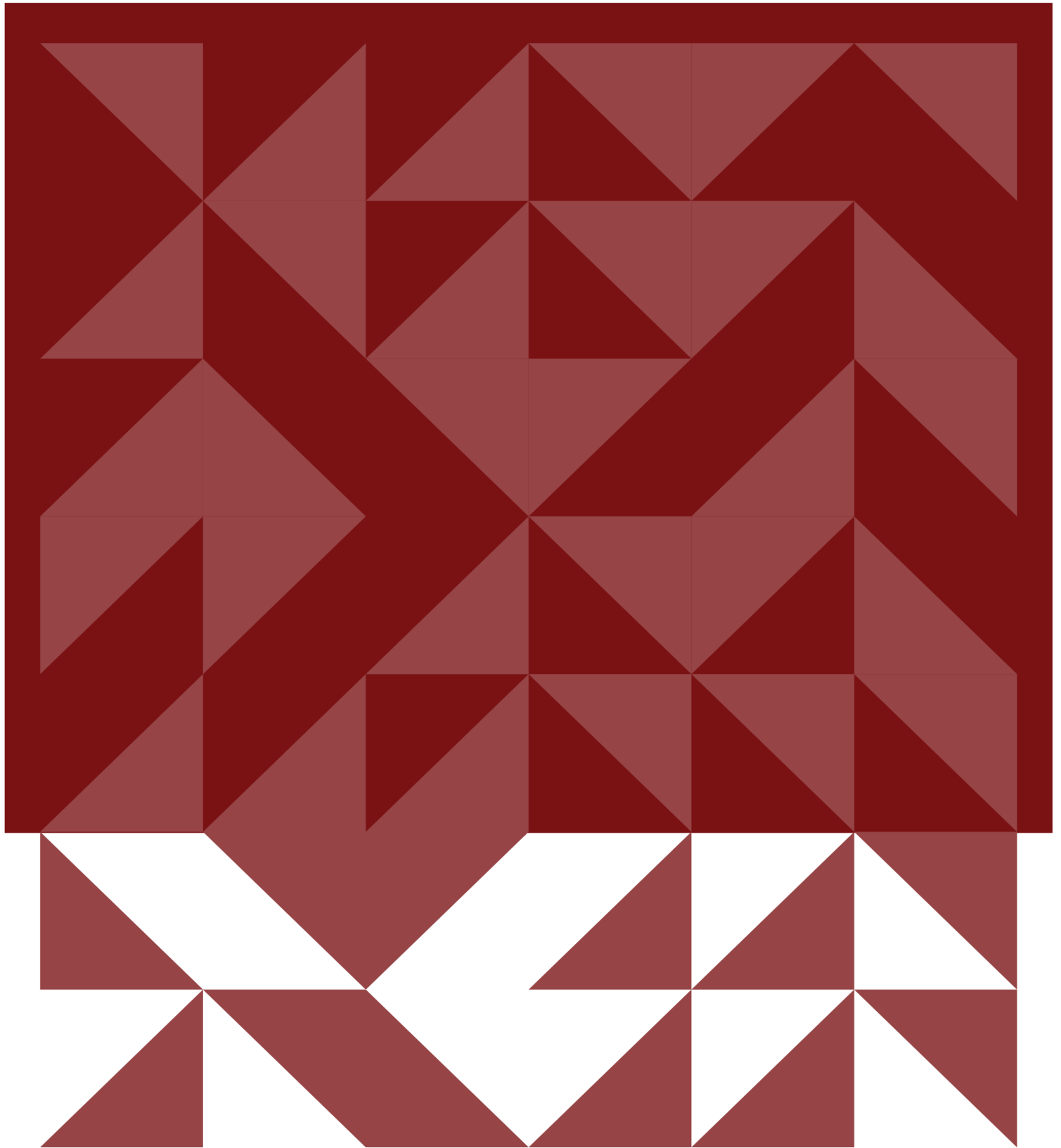




What if: Climate Migration Destabilizes North Africa and Southern Europe?

