

IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE POLICY ON MIGRATIONS

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to determine the impact of international climate policy on international migrations of population. The authors will present the main assumptions of the climate policy, including the strategy of the European Green Deal, the goals of sustainable development in the context of climate change affecting population migration. The article also addresses the issue of the correlation between climate change and political stability and the risk of conflicts. An important issue raised in this publication is the question of global solidarity in the fight against the negative effects of climate change and the possibility of implementing in practice such mechanisms as loss and damage fund.

Keywords: climate policy, migration policy, climate change, European Union climate policy, population migrations.

Introduction

In the seventeenth edition of the Global Risk Report published in January 2021 by the World Economic Forum, the first five largest and most likely threats in the 5–10-year perspective concerned the state of the natural environment. According to experts and leaders of the World Economic Forum, the threats with the highest probability over the next ten years are climate action failure, extreme weather, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion and overall human environmental damage. In order to emphasize the credibility of this data, it is worth noting that already in 2006, in the previous edition of this Report, warnings were made against the risk of a pandemic and the related consequences for the population and economy.¹ The focus on economic growth and Gross Domestic Product as the main determinant of economic success has led to the pursuit of growth at all costs, gigantic over production and wasteful management of natural resources. Sustainable economic growth means balance in economic, social, and ecological dimensions. The current model of economic development leads to a significant disturbance of this balance, both in the ecological and social dimension. Some hope for the improvement of the situation is given by the fact that each year climate action is more and more decisive, and numerous scientific studies on climate change and its consequences are gaining in importance. The interest in this subject is primarily due to the fact that the issues raised touch the core of the political, social and ecological transformations of the 21st century, such as environmental and climate justice, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and relations between the so-called the rich North with the countries of the poor South². Reaching the roots of the problem, it should be noted that since the beginning of the second industrial revolution, i.e., for about 150 years, man has been increasingly engaged in activities that exploit natural resources, which results in the growing extraction and consumption of fossil fuels. As a consequence, this turns into constantly growing emissions of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, which contribute to climate warming and numerous negative consequences for the natural environment and humanity.

¹ The Global Risks Report 2006 – World Economic Forum 2006 available on-line http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2006.pdf [L.s.15.01.2022].

² Klepp, S., Klimawandel und Migration Heterogenes Forschungsfeld und politisierte Debatte, 2018. <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/269304/klimawandel-und-migration/> [L.s.05.01.2023].

In the literature on the subject and numerous reports on climate change, scientists define the so-called climate tipping points (*Climate tipping points - CTP*), beyond which certain negative climatic consequences can be expected. The current 1.1°C increase in global temperature above pre-industrial levels is already at the lower end of the five CTP uncertainty ranges. Exceeding the threshold of 1.5-2°C will result in the melting of glaciers and the extinction of coral reefs at low latitudes. Crossing further CTP tipping points in the near future will lead to significant, policy-relevant impacts, including a dramatic rise in sea levels due to the collapse of ice sheets in addition to the loss of the planet's biodiversity³.

1. Climate change and migrations

One of the negative consequences of this process which will be addressed in this article, will be the increase in international migration of people caused by climate change. As already mentioned, international migrations of people touch the heart of socio-economic, political, and ecological events in the current century and require states, international organizations, and societies to take adaptation measures to limit the negative consequences of this process as much as possible. With constantly growing awareness of climate change, its impact on international migrations has also become the subject of numerous studies, scientific publications and reports from international government institutions, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. At the same time, it is worth remembering that migrations are not only challenges and threats but can also bring numerous benefits for migrants and host countries. They are also significant for national and international policies. They force states to take action to create legal and institutional solutions that will allow, at least to a minimal extent, to manage population movements.

The size and intensity of migrations result from many factors of an economic, demographic, social and increasingly environmental nature⁴, with the assumption that the latter factor - environmental - is likely to play an increasingly important role in the coming decades. The hypothesis formulated in this way also results in the purpose of this article, which is to assess the impact of international climate policy on international population migrations. First, the European Union's climate policy will be analyzed in the context of counteracting the negative effects of climate change, which is an important factor inducing national and international migrations of the population. The next part of the article is devoted to reflection on the impact of climate change on international migrations of people and the role of international institutions, proper regulations and initiatives in this area. The study ends with a summary containing the main conclusions from the conducted research.

