

Climate Migration: The Hidden Crisis

Md. Omar Faruk, Rukya Zaman Juthi

Lecturer, Department of General Education Northern University Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Climate migration is emerging as one of the most pressing yet underappreciated crises of our time. As climate change accelerates, millions of people around the world are being forced to flee their homes due to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, desertification, and other environmental stressors. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions of climate migration, including its causes, the socio-economic and political impacts on both migrants and receiving communities, and the challenges of addressing this issue within existing legal frameworks. Although climate-induced displacement is increasing, global responses remain uncoordinated and inadequate. This article argues that without urgent and coordinated global action, climate migration will exacerbate existing inequalities, strain resources, and potentially lead to heightened conflicts. It also emphasizes the need for new policies that recognize climate migrants, protect their rights, and provide sustainable solutions for both origin and destination areas. By bringing attention to this hidden crisis, the article seeks to inform policymakers, scholars, and the public about the urgent need to address climate migration as a critical component of climate change adaptation and global security.

Keywords: Climate-Induced Displacement, Environmental Migration, Climate Change Adaptation, Migration Policy, Global Security.

INTRODUCTION

As the planet faces unprecedented environmental changes, a profound yet largely unrecognized crisis is emerging: climate migration. Across the globe, millions of people are being compelled to leave their homes due to the devastating effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, severe droughts, and increasingly frequent natural disasters. Unlike traditional migration, which is often driven by economic or political factors, climate migration is primarily a survival strategy in response to environments that have become uninhabitable or too dangerous to live in (Cipollina et al., 2024; Daoust & Selby, 2024).

Despite its growing significance, climate migration remains a hidden crisis—overlooked in international policy and inadequately addressed by existing legal frameworks. Current global governance structures fail to account for the unique challenges faced by climate migrants, who often fall through the cracks of national and international protection systems (Žuk et al., 2024). This has led to a situation where millions are displaced without recognition or support, exacerbating existing inequalities and fueling potential conflicts.

This article explores the complex realities of climate migration, examining its root causes, the socio-economic impacts on both migrants and host communities, and the urgent need for new policies that address this emerging crisis. Though early research focused mainly on economic or conflict-driven displacement, environmental factors are now central to migration discourse. Comprehensive reviews show that both fast-onset events (e.g. storms, floods) and slow-onset changes (e.g. drought, sea-level rise) have significant, though heterogeneous, effects on migration patterns (Daoust & Selby, 2024).

The phenomenon of climate migration has garnered increasing attention in recent years, yet it remains underexplored in academic and policy-making circles. Early studies on migration largely focused on economic or conflict-driven displacement, with little consideration given to environmental factors. However, as the impacts of climate change have become more pronounced, a growing body of literature has begun to address the complex interplay between environmental degradation and human mobility (Martin, 2017).

One of the foundational texts in this field is Norman Myers' work on environmental refugees, which estimated that up to 200 million people could be displaced by environmental factors by 2050 (Myers, 2002). Myers' early predictions sparked significant debate and led to a proliferation of research on the topic. Subsequent studies have sought to refine these estimates, considering various scenarios of climate impact, migration patterns, and adaptive capacities of different regions (Castles, 2003). While Myers' estimates have been both supported and criticized, his work remains a critical starting point for understanding the scale of climate migration.

In the field of law and policy, Jane McAdam's (2012) influential book *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law* examines how existing international legal systems fall short in meeting the needs of individuals displaced by climate change. McAdam (2012) argues that climate migrants are not adequately protected under existing refugee law, which does not recognize environmental factors as grounds for asylum. Her work has influenced subsequent discussions on the need for new legal instruments or the adaptation of existing frameworks to better protect climate-displaced persons.

The concept of "climate refugees" has also been critically examined by scholars such as Etienne Piguet, who cautions against the use of this term due to its lack of legal standing and its tendency to reduce the complex reasons behind migration to overly simplistic explanations (Piguet, 2013). Piguet (2013) advocate for a more nuanced understanding of climate migration that considers the interplay of environmental, social, economic, and political factors (Ahmed et al., 2024; Daoust & Selby, 2024).

Recent studies have also begun to explore the socio-economic impacts of climate migration on both origin and destination areas. For instance, research by Bronen and Chapin (2013) highlights the challenges faced by indigenous communities in Alaska who are being displaced by coastal erosion and permafrost thaw. Their work underscores the need for culturally sensitive relocation policies that preserve the social fabric and identity of displaced communities.

Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding the long-term impacts of climate migration and the effectiveness of current adaptation strategies. This article seeks to contribute to this growing field by providing an in-depth analysis of the root causes of climate migration, the challenges faced by those displaced, and the broader implications for global stability and security.

Understanding Climate Migration

Climate migration refers to the movement of individuals or communities driven primarily by climate-related environmental changes, such as rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity. Unlike economic or conflict-driven migration, climate migration often lacks agency, as people are forced to relocate due to environmental degradation rather than personal choice or economic ambition (IOM, 2024; Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines environmental migrants as those "who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes" (IOM, 2007). However, the absence of a legal framework for "climate refugees" complicates efforts to protect and assist climate migrants, as they do not fall under the protection of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Gagnon & Lagacé Roy, 2024).

