



ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF FORCED MIGRATION

Lead article by Eva Youkhana, Joachim von Braun and Christian Borgemeister

According to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, almost 60 million people had been forcibly displaced globally by the end of the year 2014. Root causes of migration and flight range from wars over destabilized regions to economic, political and social asymmetries. They make people search for a perspective for survival and for secure living conditions. The total number of displaced persons is made up of internally displaced persons (38.2 million), refugees (19.5 million), as well as asylum seekers (1.8 million). Although the large majority (86 percent) seek refuge in neighboring countries, many individuals and families take high risks to find secure destinations in far-away countries. The pathways to security and better living conditions force thousands of people to travel either in ramshackle boats across the Mediterranean Sea, as human cargo in overcrowded and stifling trucks or as stowaways on train routes such as the notorious “La Bestia”, carrying Central Americans from southern to northern Mexico. In recent years the industrialized countries of Europe and North America have pursued politics of compartmentalization (e.g. the Dublin Regulations stipulating that asylum seekers can only apply for asylum in the first EU member state they enter) and of installing restricted border regimes, resulting in a lethal refugee smuggling business. Recently, these policies have been partly revised but no coherent framework has been established so far. The countries of the

Global North must therefore engage in creating legal refuge and secure escape routes in order to avoid becoming complicit in the present refugee crisis.

The reasons why people are forced to migrate are multiple and relate to a complex system of interconnected economic, institutional, environmental, social, cultural and political processes and causalities. Since ZEF started its research activities in 1997, it has been studying the causes of migration and displacement, and identifying policy options for changing the situation in different contexts. ZEF researchers have been conducting noted theoretical analyses on migration and relative deprivation in countries of the Global South to find evidence-based solutions for issues such as the role of food and health insecurity, and of environmental stress, such as water pollution and climate change in the context of migration.

According to the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, environmental degradation and climate change are important causes of migration. People leave their homes temporarily or permanently to escape from environmental disruption, often caused by climate change, land use changes, pollution, and over-exploitation of natural resources that can trigger natural disasters like floods, droughts, hurricanes, etc. Refugees and internally displaced people who flee for environmental reasons are often and wrongly identified as

economic refugees – an argument used in the destination countries to de-legitimize their reasons for fleeing. In addition, people moving due to climate change and hunger do not fall under the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, they should be protected in the same way as marginalized groups belonging to a certain race, religion, nationality, or social or political group. This point was also highlighted in the context of the recently ratified Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where a target under goal 10 (reduce inequality) states: “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. Moreover, the world community is called upon to take urgent action to combat climate change (SDG 13) and to protect the environment (SDG 15).

Identifying the causes of forced migration requires in-depth analyses, sometimes covering long periods of time. In Latin America, for example, the taxation of agriculture, the privatization of communal lands and forests in addition to the failure of national governments to provide adequate public services undermined rural livelihoods in the 1970s and 1980s – with continuing effects, even after these policies changed in the 1990s. This led to rapid urbanization, high unemployment rates in urban and rural areas as well as the growth of the informal sector. Colonial trajec-

tories and economic dependencies have affected many Central American countries as much as armed conflicts and guerrilla warfare and still traumatize their citizens today. Exploitation, violent conflicts and wars cause high emigration rates and refugee movements via Mexico to Canada and the US. The current refugee crisis in Europe is also related to a multiplicity of processes involving geostrategic interests, environmental stress, supposedly ethnic and religious conflicts resulting in violence and wars in northern Sahel, North Africa, the Middle East and (Central) Asia. After experiencing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979), the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, the revolution in Iran (1978), and the three Gulf Wars (1980-1988, 1990-1991, 2003), these regions are in addition now suffering from the effects of the civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

The German Government supports refugees through UN and NGO programs in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, for example, with food, education and potable water - in addition to the funds it provides for the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) program "No lost generation", which strives to create future perspectives for young people in Africa. These are urgently needed steps to support communities in the camps and to address the basic needs of refugees. However, there is a lack of research providing guidance on sound action in and around camps.

Future research on migration and development needs to address the root causes of migration as well as the role migrants play in development. Future research should focus more on the resilience and adaptation capacities of socio-ecological systems in the refugees' countries of origin, such as the political and economic indicators of ethnic conflicts, processes of urbanization, land pressure and socio-cultural changes. Potential conflicts in communities of destination and the role migration can play in creating future societies should also be studied. In 2008, the International Organization for Migration established the International Migration and De-

velopment Initiative to better facilitate the transfer of remittances from migrants. For example, by creating tax incentives for development projects or by organizing labor migration in a more structured way. Furthermore, the Global Migration Group (GMG), an inter-agency group bringing together several UN agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank to promote migration for development acknowledges "the important contribution made by international migration to development in countries of origin, transit and destination" (GMG 2015). Development here is also understood as a consequence of people's own initiatives, of the (human) capital and know-how accumulated by migrants and returnees. Remittances support the livelihoods of entire communities by channeling resources into housing and development initiatives as well as health and education. Yet, large shares of these remittances are not invested productively because of deficient banking and advisory capacities, as studies on the effects of remittances in Mexico and Bangladesh have shown.

Development research and policies must address forced migration and drivers of migration in their diverse contexts. The respective investments need to be scaled up while considering the issues listed below. These issues need evidence-based research for implementation and context-specific strategies:

- The plight of refugees from war and conflict zones must be addressed everywhere in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention. This applies both to developing countries, which should be supported through development assistance, and to destination countries such as countries in the EU. Accompanying research involving civil society and migrant organizations could assist in this context.
- Work opportunities in developing countries need to be expanded by investing in infrastructure and rural

development programs, including large-scale employment programs such as are in place in India and used to exist in China in the 1980s and '90s. Research into the labor markets of forced migrants would be important for guiding respective policies and programs.

- Research needs to test low-cost but effective (possibly IT-based) education and training programs for migrants to improve their education and skill base.
- Nutrition and the health of migrants and refugee children are crucial. Targeted programs are needed in the countries of origin, but also along the entire escape and migration routes. Research is needed to deal with the challenge of flexible nutrition and health interventions.
- Investment opportunities and incentives for remittances as a means for development should be strengthened. Migrant organizations can be partners in development cooperation and related research.
- Labor markets with a high proportion of migrants such as care industries and household services need to be regularized to ensure fair employment conditions.
- The European border regime as well as asylum and immigration laws need to be revised at national levels and coordinated at European level to ensure safe escape routes.
- Social, economic and human rights aspects should be considered jointly in immigration laws and regulations, given the overlap of poverty, environmental stress, and violence leading to displacement and migration. Related legal innovations and institutional research would need to identify implications.

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on and with migrants will be essential to improve the evidence base of causes of forced migration and develop solutions. By considering migrants' contributions to development in research agendas, innovative participatory research can help to give migrants a voice, visibility and agency.