2. Climate policy of the European Union

The climate policy of the European Union has undergone numerous transformations in recent years. It originates from the EU environmental policy initiated in the 1970s. In 1972, during the meeting of the European Council, the need to develop European Union's environmental policy was pointed out. At the same time, in the Single European Act of 1987 the 'environment' section was added, which became official EU policy in 1993 under the Maastricht treaty on promoting sustainable development. The 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam established an obligation to integrate environmental protection into EU sectoral policies to promote sustainable development⁵. Additionally, the framework of the modern EU climate and energy policy in the perspective of 2030 was proposed by the European Commission on January 22, 2014 and adopted during the meeting of the European Council on October 23-24, 2014. The proposed new goals concerned:

1. 40% reduction in emissions greenhouse gasses compared to 1990,
2. increasing the share of energy from RES in total energy consumption in the EU to 27%,

³ Armstrong McKay, D.I., Staal, A., Abrams, J.F., Winkelmann, R., Sakschewski, B., Loriani, S., Fetzer, I., Cornell, S.E., Rockstroem, J., Lenton, T.M., Exceeding 1.5 C global warming could trigger multiple climate tipping points. "Science", 2022. 377(6611).

⁴ Tutak, G., Migracje klimatyczne (nie)obecne wyzwanie? "Człowiek w Kulturze", 2020. nr. 30, p. 219.

⁵ Szpak, K., Polityka klimatyczna Unii Europejskiej w perspektywie 2050 roku, w: J. Gajewski, W. Paprocki (red.), Polityka klimatyczna i jej realizacja w pierwszej połowie XXI wieku, Centrum Myśli Strategicznych, Sopot, 2020. s. 35.

3. increasing energy efficiency by 27%,
4. completing the internal energy market.

These provisions were updated in 2018, in which the targets for RES (from 27 to 32%) and energy efficiency (from 27 to 32.5%) were increased⁶.

Currently, the most important EU initiative in the field of climate policy is the European Green Deal which is the most ambitious initiative in the history of the European Union in economic, political and social terms. Green Deal applies to all sectors of the economy, in particular energy, agriculture, transport, construction and such industries as steel, cement, ICT, textile and chemical industries.

It aims to "transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource- efficient and competitive economy with zero net greenhouse gas emissions in 2050, and where economic growth is decoupled from the use of natural resources"⁷. The vision of climate neutrality was presented by the European Commission as early as November 2018 in the document Clean Planet for All. It sets out the goal of "achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 through a socially just and cost-effective transition"⁸. Climate neutrality was also supported by the European Parliament.

The implementation of the European Green Deal is to be based on the following strategic elements: energy efficiency, Renewable Energy Sources, clean mobility, competitive industry and circular economy, development of infrastructure and interconnections between countries, development of the bioeconomy and CO₂ sinks, and CO₂ capture and storage. The Green Deal, as another tool for implementing EU resolutions, sets the target of reducing CO₂ emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. This is related to the revision and extension of the CO₂ emissions trading system (ETS) and the increase in the prices of allowances⁹.

The European Union's climate policy uses numerous tools to support its goals. In addition to the ETS, these are modernization funds, planning and management documents, such as national energy and climate plans, as well as standards related to the use of specific technologies. Therefore, the strategy refers to the introduction of new, broader EU climate policy instruments and tools. At the same time, the European Commission proposes that 25% of funds under all EU programs should be allocated to combating climate change. It is estimated that achieving the assumed goals only in the perspective of 2030 will cost an additional EUR 260 billion per year¹⁰.

When evaluating the current EU climate policy, attention should be paid to its significant effectiveness. Between 1990 and 2018, the European Union reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 23%, while its economy grew by 61%. This was influenced by the transformation processes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but also by the phenomenon of transferring greenhouse gas emissions outside the European Union (*carbon leakage*). As a result, it may even lead to an increase in global emissions, e.g., due to less advanced production methods used on other continents. At the same time, the European Green Deal itself noted that the existing tools will not allow it to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The implementation of the EGD strategy will have a significant impact on the economies of the Member States, in particular those countries using high-emission energy carriers¹¹. This may reduce the competitiveness of these economies and make them dependent on imported low- carbon technologies. Indirectly, the scale of energy poverty of many citizens of the European Union may increase.

