Planetary Security
INITIATIVE

NOVEMBER 2017

Climate-migration-security: Making the most of a contested relationship[1]

This policy brief discusses the relationship between climate change, migration and security. This relationship is academically contested. Research is inconclusive on key issues, such as how many migrants may come to Europe due to climate change. However, given the political urgency and potential scale of the issue, it is not possible to wait for academic consensus to emerge. The relationship between youth unemployment, irregular migration and instability in the context of climate change is politically recognized as a likely risk with high impact, even though contemporary policies still focus primarily on responses to forced or irregular migration. Currently an opportunity exists to make the most of available insights and invest wisely in countries of origin. Several no-regret policy options could be envisaged that boost (youth) employment opportunities, restore degraded lands and ecosystems, strengthen food, water and energy security and reduce inequalities between groups in society. These problems are at the core of many conflicts and contribute to instability, especially in cases of poor governance. Addressing them in an integrated way is therefore of the utmost importance to securing a sustainable future.

Academic evidence on climate migration

It has been argued that climate change is already causing people to migrate and, while migration is usually not openly labelled a security risk, implicitly the link with pressures in society, the rise of populism and terrorism is often made. The problem is that the evidence base for such insights is still very weak. There has been considerable evidence linking climate change to migration, but the effects appear mainly indirect and context-dependent[2]. There is little consensus regarding which climate (policy) impacts (e.g. drought, floods, food and water scarcity) contribute most, whether climate change is a significant reason for people to migrate outside their own region and how many additional migrants would come to Europe because of climate change.

---

2   Burrows K., and Kinney P. 2016. "Exploring the Climate Change, Migration and Conflict Nexus". International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 13 (4): 443.

In its fifth assessment report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has pointed out that both direct effects of climate change, notably sea level rise or natural disasters, and indirect effects related to changing livelihoods can lead to migration. Moreover, irregular migration is mentioned as one of the risks climate change poses to human security.

However, the research underlying this statement points to the bulk of migration being projected to be within countries and of a temporary nature, especially after large-scale natural disasters. Distance is found to be an important factor, as most migrants go to places they can easily reach[3], although findings differ across regions. A rising temperature, especially above 25˚C, has been found to be an important determinant of migration, but how this relationship works exactly is unclear at this point[4].

People could migrate both pre-emptively as an adaptation strategy to a changing environment, or as a last resort when other means are no longer available (e.g. when a sea level rise makes it impossible to live on low-lying islands)[5]. In some cases people will not have the means to migrate and will be stuck in a "poverty trap"[6] as migrating requires considerable resources. It is unknown whether these people might still attempt to migrate when their circumstances improve, although earlier studies have found

that the influence of per capita income on migration follows a u-shaped pattern, indicating that most migration takes place among middle classes[7]. This indicates that economic growth among the poorest segments of the population might lead to increased migration.

Land degradation has been linked to migration, but can be caused by climate change, as well as other causes such as poor land management[8]. People from less fertile areas are generally more likely to migrate. In Bangladesh rural-urban migration is a common way to adapt to environmental change and improve livelihood opportunities and has been found to be strongly linked to crop failure and a loss of income from agriculture[9]. In the Sahel and West Africa both labour migration and family migration to the savannah are found to be important measures for adapting to food insecurity and seasonal hunger. Disaster relief and adequate government responses are important in preventing migration, since they prevent hunger[10].

Above all, the relationship between climate change and migration is generally found to be blurred with other factors, many of them having to do with governance and the resilience of societies to climate change. It is difficult to single out climate change from other factors that influence peoples' decision to migrate, such as conflict, repression and the (perceived) opportunity for a better life in another country. This knowledge gap is currently being addressed in new research, but the academic debate is unlikely to be

3   Fafchamps M., and Shilpi F. 2013. "Determinants of the Choice of Migration Destination". Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics 75 (3): 388–409.

4   Bohra-Mishra, P., et al. 2014. "Nonlinear Permanent Migration Response to Climatic Variations but Minimal Response to Disasters". Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 111 (27): 9780–9785.

