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the topic of this issue

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, MIGRATION, AND SOCIAL POLICY

As outlined in the report *Climate Change and Migration*, put out by the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs (2020), climate change interacts with and is mediated by diverse aspects of migration. What happens to our planet’s ecosystem on the global scale can forcibly propel migration but can also generate obstacles or difficulties in mobility over the long and short term. On one hand, for example, environmental disasters such as floods can impact existing infrastructures, further isolating entire areas already precariously connected with the rest of the urban-social fabric. On the other hand, conditions such as drought can entail forced migration due to the difficulty in finding the necessary local resources. In both cases, the pressure factors affecting populations are subject to increase.

Accurately estimating the number of people forced to migrate due to climate change today has its challenges, but existing literature on the subject agrees that the number of climate migrants is continuously increasing and could increase by more than 200 per cent by the end of the century. The complexity of this phenomenon will accompany the process of globalisation in the decades to come, adding to it the question of mobility within the global context with its implications deriving from the climate of constraint following the ecological crisis. Are there differences between migration for ecological reasons and because of war or socio-economic reasons in general?

The term “environmental refugee” – as it appears in the report *Climate Change and Migration* – suggests that, firstly, movement as a response to climate change is involuntary, and secondly, that due to its nature it requires specific forms of protection. Yet, these considerations have been the subject of several criticisms. Some social scientists have highlighted how the term “environmental refugee” is too simplistic and monocausal in explaining the relationship between climate change and migration while, at the same time, in the field of migration studies, excessive normativity and the difficulty encountered in drawing a clear line between forced and voluntary migration occurs even in the field of climate change.

The complexity of the issue is evident in the choice of the UNHCR in 2008 to reject the use of the term “refugee” within the context of climate change (due to its legal value which should be reserved for people protected by the 1951 Geneva Convention), except to include (2018) “climate refugee” in its *Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology*, specifying however that “this phrase can cause confusion, as it does not exist in international law”.

In the light of these notes, we can therefore ask ourselves: what is and what should be the statute of the “climate refugee”? What social policies should global and national actors undertake to face the complex intertwining between climate crisis and migration? Finally, how does this intertwining affect the globalisation process? With different approaches and research perspectives, we can answer these and other questions by offering original reflections on the nature of the relationship between climate change, migration, and public policy.