November 2025





Climate migration is becoming an increasingly pressing issue, imposing geopolitical and humanitarian challenges on countries that receive migrants at all stages. According to a report by the World Bank, climate migration is expected to force approximately 143 million people in the Global South to migrate by 2050. Natural disasters, including extreme heatwaves, droughts, insufficient crops, and flooding, have been imposing severe risks for many countries, particularly third-world countries. These countries are vulnerable to these risks due to their lack of services and financial distress, leaving most of the population living below the poverty line. Under these hardships, climate migration is spiking to northern countries where people seek better living conditions.

North Africa, geographically connecting the Global South to Europe, is a strategic transit location for migrants. While Southern Europe, linking migrants to the Global North, is an important entry point for those seeking better opportunity. Hence, the climate migration pressure on these regions creates conditions for destabilisation across both sides of the Mediterranean.

With the high wave of irregular migration, 'Destination' states, where migrants seek to settle in, often engage with the 'Transit' states, which are "any country through which a migrant passes after fleeing their country of origin, irrespective of their initial plans or actual actions within that country", in what is called 'migration diplomacy'. This strategy involves destination states offering visa incentives and investment opportunities in exchange for the transit state adopting containment measures for irregular migrants coming from their countries and strengthening control over the border. Likewise, destination countries foster economic and investment aid to 'origin' countries to tackle the root causes of the migration problem.

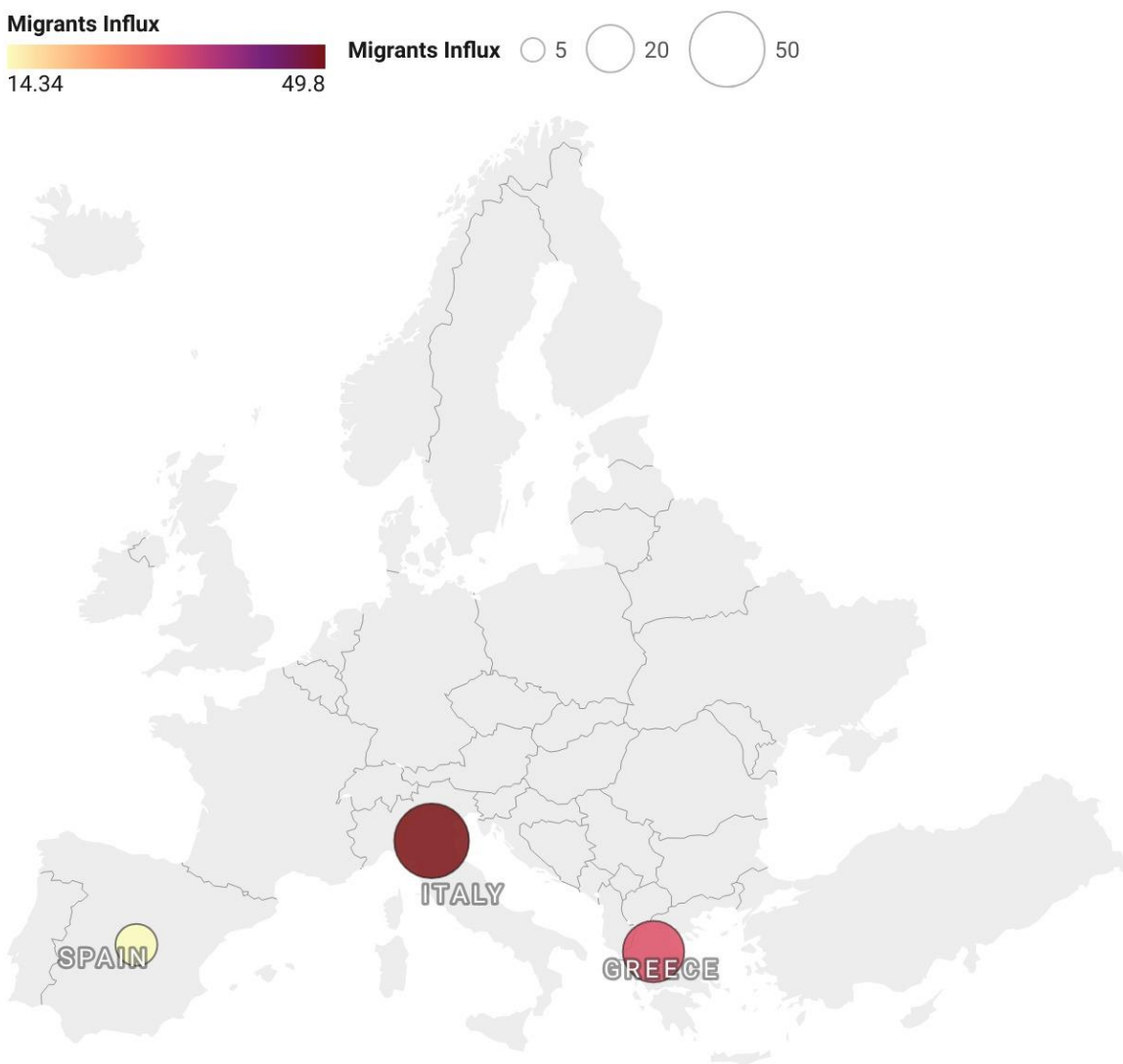
Although such diplomatic techniques could be successful sometimes, in many cases, they have been proven to be inadequate in many situations. As climate irregularities increase, climate-induced migration is expected to rise, and such methods have a high probability of their effectiveness diminishing completely, impelling destination countries to come up with other competent measures.

