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Workforce and migration – vulnerabilities in a climate change context

Summary: The theoretical and practical debates have sparked an increased attention in the last years over the topic of climate change context and its impact on people strategies to adapt, cope and integrate in host communities, investigating public perception on mobility and numerous reactions to change. The “classical” work migration due to economic reasons has been reinforced by a new response in mobility, due to gradual or extreme environment transformation, which forces people to look for work opportunities elsewhere, to adapt to new work settings and communities, in their effort to retrieve a sense of place, balance, security, normality and well-being. So far, the growing concerns over grim statistical projections on human displacement due to environment change have outlined a collection of challenges and vulnerabilities both for the migrant population and the receiving communities. In this sense, public perception over migration, the in-group out-group interactions, work integration view solicit more research and analysis, reaffirming social sciences stance to approach, explore, test, explain, implement and contribute to today’s reality dilemmas solutions.

Keywords: workforce, climate change, work integration, work migration, socio-psychological features.

A. General perspectives

1. Workforce migration and climate conditions

Today’s societies face multiple challenges and crises that seem to act continuously, sometimes in an overlapping manner, giving no pause for adaptation

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and a smooth management of change. From climate change to economic crises, from wars to various factors of instability, people have been forced to adapt or look for diverse strategies, coping with lack of resources, the need for security, seeking better life conditions and the promise of well-being. In the last years there have been plenty of debates, analysis, research and projections over the coming developments and configurations of socio-economic settings, impact on daily life as we know it, means of adaptation and strategies to be adopted, in the context of climate change and its main effect – migration. Climate change may be perceived as one of the major sources for migration and work mobility, apart from conflicts, economic uncertainty, social security and other life stability threatening factors.

The statistical projections are somehow grim, in terms of no action and given the current status of rapid climate change climate rapid change and evolutions, data showing for example that an expected increase by 2050 sits somewhere between 200 million to 1 billion migrants, given the fact that just in 2019, the observed raise in number of migrants was 3.5% (272 million) from 2.8% in 2000, an increase of 100 million people (Laczko & Aghazarm, 2009; Sironi, Bauloz & Emmanuel, 2019; United Nations, 2019; Adlam, 2020).

The two concepts of climate change and climate migration are interlinked, the first one being seen often as a threat, while the second as a direct effect, which has the potential to bring uncertainty in both positive or negative ways (Adlam, 2020). From another perspective, migration can be seen as an adaptation to the social and economic risks created by the climate change outcomes (Faist, 2016), either to references like extreme weather events (Shultz & Rechkemmer, 2022) or simply due to a constant shifting of the environment conditions, downgrading the settings for a normal work and life (Adamo, 2023). Even if the term “climate refugee” expresses the vulnerable group of people that are forced to relocate internally or externally, from their home countries, temporarily or permanently, due to sudden or gradual environment changes which impact negatively their lives and conditions for living (Sironi, Bauloz & Emmanuel, 2019), there are still ongoing debates and research over the term acceptance, case inclusion, complexity clarification and category representation. In one study, Moawad (2024) indicated that climate shock mobility may be either temporary or permanent, internal or international, voluntary or forced.

Aside from the cause of mobility, in this case climate change, the urge to protect people migrating becomes a frontrunner obligation and providing the opportunity to adapt, integrate, educate, work and live in the new settings. One particular interest of the present chapter resides in the workforce aspects, in the case of people who relocated due to environment crises. In general terms, the exodus of workforce from one region to another, from one country

to another, has been an ongoing event with a long history. People have always migrated for work, for better conditions and economic reasons. In Europe, the work mobility has been a natural means of trade exchanges, cultural intersections and community living, historically speaking. Nowadays, for example, there is a collection of standardized factors that favor work force mobility inside the European Union (e.g. from work legislation and work mobility regulations, free work mobility principles, work rights, work access, work equality etc.).

On the other hand, the challenges with an aging population, low birth rates, combined with a growing demand for personnel in various sectors, decreased or lack of work force in some specific areas (e.g. industry, services, health, education etc.), add to the need of better understanding workforce migration and its integration in the new settings. Moreover, workforce migration due to climate change brings extra specific requirements and comprehension.

People who are displaced due to the environment impact are forced to migrate not only because there is a temporary or permanent threat to their life safety but also due to the fact that their means of living, including work and work outcomes are affected (e.g. losing jobs, losing places of work, losing resources to fulfill work tasks etc.). In this case, their social safety is related to their work safety, including the need to provide for their families, support themselves and others financially, afford to live under normal circumstances and so on. In this view, migration due to climate change forces a search for work on terms of surviving first, and not on economic reasons, which drive a standard work migration in normal situations more likely.