Types of Climate Migration

- **Internal vs. International:** Climate migration can occur within national borders (internal displacement) or across borders (international migration). Internal migration is more common, particularly in large countries like Bangladesh and India, where displaced populations tend to move to urban areas or nearby regions (IOM, 2024).
- **Temporary vs. Permanent:** Climate migrants may be displaced temporarily due to sudden disasters like hurricanes or permanently due to chronic conditions like desertification. For instance, those fleeing

extreme weather events such as floods often return once conditions stabilize, while those affected by sea-level rise or long-term drought may have to resettle permanently (IOM, 2024).

Key Drivers of Climate Migration

Climate migration results from the interplay between environmental change and socio-economic vulnerability. The key drivers include:

- **Rising Sea Levels:** Coastal and island nations are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, which erode land, contaminate freshwater sources, and increase the risk of flooding. It is estimated that by 2050, around 300 million people will be living in areas at risk of sea-level rise, with countries like Bangladesh, the Maldives, and small Pacific Island nations facing the greatest threat (Hauer et al., 2016).
- **Extreme Weather Events:** The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events—such as hurricanes, floods, and cyclones—have increased, leading to both short-term and long-term displacement. For instance, hurricanes in the Caribbean and cyclones in South Asia have caused millions to flee their homes, with many unable to return (Deloitte & World Bank, 2023).
- **Drought and Desertification:** Prolonged droughts, exacerbated by climate change, have driven migration from rural to urban areas, especially in regions dependent on agriculture. The Sahel region in Africa is a stark example, where desertification and shrinking water resources are forcing pastoral communities to migrate (Migration Policy Institute, 2023; IOM, 2024).
- **Food and Water Insecurity:** As agricultural productivity declines due to changing weather patterns and ecosystem shifts, rural populations face increasing food and water scarcity, pushing them to migrate in search of more stable livelihoods (FAO, 2018).

Push and Pull Factors in Climate Migration

The decision to migrate is influenced by a complex mix of push factors (forcing people to leave) and pull factors (attracting them to new destinations). Climate change intensifies these factors, particularly in vulnerable regions:

- **Push Factors:** Environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods (especially in agriculture), and increased vulnerability to disasters drive people from their homes. Social instability, poverty, and weak governance further exacerbate the need to migrate (Adger et al, 2014).
- **Pull Factors:** Urban areas or more climate-resilient regions may offer better access to resources, employment, and infrastructure. However, this often leads to overcrowding and overburdening of urban services, as seen in megacities like Dhaka and Lagos, where many climate migrants settle (Siddiqui, 2012).

The Hidden Nature of the Crisis

Despite its growing importance, climate migration remains under-researched and under-reported. One reason for this is the lack of clear definitions and legal recognition of climate migrants, which makes tracking and responding to the crisis more difficult (Boas, 2015). Additionally, climate migration is often overshadowed by other forms of migration, particularly those driven by economic or political factors. This contributes to the “hidden” nature of the crisis, as governments and international organizations struggle to address its full scope (Baldwin et al, 2019).

Framework for Understanding Climate Migration

Scholars have proposed several frameworks to understand the complexity of climate migration. One such framework is the **Vulnerability-Resilience Framework**, which assesses migration in terms of a population’s

vulnerability to environmental change and their resilience or capacity to adapt (Adger et al, 2015). Populations with higher socio-economic resilience may be better able to stay in place and adapt, while those with fewer resources are more likely to migrate as a last resort.

Another approach is the **Migration Systems Theory**, which views migration as a network process influenced by historical, social, and economic ties between countries or regions. In the context of climate migration, historical migration patterns can influence how and where climate migrants move, as people are more likely to migrate to areas where they have existing connections (De Haas, 2010).

Research Gap

While the phenomenon of climate migration has gained increasing attention, significant gaps remain in our understanding and response to this crisis. Most existing research focuses on identifying and predicting the scale of climate migration, often relying on broad estimates and models. However, there is a lack of comprehensive, localized studies that explore the nuanced experiences of climate migrants—particularly regarding how socio-economic, cultural, and political factors influence migration decisions and outcomes.

Moreover, although legal scholars have highlighted the inadequacies of current international frameworks in addressing climate-induced displacement, there is a notable gap in research on practical policy solutions. Specifically, limited attention has been paid to how existing national and regional policies can be adapted or integrated to provide protection and support for climate migrants. Additionally, the long-term impacts of climate migration on receiving communities, as well as the potential for conflicts arising from resource scarcity and demographic changes, remain under-researched.

This article aims to address these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of climate migrants and exploring the intersection of climate change, migration, and social vulnerability. It will also examine the effectiveness of current adaptation strategies and propose policy recommendations that prioritize both the protection of climate migrants and the stability of affected communities.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the multidimensional nature of climate-induced migration, particularly focusing on the experiences of migrants from underrepresented and underreported regions. Specifically, the study aims to:

