
**Summary of the Workshop on Climate Change and Migration in Mountain Areas
May 3rd-4th 2012, University of Sussex, Centre for Migration Research, Brighton (UK)**

Organisers: University of Sussex (UK) [Richard Black] and University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland) [Etienne Piguet]. This meeting is supported by the Cost Action IS1101 Climate Change and Migration: Knowledge, Law and Policy, and Theory, and by the IGU Commission on Population Geography.

Mountain regions are identified as one of the three most 'vulnerable' areas in regards to global environmental change, showing that the drivers of migration in mountain regions are numerous and closely interlinked. Migration is already a typical diversification strategy in mountain areas to reduce vulnerability to environmental and non-environmental risks. As a result, mountain areas have experienced net outmigration at least over the last 40 years on every continent except North America.

Despite the vulnerability of mountain areas, the lack of empirical studies or data establishing when and why migration flows develop, and to what extent they have consequences for resilience and adaptation to environmental change are largely unknown. Besides, one of the main issues of the workshop was to figure out whether it was possible to justify the creation of a specific research agenda focused on those regions. Therefore, it was necessary to establish on the one hand that mountain areas were sharing enough common features with each other, and on the other hand that they were different enough from other vulnerable regions.

The workshop brought together both senior and junior scholars with an interest in migration and/or climate change in mountain areas and focused on two of the world's major mountain ranges: the Himalayas (Nepal) and the Andes (Bolivia, Peru and Guatemala).

Outcomes

The workshop helped to evaluate the existing knowledge on the migration-environment nexus in mountain areas, focusing on findings from empirical studies. It confirmed that the physical and economical marginality resulting from the frequent exposure to extreme temperatures, the distance from centres of economic wealth and the political power have contributed to substantial outmigration from most mountain areas over the last four decades. It also showed that mountains are particularly vulnerable to climate change, which can lead to temperature rise, higher exposure to extreme events, increased sensitivity of glaciers, and serious consequences for biodiversity; mountains regions might therefore be particularly vulnerable to climate-related migration.

In future studies, the priority should be to *better identify the role of environmental factors* in past, current, and future migrations in mountain areas. In addition, considering that mountain areas are characterised by long term migratory processes, another set of questions may be raised:

- Does this existing migration hold out a potential for insurance against climate related risk? What makes *migration work as a risk mitigation strategy*? Is a climate resilient mountain community a more mobile one, or one with particular types of mobility options?
- In contrast to the previous focus on mobility as a risk mitigation strategy, the *immobility of some people should also be highlighted*. Are there parts of mountains – remote locations or mountain cities (e.g. La Paz, El Alto, Lima, Quito, Kathmandu, etc.) – where people are especially vulnerable to climate change because they are trapped?

Next Steps

Given this set of open questions, it seems important to pursue the development of a mountain-specific research agenda to better understand the likely relationship between migration and climate change in affected regions. Such a research agenda should incorporate a strong comparative focus, in order to explore generalizable policy priorities across mountains, question assumptions, and characteristics of locally and regionally-based mountain research.