Regarding a climate crisis, displaced people can benefit from social protection, both formal in terms of state policy, regulations, relief strategies (e.g. financial aid, relocation services, food assistance, social work services, psychological assistance, access to education and health, work access and integration on the host country labor market etc.) and informal, given the host community active participation and involvement, support networks, informal stakeholders (e.g. providing shelter, access to information, employment opportunities, solidarity etc.), this ensuring an adequate adaptation to the labor market as well (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Levitt et al., 2016; Schwerdtle et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2024).

On the opposite, if the legislation is unclear in the reception country, regulations are missing or not properly applied, if there are limited or no relief strategies and resources, and if the informal social protection agents are missing or dysfunctional, the migrant integration on the workforce market can face work abuse, inequalities, work exploitation and mistreatment, denial of

work access and opportunities (Menjivar, 2000; Del Real, 2019; Hodges et al., 2024).

In an interesting study, Hodges et al. (2024) found that people challenged with displacement due to environment crisis, rely heavily on the informal social protection, like personal support networks, that can open the path for accessing formal social protection services or even replace them, in a situation that raises concerns about the capacity of formal assistance to reach those in need and the equity principle for all. In other words, climate victims are more likely to solicit support through their informal networks, using whatever resources these connections and systems may provide, shadowing the formal structure and sources of support, diminishing their efficiency and presence.

Even if at first glance, the process might seem to work, risks are always involved, as presented previously, with regard to imbalanced access to information and formal support, conflict, community rejections and divisions, work exploitation and work right denial etc. So even if transnational ties can act as a source for social protection in the case of climate refugees, looking for a host country, looking for work and resettlement, there is a growing concern about the formal outreach and relief programs availability, accessing options, personalized content and service to those in need.

In another study, Koirala and Bashyal (2025) underlined, in a systematic review, the implications of transnational migration on income diversification, livelihood enhancement, food security and ecological restoration which impact policy making, decision making and long-term macro-economic objectives. The authors illustrated several effects of workforce reduction in the home country, under the substitution frame, from increased workload, workforce shortage, high labor wage, to rural gentrification and a growing work pressure on those who remain (Koirala & Bashyal, 2025).

As seen in other migration studies on the workforce subject, the effects of displacement can be radical on the origin country, where the work force exodus creates imbalances in the country's economy, affecting the welfare state, disrupting the normal flow of personnel in key positions and the natural replacement of work force with newer generations (Bayrak et al., 2023; Moawad, 2024; Madondo & Dhobha, 2025). The shortage of workforce, the constant flow of skilled workers, all the way to entire resettlements of people in certain areas due to climate conditions, increase the severe depopulation rate and relocation of those remaining soon after, making resilience more difficult or impossible once the displacement reaches this point. From this perspective, climate change or climate disasters trigger not only immediate transformations on the affected areas but also long-term impact processes that engage further vulnerabilities both for the people and the areas they live in. In the case of work force migration, at a certain point and rate,

it will determine more people moving out of the home area towards other locations.

Bayrak et al. (2023) found that emigration status had no mitigating influence on climate-change effects nor to the strategies adopted by workers, yet the results indicated some impact of climate change on income status, households management, dependency on remittances and coping strategy, describing specific challenges to small production businesses, differences between income and their unbalanced impact, aging and out migration phenomenon, concluding that climate stressors trigger uneven effects on the communities and individuals.

Overall, people migration due to environment causes and threats imply seeking a certain social security in host areas, which solicits at the same time a work integration for adaptation and survival. At the same time workforce migration due to a climate crisis included in a more generalized migration model, involves a double effect, one on the origin area, confronted with workforce shortages and the other one on the host location, region or country, challenged with the integration mechanism of the new comers. If life-threatening extreme weather events and dramatic changes in climate will continue to develop and thrive, migration will become the new normal, on the long run, encompassing the work and economic mobility in a mobility for survival and tomorrow's security.

II. Social features of work integration in host communities

At a first look, the scholarly literature focuses on key causes, process and effects of climate migration, analyzing policies, impacts, individual and community responses to change, personal discourse over the migration itinerary or simply patterns of migration and main drivers. However, the question of exploring social and psychological traits of climate migration including the workforce relocation due to the environment is somehow secondary and not gaining full attention and momentum.

