

# Non-political factors of migration crisis

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## Abstract

Contemporary migration crisis is perceived in the context of the armed conflict in the Middle East and exacerbating worldwide political and economic problems. These are certainly important reasons resulting in displacing of considerable number of people, with whom the Old Continent cannot cope with. As the matter of fact, causes are much more complicated. In many cases they result from changes in human environment, usually determined as climate change. Most often it is related to serious long-term phenomena, which are gradual and hardly noticed for one generation.

However, in the media sphere, there are noticed almost exclusively the spectacular and impressive ones, such as floods and droughts. All of them “produce” millions of people, who need new houses, jobs, livelihood. The scale of this phenomenon outgrows previous predictions and this situation is aimed merely at sensitizing individuals to the problems of other people. An effective solution in bringing material help is provided neither by the international community nor the international law.

**Keywords:** climate change, climate migrants, international law.

## Introduction

Climate change and more or less related with it perceptible extreme weather phenomena in almost all regions of the world lead to the formation of frequent unfavourable conditions. The consequences of this are migrations of people. The mass movement may cause social conflicts or even the armed ones. It can be confirmed in reality. There are suggestions, that several years of drought in the Middle East led to the outbreak of the revolution in Syria, and consequently to the immigration crisis in Europe. Formerly fertile lands, because of the lack of rainfall and low groundwater levels, became less efficient. This resulted in the escape of thousands of people from the

villages to the cities in order to look for works. They joined still too large number of habitants living in poor suburbs of bigger cities, where finding job was difficult considering previous refugees from Iraq. In view of the difficult material situation it is easy for social tensions and conflicts. Anti-governmental protests rapidly escalated into a civil war, which devastated many cities. Many of them abandoned their previous lives and are looking for better future in Europe.

The consequences (at least some of them) of mass movement of people in part we already know. Much more difficult and more complex are causes of these events. Sometimes they are obvious and well-known, sometimes – concerning distant future and only probable, pluricausal and to some extent provoked by the economic activity of humans. The rest is made by the nature itself. Here, a man cannot do much – only bear the consequences and find the way to survive.

## **1. Climate change – ecologic and economic consequences and conflicts**

In the recent years, we can observe the changes of considerable importance for the Earth's climate system, which consists of various marine, water and land ecosystems shaped by such factors as solar activity, volcanoes or ocean currents. As the climate change we understand all the modifications that occur in the atmosphere of a planet (both at the local and global level) observed due to deviations of temperature values, amount of rainfall, cloudiness, quantitative and qualitative changes in fauna and flora. Some of them are attributed to the transformative activity of human beings (Cel, Czechowska-Kosacka, Zhang, 2016, s. 173-176).

The climate change and the resulting environmental stress, apart from causing direct changes in a given area, and thus causing changes in the conditions of inhabitants, may contribute to fierce conflicts, which can make this difficult situation worsen. This happens because climate change reduces such primary resources as food, water, energy, which are indispensable for life. People experiencing such decline in availability of these resources can adopt the accommodative strategies, they can become involved in conflicts to take control over limited resources or abandon everything in order to find more favourable places. This movement usually inflames already difficult situation in destination places, which results in new conflicts.

## 2. Natural environment – effects of degradation

Difficult situation concerns Sub-Saharan African countries affected by rapidly progressing desertification of formerly agricultural regions. Increasingly rare precipitation considerably reduced harvest and the variety of possible crops. The wind erosion intensified. The accompanying continuous tree felling intensifies the negative effects of climate change. All of this worsens already very difficult economic situation. Usually young people seeing no chance of improving their standards of living, decide to leave their homeland and go into the unknown.

Such experiences are known in the history of Italy in the early twentieth century. Great owners of latifundia expanded their properties on plains, thereby forcing small farmers to deforestation and withdrawing to mountain slopes, which were prepared for cultivation and animal husbandry. They did not have to wait long for further changes. Few periods of greater rainfall were enough. Slopes deprived of plant cover slid down in the form of mud avalanches or underwent erosion quickly becoming a stony and impoverished wasteland. Cut down forests and degraded soils could not have provided preserving them. There remained only emigration to cities or abroad.

