POLICY BRIEF

Climate -Mobilities and Policy Directions for The Global South



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December 2023



Photo caption: Rural community trapped in place during the 2013 Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), Uttarakhand, also an area with high out-migration. From 2008-2018, 118,981 migrated out from rural settlements in the state (IE). ¹ Taken by author.

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Climate-Mobilities and Policy Directions for The Global South

Human mobility linked to climate induced disasters, that includes slow and rapid onset events, is at the centre stage of policy debates around recognition and protection, in the present epoch. Such conversations are intersected by past and recent trends in labour migration flows, conflict induced forced displacement and refugee movements and planned evacuations and relocations by states during disasters and health emergencies. Many observers, seek a rethinking of mobility, by highlighting the opposite phenomenon; enforced immobility of people locked in longstanding habitations despite increasing climate change induced disruptions. Some research projects underscore the necessity for including simultaneous complex push factors such as geology, geography and temporal dimensions in unpacking the climate-mobility relationships, other influential reports have underscored the continuing significance of migrant agency and destination needs (WDR 2023), some are meticulously recording the sheer scale of enforced human mobility from all possible causes (IDMC 2023), others seek to strengthen the compromised rights of people forced to move. Science, meaning and voice embedded in justice concerns can provide insights across the hardening positions of the participants engaged in climate-mobility debate, beyond temporary solutions.

Claims and entitlements for protecting the on the move population groups, whether mobility is through their own actions (livelihood diversification, economic migration, reducing exposure to hazards) or disaster enforced (rendered homeless by tropical cyclones, drought induced water scarcities or intense monsoon floods) is not always associated with the extent of exposure to risk or innate vulnerability but to the legal recognition of specific attributes, availability of resources and agreements among institutional authorities (politics).

While labour migrants (internal-short-term, desperate-cross-border, or planned international), refugees and internally displaced by disaster, may obtain protection from designated agencies and institutions, available safety nets, provided by national or sub-national governments, are often inadequate to address the scale, spread and frequency of climate induced vulnerabilities.

Climate change raises concern not only about largescale displacement of populations within and across regions, globally in future, but also draws attention towards the rising frequency of disaster induced displacement. Since, displacement and relocation induced by climate change are governed by fewer (or poorly implemented) national laws, affected people may lack adequate protection for the specific loss of rights and wellbeing. Widespread absence of accountability is compounded by the scarcity of resources, lack of voice of the affected, poor institutional will and capacities, restricted definitions of state and international obligations. In this context, the objective of this policy brief is to discuss the ways in which insights about human mobility in relation to climate induced disasters, is being documented, debated, understood and addressed by academics, protection policy regimes and institutions in the context of the global South.

As Hulme (2021) argues, since the normative knowledge of the world, how humans come to be, to know and to act, is beyond the knowledge produced by climate science or social science, understanding of climate-mobilities requires complex, historical, and contextual knowledge to understand how survival and adaptation trajectories are taking shape. Policy documents, in contrast are establishing certainty through aggregation of data and conversion of the extent of risk, loss, damage, exposure and adaptations, into uniform metrics. The thrust in the latter case appears to increase the monitoring and regulation of migrant flows to ease the logiams at borders and destinations, while persuading governments to create protective nets for at risk mobile groups. In addition to these efforts, the brief finds that re-centring justice and voice, dissemination of science (curbing misinformation), collaborations across local, national and international borders, attending to migrant voice and local specificities and more accountable state will be required to create responsive societies, legal social protection for mobile groups in situ, at transit, intermediate locations and at destinations.

FRAMES, ENUMERATION AND IMPLICATIONS

An article carried by the Economist magazine in 2009, described 'environmentally induced migration' as a case of 'permanent emergency'. It went on to describe a pastoral community living in the drought affected region of Northern Kenya as stuck in a 'frantic drift from one dry place to another' as the region became hotter and drier and their numbers increased, while stocks of water, fodder and livestock declined. numbers were hard to determine, environmental degradation was the cause of largescale population mobility. As large regions of the world became 'unviable', a pauperized mass would move towards the few 'lifeboat' areas. Such a scenario was described as an evolving 'security risk' since it would give rise to inter-community conflicts over scarce survival goods, water, pastures, shelter, food, between the mobile groups and the already present populations in the habitable areas. As the most recent drought, displacement and conflict unfolds in the Horn of Africa, little seem to have changed for local populations experiencing life threatening circumstances (UNHCR 2023).

