
Gender and climate induced migrations in the Mediterranean Region

Monia Braham, International Expert in Sustainable Development Policies

In 2015, Europe faced an unprecedented influx of migrants from the Middle-East, Maghreb, Sub-Saharan regions and the greater Horn of Africa. While securitized border responses were quickly cobbled together, less attention has been paid to the underlying drivers of these migratory flows, among them climate change and conflicts, and their complex secondary effects in migrants' countries of origin. In fact, Europe is a major destination for mixed migration flows through and from North Africa, due mainly to its proximity, historic and linguistic links, real and perceived economic and employment opportunities, existing networks, and established asylum systems. Increasingly restrictive immigration regimes and border management in Europe, combined with high migration pressures in the region and real labor market demands in Europe, have contributed to the rise in irregular migration (ESCWA, IMO, 2015)

Nationalities of irregular migrants recorded for the period January 2017 - March 2018 on the Central Mediterranean Route of migration included Nigerians (15,6%), Guineans (8,3%) and Ivoirians (8,2%) followed by citizens from other sub-Saharan countries such as Mali and Senegal. Together, those countries make up more than 50% of arrivals in Italy for the same period. Other migrants from the Sahara caught up in the flows through the Western Mediterranean Route are motivated by a mix of humanitarian and economic concerns, especially with the increasing climate vulnerability witnessed in their countries of origin. The number of migrants from North African countries also considered countries of origin of migration to Europe has been on the decrease since 2015; North African migrants represented only 15% of the migration flows to Europe in 2017.

From a gender perspective, migration flow through the Eastern Mediterranean Route seems to be more gendered (22% women and 37% children) than the central route (11% women and 15% children), and

the western route (8% women and 9% children). This is due to the nature of displacements from conflict affected countries to Turkey and Europe involving families rather than individuals and the high risks related to sea arrivals on the Western and Central Mediterranean Routes for women and children compared to land arrivals through the Eastern Mediterranean Route. New trends of irregular migrant flows to Europe and some extreme weather events in the same periods clearly show that arrivals from some countries of origin to Europe are those of climate migrants.

Climate migrants forced to flee because of loss of livelihood and habitat will be unlikely to meet the legal definition of refugee and, therefore, will become irregular migrants. Most migration occurring from climate change is likely to be internal, with the affected population seeking more habitable locations with greater economic opportunities within their own countries. A portion will undoubtedly be international, however. Depending on the specific situation, climate migrants will resemble labor migrants, seeking better livelihood opportunities in a new location, or they may resemble refugees and internally displaced persons who have fled situations beyond their individual control (F. Martin, 2010).

Gender is a determining factor of climate migrants' needs and priorities, and women, who suffer the double injustice of climate vulnerability and gender inequality, are disproportionately affected by climate change because they tend to be on average poorer, less educated, have a lower health status, and have limited direct access to or ownership of natural resources. Both the process (actual movements) and the outcomes (rural-rural or rural-urban migration, out-migration) of climate induced migration are also likely to be highly gendered (Shindarkar, 2012). Although the link between the gendered dimensions of climate induced migration is still under investigation,

gender remains fundamental in the decision-making process of migration since the assigned roles to men and women in family, community and society are also a defining feature of vulnerability to climate change.



In this contribution, the interaction between gender, migrations and climate change, as well as the way forward for a proactive protection of climate migrants by the countries of origin, transit and destination through the Mediterranean routes will be explored. Those concerns are also reflected in the progress made towards integrating gender into climate negotiations, climate planning and climate action, as demonstrated by the efforts for the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Lima Work Programme on Gender (2014, FCCC/CP/2014/10/Add.3, Decision 18/CP.20) and the gender equality considerations in the recent UNFCCC Paris Agreement (2015, UNFCCC/CP/2015/L.9/ Rev.1).

