration is in most cases different from slow-onset displacement, where people have relatively more time to think.

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While labor-motivated migration is usually understood as a more voluntary movement, climate migration is generally viewed as a forced movement. However, there is a direct link between people who lost their jobs or their livelihoods were negatively affected by any impact of climate change. In this respect, we can understand labor migration, at minimum partly, like climate migration.

Most of the literature on climate migration focuses on the topic of predicting the processes. The number of people potentially displaced by sea level rise globally will reach 190 million by 2100 under low emission and 630 million under high emission scenarios (Kulp and Strauss, 2019). Groundswell reports (Rigaud, et al. 2018; Clement et al. 2020) predict about 216 million internal climate migrants by 2050. They will move mostly from rural areas to nearby towns and cities where there will be more opportunities to seek new jobs and protection.

Although global attention is often paid to only international migration such as the European migration crises (2015-2016), far more people are moving inside their countries of origin. Migration to cities is the dominant

part of the movements, including climate migration. This is a typical in Bangladesh, for instance, where most climate change migrants move from rural to urban areas, and only a minority of such persons cross an international border (Ahsan, 2019). Lustgarten and Kohut (2020) described the migration strategy in Guatemala where farmers displaced by decreased rainfall from rural drought-affected areas firstly to big cities, supporting a rapid and increasingly overwhelming urbanization. Then they move farther north, increasing the number of labor migrants toward the United States. Internal migration on Pacific low laying islands is fueling urban growth in the capitals of Kiribati and Tuvalu, according to Locke (2009). According to him, migration to the cities of South Tarawa and Funafuti is triggered by economic and environmental issues such as coastal erosion and gradual salinization of drinking water sources and agricultural soil.

Another example of internal migration and displacement can be seen within the US. Houston, Texas became a temporary home to more than 250,000 people displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and between 40,000 and 100,000 are estimated to have stayed there permanently (BBC, 2017). According to Hauer, et al. (2020), when people in the USA are displaced in response to sea level rise hazards, they more often migrate to nearby cities. Similarly, many climate migrants in Bangladesh gravitate toward wage opportunities in urban economic centers. However, unlike in the USA, many of these migrant destinations include cities under similar risk of future sea level rise. Paradoxically, sea level rise-induced migration may, therefore, contribute to the further expansion of a nation's informal settlements. These climate migrants or displaces live in slums and squatter settlements.

The interlinkages between internal and international migration dynamics remain under-explored in climate migration research. Although it is often argued that most climate migration is likely to be internal (e.g. Mueller, et al. 2014). In this respect, Paul (2011) examines international migration as a stepwise process, whereby migrants gradually accumulate more capital and expand their migration range – from the nearest city to a neighboring country, to ultimately a higher income destination country.

This is consistent with a number of findings that poor people tend not to migrate because the ability to migrate depends on finances, education, knowledge of migration networks, etc. This effect is known as immobility and it may result in a deepening cycle of poverty, vulnerability and exposure to adverse impacts of climate change coupled with the inability to move (Black, et al. 2011). Thus, it is important to distinguish between people who want to move but cannot and those who do not want to move (voluntary immobility) (de Sherbinin, 2020). Some people are strongly attached to their place of origin and simply do not want to leave their homes.

These climate factors contribute to mobility, but their contribution is rarely in isolation from other, generally more important, socioeconomic factors such as wage differentials, family reunification, and various aspects that improve living standards (Foresight, 2011).

Climate research has recently started to take an interest in migration as a potential societal response to the impact of climate changes. Climate migration will become an important element of multidisciplinary research in the future, increasing media and public attention, as well as those of political decision makers on this issue as part of growing climate change discourse.

**Robert Stojanov** is an environmental and population geographer at the Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University in Brno, the Czech Republic. He focuses on drivers and techniques of smart migration; environmental factors of population dynamics; social and economic impacts of climate change and adaptation strategies; migration, remittances, and development; and effectiveness of development interventions such as development aid. Robert was awarded by the Jean Monnet Postdoctoral Fellowship at the European University Institute; by a Certificate for Climate Change & Its Impact from Brown University. In early 2018, his paper was ranked among the top 1% of the most cited papers in Social Sciences at Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics). For details, see www.stojanov.org