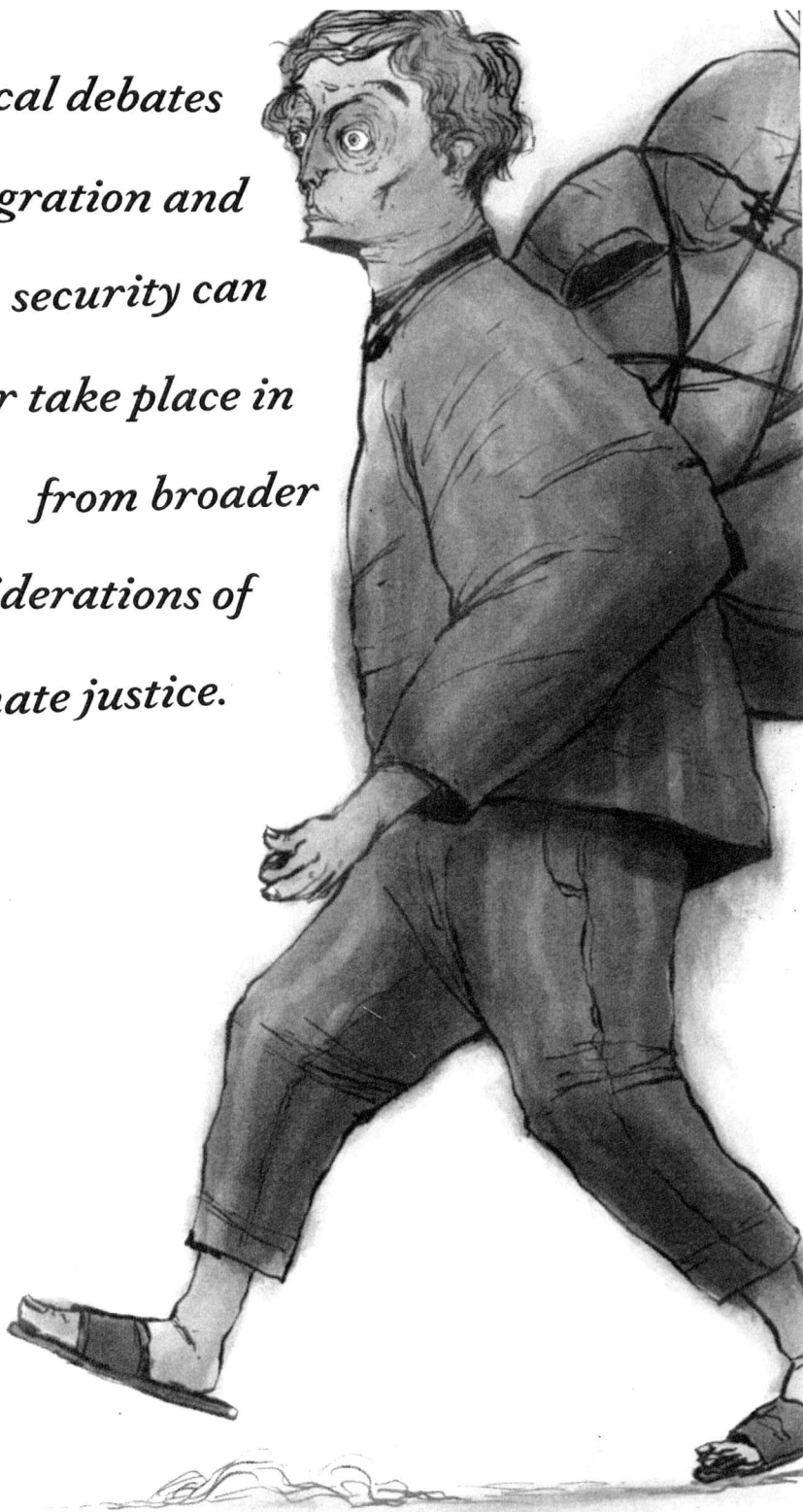


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MIGRATION FLOWS

# Open the Borders!

## Welcoming Climate Refugees

THE RULES OF BORDER  
CONTROL WILL NEED TO BE  
REWRITTEN TO MAKE  
MIGRATION AN OPTION  
FOR THOSE FLEEING THE  
CONSEQUENCES OF  
CLIMATE DESTABILIZATION.

**E**very minute, twenty-five people are displaced somewhere in the world — a fourfold increase compared to ten years ago. At the same time, international borders are becoming more and more difficult to cross for the undesired, the persecuted and the poor.