Yet, the key challenge remains a systematic integration of gender equality and women's empowerment strategies in climate change responses at the local, national and international levels. This signifies a paradigm shift that puts gender concerns and the voice and agency of women, girls, men and boys, at the center of adaptation, mitigation, and disaster risk management efforts

(UNWOMEN, 2016). This contribution attempted to identify the legal and policy lessons learned on climate induced migrations to, across and within the Mediterranean region taking into account the double injustice of gender inequality and climate vulnerability as suffered by women in their countries of origin. The key findings of this analysis are also intended to shed light on the need for advocacy on a Regional Protection Agenda of Climate Migrants for the preparations to Katowice COP 24 at the end of 2018.

Migration and the double injustice of gender inequality and climate vulnerability

The understanding of migratory patterns in the Mediterranean and beyond is *sin qua non* to the identification of climate change as a push factor of the international migration flows to North African countries as they involve several points of transit to Europe and from these countries, depicted also as countries of origin of thousands of migrants to Europe annually. The migratory flows on the different routes of the Mediterranean region encompass women and children. Also, women, children and elderly persons left behind by men in the countries of origin should be considered a full part of the investigation in order to provide a comprehensive reading on the gendered dimensions of migration flows throughout the three Mediterranean routes.

International migration flows from climate change hotspots in sub-Saharan countries and the Horn of Africa region to the Mediterranean are attributed to several natural hazards and casualties: desertification, rising sea levels, negative agriculture change and disasters. Migration streams within the borders of Mediterranean Arab Countries that are also countries of origin of thousands of climate migrants to Europe need to be highlighted. Internally displaced persons

because of climate change impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods in rural areas of Syria, in the Saïess region in Morocco and in Bhira of the Nile Delta in Egypt should be considered on the same footing as international migrants for their protection regardless of the regular or irregular nature of the migratory pattern.

In sub-Saharan Africa, changed patterns of rainfall would have particularly serious impacts on food security (Brown, 2008). New patterns and other intense hydrological cycles mean that extreme weather events such as droughts, storms and floods are expected to become increasingly frequent and severe. Serious impacts on agriculture are predicted by the IPCC which is largely rain-fed in Sub-Saharan countries: yields from rain-fed agriculture could fall by up to 50 per cent by 2020. Agricultural production, including access to food, in many African countries is projected to be severely compromised by climate variability and change” (IPCC, 2007).

The regional displacement figure from Sub-Saharan Africa needs to be complemented by the climate induced migration from other regions, notably the Horn of Africa. Migration flows from January 2017 to March 2018 included individuals from Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. Apparently, the rapid onset of climate change events such as extreme weather events and disasters, as registered the same period, are the root causes of those migration flows to the Mediterranean. Indeed, figures about migrants from Eastern African countries (Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia in addition to Sudan) are numerically 18,702 migrants during 2017 and surpassed largely those who had fled Nigeria (18,590) but are lower than those who had fled Syria (20,221) during the same year (IDMC, 2017).

Gender is a system of power relations that permeates every aspect of the migration experience. One cannot understand the opportunities or barriers to migration, nor the economic upward mobility of some and the downward mobility of others, nor the desire to settle or return, without understanding how migrants are embedded in a gendered system of relations, with one another and with macro-structures such as global labor markets or states (Nawyan, 2010). To assess the potential impact of climate change on migration throughout the cycle of climate induced migration, we also need to tackle the gendered dimensions of migration patterns and renew policies for

adaptation to climate change that include land use and property rights, social welfare, housing, employment and other frameworks that determine whether individuals, households and communities are able to find decent living conditions and pursue adequate livelihoods (UNDP, ODI, 2017).

The impacts of climate change in rural areas on the access to productive and natural resources amplify existing gender inequalities. Climate change affects women’s and men’s assets and well-being differently in terms of agricultural production, food security, health, water and energy resources. Women’s dependence on and unequal access to land, water, and other productive assets which are compounded by limited mobility and decision-making power in many contexts mean that they are disproportionately affected by climate-related natural disasters and conflicts and consequently by climate-induced migration.

