

Gender and Climate-Induced Migration



Different migration patterns exist, encompassing both short and long distances, and these patterns impact men, women, and gender-minority groups differently. The ongoing climate crises serve as a catalyst for individuals in vulnerable situations to seek alternative living arrangements. This briefing paper explains how climate-induced migration leads to different patterns for men and women, highlights its root causes and provides examples of women's leadership and recommendations.

The International Organisation of Migration defines “migration” as an umbrella term, not defined under international law but which reflects the common understanding of a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

Climate-induced migration is context-specific and results from a multitude of factors influenced by gender inequalities, further impacting marginalised groups. For instance, during disasters, it is often women and girls who find themselves disproportionately affected and left behind to attend to family members. It is essential to approach this issue from an intersectional perspective, recognising the intricate interplay between different genders and other factors such as class, race, age, ethnicity, or disabilities. There should be much more research done and data collected that make these intersections visible, not only for men and women but also for LGBTQI people.

What is Climate-Induced Migration?

Two primary climate dynamics are contributing to migration: 1) slow-onset events, such as ongoing droughts and rising sea levels, and 2) rapid-onset events

such as hurricanes. In the former, people gradually lose their livelihoods, prompting a slow but steady need for relocation, while the latter necessitates immediate evacuation in the face of sudden disasters. Despite the historical existence of climate-related events, human-induced climate change has heightened their frequency and intensity.

An illustrative example of the complex relationship between climate and gendered migration is evident in the connection between conflicts and climate change as the latter contributes to the escalation of violent conflicts, leading to more (sexual) Gender Based Violence. Equally significant is the reverse relationship - climate vulnerability during times of conflict. During conflict, women often assume caregiving rather than combat roles, and they encounter unique challenges that lead to distinct migration patterns. These distinct migration patterns emerge from the intersection of culture and social relations. Societal norms and expectations, valuing women's caregiving roles, confine them to specific spaces and roles. This creates a cycle where the limited mobility of women becomes both a cause and a consequence of their gender-defined societal roles. Despite these challenges, UN data reveals that women globally account for nearly half (48.1%) of global migrants, a trend sustained for almost six decades. While men and women do not significantly differ in total migration flows, substantial regional differences persist across the globe.

Navigating on Migration Routes: Challenges Women Face

Women undertaking migration journeys confront a distinctive set of vulnerabilities arising from the convergence of factors such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity





or race and parental status. Amidst these intersections, they consistently encounter heightened risks to their safety and well-being. This exposes them to various forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse, encompassing issues such as human trafficking, sexual harassment, and forced labour. Moreover, insufficient access to critical resources compounds the challenges faced by women on migration journeys. This includes the limited availability of sanitation facilities, hygiene products, sexual and reproductive healthcare, as well as general healthcare services. These inadequacies intensify their precarious situation, affecting both their physical health and overall well-being. The absence of gender-sensitive services and resources along migration routes creates barriers for women seeking shelter, food, healthcare and legal assistance tailored to their specific needs. This unequal access not only heightens their vulnerabilities to abuse but also perpetuates and increases cycles of disadvantage and inequality.

Decolonising the Narrative & Empowering Women

The climate crisis disproportionately impacts societies shaped by gendered power relations, leading to distinct challenges for women and girls and LGBTQI people in adaptation and climate-induced migration. Understanding these gendered aspects requires a focus on patriarchal power structures. Women are not vulnerable per se but become vulnerable due to these structures that impact women in all kinds of domains, including limited access to public services (not only health services), reduced educational opportunities, and diminished prop-

erty rights and formal employment. Addressing these power structures necessitates dealing with the hugely unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South that are not natural but rather part of a global system favouring a privileged few. A decolonial feminist lens is essential when examining the interplay of women's rights, climate issues, and migration.

In discussions on gender and climate-induced migration, it is crucial to emphasise that women are agents of change. They play vital roles in disaster response, often ensuring family survival through their resilience and problem-solving abilities. Their participation in decision-making processes leads to more climate-friendly and inclusive outcomes. Despite the significance of this intersection, research and public funds dedicated to gender, climate, and mobility remain scarce. Given that gender and migration brought on by climate change are context-specific, there is an urgent need for more funding dedicated to the nexus while deploying an intersectional lens in gender analyses. It is crucial to embrace both an empowerment and a decolonial approach, allowing women to actively engage in discussions rather than being passive subjects. Establishing a legal framework for protection is imperative to safeguard individuals facing climate disasters. Presently, there is a shortage of adequate global instruments addressing the needs of those affected by the climate crisis, especially those who have not contributed to the issue.

Recommendations

- ☞ European countries and the EU must allocate funds for climate mitigation, adaptation, and addressing losses and damages. This climate finance should prioritise gender sensitivity, involve women in decision-making processes, and address their specific needs. When implementing projects, they should be inclusive and aim to change gender inequality over the long term.
- ☞ European countries and the EU should uphold accountability policies for companies, ensuring they adhere to human rights standards and environmental protection measures. This requires stronger regulation than adopted by the EU in 2024.
- ☞ There is a pressing need for the development of human rights-based migration policies at the national, regional, and global levels to address the complexities of migration with a rights-centred approach. This includes reversing an ongoing backlash on human rights and dignity in asylum policies in many European countries.



Spotlight on Women's Experiences – FIJI

At the CSW67 (2023), women from Fiji shared their perspective from the front line of climate disasters. They claimed that some women are at home, cooking and caring for the community and some are involved in immediate disaster response. Being at different locations, they try to stay connected, which is often difficult due to a lack of energy, telecommunication or internet service. "You can scream in order to help each other", one of them said. More access to information about flooding and weather conditions would also help them as they could keep their children at home in case of a warning. At the moment there are high death rates due to drowning, as the window to react in case of emergency is very small. The group of women at the CSW called for education and training on technologies, but also for knowledge on how to act in case of harassment, as well as knowledge and scope of action about legislative rights and policies.

(Isabella Szukits)

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Spotlight on Women's Experiences – GUATEMALA

A case study about Guatemala and climate mobilities from 2022 shows that the impact of natural disasters disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including the elderly, women (particularly indigenous women), children, and those residing in impoverished rural regions. Moreover, it has been reported that six out of ten women who migrate experience rape during their journey, with girls travelling alone and LGBTQI+ individuals being at a heightened risk of human trafficking.

(University of Bologna: Beyond Panic? 2022)



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Abbreviations

CSW - Commission on the Status of Women

LGBTQI+ - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexual

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About The Project

'Gender and Climate Justice: Knowledge for Empowerment' with the acronym 'COPGendered' is an EU-funded project under the Erasmus+ programme that commenced in December 2022 and will run for three years. The project is led by WIDE+ and a transnational consortium of seven leading partners, including Gender CC, WIDE Austria, GADIP, KULU Women and Development, Mundubat, and CSCD. The primary aim is to equip learners with tools, knowledge, and methodologies to understand and address the critical connections between gender inequality and the climate crisis.

This briefing paper is part of a series of papers that delve into specific themes on the nexus of gender and climate justice. This includes the following briefing papers:

- Gender and Climate Justice
- Climate Justice, Gender and Energy
- Climate Justice, Gender and LGBTIQ
- Climate Justice, Gender and Transport
- Climate Justice, Gender and Extractivism

You can read more about the COPGendered project at: <https://wideplus.org/copgendered-project/>

