

Fleeing from civil war:
The conflict in Darfur,
Sudan, has led to mass
migration. The IOM has
been involved in large-
scale resettlement
projects.



Migration and the environment — We need policy-oriented research

Frank Laczko

Environmentally forced migration can be seen as a failure of adaptation as well as a successful survival strategy for those who move. The lack of data and definitions makes it difficult for policy-makers to develop appropriate solutions. They need the support of sound research.

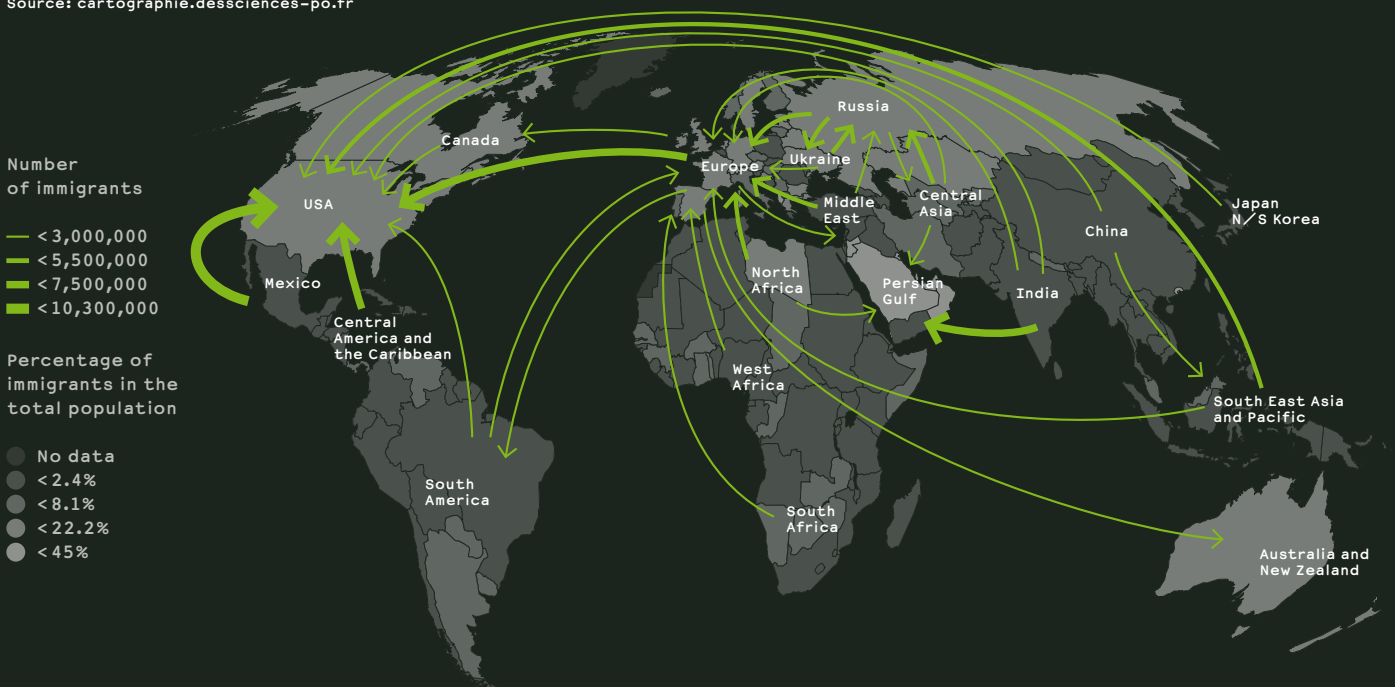
Gradual and sudden environmental changes can result in substantial human movement and displacement. The scale of such flows, both internal and cross-border, is expected to rise, with unprecedented impacts on lives and livelihoods. It has positive and negative effects on both the local coping capacity and the environment in areas from which these migrants originate, as well as in their temporary or permanent destinations. Adequate planning and management of their movements will be critical for human security. But still the major issues migration, climate change and environmental degradation are often discussed separately. Even if International Organization for Migration (IOM) research and policy activities on the topic date back to 1992, with its first publication on the subject, "Migration and the Environment", the knowledge base on the relationship between the two remains limited.

This is reflected by the lack of consensus on a definition of environmental migration that makes it difficult for policy-makers to develop appropriate policy interventions. Researchers arrive at widely differing estimates depending on the definition of those to count. Estimates ranging from 25 million to 700 million persons per year in the not-too-distant future underline the fact that there is relatively little agreement. Therefore, the quality of existing data sources needs to be improved and attempts made to correlate such data across time and geographical areas. Integrating related questions in censuses and household surveys should also be considered to understand, who moves and why, as well as, who stays and why. Models should take into

People on the move

Migration will assume even greater significance in the coming decades than today. Source and target regions are generally clear, but the experts differ widely on the numbers involved.

Source: cartographie.dessciences-po.fr



account a variety of factors such as the local context, the social networks, the destination and length of stay or individual perception and historical analogues. Environmental hotspots and tipping points are also important to analyse.

Whereas migration is often considered to be a negative consequence of environmental change, it can in some areas contribute to further degradation. And though it is often characterised as a failure of adaptation, migration can also be a form of adjustment and a survival strategy for those who move. It is a key to integrate the issue into adaptation strategies and to link it to the development agenda. More research is required on how remittances, important money for the recipients, can contribute to the reduction of environmental migration from degraded areas. The migrants' "know-how" also can help to increase the resilience of local populations. It is important to involve all relevant stakeholders and consider a range of policies from mitigation and adaptation to return and reintegration from both an internal and an international perspective.

The way forward should include elements as outlined at the Research Workshop on Migration and the Environment in Munich in April 2008 co-organised by the IOM and the United Nations University (UNU) in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Munich Re Foundation and co-sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation: systematic stock-taking of existing research evidence in order to highlight the implications for policy, and to develop new methods and approaches which the IOM is now currently undertaking; a global research programme based on new in-depth studies focusing on those parts of the world expected to be worst affected by environmental degradation and extreme environmental events.

The founding of the Climate Change, Environment, and Migration Alliance (CEEMA) initiated at the Munich meeting mentioned above, was one of the promising steps in 2008. The CEEMA is a new multi-stakeholder global partnership of concerned actors such as international organizations, interested groups of states and representatives of the private sector, the scientific and professional community and civil society. These actors represent a range of perspectives including environment, migration development, and humanitarian assistance. The CEEMA also provides a neutral and open forum for policy dialogue.

The Alliance aims to bring migration considerations to the environment, development, and climate change agendas and vice versa. The work programme includes awareness-raising, better information and knowledge management through networks, new databases and websites to enhance information sharing; and capacity-building projects to ensure that countries likely to be most affected by environmental migration will be better prepared. Policy-makers need to learn from best practices based on policy-oriented research. And we need to support them.



Frank Laczko, Head of Research at the IOM in Geneva, is currently involved primarily in migration and development in Africa and migration out of China. He explained the causes and effects of migration at the 2008 Summer Academy.

Waiting for help:
Victims of the Myanmar
catastrophe cut off
from the outside world
following Cyclone Nargis
in May 2008. Stronger,
more frequent cyclones
caused by global warming
will force the inhabitants
of the Irrawaddy Delta
to leave their ancestral
homeland.

