



The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI)  
المنظمة للعدل البيئي العمومية לצדק סביבתי (ע"ר)

## The 3R of Climate Migration in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean Region – *Refugees, Risks, Resilient*

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1. The main points are included at this working paper will be presenting at the Panel session: "Climate Change, Refugees and Conflict" in frame of 1<sup>st</sup> ICRM Tel Aviv University, 7 November 2018.

## **The 3R of Climate Migration in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean Region – Refugees, Risks, Resilient**

### **Introduction**

More than 500 million people live in the Middle East and North Africa. As the recent public discourse has evolved following latest IPCC report<sup>2</sup> focusing on the threshold of global warming to the point where irreversible catastrophic changes could be prevented (1.5 centigrade Celsius compared to 2). The report was published at the end of the summer season (Northern Hemisphere), where the temperature during this period is already very hot in Middle East and North Africa, and will increase more than two times faster compared to the average global warming. In combination with increasing air pollution by desert dust, the environmental conditions could become intolerable and may force people to migrate<sup>3</sup>.

### **The context and terminology of climate migration and refugees**

Evaluating of the diverse refugees groups in the Middle East - in the prism of climate change - provides distinctive platform for studying and discussing in the academic arena and public discourse, in order to construct the long-term policy of 'Climate migration and refugees', in partnership with different stakeholders from neighboring countries and the international community.

A new initiative of Climate Justice in regional scale<sup>4</sup> was established by AEJI in 2017, aimed 'to mitigate the climate risks and adaptation to climate security'. The research of 'climate migration and refugees' is part of this initiative. AEJI study has been indicating on 2 categories of 'refugees groups' in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean Basin that should be in focus.

Firstly, brief introduction with the terminology are prevailing in the international community and international law.

The different terms in regarding to people who displaced by environmental degradation and climate change according to UNEP should be called "environmental refugees", "environmental migrants" or "environmentally displaced people". Each definition has real implications for the obligations of the international community under humanitarian law and the rights of the people displaced (UNEP, 2016). However, the use of the word "refugee"

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<sup>2</sup> IPCC report, September 2018

<sup>3</sup> Jos Lelieveld, (2016) <https://www.mpg.de/10481936/climate-change-middle-east-north-africa>

<sup>4</sup> Levant, Eastern Mediterranean Basin

to describe those fleeing from environmental pressures is not accurate under international law. The majority of people forced out of their homes by environmental change will likely stay within their own borders, but there may be no possibility of return to areas that turn to be non-habitable. The difficulty regarding acceptable international definition is explained by few reasons including lack of an adequate term, long term process of displacement, difficulties with collecting data and uncertainties on their numbers. In many cases, unable to prove political persecution in their country of origin, the migrants/refugees fall through the cracks in international humanitarian law. UNEP uses the term “environmental displacement”, although acknowledging that it is not a universally accepted term.

We have adopted in our project the terms ‘climate refugees’ and ‘climate migrants’ as reflecting wide phenomena of forced population displacement linked to environmental degradation following climate change. We expand the discourse of climate change by adding the legal term in use of ‘refugees’, as is politically recognized in the Middle East, linked to Israel-Palestine conflict. Therefore, the 2 defined categories are:

1) Climate refugees – i.e. forced migration on the backdrop of environmental degradation, especially frequent occurrences of droughts, increasing of dust storms, accelerating loss of agricultural land, threatening on food security in Africa and the Middle East.

2) Refugees groups who associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or other wars in the region (for example Iraq, Syria). The majority of those groups have been living in temporary or permanent refugee camps for decades, characterized with poor infrastructures. The predicted climate change in the region include the expansion of the arid areas, increase in number of hot days per year compared to previous decades, intense dust storms - all will severely impact on the living conditions of refugees in designated camps and neighborhoods, without adjusted infrastructure. Those ‘wars refugees’ will be exposed in a much more severe way to climate change, compared to other population groups in neighboring areas, in turn enhancing their vulnerability for the physical surrounding that will be affected by the climate change, and meet them as one of the less **resilient population** group in the region, in both terms of environment and political stability.

### The research frame & goal

As the different papers and institutional reports on the migrants indicate, it is not possible to be precise on the figures of number of people who seek to migrant<sup>5</sup>, but the trend is clear, the existing migration pressures stemming mainly from economic pressures are already being exacerbated by the impact of climate change and this is predicted to intensify.

AEJI research on regional scale evaluates the 3R - Refugees, Risks and Resilient - in order to provide as much as possible coherent updated picture of migration patterns and scope of the social and economic aspects of the environmental migration, and is aimed to formulate constructed long term strategy for climate resilience and climate economy in Africa and the Middle East.

### The outline

In general, adaptation plans should be targeting not only the “national goal” of CO2 emission mitigation as governments were committed in Paris accord – but to address accurately and determinably the following 3 principles:

- 1) Strategy for **climate resilient** communities in Africa and the Middle East.
- 2) Advancement of governed transition into **low carbon economies** across the developed world in order to mitigate the causes of climate change on global scale.
- 3) Agreement that it is the role and the responsibility of the developed world to assist poor countries in developing low-carbon economies, and the role and responsibility of economically strong countries in the region, as Israel.

In frame of AEJI regional initiative, we will study the driven causes and the different economic models for climate plan in the origin countries of migrants. The assistance to the countries across Africa and Middle East that are most affected by climate change will focus on mitigating the effects, and will create tracks for adaptation models. For example: new agricultural practices, farming and food security nexus with renewable energy and clean technologies.

- ⇒ ***Only by development of low carbon economy framed by long term strategy that include climate resilience plan in field designed with the local communities, based on Risk analysis - the homeland-countries will be able to sustain and to provide to potential climate migrants to live in fair conditions in their own countries.***

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<sup>5</sup> For example: [https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou\\_i/asylmottak/migrants-or-refugees-internal-and-external-drivers-of-migration-from-eritrea.pdf](https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou_i/asylmottak/migrants-or-refugees-internal-and-external-drivers-of-migration-from-eritrea.pdf)



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