5   Koubi, V., et al. 2016. "The Role of Environmental Perceptions in Migration Decision-Making: Evidence from Both Migrants and Non-Migrants in Five Developing Countries". Population and Environment 38 (2): 134–63.

6   Government Office for Science (UK government). 2011. "Migration and global environmental change: future challenges and opportunities". https://www. gov.uk/government/publications/migration-and-global-environmental-change-future-challenges-and-opportunities (Accessed August 2017).

7   Richard, A.H. and Page, J. 2003. "International Migration, Remittances, and Poverty in Developing Countries". *The World Bank*. https://elibrary. worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/1813-9450-3179 (Accessed August 2017).

8   Gray, Clark L. 2011. "Soil Quality and Human Migration in Kenya and Uganda". Global Environmental Change 21 (2): 421–30.

9   Saha, S.K. 2017. "Cyclone Aila, Livelihood Stress, and Migration: Empirical Evidence from Coastal Bangladesh". Disasters 41 (3): 505–26.

10 Tacoli, C. 2009. "Crisis or Adaptation? Migration and Climate Change in a Context of High Mobility". Environment and Urbanization 21 (2): 513–25.

settled soon and some of the research challenges, such as those related to the motives of people, are inherently complex to address.

Migration as a security risk for Europe?

Despite the lack of precise knowledge on causalities in the relationship between climate change and migration, its potential impact and population growth expectations in countries of origin makes the topic politically too important to ignore. Estimates of the number of people that are (expected to become) displaced because of climate change vary widely due to the methodological difficulties mentioned above and the choice of variables used (e.g. sea level rise, desertification, population growth etc.). Over 200 million people live in vulnerable coastal regions, and between 0.7 billion and 4.4 billion people will suffer from water shortages according to projections[11]. The NGO Christian Aid has estimated that by 2050 around 1 billion people could be displaced because of climate change[12]. Norman Myers calculated the most frequently cited figure of around 200 million climate migrants by 2050[13]. However, as Myers himself admitted, he made extensive use of extrapolation and the research was done over twenty years ago. It is also unclear what proportion of these climate migrants would try to reach Europe.

Mainstream media often imply migration is a problem that jeopardizes security, which in itself is contested, as many have pointed out the need for migrants to supplement the labour force in an aging Europe[14].

The income that developing countries receive from remittances is likewise very welcome. However, for most politicians, and in the public discourse, migration is linked to competition for low-paid jobs, tensions in society and even terrorism[15]. The impact is also felt in the migrants' countries of origin through a loss of educated people (brain drain), a decreasing labour force and social disruption, depending on the characteristics of the country (e.g. labour shortage or surplus) and the nature of the migration (e.g. highly skilled or low income)[16].

Migration in the region can also increase tensions in countries that are still relatively stable. This appears to be a risk in Jordan and Lebanon, which host many refugees from Syria and Iraq. There have been reports of human rights violations and increasing hostilities towards Syrian refugees.[17] In Libya, which is still in the early stages of reconstruction and coping with an influx of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa[18], human trafficking networks and the political economy that has arisen undermine state authority and further destabilize the country.

In the EU the security implications of migration are mainly visible in the fragmentation of politics with a rise of nationalist sentiment after fears of a loss

11 Government of the United Kingdom. *Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change*, 2009.

12 Christian Aid, *Human Tide: the real migration crisis*, 2007. May.

13 Myers, N., and Jennifer K. 1995. "Environmental Exodus, An Emerging Crisis in the Global Arena". Climate Institute, Washington DC.

14 International Monetary Fund. 2016. "The Impact of Workforce Aging on European Productivity". https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16238.pdf (Accessed August 2017).

15 Reuters 2016. "Hungary's Orban says 'obvious connection' between terrorism and migration". http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-idUSKCN1011FM (Accessed August 2017).

16 OECD 2007. *International Migration Outlook*. http://www.oecd.org/els/internationalmigrationoutlook2007.htm (Accessed August 2017).

17 Francis, E. 2017. "Hostility grows towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon". Reuters Press Agency. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-refugees-tension/hostility-grows-towards-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-idUSKCN1B8128 (Accessed August 2017).

