

# Overview

The question of “What do people whose living spaces are destroyed or damaged with the ecological destruction, the extent and level of which increase every passing day, do and experience, and to which injustices are they exposed?” lies at the basis of the *Displacements Within the Framework of Environmental and Climate Justice: Concepts, Debates, and Cases* report. In the geological period that we live in, called the Anthropocene or the “Era of Human”, there is no field on the planet where humans’ production and consumption activities are not felt. Indeed, the effects of human activities on the biological, geological, chemical, and physical processes of the whole planet have become more determinant. In addition, the nine boundaries of the planet are being pushed; some are already crossed. Massive ecological destruction, which threatens all species’ lives with its full speed and severity, is occurring across the planet. Climate change; air, water, and soil pollution; the disruption and destruction of living spaces are among the most devastating effects of the human-caused ecological problems that we face. People lose their houses, lands, and livelihoods; their living places become uninhabitable. In other words, an increasing number of people across the world are exposed to displacement, which, in a broad sense, means that their living spaces become jeopardized or uninhabitable, and they are physically, economically, and socially ripped from these spaces. Ecological destruction results in displacements by merging with economic, social, political, demographical, and environmental factors. Displacements lead to the mobility (and immobility) of individuals and communities. On the other hand, the groups positioned unequally in social power relations and facing other injustices are more exposed to the risk of displacement. Thus, the relationship between ecological destruction-displacement-mobility and its consequences confronts us as an environmental and climate justice issue.

It is possible to consider the correlation between ecological destruction and displacements through two main axes. The first one is constituted by the displacement processes related to climate change. The extent, severity, and frequency of events related to human-caused climate change, such as floods, droughts, extreme weather events, and extreme heat, are gradually increasing. The major devastating effect is the disrupt-

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tion and disappearance of living spaces. In addition, livelihood activities are interrupted due to climate events, livelihood resources perish, and essential needs such as water and food deplete. In short, life is getting harder based on climate events. Places such as coasts and dry lands which are more open to the effects of climate events, and areas in which the existing injustices are widespread, and the capacity to repair the damages of climate events are low—as in the large section of the Global South—are exposed to climate events more acutely. When mainstream media, NGOs, politics, and academia address the topic, they generally assume that there is a direct causal relationship between climate change and migration. According to this view, which was popular for a long time, the world is facing a phenomenon called “climate migration”, which is described as a problem.

The prediction about climate migration is that people who will be desperate in the face of the devastating effects of climate change in the Global South and whose numbers will reach hundreds of millions will directly migrate to the Global North, long-distance and permanently. Migration is perceived as another disaster that accompanies climate change which is a massive disaster in itself. Since it is argued that climate migration will put pressure on the resources in the Global North, cause conflicts and create instability. These “alarmist” discourses, which create panic and fear, justify security policies with the primary purpose of protecting borders. Thus, let alone devising administrative and political solutions which would stop climate change and its adverse effects, they open the door for a series of practices which will increase and deepen injustices and inequalities. However, the “climate migration” argument and the security discourses built around it do not have an empirical basis. The alternative views and research, whose number increases by the day, indicate a multidimensional and complicated relationship between climate change and mobility in terms of its reasons and effects. These studies show that direct and permanent international migration toward the Global North, described as climate migration, is only one of the consequences. Generally, climate mo-

bility does not unfold in this way. Based on the findings in the field, the observed main characteristics of the correlation between climate change and mobility are as follows:

- Climate change is only one of the factors resulting in mobility. Climate (and generally ecological) events' effects on people's mobility emerge by merging with a series of social, economic, and political factors and augmenting these factors' effects. In other words, climate mobility is a multifactorial phenomenon.
- Climate mobility can occur for different durations. That is, while climate migration is only one of the possibilities, field findings indicate that climate change mostly doesn't occur permanently. Climate mobility mainly occurs in the short term; it is temporary, cyclical, and seasonal.
- Climate mobility predominantly occurs within borders or neighboring countries, in the same region and close locations, rather than long-distance and internationally.
- Environmental changes based on climate change produce (voluntary or nonvoluntary) immobility as much as they produce mobility. Here, the needs, intent, and capacities (which are constituted by different elements ranging from financial resources to social ties) based on economic, political, social, and cultural factors are determinants.
- Climate mobility has positive results, such as adaptation and reducing vulnerability. Some of these advantages are listed as reducing the exposure to climate risks, diversifying and increasing livelihood and income resources, and sharing information, experience, and technology between different places.
- Mobility can be an adaptation strategy that individuals and communities use consciously and willingly.