While researchers have found little evidence for simple associations between environmental decline, migration flows, and conflict, forced displacement of population is an ever-growing phenomenon. The UNHCR (Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2022) counted 108 million forcibly displaced people in 2022, out of which 70 million had sought refuge in the low and middle-income neighboring countries. Apart from refugees, the UNHCR measure also included three other groups, internally displaced people, asylum seekers and 'other people in need of international protection'. More than half the mobile population came from war affected countries: Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. While climate change induced disruptions may also have taken place in these regions, the immediate cause of displacement has been war that may enable some form of legal entitlement for protection. Some of the complex challenges for obtaining eligibility for protection emerges from the status and location of mobile populations.

Climate related displacements, recognised by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, numbered 30.7 million in 2020 alone (IFRC 2021). The vast majority of all disaster-related displacement was in the context of weather and climate hazards, mainly floods and storms, and to a lesser extent due to wildfires, landslides, extreme temperatures and drought (ibid). Although large number of people are displaced, they are likely to be a population that is internally displaced requiring temporary relocation and resettlement within their own country. The responsibility of social protection in this case, is more directly dependent on the laws, capacities and resources of national governments. Predictions about the causes and extent of future human mobility is based on the understanding that multiple, interlocking crises are likely to occur more frequently. According to the World Bank's 'Groundswell' report (Clement et al. 2021), climate change, alone may contribute to the movement of 216 million people within their own countries by 2050.

Involuntary nature of displacement and forced migration distinguishes such phenomena, from categories of mobility that centre human agency such as economic migration. Unlike the sudden-ness, speed and vulnerability that defines the former, economic migrants are viewed as careful decision takers who follow established routes and corridors to their destination areas and whose choice to move benefits the origin society and economy (WDR 2023). Yet, as the WDR 2023 argues, climate displaced people or those escaping conflict, may move through the corridors used by economic migrants to reach high income countries, giving rise to **complex mixed movements** (ibid). Not only do drivers of mobility, work in tandem, climate impacts can also amplify pre-existing patterns of movements such as 'circular, seasonal, and rural to-urban migration' (WDR 2023). However, the report, goes on to argue that the distinctions between groups, that are moving to 'seek opportunity' as against those who are recognised as refugees under international law, are significant, not only because of their different characteristics and capacities but since they have variable claims of protection from destination governments.

Calls for clearer understanding and enumeration of categories of migrants feed into debates around protection responsibilities of sending and receiving governments. Economic migrants are expected to seek protection as 'citizens' of their origin countries. The IPCCC

AR6 report, describe some mobile groups as **high agency migrants** whose ability for self-protection is derived through their integration into labour markets. Not only do such migrants have more mobility options, but they also contribute to their origin communities through remitted incomes. While some commentators have in the past, mooted the term, environmental refugees to be considered 'as special kinds of migrants, with classical refugees' features (forced uprooting and need of international protection) as well as distinctive features of their own (Ramos 2013). Institutions such as UNHCR, is hesitant to add new dimensions of vulnerability to existing laws and conventions, as resources and relocation possibilities has been shrinking for refugee protection. In 2021, only 57,500 out of 1.4 million refugees were resettled due to pandemic restrictions and reduced resettlement options offered by states (cited in WDR 2023, p.213). Emphasis on refugee self-reliance and providing them with regulated access to labour markets is growing.