The evidence shows a high probability of devastating effects in both transit and entry states. For transit states, they might face more strain on their financial resources than what they currently incorporate, and at the same time, security threats could escalate. Regarding entry states, economic pressure, political tension, and intensified cultural polarisation might empower far-right parties, changing the structure of the European Union. So, climate migration could become a huge threat to the regional stability in both transit and entry states without effective and coordinated measures.



This paper explores the destabilising potential of climate-induced migration on transit North African states and Southern European entry states. It is divided into four sections: climate regression, effects on transit states, effects on entry states, and proposed solutions. The paper addresses the economic, political, and security implications, and suggest the necessity for tailored measures suitable for affected countries. The paper concludes that the continuous pace of climate migration will have destabilizing consequences on both transit and entry hubs. Besides resilience and early warning solutions, the EU has to provide attractive incentives for North Africa in order to limit the spill-overs on its borders. Such proposals shouldn't be detached from the realities of African states and better align with the economic and security needs of these countries.

Migrants Influx via Med Route to Europe in 2025



According to the Operational Data Portal When Accessed on September 30, 2025.

Source: The Operational Data Portal



Interlink between Climate Regression, Conflicts and Migration

Climate change refers to “long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns.” It indulges several indicators ranging from temperature rise and floods to water scarcity and failed crops. Climate change has affected the African continent greatly, where the continent is experiencing a rise in temperature more than the global average, along with droughts and flooding, causing loss of lives and economic casualties. Forecasts suggest that without the implementation of resilience measures, by the year 2030, around 118 million people living in extreme poverty in Africa will face threats from drought, flooding, and extreme heat, ultimately straining efforts to grow these countries' economies.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region by climate irregularities. Droughts are occurring more frequently with projections indicating that they will worsen, particularly in Central and Southern Africa. Droughts combined with high temperatures will damage crop yields and overall harvesting, leading to a decline in agriculture, a sector on where these areas are highly dependent. Agricultural decline makes the population vulnerable to famine, malnutrition, and diseases, inducing large-scale migration and forced displacement.