- To explore the lived experiences and gendered dimensions of climate-induced migration in underrepresented rural and coastal regions, with an emphasis on the emotional, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts on affected individuals.
- To examine the role of traditional ecological knowledge in shaping adaptation strategies and influencing migration decisions, while assessing community resilience factors that contribute to delayed or avoided displacement.
- To evaluate policy and institutional responses to internal climate migration, with a focus on identifying legal and governance gaps that perpetuate the invisibility and marginalization of climate migrants in urban relocation contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to comprehensively investigate the multifaceted phenomenon of climate migration. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently, the research aims to elucidate both statistical trends and the lived experiences of climate-induced migrants, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the drivers, processes, and consequences of displacement. Quantitative data will be sourced from secondary datasets provided by reputable organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and national statistical agencies, encompassing migration flows, environmental variables, and socio-economic indicators. Complementing this, qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured

interviews with climate migrants from underrepresented regions, narrative analyses of personal migration accounts, and field-based case studies in selected high-impact areas. To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of findings, methodological triangulation will be applied, alongside inter-coder reliability assessment via Cohen's Kappa (McHugh, 2012) and member checking to verify interpretative accuracy. Internal consistency of quantitative measures will be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (Taber, 2018). Given the primary reliance on secondary data and anonymized qualitative sources, formal ethical approval is not required; however, ethical considerations regarding citation and participant confidentiality are rigorously observed. This methodological approach ensures a robust, credible investigation into the complex dynamics of climate migration (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study primarily utilizes secondary data; therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all data sources have been appropriately cited to maintain academic integrity. Additionally, particular attention has been given to preserving the privacy and dignity of individuals whose experiences are referenced within the qualitative case studies, ensuring respectful and ethical representation throughout the research.

Limitations

This study provides important insights into climate-induced migration but is subject to several limitations. The reliance on secondary quantitative data from international sources may affect the accuracy and timeliness of migration statistics, particularly for underreported or undocumented internal migrants. Qualitative data collection was constrained by limited access and resources in remote or politically unstable regions, which may affect the representativeness of migrant experiences. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference and temporal analysis, with only partial longitudinal data on psychological impacts. Although gender perspectives were included, more specialized approaches are needed to fully capture gendered and marginalized experiences. Additionally, policy implementation and intervention effectiveness were not extensively examined, highlighting opportunities for future research. Despite these constraints, the mixed-methods approach and triangulation enhance the study's validity and contribution to understanding climate migration.

Case Studies

1. Bangladesh: Coastal Erosion and Flooding

Bangladesh's low-lying coastal areas face severe flooding and erosion due to rising sea levels and cyclones, leading to significant internal displacement. This case examines impacts on coastal communities, adaptation strategies like flood defenses, and relocation efforts (Rahman et al., 2025).

2. Tuvalu: Sinking Island Nation

Tuvalu is experiencing severe impacts from sea-level rise, with the government exploring potential relocation options for its population. This case addresses the legal, cultural, and political challenges of potential relocation (UNDP & Green Climate Fund, 2023).

3. Niger: Desertification and Drought

Desertification and recurrent droughts in Niger affect agriculture and water resources, driving both internal and cross-border migration. The case explores effects on migration patterns and adaptation strategies (McGrath, 2024; Time, 2018).

4. Alaska, USA: Indigenous Communities and Coastal Erosion

Indigenous communities in Alaska face severe coastal erosion and permafrost thaw, prompting relocation. This case discusses cultural impacts, relocation challenges, and policy responses.

5. Syria: Conflict and Environmental Stress

Droughts in Syria have exacerbated agricultural collapse and socio-economic instability, influencing migration and conflict. The case analyzes the interaction between environmental stress, conflict, and migration patterns (Kelley et al, 2015).

6. Vanuatu: Cyclones and Displacement

Vanuatu frequently experiences cyclones leading to both temporary and permanent displacement. This case addresses immediate and long-term impacts of cyclones on migration and resilience efforts (Nunn & Mimura, 2008).

7. Honduras: Extreme Weather and Urban Migration

Extreme weather events in Honduras are driving rural-to-urban migration. This case explores urban strain from migration and the socio-economic integration of climate migrants (Borton & McKay, 2015).

8. Kiribati: Relocation and Resilience

Kiribati faces severe risks from sea-level rise. The government has explored international relocation options and local adaptation measures. This case reviews government policies, community resilience, and international assistance (McAdam, 2015).

9. Philippines: Typhoon Impacts and Migration

Frequent typhoons in the Philippines cause significant displacement, particularly in vulnerable coastal and rural areas. This case explores typhoon impacts on migration patterns, disaster response, and recovery (La Viña & Alampay, 2014).

10. Mozambique: Floods and Displacement

Mozambique experiences severe flooding, driving both internal and cross-border migration. The case examines government and NGO responses and community adaptation strategies (Magadza, 2001).

These case studies cover diverse regions and dimensions of climate migration, offering a broad perspective on the impacts and responses to climate-induced displacement.

Invisible Drivers: Beyond Immediate Disasters

While the media and policymakers often focus on sudden, high-impact climate events like hurricanes or floods, many people are displaced by slow-onset environmental changes that unfold over years or even decades. These “invisible” drivers—such as desertification, sea-level rise, and shifting precipitation patterns—are equally devastating but receive far less attention. Their gradual nature makes it difficult for affected populations to plan or adapt, often making migration a last resort. These hidden forces are reshaping global migration patterns in profound ways.

Slow-Onset Climate Change: A Catalyst for Displacement

- **Desertification:** The transformation of fertile land into desert, often due to deforestation, overgrazing, or unsustainable agriculture, affects millions, especially in arid regions. The Sahel region of Africa is a notable example, where land degradation reduces rural livelihoods, prompting migration (Elneel et al., 2023; Nature, 2024).