Apart from climate, economic and political factors that can trigger migration, resettling determines a series of social and psychological challenges when it comes to a new location adaptation, community and work integration. Strictly referring to work opportunities in the new setting, the climate refugee or migrant is liable to encounter a collection of barriers until securing a job in the host community. From a social point of view, the public perception on climate change as well as on the reception of climate migrants is widely divided between acceptance or rejection, the host population sometimes tending to react in an opposite manner to the climate discourse (Singh

& Swanson, 2017; Gillis et al., 2023; Raimi et al., 2024). There is no consensus whether climate migrants are perceived as economic or political ones (Spilker et al., 2020; Arias & Blair, 2022; Raimi et al., 2024), the concepts overlapping in this sense, as indicated before. Migration due to environment crisis includes also a strong economic motive, people resettling to areas where they can farm, produce, work and gain, ensuring their daily needs and normal living.

Another social variable, besides the public perception, refers to the community inclusion practices in the work sector, including here various reactions and attitudes towards migrants and the climate topic. The major models on social groups underline here the “classical” clash between the ingroup and outgroup when it comes to new comers’ adaptation and integration in the host community. Trop and Liberman (2012) indicated there is a risk of generating an ingroup mentality in the receiving communities when climate migration is addressed from a local stance and close-up position. At the same time, whether local or international, migration has the potential to trigger ingroup attitudes and reactions in the host communities when it comes to receiving incoming new members. As the scholar works have presented so far, the fear towards outgroup participants lead to “protection” behaviors, which are quick to be on display (e.g. rejection, avoidance, risk perception, negative attitudes, threat perception and fears etc.) when the members of the ingroup local community are challenged with the reality of receiving members of an outgroup inside their structures (Everett, Faber & Crockett, 2015; O’Donnell et al., 2019; Raimi et al., 2024). In other studies, research has observed that if domestic migrants or even international ones are perceived as part of the ingroup, on the basis that the local community projects similar possible situations for relocating due to environment conditions, then the reception becomes more open, adaptation and integration being supported by the locals (Lujala et al., 2020; Kim, Kay & Schuldt, 2021; Raimi et al., 2024).

Besides overall public perception and group functioning, the perception on work integration itself of migrants raises various questions. From the migrant point of view, work adaptation may provide security overall, a mean to accommodate and retake a daily normal functioning. On the other hand, the host community may perceive work adaptation as a will to integrate and participate. Other scholar studies argue that in contrast migration presence may lead to higher competition and conflict on the labor market, over employment opportunities (Turhan & Armiero, 2019; Spilker et al., 2020; Lujala et al., 2020; Tubi & Kapinga, 2024). Even if these effects are difficult to analyze, confirm and generalize, various authors draw attention over the usual narratives that might influence potential disruptions, both ethnic, cultural and social between those incoming in search for a job and local resi-

dents (Gaikwad & Nellis, 2017; Spilker et al., 2020, Tubi & Kapinga, 2024). Moreover, the sociocultural dimensions of migration, with regard to employment status, work perception and attitudes, income expectation and projection, community participation, affect the integration process from both migrants and receiving communities point of view, underlying the importance of psychological predictors as well (e.g. having a positive mindset, objective life expectations, empowering personal beliefs, cognitive judgements), on supporting an optimal transition and adaptation or biasing them (Duque et al., 2025).

Social perception on work integration of migrants relies heavily on public perception, existing community narratives on the subject, groups behavior, global discourse and political views, host communities being under numerous pressure points in their reception of newcomers which are directly impacted nevertheless.

B. Psychological features of work integration in a climate change context

The social perspective on work challenges due to environment conditions brings also to attention the numerous psychological variables, which shape the mobility process of climate migrants, from root causes to projections, search experiences and potential outcomes. The scholarly literature is also scarce, results being disparate and too few on the matter. Studies focus more on immediate public views, climate justice, social transformations rather than on the overall individual perceptions, experiences and behaviors, critical, social and psychological approaches to climate crisis (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2024). Following a focus group analysis, Fritz et al. (2024), observed that the main drivers for climate management and adaptation reside in individual behavior change, top-down industry centered reconsideration as well as technology-centered dynamics, while major barriers are represented by the economic systems and interests, lack of awareness and international coordination or cooperation. In another view, the lack of proper communication and support policies will result in tensions, in the case of migrant mobility and job searching within the local communities that are recipient, diminishing the public support and cohesion, sometimes disfranchising the climate migrant, part of a risk outgroup (Mols & Jetten, 2016; Stanley, Leviston & Tseung-Wong, 2023). Living with a constant assault on social identity and job security, climate migrants are challenged with the risk of inadequate work access and opportunities, unequal rights and restrictions. The burden of feeling “not welcomed” or “not invited” can be translated in fewer to no options

to work, to get familiar with, to adapt and to integrate in a functional labor market, which leads to negative psychological outcomes of being rejected and isolated. The perception of threat at work imports two sides of understanding, one in which the migrant experiences the denial of acceptance and integration, and the other in which the community “fears” job losing, impact on work style and unknown or unwanted interferences in their organizational culture, climate, views, objectives and functioning.