18 For more on migration and instability in North Africa also read: Molenaar, F., and El Kamouni-Janssen, F. 2017. "Turning the tide: The politics of irregular migration in the Sahel and Libya". *The Clingendael Institute*. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2017/turning_the_tide/ (Accessed August 2017).

of culture[19], prompting the EU and many national governments to place migration at the top of the political agenda. Migration also played an important role in the campaign leading up to Brexit[20]. Nevertheless, in most of these debates migration is portrayed as something we cannot do much about apart from building fences at the border and closing much-contested deals with transit countries. War and suppression would be the key factors resulting in waves of refugees and economic differences would pull other migrants to Europe.

In some political debates the conflicts in turn have been related to climate change. For instance in Syria the conflict is often associated with the preceding extreme drought in the region[21], although recent publications have ignited a debate on this[22]. Migration is also included in more general debates on climate change as a threat multiplier[23]. What is still missing is a shift of focus from responses to migration towards addressing resource scarcity and climate change as root causes of local and regional tensions, youth unemployment and migration and using such policies to promote other objectives such as stability and development in conflict-prone areas. This would shift the debate from a focus on response to a focus on prevention of conflict and migration.

The political debate on climate migrants

Politicians both in Europe and in the countries from which most migrants emigrate to Europe have pointed to the relationship between climate change and migration. They acknowledge the potentially destabilizing impact on both countries of origin and receiving countries now and in the future. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker identified climate change and underdevelopment as root causes of conflict and migration in his State of the Union addresses in 2015 and 2016.

Climate migration is also covered extensively in media all over the world, which have also linked it to the security implications of climate change[24]. Some argue this has led to a 'securitization' of climate change, effectively reframing an environmental and developmental problem as a security threat to move it up the political agenda, although this depiction is not universally accepted[25]. While securitization may have happened at times, we believe this should not be used as a reason not to address the possibility of climate change impacts being a root cause of migration, displacement and conflict that leads to asylum seekers and refugees.

It strikes us that climate change is still often conspicuously absent from general debates on migration and security. An example is a recent report by UN Secretary-General Guterres on the Lake Chad region that failed to recognize climate change as a root cause[26]. Might it be that the mainstream

19 Miller, Bowman H. 2017. "Tomorrow's Europe: A Never Closer Union." Journal of European Integration 39 (4): 421–33.

20 Henderson, A., et al. 2016. "England, Englishness and Brexit". The Political Quarterly 87 (2): 187–199.

21 Kelley, C.P., et al. 2015. "Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought". Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 112 (11): 3241–46.

22 For an overview of the debate, see: http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2017/09/19/climate-change-and-the-syrian-civil-war/.

23 For an analysis of climate risks and migration see: Rüttinger et al. 2017. "A New Climate for Peace Report". https://www.newclimateforpeace.org/#report-top (Accessed August 2017).

24 Schäfer, M.S., et al. 2016. "Securitization of Media Reporting on Climate Change? A Cross-National Analysis in Nine Countries". Security Dialogue 47 (1): 76–96.

25 Peters, K. and Mayhew, L. 2016. "The Securitization of Climate Change: A Developmental Perspective" in *The Securitization of Foreign Aid*; ed. Brown, S. and Grävingholt, J., 212-236.

26 Born, C. 2017. "UN reformer Guterres needs to do more on climate change". Climate Home http://www.climatechangenews.com/2017/09/20/un-reformer-guterres-needs-climate-change/ (Accessed October 2017).

humanitarian aid scene is not yet ready for climate change[27] and the migration debate is still too preoccupied with how to react and respond to the people willing to cross the Mediterranean Sea?

Even if it is only a (small) contributing factor, the severity and numbers of people affected by climate change makes it a large potential driver for migration and insecurity, now and in the future. Precautionary action to prevent conflict therefore makes sense, as the costs of responding to humanitarian crises are significantly higher than those of addressing their causes[28]. We believe simultaneously there is a need to strengthen the evidence base by new research on the root causes of migration and instability with a view to using these insights to improve policies on the ground.