Recent developments in Europe and North America highlight the growing centrality of migration to the political debates and social struggles of the early twenty-first century. In June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union following a campaign marked by fierce anti-immigration rhetoric. In November that year, Donald Trump won the US presidential elections while dog-whistling white supremacists and boasting of the “great wall” he was going to build at the Mexican border. These developments were accompanied by a surge in support for right-wing nationalist parties across Europe, right off the back of a major “refugee crisis” that saw over 2.3 million people enter Europe irregularly, 80 percent of them arriving from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan — all countries suffering ongoing conflict and political instability. According to UNHCR, an unprecedented 65.6 million people worldwide have now been forcibly displaced from their homes.



APRIL HUMBLE

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Open the Borders!

Illustration by  
**Kaan Bağcı**

*Taken together, militarized borders  
and climate change  
make for a toxic combination,  
especially in the Global South,  
where local populations often  
face the most serious social, economic  
and political  
obstacles to climate adaptation.*

The way the term "refugee crisis" has been used in recent years implies a crisis for Europe and the West. The real crisis, however, is faced by those who have been forced to leave everything they have ever known. Climate change is the ultimate game changer in this respect. In extreme times, the rules of the game — including the rules of international migration — will need to be rewritten. This cannot wait for a few years or decades down the line. By then, some of the most dangerous forces of climate destabilization will already have been locked in. We must act on this today, lest we lose millions of fellow human beings to the global threat of climate change, and to the narrow-minded and xenophobic views of world leaders on who has the right to move and who doesn't. ★

One factor that is often left out of these political debates, however, is the role played by climate change as an amplifier of push factors behind human migration everywhere. This is particularly true in areas where political, economic and social forces diminish the capacity for adaptation. Climate change will undermine many countries' ability to support their respective populations, pushing up migration rates across the globe. In a rapidly warming world, the rules of border control clearly need to be rewritten to make migration an option for those fleeing the consequences of climate destabilization in their home countries.

## BORDER SECURITY

Following 9/11, a dangerous love affair blossomed between Western leaders and the notion of border security, against the backdrop of a radical escalation in the Global War on Terror. Today, a decade and a half later, the official response to increased global migration flows is entrenching this narrative — of migrants as a threat to Western security, society and culture, and of border security as the only possible answer — in the minds of millions.

In Europe, the recent "refugee crisis" saw the bloc rapidly backtrack on its long-standing pledge to safeguard people fleeing war and persecution worldwide. Barbed wire fences were erected and war ships deployed. In just over a year, security and control had been heightened or reintroduced at more than twenty national borders. The European Union's contentious agreement with Turkey appointed President Erdoğan as the *de facto* gatekeeper of Fortress Europe, while absolving the EU of any responsibility towards the migrants and refugees trying to scale its walls.

This disregard for the rights of refugees is by no means limited to Europe. Between 2012 and 2015, for instance, more than 120,000 Rohingya boarded ships in an attempt to flee religious persecution in Myanmar. Thousands were turned away by neighboring states as they drifted at sea, with no country wanting to claim responsibility for their plight. From those suffering abuse, torture and murder at the hands of border guards at the Turkish-Syrian border or the Indian-Bangladeshi border, to the Australian government putting up posters in the cities of South-East Asia warning migrants that they are not welcome, abuse and oppression of migrant populations is increasing across the globe.

## REWRITING THE RULES

Clearly, then, political debates over migration and border security can no longer take place in isolation from broader considerations of climate justice. Climate change will have the greatest impact on some of the world's most vulnerable populations, gravely affecting their ability to survive and prosper. With this in mind, we should be fighting for safe cross-border passage as a serious coping mechanism for those living in areas where the capacity for adaptation is particularly low.

Social movements will have an important role to play in this respect. Climate-induced migration has only become an international issue of concern in recent years because of the persistent work of social justice activists and non-governmental groups. Movements mobilizing around refugee rights, border security and climate justice will now need to join forces and exert strong pressure from below to force world leaders to open borders, rather than closing them. Of course, taking radical steps to limit global carbon emissions will be the single most important contribution to easing the pressures on vulnerable populations, but we must be clear that there *will* be further increases in international migration, and that our struggles must be geared towards enabling orderly resettlement wherever necessary.

temperatures and water scarcity. Agriculture makes up a large share of economic output, employment and local food security, and is particularly sensitive to temperature increases and droughts. This will have huge knock-on effects on the Palestinian people, whose socio-economic resilience has already been battered by decades of occupation and conflict. Due to the severe restrictions on popular movement in the area, seasonal migration is no longer a viable coping mechanism.

