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## **GENDER DYNAMICS OF CLIMATE INDUCED MIGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Climate change has become a significant driver of migration worldwide, particularly in vulnerable regions like Pakistan, where extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, displace large populations. However, the impacts of climate-induced migration are not experienced equally by all, with gender dynamics playing a critical role in shaping migration experiences. This study explores the gendered nature of climate-induced migration in Pakistan, focusing on the unique vulnerabilities, coping strategies, and adaptive responses of men and women in displaced communities. Using a qualitative approach, this research analyzes interviews and focus group discussions with migrants from the Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan provinces to understand how gender roles, socioeconomic status, and legal inequalities exacerbate the challenges faced by women during and after migration. The findings reveal that women face increased vulnerability due to limited mobility, gender-based violence, and restricted access to resources. Despite these challenges, women demonstrate resilience through community-based support networks and leadership in adaptation strategies. The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive migration policies that ensure women's empowerment, legal rights, and participation in decision-making processes to promote sustainable and equitable climate adaptation.

**Keywords:** Gender Dynamics, Climate-Induced Migration, Pakistan, Gender-Sensitive Policies, Vulnerabilities, Adaptation Strategies

### **Introduction**

Climate-induced migration has emerged as a growing global concern, with millions of people displaced by extreme weather events and environmental stressors. Pakistan, located in one of the most climate-vulnerable regions, faces significant challenges due to climate change, including floods, droughts, and rising temperatures. These environmental disasters, coupled with glacier melt, affect the country's agrarian-based communities, particularly those dependent on agriculture and livestock. Over **220 million** people in



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Pakistan are directly reliant on climate-sensitive sectors, which makes them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Global Climate Risk Index, 2020).

As a consequence of such environmental pressures, climate-driven migration has become an increasingly common occurrence, particularly in rural regions. “Unfortunately, populations – their composition changes and people come and go; they are forced out into safer places or to go find the way to make their living,” she said. But not all groups undergo this type of migrant process. Gender dynamics shape processes of migration and their consequences for different groups of people, and the effects are more profound for women, especially in patriarchal societies including the Pakistani society.

Environment-induced migration is influenced by gendered social relations and inequalities. Men and women do not experience displacement or migration in similar creative, and as such, the tasks performed while ‘in transit’ (Wilson 1977) deeply affected by cultural gender norms. Whereas men frequently migrate to urban settlements seeking work, women remain in their communities, caring for their homes against a more fragile backdrop. Where women do migrate, independent of, or with their families, they are often confronted by specific barriers, such as greater exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation and less access to resources and the ability to make decisions.

In the agrarian remote villages in Pakistan, where much of the climate-driven migration happens, women are customarily the cooking, water-slinging, stick-collecting, baby-carrying arm of the household. These tasks are now exacerbated when women are displaced so they become even more stretched and burdened. The women who are left behind suffer from food insecurity, limited access to education, health and financial services and are even more vulnerable during climate-induced displacement.

Despite increasing recognition of climate-induced migration as a priority issue, the gendered impacts of such migration have received scant attention. Current research on and policy responses to climate migration tend to cast climate migration as a monolithic matter and do not address the gender-specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and marginalized gender groups. Within Pakistan lack of research prevents us from seeing concrete and gender-oriented migration policies of such a nature. We will attempt to fill this gap by studying gendered dynamics of climate induced migration in Pakistan, specifically, differences between how men and women experience and respond to exposure and displacement.

This research is important for the light it shines on gendered aspects of climate-induced movement, which has to date been largely ignored in research and policy paradigms. The insights generated will add to the expanding literature on climate-induced migration by shedding light on gendered vulnerabilities, capacities to ADAPT, and post-migration challenges of those displaced. Additionally, such research would emphasise the urgency to develop gender sensitive migration policies and climate adaptation options in Pakistan. Such knowledge may contribute to national policy frameworks and form the basis for international climate governance tailored to the specific needs of displaced women and marginalized genders. Through this research, we hope to advance gender-inclusive resilience measures which increase the social agency of women in climate governance and adaptation.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to:

Examine how climate-induced migration impacts men and women differently in Pakistan.



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Explore gender-specific vulnerabilities, adaptive strategies, and post-migration challenges faced by displaced individuals, with a particular focus on women.

Investigate the role of gender norms in shaping migration decisions and adaptive responses to climate stressors.

Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs addressing climate-induced migration from a gendered perspective.

### Literature Review

It is now widely understood that climate change is a major factor in human mobility, especially in regions such as South Asia where millions of people are extremely vulnerable to environmental fluctuations. Increased temperatures, extreme events (e.g., floods, droughts, and cyclones) and land degradation have been observed to result in displacement of people who are forced to move in order to find less hazardous living conditions (Adger 2006). As one of the most climate-vulnerable nations, Pakistan has experienced a rise in climate-induced migration, particularly from its rural areas which have been directly affected by floods, droughts, and glacial melt (IDMC, 2021). Under this process, gendered relations are instrumental in both driving and significantly transforming the migration, positioning men and women differentially in relation to pre-existing social inequalities and violence.

The vulnerability of women to climate-induced migration has been well documented. Feminist scholars argue that women are more at risk from environmental hazards due to gendered social roles, gendered access to resources, and gender differences in power and decision-making in disaster risk management and climate change adaptation planning. Women and girls disproportionately educate, plan, prepare food, and care for families, activities that are critical in situations of migration and displacement. Furthermore, the invisibility of women in climate adaptation planning processes exacerbates their vulnerability. Few women participate in such processes, and many parts of the world must obtain offspring husbands. Legal considerations such as land and inheritance rights are unavailable after migration and do not allow women to recover from environmental impacts. Due to cyclones and floods in Pakistan, women have significant barriers in achieving access over land rights or inheritance.

Women have greater vulnerabilities but are also key actors in adaptation processes in migration. Women frequently participate in the informal economy through things like homebased work and leadership in the community to help their families survive in displacement (Blaikie et al., 2014). Social support networks are another important factor with regard to tapping into sources of safety and protection, with sources of support often being kinship and community based for women in their struggles related to migration (Mosse et al., 2017). But their ability to adapt is often impeded by gender discrimination, poverty, and restricted mobility for social and cultural reasons (Schipper 2010).

Perceiving and recognizing tuning to a gender-specific nature of such adaptation strategies helps in shaping migration policies against the backdrop of needs of displaced women.

Women who are refugees experience different challenges at the 'post-migration'. This tends to mean limited access to essential services, including healthcare, education and legal assistance in temporary shelters or urban areas. For instance, Women and girls have an increased exposure to GBV in displacement situations as they are typically living without secure housing and protection (UNHCR, 2020). Women's opportunities for livelihoods, furthermore, are inhibited by cultural restrictions, and gendered divisions of labour, which influences the way in which they participate in economic support of their



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households postmigration (Dasgupta, 2013). The comprehension of these post-migration gendered challenges is an imperative for designing policies that will ensure gender-sensitive disaster relief and reintegration packages for climate migrants.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Vulnerability Theory 14) This paper uses the Vulnerability Theory to analyze different consequences from climate migration for men and women. The theory of vulnerability holds that people's exposure to environmental hazards is determined by varying social, political, and economic forces (Wisner et al., 2004). Further, in the framework of climate migration, vulnerability is not solely induced by environmental factors, but rather is rooted within social systems and gendered power relations that shape one's capacity to cope with and recover from climate impacts (Adger et al., 2003). Using such a framework, this paper analyses how gendered social roles, economic dependency, and inequitable access to resources extend women's vulnerability to migration as a result of climate change and its effects. This perspective helps to reveal how gender injustices are woven into the fabric of climate adaptation, as well as the necessity of gender-sensitive migration policies.

Although climate migration has been extensively studied, most studies focus on the overall impact of climate change on displacement, with little attention being paid to the differentiated impact or gendered effects of migration. Further, studies on Pakistan's climate migration are gender-blind; there has been minimal attention paid to the gendered aspect of climate migration and the manner in which culture influences social patterns of migration. This knowledge gap is particularly significant for women as their particular vulnerabilities to, and coping strategies for, climate-induced displacement in Pakistan are still under-researched. This paper seeks to fill the gap by examining the gendered experiences of climate migration, and highlights how women's social roles and empowerment influence their migration experiences and strategies of survival.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the lived experiences of individuals affected by climate-induced migration in Pakistan. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the gendered dynamics of migration, which quantitative methods may not fully capture. By focusing on personal narratives and the psychosocial impacts of displacement, the research provides insights into the adaptive coping strategies and gender-specific vulnerabilities faced by climate migrants. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are employed to gather rich data on how men and women experience migration differently, emphasizing their unique struggles, coping mechanisms, and gendered roles during displacement. These methods also help explore the gendered power dynamics that influence migration experiences and the adaptive strategies of men and women in response to climate-related stressors.