Policy responses

In terms of policies in countries from which migrants originate, many multilateral organizations and governments have not yet embraced the interface between climate, migration and security. There are a few exceptions.

In November 2016 African countries launched the Sustainability, Stability and Security (Triple S or 3S) initiative[29]. The initiative aims at promoting Security, Stability and Sustainability by stimulating the creation of green jobs and investment opportunities by migrants themselves. The goal is to create two million jobs for the most vulnerable groups, including youth, former combatants and returned migrants, increasing livelihood opportunities and combating land degradation in order to reduce the number

of people migrating because of distress. This initiative underlines the importance African politicians attach to the relationship between land degradation, migration and stability. It builds upon and collaborates with other initiatives, such as the Great Green Wall that aims to combat desertification in Africa.

Similarly the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has proposed a 'Marshall Plan with Africa' in order to increase youth employment opportunities. The EU has adopted a proposal for a European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) for Africa and the Neighbourhood[30], mainly aimed at stimulating investments and business opportunities and projected to be worth between €44 billion and €88 billion. Private finance is projected to play a major role in achieving this.

The EU response to irregular migration and stability follows a two-pronged strategy, one focusing on the root causes of migration through development, the other on strengthening the capacity of security forces of transit countries in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and some North African countries[31]. The focus of policies has mainly been on stimulating peacebuilding measures and increasing 'resilience', mainly by increasing investments to provide employment opportunities[32]. Beside these, the EU has several tools for climate adaptation, countering political instability and mitigating conflicts, including the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, amounting to €2.8 billion (EUTF, part of EDF), the Africa Peace Facility

27 Brown, O., et al. 2007. "Climate Change as the 'new' security Threat: Implications for Africa". International Affairs 83 (6): 1141–1154.

28 Shreve, C.M. and Kelman, I. 2014. "Does mitigation save? Reviewing cost-benefit analyses of disaster risk reduction". International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol. 10, Part A: 213-235.

29 UNCCD, *Sustainability, Stability, Security*. 2017. http://www2.unccd.int/actions/sustainability-stability-security (Accessed August 2017).

30 European Commission. *State of the Union 2016: Strengthening European Investments for jobs and growth*. 2016. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-3002_en.htm (Accessed August 2017).

31 EEAS. *The European Union and the Sahel, fact sheet*. 2017. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4099/The%20European%20Union%20and%20the%20Sahel (Accessed August 2017).

32 See for instance: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/fragility-and-crisis-management/resilience-and-linking-relief-rehabilitation-and-0_en (Accessed August 2017).

and the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP).

As the existence of these various programmes and funds shows, policies are largely aimed at single-issue challenges, missing valuable opportunities for exploring synergies at the regional level. It is striking that while these instruments cover many aspects of climate change, conflict resolution and migration prevention, there is little integration between these fields. In the EU Sahel Strategy, launched in 2011 and adopted in 2015, climate change is not mentioned at all[33]. Integrating efforts to combat climate change, improve livelihoods to prevent migration and boost conflict resolution could lead to synergies that increase resilience in all of these fields at lower costs[34]. Another issue is the time horizon of these projects, which generally does not extend beyond five years. Formulating long-term integrated regional strategies would allow for policy tools that take into account various interdependent drivers of instability and migration while ensuring future-proof strategies.

A golden opportunity?

As momentum on climate action, preventing migration and preventing conflicts is gaining traction, political calls are on the rise for joined-up policies to address these issues, and more funds are becoming available. Several politicians, including the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and the President of The Gambia, have recognized in recent speeches at the UN General Assembly that climate change and sustainable development are key factors in countering instability and preventing irregular migration. Several initiatives are underway to address

these issues in the UN Security Council, although this has so far not been done consistently[35].

It is unlikely that climate change, poverty and discontent with national leadership and inadequate governance will be addressed in such a way as to prevent all irregular migration and security. However, more could be done to adjust European policies with a view to bolstering resilience by alleviating root causes of migration that are associated with climate change and increased natural resource scarcity.