In fact, women and men exhibit different vulnerabilities to climate change given their unequal access to resources and information. The gendered process plays out differently in diverse societies depending on local cultural norms that entail gender roles, age, class and ethnicity. The masculinisation of migration is a response to social inequality exacerbated by climate change and is strongly linked to livelihood, risk exposure and weak adaptive capacity of individuals and groups. The loss of livelihood is indeed the triggering event that sets a migratory plan into motion. Men tend to migrate when farming becomes uncertain and household income is kept on the decrease (UNESCO, 2017).

The unequal access to land is the landmark of societies in the countries of origin, especially in the south of the Mediterranean. Making progress towards equality will require a strong commitment to removing all hindrances that currently prevent women from having access to land and non-land assets. Access to land and ownership are essential to women empowerment and gender equality. In countries of origin, gender equal tenure rights need to be promoted in order to ensure equality in land access. It is important to determine not only who owns the land but also, who the titular head of the household is and who has decision making power over the land and its uses. The masculinisation of the rural space remains a salient feature despite land governance transformation brought on by tenure reforms. According to the FAO, Sub-Saharan Africa exhibits a much better

figure on female control of agricultural lands (17%) than Arab countries, especially in the south of the Mediterranean (less than 5%). However, both remain well below the global average (19%).

In fact, climate change will force countries of origin not only to rethink long-standing gender roles that have perpetuated gender inequality but also gender sensitive climate change strategies as an alternative to rural development strategies. In these countries, women may face exclusively the impact of the extreme weather events and natural disasters. The formulation of gender responsive strategies to climate change and disasters, requires not only the determination of the risks and vulnerabilities, that pertain to women, men, girls, and boys at all levels but also drawing these strategies on tackling a wide range of socio-economic, cultural, and structural inequality issues.

The nexus conflicts-climate change-migration in countries of origin should be especially emphasized and further investigations on conflicts over natural resources between local communities as exacerbated by climate change are necessary to rethink an alternative pathway for resilience, climate security and peaceful societies in sub-Saharan, the great horn of Africa, Southern and the Eastern Mediterranean countries. Evidence based analysis on climate vulnerability are also needed to feed into the migration profiles of countries of origin, to be of guidance for national adaptation strategies under the national planning systems and for regional processes intended to the formulation of migration policies, especially in the Mediterranean.

Towards a Regional Protection Agenda of Climate Migrants

A definition of climate migrants is needed for a Regional Protection Agenda of Climate Migrants in the Mediterranean Region. Such a definition is not a semantic issue but it is crucial in recognizing a legal status for those fleeing the adverse effects of climate change since they are not considered refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. The multi-causality dimensions of the human movements across and within borders compounded by the diversity of migration drivers including environmental factors are an additional argument for establishing at least a working definition of the two notions: Climate migrants and climate migration. In fact, an advocacy definition is needed to bring visibility to cross-border

displacements in the context of disasters and to place climate migrants on the policy agenda of countries of origin, transit and destination.

In accordance with the Nansen Initiative, prevention, preparedness, and responses to cross-border displacement in the context of disasters including climate induced migration require action to be taken at community, national, regional and international levels, while paying special attention to the needs of women, youth and children. Several areas where action is needed notably for the prevention and mitigation of the displacement impact through disaster risk reduction measures and resilience building have been identified which consider migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental impacts linked to climate change, protect people displaced across international borders in the context of disasters and the international coordination and cooperation for cross-border displacement in disaster contexts. These thematic issues should inspire the Mediterranean Institutions to propose a Regional Protection Agenda for Climate Migrants targeting countries of origin based not only on Humanitarian Protection Measures for Cross-Border Disaster-Displaced Persons but also on reviewing national laws, policies and strategies to determine to what extent they allow for lasting solutions for cross-border disaster displaced persons. Such measures should consider the specific needs of women and children, who are particularly vulnerable during the emergency relief phase, as well as ongoing support during the recovery and reconstruction phase through the provision of adequate infrastructure and the necessary social services.