Likewise, today's inhabitants of the mountainous areas of Albania, who apart from difficult socio-economic conditions experience a variety of other effects due to their geographical location. Living in the medium and higher altitudes means that they live in relative isolation due to limited connectivity options and they use public infrastructure and social welfare to a small extent. This serious situation is intensified due to progressive deforestation and environmental degradation in general. For rural residents the only way out seems to be emigration, which paradoxically becomes the largest economic resource of the country. The departure from the village (especially it concerns mountain villages) in search of a place to live, almost always ends on the outskirts of large cities. Such a residence is almost always illegal, it remains beyond the control of the services and the authorities. It also has its serious economic, social and ecologic consequences. Usually the first ones are emphasized as the most experienced and measurable. More rarely there are mentioned values and cultural heritage acquired from previous generations, especially in terms of tangible and intangible, landscape heritage, local traditions, crafts, music passed down from generation to generation. All of this, because of the increasing internal and external emigration, almost

certainly can completely disappear in short time. The subsequent result of depopulation and departure from rational economy of used areas is also disordered deforestation and reducing sensitivity to the state of environment. Lack of interest in the state of environment creates the risk of maintaining the natural and cultural biodiversity of the given region.

### **3. Raw materials – raw material conflicts and migrant crisis**

In dynamically changing international policy natural raw materials play a key role. The best confirmation of it is the lack of stability in the post Cold War world. Conflicts conducted in different regions of the globe, almost everywhere or somewhere in the background, relate to the access and control of everything what today's man needs. It for sure raises a lot of internal and international concerns. Their victims, in the fear of their unexpected effects (or the need to find the solution of already existing problems) decide on an uncertain future as immigrants (Pronińska, 2005, s. 29–47).

Together with the development of civilization other raw material became appreciated. Without the access to resources there is no economic progress. Ambitious in their development societies are ready to use any means (including the military ones) only to ensure their own prosperity. Therefore, they can become the subjects/reason/purpose of the conflict or serve as a form of payment. Uneven distribution, deficiency and the fact of their gradual depletion, cause anxiety of societies, especially these highly developed and it leads to political tensions. This anxiety becomes even greater, because a significant part of these mostly wanted and necessary to develop modern technologies, is extracted in the poorest countries, the most economically and politically unstable regions of the world. Similarly as with transport routes to the countries dependent on import. Disputes and internal tensions, especially in a situation of politically unsure and unclear legal status, especially the ownership of some deposits areas, contribute to conflicts and anxieties and each of them causes larger or smaller waves of people looking for peaceful lives. For this reason, both the lack of economically important raw materials, and their excessive wealth, which generates additional divisions and conflicts, for many people is the reason of making such important decisions. Conflicts about taking over and keeping the control over diamond mining in Angola, Sierra Leone, Congo, Liberia or Guinea, were internal though, but the effects of incoming refugees also concerned neighbouring countries.

In many cases the exploitation of mineral deposits leads to the complete devastation of the natural environment. Sources of water, arable land and fisheries are destroyed. It sometimes happen, that the degradation of nature, which is the basis of local communities' existence, becomes a cause of conflicts between government forces and indigenous inhabitants of the disputed territories. It happens for instance in Borneo or Papua, which are examples of the open opposition of the natives against the decision to issue a licence for tropical deforestation and exploitation of mineral deposits. It results in massive displacements, destroying lands used for agriculture and water systems.

#### **4. Water – sources of conflicts and migration**

To sustain existence, a man does not need anything more than water. It was the reason for numerous wars in past and it seems that in the future the situation might be analogous. Water, in contrast to mineral and energy resources, as something irreplaceable, is an object of strategic importance. Maybe in the future this function will be enlarged.