Migrations induced by slow onset hazards like droughts are particularly difficult to measure, primarily because mobility is dependent on resources, networks and pre-existing labour migration patterns from the area, specificities of regional economy while most opt to relocate for shorter periods of time. As the research on vulnerability and migration show, the less vulnerable households with greater physical, financial, or social capital, are more likely to send a member to an urban or international labour market, while migrant decisions are influenced both by socio-economic context of origin as well as immigration policies in destination areas (Riosmena et al 2018). When the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal, increased the rush of overseas labour migrants, travelling to GCC countries, observers viewed it as a positive move by households in their efforts to rebuild lost assets and livelihoods (Maharjan et al 2016). Newer approaches, tend to bring into the frame the habitation conditions of receiving or host areas. Climate hazards, by reducing the viability of habitable places 'act as catalysts or inhibitors in established systems of mobility' (Detges et al 2022). Mobility, especially labour migration also becomes expensive and risky when it results in migrants relocating to hazardous cities with high exposure to climate change and include working in unsafe conditions and living precariously on the margins of hostile societies (ibid). Evidence around the interactions between the multiple forms of population mobility such as migration, displacement, and

immobility show that as human habitations change, people or population groups may failing to adapt to environmental changes (Black et al 2013).

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ADAPTATIONS, MOBILITIES AND POLICIES

Complex, historical, and contextual understanding of climate-mobilities in the Global South will be required to understand how survival and adaptation trajectories are taking shape in this epoch. For political ecologists, environmental contexts, including climate must be viewed in the long term that 'reaffirms the central role of human agency' to avoid 'naïve anthropocentrism.' For climate historians, adaptation is viewed in 'in the broadest sense: on the one hand, the relation between long-term climatic variability and social life; and on the other, how long-term structural adaptations operate in relation to short term climatic change' (Watts 2013:83). The interaction between seasonal or temporary migration flows for informal work, from primarily rural areas with overseas labour migration, illustrates the fragility of adaptation strategies in the context of slow and rapid onset hazards.

Agricultural, Brick Kiln and Construction Workers constitute a large stream of temporary or seasonal internal migrants in India numbering 15-100 million, originate in areas that are considered as climate change vulnerable 'hotspots' (Bhagat 2018:33). The number of migrants tend to increase in drought years caused by the failure of South west monsoon, when local rainfed agriculture is affected. Consecutive drought years causing agricultural collapse and water stress, swell the flow of migrants from affected areas. A large body of evidence on brick kiln workers (more than 2 million people) and sugar cane harvesters, describe their unprotected working conditions and the coercive processes such as advance payments and debt bondage, used to recruit impoverished rural households including children (Roy and Kunduri 2018). Rural to urban migrants, who subsist on informal work live in poor, unsafe and congested locations in urban areas, are especially vulnerable to incidents of pluvial floods. In general, remittances from migrant workers add to the subsistence of rural households. During the COVID-19 pandemic and economic lockdown in 2020, the flow

reversed, as millions of migrant workers sought the shelter of their rural homes, to wait out the crisis. For instance, when the tropical cyclone Amphan struck eastern India, in 2020, migrant workers trapped between locked up destinations cities learnt about their destroyed rural homes (Shantha 2020). Accurate advance forecasts of tropical cyclone Amphan in India and Bangladesh led to **the evacuation of more than 3 million people, which has been praised for limiting casualties and a textbook example for multi-hazard early warning systems.** But more than half a million families lost their homes, there was serious damage to agriculture and fisheries and long term livelihoods was expected to be impacted due to salt water intrusion (ibid).

If the people living in the hard pressed pockets of drought prone, rainfed agricultural areas migrate to urban and rural areas in better endowed regions, large number of working age people from such areas seek better work opportunities, overseas. Observers have called this phenomenon, 'replacement migration' (Menon 2017). In general, overseas migration from South Asian countries is limited to 19 million to GCC countries and 15 million to other regions, due to the very high costs of travel, documents and payments to intermediaries, based on migration corridors and the nature of migration, regular or irregular (WDR 2023). Increased urgency of migration and the absence of protection for migrant labour in the GCC countries is increasingly centre stage in debates about better regulation of migrant flows and responsibility of sending versus receiving countries for social protection. Some measures undertaken by sending governments in South Asia, in the name of protection, especially around women migrant workers have been especially controversial.

