

# Environmental conflicts and migration

**Short description:** The current era of globalization is characterized by a high degree of interconnectedness across borders and continents. The 'globalization' phenomenon not only goes hand in hand with significant levels of international trade, but also with significant numbers of migrants, including labor migrants as well as refugees. These migrants are yet another source of very specific interdependencies between countries, especially when migration interacts with conflicts. A Research Group at the *Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS)* focused on this – not yet sufficiently understood – link between conflict and migration. Within this Research Group, the Chair of Sustainability Governance is especially interested in examining how *environmental* and *resource conflicts* trigger migration.

A large and increasing number of conflicts are seen to be driven by *environmental* factors. The nexus between environmental factors and violent conflicts has been theorized in various ways. The literature is, however, still quite fragmented, and there are various, partly competing, impact hypotheses: First, there is the neo-Malthusian thesis, arguing that resource scarcity spurs violent conflict; second, there is the almost reverse 'resource curse' thesis that it is environmental abundance that leads to conflict; finally, there is a thesis that sees environmental degradation as the main cause of violent conflicts.

Environmental conflicts have also been identified as potentially important drivers of *migration*. The nexus between environmental conflicts and migration has been prominently discussed in both the political and scholarly arenas. In the political debate, the notions of 'climate wars' and 'climate refugees' have gained great prominence recently. In the scholarly debate, however, a (direct) link between climate change and migration is seen with quite some skepticism. In this context, there is also a scholarly debate about the question of what distinguishes environmental migrants from other types of migrants.

Finally, the link between conflict and migration has also become subject to various types of *governance interventions*. Recently, a number of new policy instruments have been introduced, including private standard setting and certification schemes as well as import bans and the regulation of global supply chains to mitigate illegal extraction activities (e.g. for timber, palm oil or minerals). While previous analyses focus on their environmental effectiveness, their economic impacts on industries or their potential for norm diffusion, there are no studies that have explicitly taken a conflict or migration perspective.

Master theses in this field of research could, for example:

- develop (single or comparative) case studies on when and how environmental and resource conflicts create incentives for migration;
- provide a systematic overview on theoretical approaches and/or empirical case studies on environmental conflicts and migration;
- study new environmental governance instruments for their internal conflict responsiveness (e.g.: How are conflict-mitigating norms addressed in the new instruments? Which conflict effects do these new instruments have? Which migratory dynamics do they release? etc.).

**Theory and methods:** various types of policy or conflict analysis; case study methods and/or reviews

## References:

- Bates, D.C. (2002): Environmental Refugees? Classifying Human Migrations Caused by Environmental Change. *Population and Environment* 23(5), 465-477.
- Floyd, R.; Matthew, R. (eds) (2013): *Environmental Security: Approaches and Issues*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.

**Starting date:** at any time

**For how many students this topic is available:** several

**Supervisor:** [Michael Pregernig](#)