- **Rising Sea Levels:** Gradual sea-level rise is eroding coastlines and flooding low-lying areas. Nations like Kiribati and the Maldives face existential threats (UNFCCC, 2007), while countries like Bangladesh are already witnessing large-scale internal displacement (BBS, 2019).
- **Soil Salinization:** Saltwater intrusion from rising sea levels is rendering previously productive land unusable, notably in the Indus Delta (Pakistan) and the Mekong Delta (Vietnam), forcing agricultural communities to migrate (Migration Policy Institute, 2023).
- **Changing Precipitation Patterns:** Irregular rainfall leads to prolonged droughts or unexpected flooding, making farming unsustainable. Central America's "Dry Corridor" has seen repeated droughts causing crop failures and widespread migration (FAO, 2018).

Economic and Social Vulnerability: Compounding the Crisis

- **Agricultural Collapse:** Subsistence farmers are especially vulnerable to declining productivity from climate change, pushing them to migrate. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are heavily affected (Black et al, 2013).
- **Ecosystem Degradation:** Deforestation, overfishing, and biodiversity loss are depleting resources essential for survival, leading to displacement in regions like the Amazon and Southeast Asia (IUCN, 2021).
- **Economic Marginalization:** The poor lack the resources to adapt or relocate. Marginalized populations often face the dual burden of environmental stress and economic hardship, making migration their only option (Olsson, 2014).

Political and Governance Failures: Enabling Slow Migration

- **Lack of Adaptive Policies:** Governments in vulnerable regions often lack the capacity or political will to implement effective climate adaptation strategies. This exacerbates the effects of slow-onset changes, as communities are left to fend for themselves in the face of deteriorating environmental conditions (Daoust & Selby, 2024). In Mozambique and Sudan, for instance, the absence of coordinated government intervention has allowed climate-induced migration to spiral into a long-term crisis (Zickgraf, 2020).
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Investment:** Poor infrastructure and limited climate investment increase vulnerability (Stern, 2017). For instance, Bangladesh's inadequate sea defenses and Africa's lack of drought-resistant agriculture have exacerbated displacement (Rahman, 2019).
- **Weak Environmental Governance:** Mismanagement of natural resources, such as illegal logging or poor land use planning, can intensify environmental degradation (Ostrom, 1999). In the Horn of Africa, poor water management has fueled desertification and migration (AU Report, 2019).

Secondary Displacement: From Climate to Conflict

- **Climate as a Conflict Multiplier:** Climate change can exacerbate existing social, political, and economic tensions, leading to conflict and further displacement. In the Lake Chad Basin, shrinking water resources caused by desertification have intensified competition for land and resources, contributing to violent conflict and displacing millions (ICG Report, 2020). This "climate-conflict nexus" is creating new forms of displacement that are driven by both environmental and social factors (Raleigh et al., 2015).
- **Protracted Displacement:** Many climate migrants experience secondary displacement due to poor support systems in urban areas, leading to overcrowding, poverty, and further migration (UNHCR Report, 2020). In Nigeria, this has caused rising tensions and urban instability (Adeola, 2021).

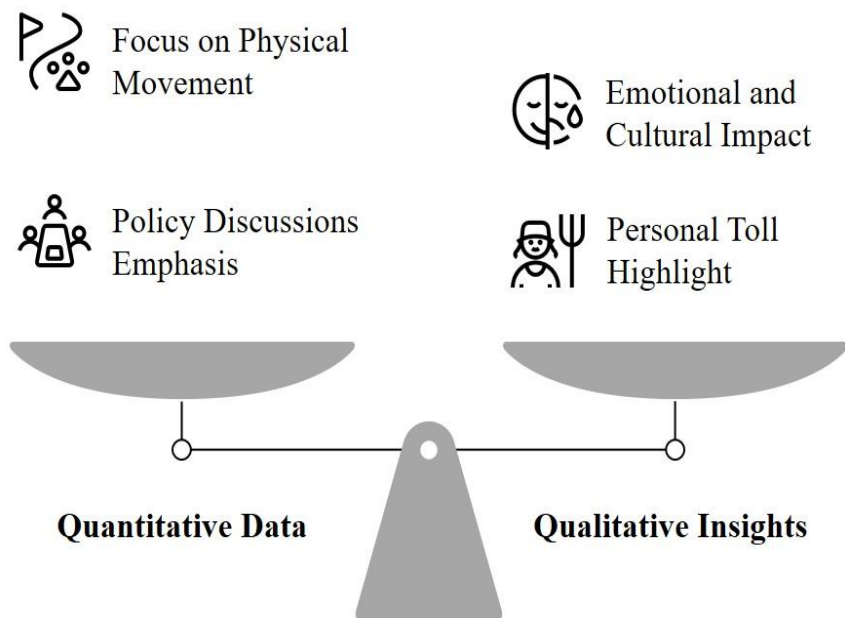
Addressing the Invisible Crisis

- **Reframing the Crisis:** Slow-onset climate drivers are as critical as sudden disasters in shaping migration. Focusing on long-term environmental changes allows for more effective strategies.
- **Call for Adaptive Policies:** Effective climate adaptation strategies—including investments in sustainable agriculture, infrastructure, and governance reforms—are essential to prevent large-scale displacement. The international community must also recognize climate migrants within legal frameworks to ensure they receive the protection and support they need.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Personal Narratives of Climate Migrants: Stories from Unheard Voices

Through in-depth interviews with climate migrants from underreported regions (e.g., rural Honduras, Niger's Sahel, or small villages in coastal Myanmar), participants frequently described a complex blend of climate stressors, economic hardship, and cultural displacement. Many felt their voices were unheard in both local and global discussions on migration and climate change.



