

Who takes responsibility for the climate refugees?

“Who takes responsibility for the climate refugees?” is an article written by Bayes Ahmed and published in 2017 in the *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*. The article proposes solutions and methods for accommodating climate refugees, using Bangladesh as an example.

#1 The increasing number of climatic events and their growing intensity is responsible for the mass migration of populations, particularly from regions that are most exposed to these disasters. Bangladesh, where about half of the population lives less than 5 metres above the mean sea level, is one of the most vulnerable countries. If the projected 2°C rise in global temperatures becomes a reality, 34 million Bangladeshis will be forced to seek refuge in other countries to escape rising water. Populations such as these, who “must leave their homes and communities because of the effects of climate change”, are referred to as “climate refugees” (National Geographic Society, 2016).

#2 While Bangladesh is vulnerable to climate change, it is only ranked 162 out of 199 countries in terms of CO₂ production according to The World Bank (2014), thus engaging the responsibility of the most polluting countries. However, there is no international convention for protecting climate refugees. In response, the article proposes a model for resettling these refugees in the countries responsible for producing the most CO₂. Four parameters were identified as relevant for identifying these countries: per capita CO₂ emissions, per capita gross national income (GNI), human development index (HDI), and per capita planet resource consumption. This data has shown that only 10 countries produce 69% of the world’s total CO₂, while the least developed countries bear the burden of this pollution in the form of climate-change impacts.

#3 The article makes 7 key recommendations for managing climate refugees:

1. The development of a calculation method to determine their distribution in host countries.
2. An internationally recognised legal convention for climate refugees.
3. An immediate short-term shelter plan in neighbouring countries in case of urgency, and a long-term resettlement plan in the liable countries, as needed.
4. A monitoring system to identify climate-related disasters and calculate the number of displaced people.
5. A cumulative monitoring system to measure which countries consume the most resources and produce the most CO₂ in a given timeframe.
6. A system of immediate penalisation for the responsible countries with an obligation to provide humanitarian assistance in the victim countries.
7. A system to compensate victim countries for losses and damage caused by climate events and to undertake plans to resettle refugees.

Situation in France

In December 2020, France began taking steps towards recognising climatic events as a risk factor. Given the respiratory difficulties that Sheel, a Bangladeshi migrant, was suffering, he could not return to Bangladesh because of the country’s air quality. The Bordeaux Court of Appeal thus annulled his obligation to leave French territory, allowing Sheel to obtain the status of a sick foreigner. This is the first time that air pollution has been considered in a risk assessment. In France, there is no legal status for climate refugees, and the Sheel case would allow for the development of legal consequences.

The opinion of Pauline Bureau, the Vice-Chair of LFE

While assigning historical responsibility appears to be a fair response to the climate refugee issue, it requires recognition of this status in national and international law, which is currently lacking.