In reference to Goal 13 of the 2030 Agenda, national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 need to be adopted to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries (Target 13.1). Local disaster risk reduction strategies are also needed and should be aligned to the national strategic framework on risk reduction (indicators for targets 13.1). Furthermore, target 13.b exhorted countries to promote mechanisms for effective climate change-related planning and management in the least developed countries, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities. Women's and girls' vulnerability will increase in the context of disaster induced migration due to limited access to information and resources. Consequently, women

and girls are prevented from benefiting from equal opportunities as citizens and the displacement across or within national borders will amplify their pre-existing vulnerability.

The New York Declaration, outcome of the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants of 2016, reaffirming the status quo did, however, include a pledge by states to work towards two Global Compacts, one on migration, the other on refugees. The Declaration recognized the multi-causal drivers of migration, which may include the « adverse effects of climate change and other natural hazard related disasters » (UN, 2016. A/71/L.1) and expressed commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda “whose objectives include eradicating extreme poverty and inequality, revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, promoting peaceful societies based on international human rights and the rule of law, creating conditions for balanced, sustainable and inclusive economic growth and employment, combating environmental degradation and ensuring effective responses to natural disasters and the adverse impacts of climate change” and underlined their commitment to migrants and refugees and “the importance of a comprehensive approach... to ensure a people-centred, sensitive, human, dignified, gender responsive and prompt reception for all persons arriving in their countries, and particularly those in large movements, whether refugees or migrants”.

Paris Agreement on Climate Change:

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties to Paris Agreement pledged to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity, when taking action to address climate change. Adaptation should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups. Furthermore, capacity-building for the implementation of this agreement should be guided by lessons learned, including those from capacity-building activities under the Convention, and should be an effective, iterative process that is participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive. However, the Paris Agreement didn't

explicitly recognize human mobility as a global challenge requiring institutional capacity at the national, regional and local levels. Indeed, the agreement comes up short in acknowledging that those facing extreme environmental risks have the right to receive preventative assistance to avoid being displaced; the right to get support if they're forced to flee; and the right to build, live, work and integrate into new communities if they cannot return to their homes. Needless to say, neither the legal status of refugees nor the mandate for their protection and assistance were recognized by Paris Agreement.

Gender analysis under the Green Climate Fund:

The overview of climate finance shows that women's roles as both driving and benefiting from climate investment have so far been modest, but that numerous opportunities exist to enhance their roles and optimize development co-benefits between gender and climate action (UN WOMEN, 2016). In fact, women are also powerful change agents in addressing climate change on a large scale. They are key actors in building community resilience and responding to climate related disasters. Gender Analysis is needed for gender responsive climate financing to impose gender equality as a guiding principle in the design and implementation of climate action, and the evaluation of climate change projects and programmes.

In fact, migration concerns are overlooked in the scope of this gender analysis approach and methodologies within the Green Climate Fund, while Multilateral Development Banks paid special attention to human displacements, especially under the environmental and social safeguards but not for systematically integrating migration concerns into the gender analysis. GCF projects benefitting countries of origin of migration covered by this first investigation need to be scrutinized in order to ascertain in depth what role migration concerns played, particularly in guidance for gender analysis. The Nile Delta Project proposed for climate finance by the Green Climate Fund had already provided a first approach for gender mainstreaming to tackle the rural-urban climate change induced displacements in the Nile Delta which would not exclude climate action adaptation aimed at preventing out-migration from the scope of the analysis.

Further assessments about the implementation of the gender action plans attached to the funding documents under the Green Climate Projects benefitting countries of origin of climate migrants to the Mediterranean will be of great interest to inform on way forward to reconsider climate induced migration and its gendered dimensions under the gender policy of the Green Climate Fund and consequently by the international and national accredited institutions to deliver on climate finance for developing countries in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries and for the benefit of the Least developing Countries in Sub-Saharan

Africa and the Horn of Africa. The effectiveness of the Green Climate Fund in implementing gender inclusive climate finance projects and programmes that integrate human migration flows should be of great importance for future investigation on the integration of climate induced migration into the national policies in countries of origin, transit and destination, A Regional Protection Agenda of Climate Migrants should be of guidance for those national preventative policies and their successful outcomes in terms of adaptation to climate change and mitigation of conflicts over natural resources.