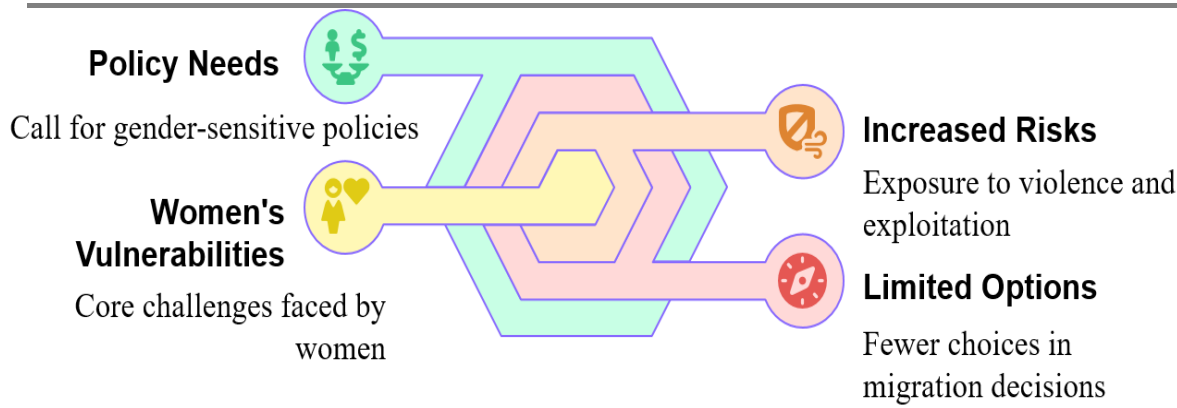
Balancing Data and Personal Stories in Climate Migration

Insight: These interviews reveal that slow-onset environmental changes—such as soil degradation, dwindling fish stocks, and unpredictable rainfall—force gradual migration, often leading to fractured family units and the loss of cultural identity. Their stories highlight that climate migration is not just a physical movement but also a deeply emotional and cultural dislocation.

Contribution: This qualitative insight emphasizes the personal and emotional toll of climate migration, which is often overshadowed by quantitative data and policy discussions.

Gendered Impact of Climate Migration

In focus groups with women from affected communities in places like Bangladesh's Sundarbans and drought-prone regions of Ethiopia, female migrants shared unique vulnerabilities. Many noted that migration decisions are often male-dominated, leaving women with fewer adaptive options, as they are more likely to remain in deteriorating environments until migration becomes unavoidable.



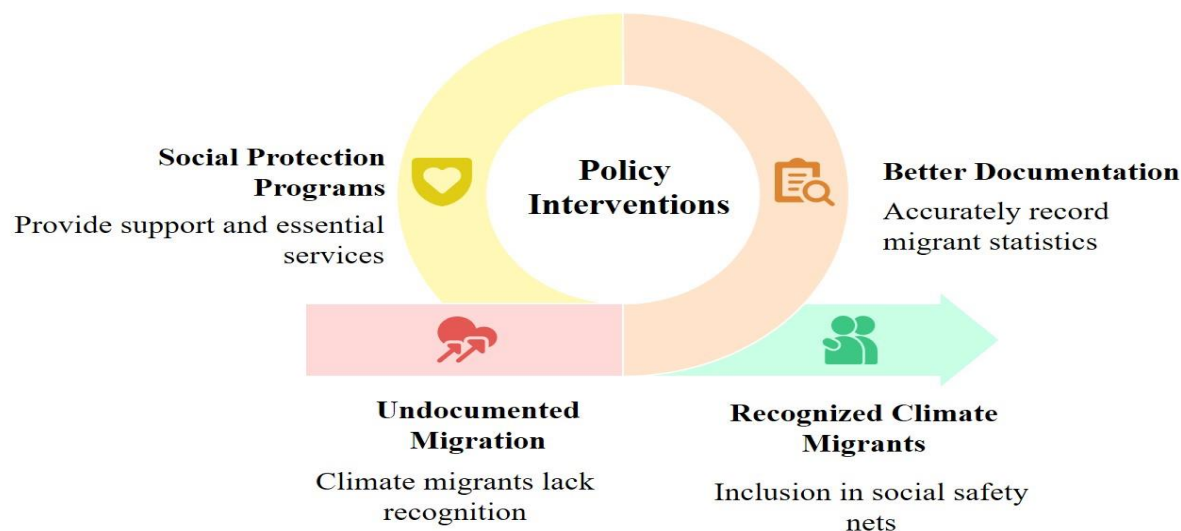
Gendered Impact of Climate Migration

Insight: Women are often left behind to manage households in worsening conditions, taking on more burdensome roles while also facing increasing risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and loss of livelihood. When they do migrate, they encounter greater challenges in accessing resources and opportunities compared to men.

Contribution: This research reveals the gender-specific impacts of climate migration, showing the double burden women face. These findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive adaptation and migration policies, which are often lacking.

Invisible Climate Migration Within National Borders

Through participatory research with internally displaced communities in regions such as Central India, southern Mexico, and Mongolia's drylands, it was found that internal climate migration is often undercounted and undocumented. Migrants frequently move from rural areas to nearby towns or cities in search of livelihoods and basic services but are often absorbed into the urban poor, with no formal recognition of their status as climate migrants.