The second axis, which deals with the correlation between ecological destruction and displacement, is constituted by development (project)-induced displacements. Mega development projects, such as dam, mine, and transportation projects, are both the driving forces and indicators of dominant growth and correlated development understandings. While such projects provide the necessary energy, raw material, and essential services for all production activities, they are also businesses that gain economic benefit and profit. Such projects are shown as the symbols of "national interest" and "development". On the other hand, development projects, with the ecological destruction they cause, are sources of displacements by extension.

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Development-induced displacements occur on two main axes. The first is that the living spaces, agricultural lands, and commons where such projects are constructed and operated are taken away from local people via various methods, and human communities are physically displaced. The second one is that through a series of ecological destruction that they create, such as vast scale deforestation, pollution, decreases in water availability, and topographical changes, such projects disrupt ecosystems and annihilate the necessary conditions for maintaining life. As a result, people in broad regions lose their health and livelihoods; they are socially and economically displaced. In short, in the process of development-induced displacements, local people, who are expected to take care of themselves and whose rights are violated, lose their shelters, lands, production tools, livelihood resources, access to commons, and cultural existences.

These main axes intersect with the environmental and climate injustices they both hinge on and reproduce. As observed in countless examples worldwide, displaced people are constituted mainly by various disadvantaged groups such as the poor, women, children, indigenous communities, and ethnic and religious minorities. These groups already experience many injustices in social, economic, and political fields, including poverty, inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. These groups, which are positioned unequally and disadvantageously in social power relations, have a minimal share in the constitution of climate change and ecological destruction. Moreover, while they benefit minimally from the advantages of the activities causing climate change and ecological destruction, they are forced to bear most of the social, economic, and ecological costs externalized by governments and companies. In addition to their living spaces being taken away or destroyed, they lose the opportunities for healthy life and livelihood. This situation results in the expansion and deepening of poverty, inequalities, and exclusion.

It is possible to mention some attempts to prevent the adverse effects of displacement on various groups. Some of these attempts are to constitute various mechanisms for protecting the rights of those who lost their houses, lands, and living spaces as a result of climate events and to define and acknowledge the term “climate refugee”—not yet recognized in international law—through various agreements and mechanisms on the international level. There are also some standards and regulations that international organizations try to implement regarding development projects-induced displacements. Yet, such efforts and attempts are far from producing effective results since international agreements are not binding, and the nation-states which propound and prioritize “national interests” do not implement such agreements. Moreover, such efforts and attempts mostly consist of some reforms, regulations, and technocratic solutions sought in the legal and administrative fields, whereas displacements and the consequent mobility/immobility are determined by macro, meso, and micro factors.

The macro factors are constituted by economic, political, and social structures such as global capitalism, the nation-state model, and male domination. The merging of such structures with historical and local dynamics makes them differ on national and local levels; varying manifestations of macro structures depending on the national and local context emerge. The characteristics of individuals on the micro level, such as age, gender, education level, and class, are directly related to the economic, social, and political structures on the macro level and are formed in correlation with power distribution inequalities in the social field. Meso-level institutional and legal regulations, guides, standards, and rules are, likewise, not independent from the macro and micro factors. Solutions sought through legal and administrative rules, which ignore the intertwined and interactive factors on different levels and aim for improvements and reforms in the existing system, remain ineffective and insufficient.

Although there are common dynamics and characteristics of displacements related to climate change and ecological destruction worldwide, the different contexts make each displacement distinct. The compensation mechanisms and tools, such as relocation programs for losses and damages, as well as that aim to correct the rights violations and injustices displaced people are exposed to, should be designed and implemented by taking common and distinctive characteristics into account. In short, standardized programs, mechanisms, and policies based on generalizations and assumptions, tailored by central authorities and imposed from the top do not produce a solution.