Migrant women workers working condition overseas continue to raise concern in South Asia. According to reports in Prothom Alo in January 2023, death of young women migrant workers in GCC destination countries such as Saudi Arabia are high and the cause of death controversial and contentious (Mansura Hossain 2023). NGOs, advocacy groups and family members have disputed the certification of the cause of death, of young women workers as natural in 227 out of 404 bodies that were returned to Bangladesh between 2020-2022. On the other hand, the prohibition by the government of Nepal to the

migration to GCC countries for domestic work, has been criticized by domestic labour union activists as reducing employment options for women. Circumventing such restrictions, many migrants have been using 'irregular' routes to reach destination countries (Himalayan News Service 2023). Advocacy for safe and decent working conditions at destination, are increasingly being framed as better regulation of migration flows through clearer outlining of the origin state's responsibilities towards their mobile population whose income and remittances add value to national economies. For international Financial Institutions, formalization of labour migration through bilateral labour migration agreements (BLMA), comes with a precondition that migrants with skills matching with destination labour market requirements, be provided legal status (WDR 2023). While advocates view BLMAs as a tool for human rights based and gender responsive decent work, many governments are monitoring migrant remittances. For instance, the Sri Lankan government eased a 2013 migration restriction policy for women with children (of age 5 years), in order to promote migration and remittances during the 2022 economic crisis (ADB, ILO and OECD 2023).

Cross border migration into the United States through Mexico especially during the Trump administration crackdown captured global attention. More recently, with the end of title 42 and reversion to title 8, border migrants were left confused leading to a sudden increase in migration. Migrants were found camping in poor conditions and more than 16000 were detained over a four day period in November 2022. The majority of the migrants were from Central and South American countries (Reuters News 2022). In some cases, green energy transition policies may add to concerns around environmental collapse in countries with critical minerals and high rates of rural-urban and overseas migration. Lithium deposits in the Potosi region of Bolivia, that is also home to its indigenous peoples is a case in point in the complex interactions between energy policy shifts and the rights of local communities (Ramos and Machicao 2023). According to the IPCCC, 'electric vehicles powered by low-emissions electricity offer the largest decarbonisation potential for land-based transport' (IPCCC Synthesis Report 2023, p.105). In 2016, when Bolivia had declared 'a state of national emergency' as El Nino droughts destroyed harvests and cattle ranches throughout the country, environmental campaigners highlighted the role of the mining industry, large plantation and

congested cities, in contaminating the nation's stressed water resources (Moloney 2016). Deteriorating relations between large farmers and indigenous people, who are competing over water, worsen during slow onset hazards (ibid). As receiving governments restrict regular labour migration, communities that are trying to adapt to multiple interlocking risks, continue undertake hazardous journey or find themselves locked in disputes with contending groups and own governments. Indigenous people are demanding to be heard in Potosi. During the pandemic, like millions of informal migrant workers in the global South, labour migrants from Bolivia were forced to squat in destination countries like Chile, as the governments locked the borders (Laing 2020).

In 2022, devastating floods in Pakistan led to the forcible displacement of 7.6 million people. Among these were the Afghan refugees living in the worst disaster affected provinces (Baloch 2022). This year (2023), in a sudden order, Pakistan asked an estimated 1.7 million Afghan asylum seekers to leave the country or face deportation as tension escalated between the two countries (Mao 2023). As tropical storms, cyclones, and intense monsoon rainfall, attributed by IPCC AR6 to climate change, affects many countries of global South Asia, impoverished countries are facing added challenge of sheltering, and protecting refugee inflows from across the borders. Massive floods in Bangladesh, created unlivable conditions in the crowded and unstable Cox's bazar refugee camps hosting Rohingya communities from Myanmar (McDonald and Hoque 2021). Thousands of refugees have also been relocated to remote islands on the Bay of Bengal prone to floods and storms (Paul 2021). Having limited resources and capacities for long distance migration, communities fleeing conflict may end up not in the desired 'lifeboats' but in already stretched, sinking and depleted areas. Refusal of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand to accept Rohingyas (after 2020), has reduced the possible places for the community to seek refuge. The Malaysian government has been seeking a third country to relocate the more than 100,000 Rohingyas who live there (Rozanna Latiff 2020a). During the coronavirus pandemic, anti-Rohingya misinformation and hate speech proliferated on popular social media platforms in Malaysia (Latiff 2020b). The horn of Africa is experiencing a situation of continuous drought since 2020. According to UNHCR's data on displacement and affected populations, by January 2023, some 1.75 million people had been internally displaced in Ethiopia and Somalia, while over 180,000

refugees have crossed borders from Somalia and South Sudan into drought-affected areas of Kenya and Ethiopia, joining a significant existing refugee population (UNHCR 2023). Different categories of displaced population groups and drought affected host communities, in the Horn of Africa, highlights the challenges associated with complex intersecting crises. As large population groups are excluded from social safety nets, direct cash transfers, that has emerged as a key instrument of humanitarian support, can provide only immediate assistance. Longer term responsibility for distressed migrants may require solutions beyond informal labour markets and cash transfers.