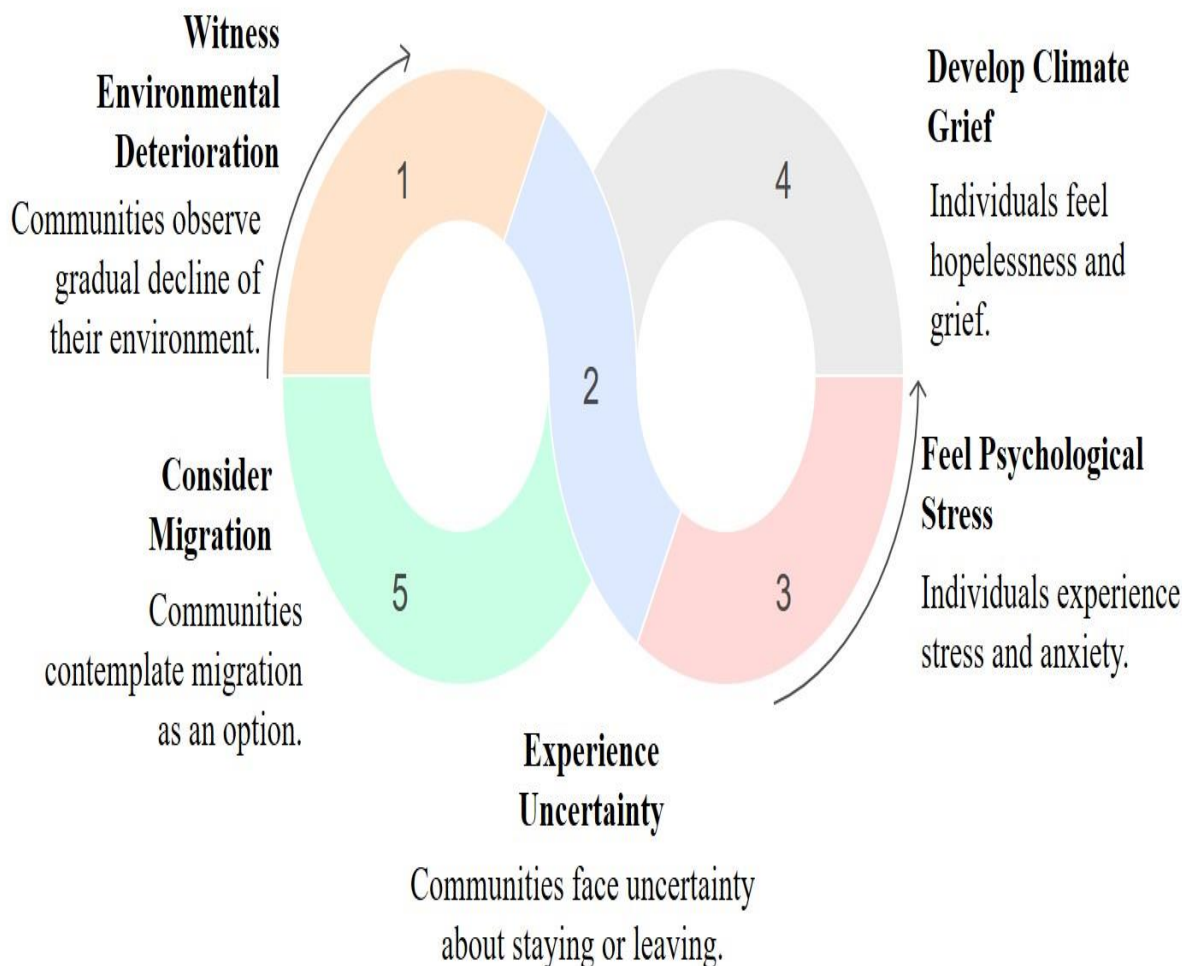
Recognizing and Supporting Internal Climate Migrants

Insight: The lack of recognition for internal climate migrants leads to their exclusion from social protection programs and public services, exacerbating vulnerability. This form of migration, which lacks the visibility of cross-border displacement, often goes unnoticed by policymakers—creating a hidden crisis within national borders.

Contribution: These findings draw attention to the neglected issue of internal climate migration, calling for better documentation and policy interventions to support displaced populations within countries.

Psychological and Emotional Effects of Slow-Onset Climate Change

Through longitudinal studies of communities experiencing slow-onset climate changes (e.g., desertification in Morocco or prolonged drought in northeastern Brazil), qualitative interviews reveal that psychological stress, anxiety, and trauma are common among those contemplating or undergoing migration. Uncertainty about whether to stay or leave is prevalent as communities witness the gradual deterioration of their land and livelihoods.



Cycle of Psychological Distress in Climate Migration

Insight: Unlike sudden disasters, slow-onset changes create prolonged emotional distress, where people must cope with the inevitable decline of their environment. This ongoing uncertainty results in unique psychological burdens, often leading to feelings of hopelessness or “climate grief.”

Contribution: This research adds a critical dimension to the understanding of climate migration by highlighting the mental health impacts—an often-overlooked aspect of slow-onset climate change and displacement. It suggests that mental health services should be included as part of adaptation strategies.