All of this comes at a high social and economic cost for vulnerable populations. The benefits of cross-border migration as a coping strategy have historically been very important. Moving across borders allows families to send one or two members abroad to earn money elsewhere and send it back in remittances, meaning the rest of the family can stay put. This strongly mitigates crisis points, preventing the need for entire families and communities to leave hearth and home behind. Remittances from migrant workers amount to three times the amount of global aid and generally act as a significant poverty alleviator worldwide. Limiting this capacity in favor of an emphasis on adaptation *in situ* is likely to further aggravate existing pressures on many fragile countries.

Today, there are over seventy securitized borders in the world — five times as many as 25 years ago. Beside Fortress Europe, militarized border security is becoming increasingly common across North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Much of this is part of a broader strategic undertaking by the Western countries to prevent migration flows from reaching their borders. The EU, for instance, has programs of “externalization” — logistically supporting third countries to secure its external borders — from Africa to China to the Caribbean, while Australia has similar programs in Asia and Oceania. The US Army has trained soldiers in border security in over 100 countries, and many leaders in other regions — particularly the Middle East and South Asia — are desperate to get in on the game.

## NO WAY OUT

In many parts of the world where social insecurity, political oppression and economic fragility already lace the foundations of society, the disruptive effects of climate change are also starting to take their toll. People's abilities

to survive and prosper are being affected, forcing them to flee their homes and give up on their traditional means of existence. This kind of climate-related migration is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon. From Sub-Saharan Africa to Alaska, from the Andes to the Himalayas, people are already on the move due to changes in temperatures and weather patterns. In 2016, 23 million people were forced to migrate following weather-related natural disasters. That year, the ratio of people fleeing environmental disasters to people fleeing violent conflict was 3:1.

Currently, no international framework exists that is anywhere close to encapsulating all the needs and protecting all the rights of those migrating in a context of climate change. Nor does it look likely that such a framework will be developed any time soon. Taken together, militarized borders and climate change therefore make for a toxic combination, especially in the Global South, where local populations often face the most serious social, economic and political obstacles to climate adaptation.

One striking example of these developments is Pakistan, where droughts, heat waves and floods are becoming an increasingly serious problem. In 2010, a single episode of flash and riverine floods killed 2,000 people and displaced approximately 20 million. Karachi, the country's economic backbone, which receives one million migrants a year in search of a feasible livelihood, is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels and storm surges. If this city is destabilized as a result of climate change, there are fears that there will be profound effects for the entire country, where lagging infrastructure and socio-economic vulnerability greatly limit the options for adaptation.

At the same time, the possibilities for cross-border migration from vulnerable Pakistan are also severely constrained. The India-Pakistan border fence is 1,958 kilometers long, and there are plans to close the entirety of the border by the end of 2018. Iran is currently reinforcing an ineffective old border barrier, and at the highly militarized border with Afghanistan, Pakistan recently launched its first modern bor-

der management system. As the sixth most populous country in the world, the citizens of Pakistan face growing threats under climate change. Unless governments work to recognize cross-border migration as an essential coping mechanism and bilateral plans are created to ensure that this is a safe option, many in Pakistan will face a pressure cooker scenario with literally no way out.

## FEELING THE HEAT

Populations across West and North Africa are already feeling the heat as well. Predictions have suggested that average temperatures in the Sahel could increase by as much as 5 degrees by 2050, with the population expected to grow threefold — from 100 million to a whopping 300 million — within the same timeframe. Already suffering from the political crackdown on the Arab Spring and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab, the region is predicted to suffer huge levels of displacement as a result of climate change-induced desertification and water loss.

The EU's policy of border externalization, meanwhile, is already posing serious challenges to many Sub-Saharan migrants traveling towards the North African countries, hoping to eventually reach European shores. Not only has the Libyan-Italian crossing become the most dangerous in the world — with the odds of dying en route as high as one in 23 — but in response to the EU's demands to stem the flow of migrants, countries such as Libya and Morocco have been rounding up migrants en masse and dumping them in the desert.

Regions where populations are hemmed in by neighboring oppressors will suffer particularly heavily. Take Palestine, for instance, where climate change is believed to cause rising