RIGHTS, PROTECTION AND OBLIGATIONS

Climate change induced mobilities, through its complex interactions with other forms of dislocations, is a matter of justice. This is not only because, groups and nations that have historically contributed significantly to emissions are unlikely to be the ones who are most, immediately affected, but also because those forced to move, are likely to be groups that lack protection of existing frameworks of rights. Protecting the social and economic rights of migrants, requires that national governments acknowledge, understand and take responsibility for the outcomes of diverse mobilities, emerging from the interaction between crisis induced and routine migrations.

Migration tends to feature prominently in three types of policy frames, disasters, labour and conflicts. In the context of climate change, labour migration can be viewed as a positive adaptation or mitigation strategy, while people who are forced to move due to conflicts and disasters, are viewed as moving on adverse terms. Although the severity of crisis can be understood by enumerating the sheer number of people who are mobile or displaced, protection requirement for each category of migrants differ and thus requires contextual understanding of evolving situations. From national disaster management laws and plans, labour migration treaties with other countries, portable social protection for mobile population groups and refugee policies, governments need to use provisions from each of these instruments to act on ground in anticipatory and protective (of basic needs, services and human rights), rather than in reactive and punitive ways.

Enabling mobility for vulnerable people affected by climate change induced disruptions is suggested by some observers as a key adaptation strategy. Policy makers, argues the Groundswell 2 Report, must support the movement of displaced populations towards 'areas of low risk and high opportunity.' Labour market integration by matching skills with requirements and formalizing labour flows both internally and across borders has been highlighted by the World Development Report, the ILO and SDG goal 8 (economic growth, productive employment and decent work).

Identifying populations at risk of internal displacement due to slow and prolonged climate induced hazard, in order to address deteriorating living conditions such as livelihood collapse, food insecurity and water stress, through improved data collection systems and protection, has been suggested by UNHCR in the context of unfolding slow onset hazards (such as the multi-year drought in the Horn of Africa). Environmental degradation must be checked to ensure that the habitability of places and regions are not damaged beyond recovery, forcing vulnerable groups to either stay entrapped in unviable locations or undertake hazardous migration to uninhabitable urban locations. Existing laws on forest protection, biodiversity, wild life, marine bodies and water need strengthening.

Enforced mobility during climate induced disasters requires, in addition to strengthening early warning systems and evacuation modalities, assistance for rebuilding of assets, livelihoods and communities in the affected area needs to be maintained. Affected communities are less resilient and maybe hosting other mobile and refugee populations. Governments need to recognise the changing relations between host and migrant communities to promote sustainable integration that includes not only extending basic services without discrimination but also protecting the human rights of the vulnerable migrants, from insider-outsider hostilities. Governments and humanitarian agencies must be involved in assistance, recovery and solutions, in addition to monitoring mobility (IDMC 2023).

Increasing emphasis on self-reliance and foregrounding of migrant agency and voice, are welcome additions to the aggregated and remote forms of enumeration, that appear to aid logistics and regulatory purposes. Yet, without accountability from state and non-state

institutions towards allocating sufficient resources to fulfil their protection obligations, migrants would continue to exhaust their limited capacities while remaining bonded to predatory and exploitative intermediaries. Press and civil society organisations must make/have the space to engage with national governments and international agencies to influence policy through their advocacy for the rights of mobile population. Agenda driven media debates that fuel polarisation and hostility by vilifying migrants require long term and continuous engagement.