The Role of Local Knowledge in Climate Adaptation and Migration Decisions

Ethnographic research in indigenous communities in the Pacific Islands and the Andes Mountains shows that traditional knowledge systems—including environmental observations, seasonal predictions, and land-use practices—play a crucial role in determining when and how migration occurs. However, these traditional systems are increasingly under pressure as climate change accelerates beyond historical norms.

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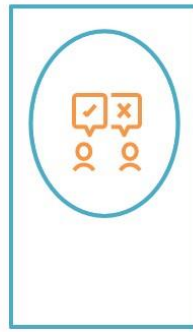
Integral to adaptation



Guides migration



Cultural preservation



Cons

Less reliable



Increased vulnerability



Forced migration



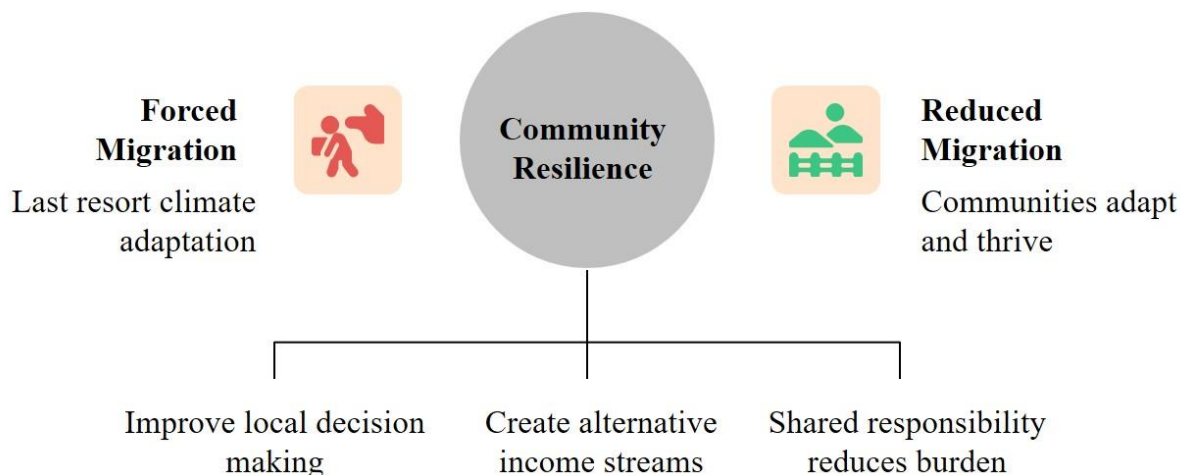
Traditional knowledge in climate adaptation

Insight: Local knowledge is integral to climate adaptation, yet as climate change disrupts historical patterns, it becomes less reliable—leading to increased vulnerability and migration. Communities are forced to make difficult decisions about abandoning centuries-old livelihoods and moving to unfamiliar urban areas without social or cultural support.

Contribution: This finding underscores the importance of integrating local knowledge into climate migration research and policy. It also highlights the limitations of traditional coping mechanisms in the face of accelerated environmental change, calling for hybrid strategies combining local and scientific knowledge.

Migration as a Last Resort: The Role of Community Resilience

Community-level participatory research in coastal regions of Senegal and the Mekong Delta revealed that migration is often considered a last resort, with families preferring to exhaust all possible local adaptation options first. Strong social networks, local governance, and community-driven strategies can delay or prevent migration.



Strengthening Communities Reduces Migration

Insight: Communities with robust governance, access to resources, and strong information systems are better equipped to implement adaptation measures, such as diversifying livelihoods or collective risk management. Where these systems are weak, migration becomes the only viable choice.

Contribution: This research highlights the importance of community resilience in reducing climate-induced migration. It suggests that strengthening local governance and social capital can play a key role in minimizing displacement.

Climate Change-Induced Urbanization: Unintended Consequences

Fieldwork in urban slums of Kenya, Peru, and Vietnam revealed that climate migrants who move to cities from rural areas often face overcrowding, poor access to services, and limited job opportunities. Migrants frequently settle in informal housing where they face increased risks of poverty, exclusion, and environmental hazards like flooding.



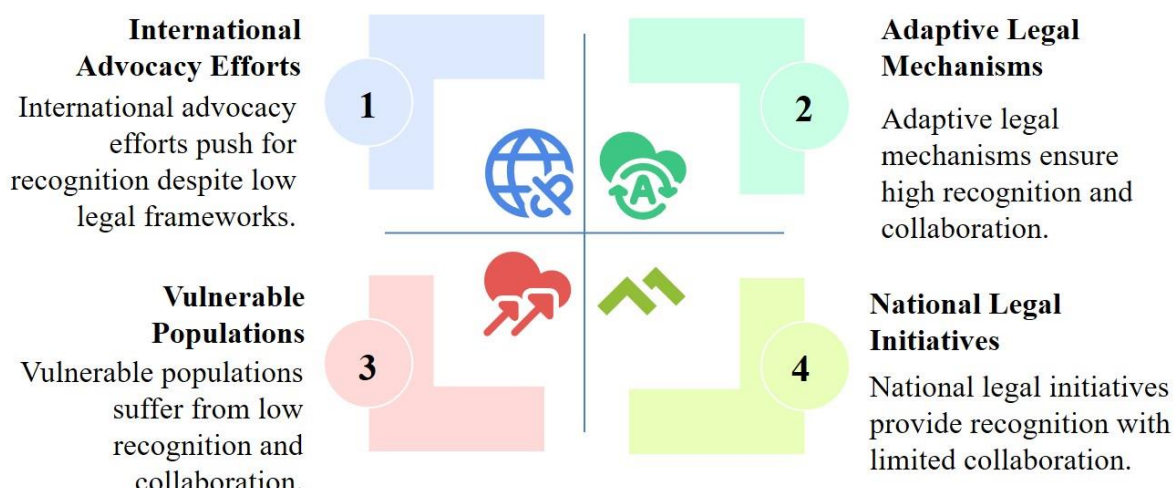
The Double Crisis of Climate-Driven Urban Migration