When assessing the current EU climate policy and its assumptions for the coming decades in the context of its impact on the phenomenon of international migration of people, it should be stated that the actions

⁶ Ibid, s. 38.

⁷ European Commission, Communication from the Commission The European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#> [L.s. 10.01.2022].

⁸ European Commission, Communication from the Commission Clean planet for all, a european strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy COM/2018/773 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A773%3AFIN> [L.s. 15.01.2022].

⁹ Marszałuk, P., Markowski, M., Europejski Zielony Ład – geneza, wprowadzenie i planowane rezultaty, 2021. <https://crido.pl/blog-business/europejski-zielony-lad-geneza-wprowadzenie-i-planowane-rezultaty/>, [L.s. 05.01.2023].

¹⁰ Szpak, K., Polityka klimatyczna ..., 2020.s. 43.

¹¹ Ibid s. 46-50.

taken by the European Union countries are insufficient to be able to reverse the negative climate trend on a global scale, and thus achieve a significant impact on the reduction of climate refugee phenomenon. However, they may lead to a situation where the European Union countries will be better prepared to manage this phenomenon. In addition, the climate policy pursued by the EU is a kind of signpost and direction for necessary actions in the field of climate protection for other countries. It will also have a significant impact on the countries in the immediate vicinity of the European Union, especially North Africa - a continent that is already suffering from the negative consequences of global warming. A well-thought-out and long-term climate policy of the European Union will not prevent the negative consequences of climate warming, but it is able to develop the necessary tools to better prepare and adapt to changing environmental conditions, including those related to the growing number of climate migrants.

3. Climate change and international population migrations

The effect of destructive human activities is seen in more frequent and sudden atmospheric phenomena such as hurricanes, storms, floods and intense heat along with prolonged droughts. The negative consequences of climate change will affect everyone. Statistics of the United Nations Development Program indicate that in 2019, as a result of natural disasters, the number of people forced to migrate amounted to 24.9 million people of which 96% of cases were the result of sudden weather events such as storms, fires or floods¹². In 2019, due to floods and tropical storms, most people had to migrate in the region of East and South Asia and the Pacific.

Sudden weather events most often result in internal migrations. People do not want or are unable to decide on further directions of migration, while counting on the possibility of a quick return to the abandoned zone of residence affected by the climate catastrophe. According to the Displacement Monitoring Center: in 2021 the number of internal migrants exceeded 38 million people, of which 23.7 million are migrations caused by climate disasters. The remaining 14.3 are conflict and violence-driven migrations¹³. The latter factor is also often closely related to climate change as there is a strong correlation between countries and regions most vulnerable to climate change and those that are experiencing conflict or violence. Conflicts in many regions are caused by dwindling natural resources such as water and farmland due to changing climate. According to Polish political scientist Joanna Gocłowska-Bolek from the Center for Political Analysis and Security Studies at the University of Warsaw, this is particularly visible in politically unstable countries such as Syria, Lebanon, or Palestine, where droughts exacerbate existing crises. The Middle East is particularly affected, where 90% of area is among the highest risk of droughts, making it the region with the greatest water deficit in the world. The expert lists many regions where conflicts over water are on the agenda. Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh accuse India of collecting water, while Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan demand "water concessions" from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Jordan River has been a bone of contention between Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and Syria for decades, and the Nile River between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. Huge Chinese investments threaten the water security of India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. The most imaginative example of the scale of human dramas and migrations caused by limited access to water is Syria. A prosperous country with an efficient agricultural economy, profitable cotton crops and thriving tourism was devastated in a few years by warfare caused by the most severe drought in 900 years, because of which 800,000 people out of 17 million Syrian citizens lost their source of income, and 1.5 agricultural workers emigrated to the cities. Destitute, frustrated farmers became an easy target for populists and terrorist organizations, which eventually led to a civil war. After more than 10 years conflict 14.6 million people need humanitarian and protection assistance in Syria, 6.7 million was internally displaced 6.6 million Syrian refugees worldwide, of whom 5.5 million hosted in countries near Syria like Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan.