Due to climate change, reduced rainfall and shrinking mountain glaciers, many rivers drain less water than in the past. This decrease reaches up to 30%. Simultaneously, the demand for this necessary component of life is bigger. Moreover, it is precious object for home use, the raw material for industrial production, irreplaceable element in the production of energy, mostly in the agri-food sector. Therefore, also in this respect, the future does not look promising and the demand for water grows like never before.

The increasing world population means escalation of the demand for drinking water. Furthermore, it is a significant increase in demand for water in developing industry and agriculture, which try to ensure a sufficient amount of food. However, the amount drinking water is not growing – just the opposite. Drinkable springs diminish and these which are used are still insufficient or polluted. Therefore, their deficiency is just like in the case of mineral and energy resources – the reason for tensions and conflicts. It is easy to notice in the redion powered by the waters of Tigris and Euphrates, where the production of food in Syria, Iraq and partly in Turkey would be very difficult or even impossible. Unsettled relations between these countries concern, among others, the access and using the resources of these rivers. The situation is similar, for several decades, also in the Middle East, where the object of constant concerns is the Jordan River, which provides water to

Israel, the Palestinian National Authority and Syria. In terms of the number of human beings and the consequences of their existence, the object of water of the greatest importance is probably the river Nile. It flows through ten countries, nine of which belong to the poorest countries in Africa. Nile determines the development of economy and agriculture in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and of course Egypt.

## **5. Migration and migrants (non-political)**

A man always undertook journeys in order to find better and more comfortable living conditions. The reasons of it were often environmental factors. However, nowadays climate change occurs extremely quickly. With the unusual speed, they cause property damages and are harmful for human health and lives. We can assume, that to some extent people contribute to this situation.

The so-called climate refugees are the people forced to change their place of residence, which are the destitute in the place of their current residence, mainly due to the extraordinary changes in the environment caused by climate change. These phenomena include: drought, desertification, deforestation, erosion, soil depletion, exhaustion of resources and natural disasters, for example cyclones and floods. It is expected, that these phenomena will have an increasingly negative impact on society. There will be also increase of people forced to abandon their homes and to search for the new ones.

Therefore, who are climate refugees and when can we talk about them? It is difficult to determine clear reasons. Above all, it is hard to separate environmental factors from all others. There is no certainty whether these are their own decisions or affected by some other reasons, i.e. political. There are usually indicated economic factors (labour, crop, earnings, level of social benefits, prices), political factors (discrimination, persecution, internal conflicts, restriction of freedom), social factors (education, family), demographic factors (population density, social structure, diseases). Such conceptualization shows predominance of economic reasons in most cases, even if the climate conditions shape effectiveness and prices of agricultural products, food, and secondarily also the state of the living environment, economic indicators in industry, politics, etc. Moreover, the important factors are also personal and territorial characteristics – it concerns mainly individual motivation, social and economic capital.

A first, people usually tend to move within their own country, they leave villages and areas, which cannot be used for agriculture and they move to cities, which seem to be less dependent on the weather. It causes quick, uncontrolled and dangerous urban population increase, for which usually there is not enough employment. There is usually reported a rapid increase in the number of acts of violence, conflicts, growing crime. Next, the needies who were not able to find livelihood, try to find the way to cross the borders of neighbouring countries, where usually water, food and most of all, employment opportunities are not sufficient. No wonder that the rich Western countries face the problem of influx. These people need everything and usually are not educated and the previous conditions in which they lived so far made them helpless.

Anyway, the effects of the changes probably will concern most of us. Mass migration surely will affect a significant displacement of people of different cultures and beliefs, and the intensity and size of this displacement may bring unprecedented and impossible to predict consequences of economic, political, social and cultural nature.