The study uses a case study design to investigate climate-induced migration in three of Pakistan's most vulnerable provinces: Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan. These regions, heavily affected by extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves, provide diverse case studies that allow for a comparative analysis of migration experiences. The data collection process includes both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be gathered through interviews with individual migrants and focus group discussions with community leaders and groups of migrants. Secondary data, such as government reports, NGO publications, and academic studies, will complement the primary findings. The thematic analysis method will be used to analyze the data,



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identifying key themes related to gendered vulnerabilities, coping mechanisms, and post-migration challenges. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the gendered nature of climate-induced migration in Pakistan.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

#### **Gendered Experiences of Migration**

The evidence shows that climate-induced migration is not a gender-neutral process. Men and women migrate in distinct ways, mainly owing to gender-based roles played in the society. For instance, rural men are often the first to migrate as they look for work and livelihoods in cities, while the women in their families remain to care for the home during the crisis. Women, particularly in rural Pakistan, experience serious barriers when displaced as a result of limited mobility restrictions on resource access, and gender roles that stereotype women as confined to the home. Many women are reliant on men to decide when and where to migrate/flee and when to seek permission to leave, which can slow down the process of evacuating them during a disaster (UNDP, 2019). Moreover, those who do migrate are put at increased risk of exploitation, gender-based violence, and a lack of social support in urban areas (UNHCR, 2020). These results highlight how dominant patriarchal values make themselves felt in migration processes, having a particularly adverse effect on displaced and post-settled women.

#### **Coping Strategies**

Despite these risks, moving women were found to demonstrate considerable resilience; and a sense of agency was prevalent amongst some women to adapt to climate-related displacement. Women frequently lead so-called informal labor markets, and local household resource management and community-based adaptation. For example, in Sindh and Balochistan women have established self-help groups to organize distribution of food, source water and care for children when men from the family were missing. Women also led community mobilization in flood affected areas, from overseeing relief distribution to campaigning for basic needs such as hygiene promotion and maternal health care (Mosse et al., 2017). Women's knowledge of local resources and their roles in leading household and community recovery during climate related displacement are evident in these tactics. However, these efforts have been largely overlooked, and are not commonly in policy or disaster management (Schipper, 2010).

#### **Post-Migration Challenges**

The post migration problems encountered by displaced women in Pakistan are complex. Women in temporary settlements or urban slums are specifically at risk for gender-based violence as well as poor sanitation and privacy (UNHCR, 2020). Displaced women, for instance, encountered challenges in accessing basic services including health, education, and legal aid during the 2022 floods. The lack of female-targeted components in the provision of disaster relief (immediate needs towards sanitary products, maternity care, and women safe spaces) further deteriorates their vulnerability (Gökçearslan et al., 2018). Additionally, displaced women often lack access to formal employment or economic opportunities both because of socioculture restraints and gendered labor markets (Dasgupta, 2013). Persons with the phenotypic sequelae of leprosy are also economically marginalized, which makes them less likely to recover economically and become self-sufficient in post-displacement contexts. Further, stigma and cultural constraints limit the participation of women in decision-making pertaining to resource allocation and resettlement, leading to their neglect in urban environments and camps (Blaikie et al,



### **Gendered Policy Gaps**

This study found that there is no gender-sensitive policy in Pakistan's climate migration response strategy, which is one of its key contributions. Although climate-induced migration is acknowledged as a national-level concern, most policies do not include a sexed analysis in terms of both displacement and adaptation. Current policies such as the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) have to a large extent disregarded the differential impacts on men and women of climate-induced migration, with men and women frequently being perceived as a single entity (UNDP, 2019). That there is no such data available on gender, and gender-responsive planning, compromises how migration and adaptation policies may be effective. In addition, women's rights to land and property are frequently not acknowledged in post-displacement rehabilitation programmes and female-headed households and widows are left without legal recourse or compensation (UNHCR, 2020). In multiple incidents, reparation and relief are only provided to male family heads, thereby disempowering women and making them even more vulnerable (Khan 2017).