Provision of identity documents to mobile groups that would enable them to access social protection (assistance, insurance and services) and work places, in destination areas and during their journey, should be humane and efficient and not be connected to more contentious processes such as establishing citizenship. Profiling, tracking, registration and Documentation must be oriented towards migrant protection and not just logistic convenience for implementing agencies. Migrants and displaced population groups are at risk of becoming bargaining chips of proxy wars between governments leading to expulsion, evictions and calls for sudden and hazardous relocations. Safe transport and passage must be provided for all categories of migrants in case of such events irrespective of their documentation status. (For a summary of safe migration objectives in the Global Compact – see table 1)

Loss and damage from climate change must be compensated. While countries agreed to the fund last year, they postponed the most contentious decisions, including which countries will pay into it. 'At a United Nations committee meeting last week, developing countries including those in Africa, Latin America, Asia-Pacific and small island states, proposed that the climate damage fund should programme at least \$100 billion by 2030' (Abnet 2023). Overall contribution to the green climate fund, (as reported in SDG goal 13) is declining. (A policy timeline of resources for loss and damage can be seen in table 2.) For a discussion about the Warsaw mechanism, see (Adelman 2016).

Climate change mitigation debates should include internal migration more seriously. The Groundswell report suggests that climate change induced internal migration be incorporated in the NDCs (Nationally determined contributions drawing on the Paris Agreement embody efforts to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change). The SDGs, 8 (growth and labour) and 10 (reducing inequality), discuss migration, but 13 (Climate action) does not refer to the issue. While many governments have frames legal policies to address displacement and migration, implementation on ground in thin (IDMC 2023). The IPCCC AR6 (WG2) discusses migration primarily in the frame of mobility as labour, suggesting that workfare rather than welfare, is being viewed as the primary protection strategy for communities living in the shadow of climate change, till a situation is recognised as a humanitarian crisis.

Migration, according to observers signifies not just uneven development or unsafe places, from which people escape either because they aspire to better their lives economically (first case) or because they must move simply for survival (second case), but also the climate change disrupted living contexts. Depending upon whether the people who migrate chose to leave a location or were forced to leave because of unbearable conditions, caused by wars, scarcity and persecution, the state of their vulnerability is assessed by external observers. But subjective assessment of migrants themselves are also crucial for understanding migration flows, generated by environmental disruption but manifested as, individual and household decisions to move to a different location.

Appendix

Table 1. UN Global Compact: 23 Objectives for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration²

KEY PHRASES

Data & Evidence	Decent Work – fair and ethical recruitment	Border Management	Social Cohesion – inclusion- Empowerment	Easy Transfer of Remittance – financial inclusion
Minimise the Adverse Drivers and Structural factors	Reduce Vulnerabilities during Migration	Transparent Procedure	Eliminate Discrimination – evidence based public discourse on migrants	Safe Return
Timely Information at Stages of Migration	Save lives – Information about Missing Migrants	Detention Alternatives	Invest in Migrant Skill Development	Portability of Social Security Entitlements
Legal identity documents for Migrants	Smuggling – transnational response	Consular Protection	Promote Migrant contribution to Sustainable Development	International Cooperation
Flexible Pathways	Trafficking – international migration	Migrant Access to Basic Services		

Information: 4, Regulatory-12, Economic Development -3, Social

Protection – 2, Empowerment and Rights – 2

Table 2. International Policies, Agreements and Reports relevant to Climate Change induced Migration, Displacement and Immobility

COP 16 Cancun, Mexico, Adaptation Framework	2010	
COP 18 Doha, Qatar, Decision on Loss and Damage		
COP 19 Warsaw, Poland: International Mechanism for Loss and Damage	2013	
COP21 Paris Agreement	2015	
Sendai Agreement	2015	
Agenda for the Protection of Cross Border Disaster-Displaced Persons (Nansen Initiative)/Protection Agenda	2015	
Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 8,10,13)	2016	
New Urban Agenda	2016	
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	2018	
World Bank Groundswell	18, 2021	
Global Compact for Refugees	2018	
COP26 Glasgow Pact	2021	
Kampala Ministerial Declaration	2022	
IPCCC AR6 Working Group II Report	2022	
ii eee iito working Group ii Keport	+	
IPCCC AR6 Synthesis Report	2023	
<u> </u>	2023	
IPCCC AR6 Synthesis Report		

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