Worrying forecasts are presented by the World Bank. According to its experts, by 2050 there will be 143 million climate migrants from Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia¹⁴. Whereas

¹² Global Report on International Displacement (2020), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, s. 4.

¹³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global internal displacement database, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data> [L.s. 5.01.2022].

¹⁴ Rigaud, K.K., et al. Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, The World Bank, 2018. s. 110.

updated Groundswell report published by the World Bank in 2021 predicts that changes could force 216 million people across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050¹⁵.

Rising sea levels due to global warming will also be an important problem in the future. There are estimates that by 2100 the water level in the oceans will rise from 26 to even 98 centimeters¹⁶. The problem is even more important because 10% of the world's population lives in coastal areas. Island states are the most vulnerable to rising sea levels, but not only. This problem will also affect many areas of North America and Europe, where the rising water level will make many areas uninhabitable.

Despite the deep relationship between the environment and human life, the issue of climate migration until the 1990s remained on the margins of public and scientific debate. Nowadays, climate migration is becoming an important issue attempting to be addressed by the international community. The interest in the issue of migration in the context of climate change results from its global nature. Climate migration in the future may reach an unprecedented scale. It will have an impact on the global economy, the development of international relations and the financial condition of countries.

4. The lack of law

Despite the growing awareness of climate change and its direct impact on population movements, international law has not yet been adapted in this area. The lack of legal regulations in relation to climate migrants is referred to as the "rights deficit"¹⁷. This situation means that people affected by the effects of climate change are not entitled to resettlement rights to other countries. Conventions protecting human rights, created several decades ago, do not take into account changes, processes and mechanisms responding to climate phenomena. This means that there is still a need for further work on legal solutions regulating international migrations of people caused by climate change. The most appropriate actor to regulate migration caused by climate change at the international level is the UN. In recent years, two of its bodies have been particularly active in this regard: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) and the Secretariat for work on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹⁸. During the 16th Climate Conference in Cancun in 2010, a decision was signed under which the member states of the Convention are to take action to become familiar with the degree of impact of climate change on migration and to coordinate it at the regional, national, and international level. One of the achievements of the summit was the adoption of a package defining a framework for adaptation to climate change. A decision was made to create the Climate Fund, in which developed countries have committed themselves to provide financial assistance to developing countries from 2020 for activities related to climate change¹⁹. In 2021, a group was established at the climate conference in Doha, whose task was to include the issue of climate migration in global negotiations²⁰. The appointed advisory group presented a range of proposals for incorporating the discussed issues into the text of the Paris Agreement and places in the document where references to migration caused by climate change, which is unfavorable for humans, should be included. According to experts, it was necessary to indicate the need to take measures to prevent and minimize the movement of people. Migration should be included in the procedures dealing with the impact of climate change on the population, together with the proposal of remedial measures, in the provisions on adaptation, prevention, reduction and removal of losses and damage. The group also gave examples of medium-term actions aimed at e.g., provide support to the governments of Member States, local authorities or organizations in including climate change in the created strategies and action plans, while ensuring funding for activities related to climate migrations. Particular emphasis was placed on facilitating migration and planned relocations, which, carried out in consultation with vulnerable communities, can result in creating new, safe living environments and thus reduce the negative impact of climate change

¹⁵ Clement, V., Rigaud, K. K., de Sherbinin, A., Jones, B., Adamo, S., Schewe, J., Sadiq, N., Shabahat, E. 2021. Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank., <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248> [L.s. 5.01.2022].

¹⁶ Tutak, G., Migracje klimatyczne ..., 2020. s.213.

¹⁷ Ibid s. 217.

¹⁸ Krajewski, P.W., Groszkowska, K. Environmental migration in international law and politics, "Journal of Modern Science", 2018. vol 1(36), s. 150.

¹⁹ Tutak, G., Migracje klimatyczne ..., 2020. s. 222.

²⁰ Ibid, s. 150.

on living conditions. Moreover UN migration experts indicate on necessity intensification analysis for reduction negative ones effects migration in areas such as trauma and psychological impacts; direct economic costs; access to food and water; loss of income and livelihoods; loss of future outlooks and opportunities; reduced health and access to healthcare; reduced safety of women and girls; reduced access to education; reduced access to political representation; disruption of the community; loss of sense of place/identity. Experts also note additional risk of people moving and ending up in places that are at even higher risk to future hazards. Data on mobility patterns and trends need to be leveraged to reduce these risks through mobility-informed, anticipatory planning²¹.