### **Discussion**

#### **Implications of Findings**

The results of this study indicate that climate-based migration is a gendered phenomenon, affecting women in specific ways to a greater extent than men. Women hailing from the rural and marginalized communities in Pakistan are susceptible to the risks potentially associated with displacement in the age of the social norms that restrict their mobility, decision-making competency and the access to their resources (Shafqat & Mahmood, 2021). The study under doubles that just as men move away first in most cases in search of livelihood options, with the women staying back to run households, so too is the case in reverse for women if they were to migrate. In urban settings, displaced women experience gender-based violence, economic exploitation, and denial of basic services such as healthcare and education (IOM, 2020). Behind these gender-differentiated vulnerabilities are inbuilt patriarchal norms and gender-biased legal regimes, which have kept women on the margins, restricting their economic opportunities and entitlement to property rights (Agarwal 1992). Thus, the research underscores the need for gender-responsive mechanisms to be integrated in climate migration and disaster governance policies focuses on inclusive resilience and fairer adaptation strategies.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

The study makes several policy suggestions which would help to deal with the gendered nature of climate migration. And such gender-responsive frameworks should be woven into Pakistan's disaster response and migration policies. Existing policies largely fail to address the particular vulnerabilities of women and minority groups in the context of displacement from climate impacts. Pressing legal reforms securing women's access to land, property and compensation post-displacement are needed. "These reforms will help women-headed and widow households by restoring their control over resources and furthering their economic security (Qureshi & Saleem, 2020). 42 Second, social protection programs (e.g., targeted cash/school grants/ mobile health and or schooling) need to be adapted to the specific needs of displaced women and children to prevent exclusion from necessary services (Le Masson et al., 2019). Moreover, they should be



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actively engaged in climate governance and disaster management as decision-making power is an essential condition for the effectiveness and justice of climate adaptation (IOM, 2020).

### Limitations of the Study

Although the results of this study help to illuminate the gendered aspect of climate-change-related migration, there are several limitations. It uses secondary information and is applicable to the provinces of Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan in Pakistan only, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other areas of the country or to areas with different climate-induced migration pattern. Further, there is a paucity of gender-specific data on climate migration in Pakistan that limits the full understanding of the gendered consequences of climate change. In addition to the fragmented approach towards migration, the absence of harmonization between various wings of the state such as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the Ministry of Climate Change also hampers the formulation of coherent and gender-sensitive policies (Sajjad & Malik, 2023). Future efforts should involve broader regional scales and gender disaggregated data to inform the policy making and inclusive strategies related to the climate migration.

### Conclusion

This study underscores that climate-induced migration in Pakistan is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. It reveals that women experience climate migration in ways that differ from men, primarily due to entrenched gender roles and socioeconomic inequalities. While men often migrate in search of employment, women frequently remain behind to manage households and farms under increasingly precarious conditions. However, female migrants, whether they migrate alone or with family, are confronted with heightened risks, including exploitation, gender-based violence, and limited access to resources. Despite these challenges, women exhibit significant resilience and agency through community networks, small-scale entrepreneurship, and local advocacy. The findings emphasize the need to address these gendered vulnerabilities in climate migration policies, particularly the need for gender-sensitive frameworks that prioritize the needs of displaced women and those left behind.

The research highlights the urgent need for comprehensive gender-sensitive approaches in addressing climate-induced migration. Gender roles significantly influence how migration is experienced and managed, and therefore, policies must empower women by ensuring their participation in decision-making processes. Women's involvement is essential not only for addressing immediate **humanitarian needs** but also for leading **adaptation strategies**. Policies should focus on **empowering women**, ensuring that they have the **right to land, property, and access to compensation** after displacement, and enabling them to be active participants in shaping migration and adaptation strategies. By doing so, Pakistan can build more **inclusive and resilient communities** capable of withstanding climate impacts.

The findings of this study call on **policymakers, NGOs, and international stakeholders** to **incorporate gender considerations** into all **climate migration frameworks**. There is an urgent need to adopt **gender-responsive strategies** that address the **specific needs of women**, particularly in relation to **legal rights, access to resources, and protection from gender-based violence**. Collecting **gender-disaggregated data** and ensuring **women's participation** at all levels of **climate governance** are critical steps in ensuring that the impacts of climate-induced migration are equitably addressed. Through **inclusive policies**, the international community and national governments can ensure **more**



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**equitable and resilient outcomes**, empowering both **migrants** and **host communities** to adapt effectively to the challenges of climate change.

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