According to international law, climate immigrants as institution has been not nominated yet. However, they exist. What is more, there are a lot of them and the number is still growing. Families and entire local communities leave their homes, mainly due to the extreme weather anomalies, unusually torrential storms and floods. Every year their number is estimated in tens of millions and in 2015 it is supposed to be about 250 millions. Nevertheless, international law still has not provided any definition for people who are forced to change their lives due to climatic and environmental conditions. Moreover, there are no prepared appropriate mechanisms to protect and help such migrants. Even determining the concrete reasons becomes a problem. In case of hurricanes or floods it is rather simple. It is easy to point out a direct factor in nature, which forced to make such decision, even though it is not so obvious. The situation is much more difficult in case of complex and long-term processes, such as drought or desertification, which affect large areas of Africa, mainly but not only – Sub-Saharan Africa. In such cases, it is not simple to indicate motives, which forced to leave the previous places of living and working. In urgent cases, the relation between the effect and the cause is quite easy to identify. Identifying and linking the causative factors is usually much more difficult when we are talking about long-term phenomena,

because they occur simultaneously and/or overlap. For instance, recurring droughts cause decrease in productivity of soil. The lack of crop forces to look for more favourable places to live. However, connecting exhaustion of fields with long-term climate change is not always correct. Therefore, calling such people as economic migrants is not quite right simplification.

Nevertheless, is there any real need for legal definition of climate migrant, since regardless of the reasons forcing them to find help, the most serious consequences are beared by immigrants themselves? Sometimes, plans to help migrants and support the receiving ones is more important than reasons of such phenomenon. From the ethic point of view, it is better just to call them “fugitives”, whom de facto they are. They are people running from some danger. Quite incompetent looking for some proper legal qualification became a kind of alibi. It is convenient, while leading some policy, take ones (due to commitments) and send back others as less endangered ones, but always equally inconvenient. Law in these cases is a very clever instrument. For sure, such an approach in international politics may be useful, but it cannot stop the decisions of those whose economic and living conditions become really dramatic. Migrations always took place and these caused by non-political and non-economic factors (which always remain in interaction with each other) certainly will be intensified. The right to change the place of residence, therefore should not denied, since causes are becoming more difficult to define, so it is hard to make some legal classification. They are always multi-ply. It correctly determines the reality: the devastated areas, those regularly affected by droughts and crop failure, almost simultaneously or shortly thereafter have armed conflicts in order to take control over the water sources and exploitation of natural resources.

Taking it all into consideration, the subject of migration should be an opportunity to reprimand societies and sensitize in the sphere of environment protection and the concrete effects of climate change striking people. But are we able to do it? Do we have enough time, taking into account that the changes take place before our eyes and our mentality does not change?<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

Climate change, amongst others through generating economic disproportions, contribute to social misunderstandings and in some cases are directly the causes of open social conflicts, which can easily turn into revolts and wars.



When the man – owing to circumstances beyond his control – is running out of water, food and basic livelihood, it is hard to rely on rational thinking and proper judgement of reality. Survival is the only thing that matters. Weather anomalies, droughts and floods damaging crops or natural disasters, force people to abandon their own properties and to go into unknown, where only few people can find better conditions of life. There appears frustration, disappointment and despair, drastic worsening of life conditions may lead to criminogenic behaviours. Growing antagonisms become an impulse for political pressure and starting legal procedures and afterwards a number of initiatives limiting worrying influx of people, which the modern world is experiencing with varying intensity.

Science can come with help to a certain extent. Drawing up appropriate reports concerning specific threats for the most vulnerable regions would help in taking concrete political and material actions. The scale of current and future changes in environment requires the involvement of chief state authorities in order to maximize the benefits and minimize risks for the people who experience adversities. It will help in developing and implementing local strategies of saving what is still possible to save. Emigration and counting on help from the stronger and richer ones is not always successful. It is not always and not necessarily the only and the best option.

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## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Cfr. <http://www.difesapopolo.it/Immigrazione/Sono-gia-milioni-nel-mondo-i-migranti-ambientali>, (2.07.2016).