With all the reasons enumerated above, there is a need to seek and develop solutions for displacements through a comprehensive, dynamic, and integrated process that is grounded on environmental and climate justice. Every stage of this multi-actor, multiscale, and multidimensional process should be implemented based on the main dimensions of environmental and climate justice: recognition, distribution, and participation. The roles that local peoples/communities, civil society, academia, and political actors should assume in research, (trans)local solidarity networks, and negotiation and decision-making processes, and some suggestions to ensure that these main fields correspond to environmental and climate justice are presented below:

## **RESEARCH**

Field research has critical importance in understanding the multifactorial and complicated correlation between ecological destruction and climate change.<sup>1</sup> Collecting long-term data in field research is essential for identifying ecological factors' effects on mobility in a region with its distinctive features. On top of facilitating temporal comparisons, collecting data over extended periods in different places can enable comparative analyses on a spatial basis. Furthermore, integrating local information in research can reveal the specificity of local dynamics and how they shape dimensions of the issue.

When mobility/migration is addressed by politics, civil society, media, and academia, they generally focus on the situations and reasons at the starting point of mobility/migration. On the other hand, the destination points are generally included by looking into a priori results based on commonly held beliefs and assumptions. However, migration is a process which is continuous through time and space and involves transformations and interruptions. When migration occurs, migrants' links with their place of origin mostly continue while they also engage in new social relations and form new ties in the areas they arrive. In this way, financial resources, information, technology, know-how and experiences constantly flow and circulate via a web of ties and connections. In addition, different factors such as conditions, dynamics, practices and policies at the destination are in many ways the determinant of the injustices and problems related to mobility/migration over time. For these reasons, in research and during different policy and program designs and implementations, it is necessary to have an integrated approach considering mobility as a dynamic process spreading over time and space.

Displacements and the consequent mobility have reasons and effects in social, cultural, economic, political, legal, and many other fields. Several violations emerging with displacements, such as loss of livelihood and income, impoverishment, loss of prosperity, discrimination, inability to maintain cultural existence, loss of housing and land, and access to the environment, health, and goods, are not independent of a series of adverse situations in other social, economic, and spheres. On the contrary, there is a strong correlation between these; they trigger each other or mutually increase the extent and intensity of injustices. Researching and understanding this situation of intersectionality is possible with an interdisciplinary approach.

### **(TRANS)LOCAL SOLIDARITY NETWORKS**

Local struggles worldwide try to protect their houses, lands, and common areas against dams, mines, transportation projects, and other mega projects. In many regions of the world, including Turkey, local communities resist development project-induced ecological destruction and displacements through legal processes and protests. Local environmental justice movements advocating for a series of rights can also voice their demands on the international level; they try to get the support of the global public and stop the financial resources for the projects by making themselves heard. Local environmental justice movements established at the transnational level are mostly temporary, and they last as long as campaigns are staged. Yet local struggles establish trans-local ties with the participation of NGOs, academia, and other actors, and regional and global solidarity and advocacy networks are critically important. It is important to highlight that the collaboration between transnational advocacy networks and local struggles had an impact on the 75% decrease in large-dam constructions between 1980 and 2000 across the world.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, thanks to permanent and organized trans-local networks, local groups and local struggles exposed to the risk of displacement can establish permanent relationships between themselves. In this way, they can maintain a regular exchange of ideas, information, and experiences. One effect of this will be to contribute to the strengthening of local communities and groups as political subjects. Through mutual understanding, local communities discover common aspects of their situation and struggle with others, as well as what makes them unique. This would lead to the emergence of various opportunities that would empower their movements and increase their sense of efficacy, such as sharing experiences and building bonds of trust and solidarity. In establishing trans-local ties between local mobilizations which trans-

form into regional and global networks, NGOs can undertake essential roles such as coordination and facilitation of the process.

## **DELIBERATION**

The prevailing management model utilized for climate-related and development-induced migration sets forth seeking and designing solutions on an international scale and then implementing them from top to bottom on the national scale, which cannot prevent environmental injustices caused by displacements. Alternatively, it is possible to think of a multiscale/multicentered and multi-actor, bottom-up dynamic governance model. This model would rely on (1) deliberation processes which proceed simultaneously and are interconnected across scales (local-national-regional-global) and (2) the involvement of a multiplicity of actors in these processes, foremost local communities who are exposed to environmental and climate injustices as well as other parties ranging from NGOs and academia to different political actors and authorities.

In their search for solutions/policies regarding ecological destruction, displacement, and mobility, authorities, NGOs, and other actors need to consider some of the essential characteristics of these three phenomena: First of all, the phenomenon of mobility itself does not inherently constitute a problem; rather, it is a strategy used for adapting to environmental changes. Thus, solutions should focus on economic, social, and political injustices that lie at the root of the problems in relation to mobility rather than preventing mobility. It is possible to consider mobility as a tool that is part of solutions/policies, just as in the case of the planned relocation of local communities, whose lands and living spaces are about to ultimately disappear, as an adaptation strategy. Yet, not considering the social, cultural, economic, and political factors here and not involving the actors in all the processes does not produce results that eliminate injustices.