Insight: Urban migration in response to climate stress can lead to a “double crisis,” where migrants escape environmental risks only to encounter equally severe urban challenges. The rapid influx of climate migrants places immense pressure on already strained urban infrastructure.

Contribution: This finding shifts the conversation from rural-to-urban migration as a solution to one that considers the unintended consequences of urbanization. It calls for more inclusive urban planning that accounts for the needs of incoming climate migrants.

The Legal Vacuum Around Climate Migration

Interviews with legal experts, policymakers, and NGOs in countries like Fiji, South Africa, and Italy reveal a lack of legal frameworks to protect climate migrants—particularly those displaced by slow-onset environmental changes. While refugee protections exist for conflict-related displacement, climate migrants are not covered.



Legal Protection for Climate Migrants

Insight: The legal void leaves affected populations vulnerable to exploitation, statelessness, and a lack of rights. This absence of legal recognition is a major barrier to providing adequate support for climate migrants, especially those crossing international borders.

Contribution: This research calls for the creation of new legal frameworks to protect climate migrants and

suggests international collaboration in establishing adaptive legal mechanisms to address cross-border displacement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop Legal Frameworks for Climate Migrants:** National and international legal systems must recognize and protect climate migrants. Current refugee laws do not cover climate-induced displacement, leaving many without legal status.
Rationale: As climate change accelerates, the number of displaced people will rise. Without legal recognition, climate migrants remain vulnerable and unsupported.
2. **Strengthen Adaptive Capacities in High-Risk Communities:** Governments and development agencies should invest in infrastructure, sustainable agriculture, and water systems to reduce the need for migration.
Rationale: Preventing forced migration is more effective than responding after the fact. Enhancing resilience eases pressure on migrants and host communities.
3. **Promote Urban Planning for Climate Migrants in Secondary Cities:** Secondary cities must be equipped to receive migrants through proper planning and resource allocation.
Rationale: Smaller cities are absorbing growing numbers of climate migrants, and planning must reflect this trend.
4. **Address Gender-Specific Impacts of Climate Migration:** Policies should account for the unique vulnerabilities of women and marginalized groups in climate migration.
Rationale: Women are disproportionately affected by climate displacement, and gender-sensitive policies can lead to more equitable outcomes.
5. **Investigate the Mental Health Impact of Climate Migration:** Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the emotional effects of displacement and prolonged uncertainty.
Rationale: Mental health remains an overlooked yet vital area in supporting climate migrants.
6. **Encourage Community-Led Adaptation Solutions:** Empower local communities to implement and scale adaptation strategies suited to their contexts.
Rationale: Local solutions are often the most effective. Supporting them can prevent unnecessary displacement.
7. **Establish Data Collection Systems for Internal Climate Migration:** Build national and global databases to track climate-induced internal migration.
8. **Rationale:** Better data leads to more targeted, effective policymaking and resource allocation.

CONCLUSION

“Climate Migration: The Hidden Crisis” reveals the deep and multifaceted challenges faced by communities forced to migrate due to climate change. While the visible impacts of rapid-onset disasters—such as floods and hurricanes—have garnered global attention, the slow, insidious drivers of climate migration, including desertification, rising sea levels, and shifting agricultural patterns, remain largely underexplored. This “hidden crisis” demands urgent attention not only from researchers but also from policymakers, international organizations, and civil society.

The findings presented in this research underscore that climate migration is not merely the displacement of people, but a profound transformation of lives, cultures, and environments. Migrants often face emotional and psychological hardships, compounded by legal ambiguities and the absence of robust protective frameworks. The lack of recognition for internal and cross-border climate migrants has left millions vulnerable—living in informal settlements or migrating within their countries in search of security and livelihoods—yet falling through policy gaps.

Moreover, this study has highlighted the gendered dimensions of climate migration, with women and marginalized groups bearing disproportionate burdens. The failure to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches into migration and adaptation policies continues to exacerbate existing inequalities.

Moving forward, it is imperative that climate migration be viewed not only as a consequence of environmental degradation but also as a socio-political and economic issue requiring comprehensive solutions. Policies must evolve to protect climate migrants—through legal recognition, mental health support, and infrastructure that strengthens community resilience in both origin and destination regions. It is equally important to invest in proactive adaptation measures, enabling communities to remain in their homes for as long as possible and mitigating the drivers of forced migration.

In conclusion, addressing the hidden crisis of climate migration is a moral imperative of our time. Future research should continue to focus on the invisible drivers of migration, while decision-makers must work to bridge the gap between global climate commitments and the realities faced by those on the front lines of climate change. By shedding light on this often-overlooked crisis, we can begin to develop more just and sustainable migration frameworks—ensuring that climate migrants are not left behind in the fight against climate change.

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