Detaining a sense of place or belonging refers to people’s attachment, both cognitive and emotional, for their familiar environment which in turn shapes a specific balance, stability and fluency of life, with deep impact on personal identity, experience and behaviors (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Rubin, Garfin & Wong-Parodi, 2024). Naturally the place of origin contains also the person’s habitual work environment and activities which are familiar. In climate migration, people lose contact with their initial home, with their job and work context and need to develop a new attachment to the reception environment in all aspects, following a dynamic natural transaction due to constant context and conditions changes. From this perspective the migrant worker needs to find connections with the new workplace, to fit in and to feel involved and included. Work integration in a climate change context will always require an identity and work process retake, reallocating personal resources in an effort to build a sense of place after losing it, a sense of community (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2024), or growing “roots” again (Blackwell, Aranda & Rosa, 2023). Rubin, Garfin and Wong-Parodi (2024) stated that further research is needed in exploring and understanding place attachment and detachment, personal experience, fears and emotions with regard to climate migration. Work integration in a host environment may trigger fears and stress of potential inclusion rejection, adding up to the detachment state from the previous context. By exploring these negative states in association with climate change, distress, perceptions or awareness, new insights can be depicted on human behavior patterns and perspectives (Weiß, Gutzeit & Hein, 2024; Cipriani, Gemignani & Menicucci, 2024). Social cohesion, detaining skills and expertise, certain positive beliefs can ease the adaptation process (Al Maamari, 2024). On the opposite, Stanley, Leviston and Tseung-Wong (2023) found that ideological attitudes and threat perceptions have the potential to act as barriers in migrant adequate integration in the recipient society, more attention being needed in implementing support programs, inclusion and people well-being.

New frontiers in research will have to undergo in-depth analysis of climate migration and the challenges of workforce demands and stances. In this light of things, Table 1 contains several future directions proposals for research, regarding workforce migration in a climate change condition.

Table 1: Future research directions and themes for workforce migration

| Direction | Topics |
|---------------|--|
| Concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Construct validation – Work impact self-evaluation on host community – Environment and work displacement process – Community acceptance and work adaptation – Work integration barriers and facilitators – Cultural variations – Stereotypes on climate migration – Socio-psychological variables and climate migration – Formal and informal support – Public perception, social representations and awareness |
| Methodologies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Longitudinal approaches on workforce mobility and adaptation due to climate change – Existing evaluation instruments validation – New methods and instruments for data collection exploration – Experimental design approach on work migration due to climate conditions – Qualitative data analysis – Research participants specific segmentation – Context and causal relations testing |
| Results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – External validity target – Thematic representativeness on climate and work migration outcomes – Nuances of climate migration and work implications – Prediction models testing |
| Implications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Policy crafting and actions on migration, work, integration and climate – Vulnerabilities prevention and management through regulatory mechanisms and guidelines – Participation and decision-making of migrants and reception communities – Coping strategies and support interventions for migrants – Education programs development |

Despite recent research and works, there is a long path for social sciences and theory to explore the dynamics of climate migration, its impact on the workforce and adaptation. Given the sense of urgency and constant crisis, the challenge resides in keeping track with the momentum while providing solution-oriented research and insight.

C. Conclusion

After following the systematic itinerary through the challenges brought by environment changes on the labor market and work integration, the discourse underlines the necessity to invest more in researching climate mobility, work solicitations and demands. As observed previously, studies are still

scarce on the matter, with heterogenous data. Going beyond climate justice, policies, drivers and public perception, an increasing interest arises in exploring and explaining social and psychological factors of climate migration. Understanding socio-psychological mechanisms of place detachment and attachment, work attitudes and relocation impact, as well as context-related experiences towards work integration and host community narratives, may bring the society approach closer to respond adequately to work and climate crisis.

Overall, support strategies for sustainability and efficiency in adapting the labor market to climate change will rely heavily on the nexus comprehension, between rapid transformation, the unique human response to adaptation and the never ending search for welfare and well-being.

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