For instance, the European Parliament called for 28% of the newly agreed upon EFSD to be spent on implementing the Paris Agreement and combating climate change[36]. Climate change has also been recognized as a driver of migration by the UN General Assembly in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016[37]. The recently established Triple S initiative illustrates ownership among recipient countries to step up efforts to address environmental security. The EU has also recognized the need for an integrated approach, as can be seen in its Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy and the recent EU Council conclusions on resilience[38].

33 EEAS. *Factsheet: EU relations with Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger*. 2016. http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/factsheets/docs/sahel-european-union-factsheet_en.pdf.

34 Mobjörk, M., et al. 2016. "Towards A Global Resilience Agenda - Action on Climate Fragility Risks". https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/towards_a_global_resilience_agenda.pdf (Accessed August 2017).

35 Born, C. 2017. "A Resolution for a Peaceful Climate: Opportunities for the UN Security Council". https://www.sipri.org/publications/2017/sipri-policy-briefs/resolution-peaceful-climate-opportunities-un-security-council (Accessed August 2017).

36 European Parliament. *Resolution on EFSD Fund*. 2017. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0311+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#BKMD-7 (Accessed August 2017).

37 The declaration can be found here: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/NY_Declaration_ENG.pdf.

38 For more information see: European Union Global Strategy, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*. 2016 https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf; Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*. 2017 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31519/ccs-on-resilience-in-eu-ea-st14191en17.pdf (Accessed November 2017).

Currently two pilot projects are being undertaken by the EU in collaboration with UN Environment to explore the possibilities for mainstreaming climate change into peace-building efforts[39].

This offers opportunities for developing and testing an integrated approach towards the climate-migration-security nexus. Such insights could also be included in regional and national strategies and action plans. Considering the strong linkages that climate, migration and security have with other development issues such as poverty, urbanization and unemployment, climate security can be easily integrated into other agendas and portfolios. An integrated agenda, investing in natural resource management, landscape restoration and renewable energy, is also less contested than a focus on good governance, for instance.

When considering options for action on the ground it is not difficult to envisage linkages with other migration-related agendas such as keeping youth in the countryside (instead of in slums in big cities). Examples include landscape restoration and renewable energy projects that create jobs for those who are considering migrating or who return after a failed attempt to reach Europe. Such projects have now started in pilot phases, for instance in Agadez (Niger). At the same time, such projects can build on years of experience gained in projects implemented in the past, which often had different objectives but in essence also concentrated on creating livelihoods for rural poor in Africa and South-East Asia. The new factor is the scale needed and the focus on countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Now is the moment to consider how to include insights into the relationship between climate, migration and security in policies implemented on the ground. Moreover, there is an urgent need to scale up such efforts in countries from which migrants originate and which are highly vulnerable to climate change, simply because prevention is better than cure and comes at a lower cost: economically *and* politically.

---

39 For more information see: http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/what-we-do/risk-reduction/climate-change-and-security-risks.

About the Planetary Security Initiative

The Planetary Security Initiative aims to help increase awareness, to deepen knowledge, and to develop and promote policies and good practice guidance to help governments, the private sector and international institutions better secure peace and cooperation in times of climate change and global environmental challenges. The Initiative was launched by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 and is currently operated by a consortium of leading think tanks headed by the Clingendael Institute.

Follow us on social media

🐦 @PlanSecu

in The Planetary Security Initiative

f The Planetary Security Initiative

E-mail: psi@clingendael.org
Website: www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org

About the authors

Louise van Schaik is Head of the Clingendael International Sustainability Centre and Senior Research Fellow at Clingendael Institute. She is also a visiting professor at the College of Europe in Bruges (Belgium) and coordinator of Clingendael Research on EU in the World. In her research she has extensively analysed the EU's performance in multilateral bodies, including in the fields of climate change, health and food standards. She has also published on related research areas such as EU foreign policy, EU climate change and energy policy, EU research policy, scarcity of natural resources and green growth.

Tammo Bakker is Research Intern at the Clingendael Sustainability Centre. He is specialised in the politics of development and planetary security.