Secondly, treating displacements—like in climate change—require simultaneous action and policies in different fields, ranging from energy to economy, and should be dealt with holistically. In other words, just as for climate change, displacements must be situated at the intersection of all policy areas.

Third, standardized solutions, which ignore the temporal and spatial differences, cannot be applied to all types of climate- and environment-related displacements. As



it has been indicated throughout this report, although displacements have common characteristics on the global level, each one of them has unique aspects depending on local and historical conditions and dynamics. Thus, solutions should have flexibility and dynamism that allows adaptation to local conditions and changes in time. In addition, it should also be kept in mind that communities in the same context are not affected by the displacement process uniformly on the same scale and in the same way. According to intersectionality, which can be defined as being exposed to more than one injustice simultaneously, there are sub-groups and individuals within each disadvantaged group whose access to resources and services are more restricted, less recognized, and more excluded from the decision-making processes. For environmental and climate justice to be realized entirely, it is vital to consider inner group inequalities and injustices through intersectionality in proposed solutions. In short, instead of one-size-fits-all approaches, solutions that pay heed to intersectionalities and respond to changes that emerge in different conditions and dynamics over time should be designed and implemented in a participatory manner.

## **DECISION-MAKING**

Carrying out decision-making processes in an inclusive and participatory way is essential for providing environmental and climate justice. However, as is the case in many parts of the globe, it is one of the principles fulfilled the least during displacements. The cases of Turkey, Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Uganda-Tanzania analyzed in the report indicate that although participatory processes are foreseen in the laws, regulations, and agreements, these processes are not carried out or executed fully or even partially. Participation mechanisms required by law mostly comprise informing people about the projects unilaterally without engaging them in the decision-making processes. Even though there are places like India where village councils are legally given the authority to make decisions, these mechanisms rarely operate on a regular basis or effectively. In many examples, governments and companies obstruct these participatory decision-making mechanisms and processes through various deceptive and illegal practices, which decrease effectiveness. Some of these practices include the choices of location and time of meetings in a way that hinder the local community's access, not sharing meeting information with the local community, and the presentations of technical details in an incomprehensible way. Here, as much as the full implementation of such mechanisms that are already recognized by law, there is also the challenge of improv-

ing, developing, and extending the scope of participatory mechanisms and processes. First, participation should not be limited to the implementation stages of development projects and climate adaptation and mitigation actions. Local communities which are or will be affected should be able to directly participate in the decision-making during the planning and preparation stages. For example, it is necessary to foster participation starting from the planning phase of a dam or mine; local communities should be able to decide whether these projects will be constructed in their region. Making every phase of policy-making processes open to the participation of all is a complicated objective which can be reached incrementally. Here, monitoring the use of existing mechanisms, ensuring that all groups partake in these mechanisms in a way that ensures recognitional justice, and guaranteeing opportunities for expression to those exposed to more than one injustice, such as women, can be the first steps. In addition, there is also a need for rules and approaches that are concocted in a participatory manner and reached by consensus regarding how to run the process of direct democracy.

In short, solutions and policies which can ensure environmental and climate justice regarding displacements are possible with multi-actor, inclusive, participatory, integrated, flexible, and dynamic negotiations and decision-making processes that proceed on more than one scale and center. Every stage of these processes should focus on the questions of “who/for whom?” toward recognitional justice, “what?” toward distributive justice, and “how?” toward procedural justice. It is crucial not to forget that the encounters of people exposed to injustices caused by ecological destruction and displacement have inherent transformative power in participatory processes developed from the bottom up rather than in a monocentric way. Such encounters can be one of the essential pillars for talking about social, economic, and political inequalities and injustices that lie at the root of displacements and environmental and climate injustices, questioning the paradigms of “growth” and “development” and devising alternatives to these, ranging from commons to degrowth.

1- The title of this research references an academic manifesto written by a prominent scholar on the topic of climate mobility. For detailed information, see: Ingrid Boas, "Climate migration myths," *Nature Climate Change* 9 (2019): 898-903.

2- Sanjeev Khagram, *Dams and Development. Transnational Struggles for Water and Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).