5. Climate migration in the Paris Agreement

The issue of climate migration has also been included in the Paris Agreement, which is the first binding international agreement to mention migrants in the context of climate change²². The Paris Agreement includes three important elements for displacement and human mobility issues:

1. Recognition that climate change is a common concern of humankind and includes a reference to migrants, asking Parties to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations towards migrants, among others, when taking actions to address climate change.
2. References to the protection of people, the resilience of communities and the importance of livelihoods. These are essential entry points for addressing environmentally linked root causes of forced displacement such as access to water, food, energy, and the need for livelihood opportunities to enable people to remain where they live.
3. Request to the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage to establish a task force on displacement. This task should “develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.” This is also an acknowledgment of the dangers of displacement and a welcome recognition of climate change as a factor of displacement²³.

Conclusions

Millions of people around the world are forced to move from uninhabitable places, a trend will only increase in the coming years. These migrations are driven by the challenges of producing the minimum amount of food and basic goods that are necessary for human survival such as prolonged periods of drought or excess water destroying harvests. In order to reduce the size of migration and change the direction of people's movement, the international community should intensify its support and repair consequences, especially in the local environment, most affected by climate change. The least developed countries, whose share in global CO₂ emissions and thus the impact on climate change is negligible, are the hardest hit by the disasters caused by climate change. An example of such a country is Pakistan, which is particularly affected by climate change due to intensely melting glaciers causing flash floods. In 2022, about 1,350 people died in Pakistan as a result of flooding and 50 million people had to evacuate. Losses were estimated at \$30 billion. I the Convention on Climate Change (COP27), that took place in 2022 in Egypt, concluded with a historic decision to establish and operationalize a loss and damage fund. Development countries particularly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis will be

²¹ Platform on disaster displacement, 15 observations on disaster displacement as loss and damage, https://disasterdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PDD-15_Observations-2022-ENG-screen_compressed.pdf [L.s. 15.01.2022].

²² Preamble to the Paris Agreement, Official Journal of the European Union, L 282/4, 19/10/2016.L 282/4, 19.10.2016. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22016A1019\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22016A1019(01)) [L. s. 10.01.2022].

²³ The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Frequently asked questions on climate change and disaster displacement, 6.11.2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/latest/2016/11/581f52dc4/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-disaster-displacement.html> [L. s. 12.01.2022].

able to get refunds for losses arising from droughts, floods, rising seas and other disasters that are attributed to climate change²⁴.

Actions taken by international organizations, including the UN, indicate the direction debate on climate migration has taken. One gets the impression that the problem is dealt with almost exclusively taking into account the measurable damage and economic losses caused by natural disasters, while minimizing or even ignoring the real personal dramas of the people affected by this misfortune.

Unfortunately, narrowing the debate on climate migration to only two areas, i.e., sudden disasters and damage recovery, is not a trend that everyone is satisfied with. This reasoning is too narrow as it limits the negative impacts of climate change to natural disasters and forced migration to their damaging consequences. Climate change is a phenomenon that progresses over time, causing the gradual transformation of numerous ecosystems, as a result of which many existing places that are the basis of existence of millions of people are no longer suitable for life, thus forcing the population living in these areas to migrate. Taking up the issue of climate migration is the first step towards building new standards of rights for migrants. However, the actions taken are still insufficient both in the areas of climate change and in the conduct of migration policy. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that migration can be beneficial for both migrants and the public. Often, migration is the only solution that guarantees a decent existence. Therefore, the focus should not be on preventing migration. Most crucial is an appropriate migration policy that guarantees social inclusion for migrants and creates appropriate conditions for development, education, employment, and health care. Counteracting the negative effects of climate change can help societies limit the negative effects the humanitarian crisis caused by climate change.

²⁴ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), COP27 ends with announcement of historic loss and damage fund, 22.11.2022, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/cop27-ends-announcement-historic-loss-and-damage-fund> [L.s.12.01.2022].

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