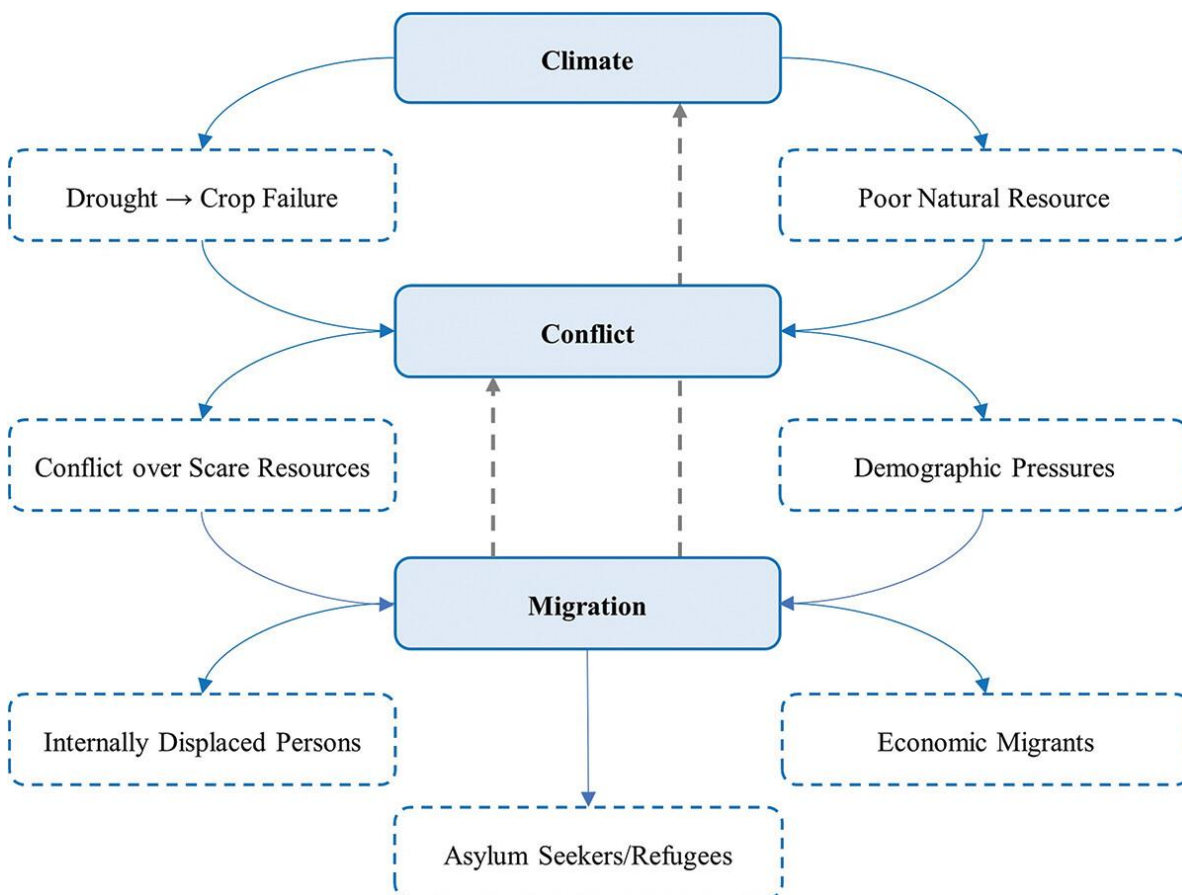
The climate change phenomenon, including high temperature, rise of sea levels, water scarcity, and agricultural decline, is worsening the livelihood in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel, driving a huge influx of northward displacements. Droughts, floods, and heatwaves cause crop failure in vulnerable areas and resources scarcity, affecting Africa's vulnerable and fragile areas, especially Sub-Saharan Africa. These areas are characterized by poverty, reliance mainly on rainfall for agriculture, inequality in resource distribution, and weak governments. So, when extreme environmental conditions threaten food security and the livelihoods, it induces fights over the scare yet vital resources, like land, water, and grass for grazing cattle.

Accordingly, these areas witness a rise in violent conflicts between farmers, fishermen, and herder communities over limited resources. Additionally, extremist groups exploit competition over scarce resources, driven by climate degradation, to recruit people and expand their influence, contributing to the destabilization of these areas. Some scientific findings project that by 2030, armed conflicts driven by rising temperatures will increase by 54%.



Under such security threats, people are forced to migrate, whether internally or externally. If migrants are displaced in another area within their country, they put more pressure on the destination area's resources, and are faced with the same cycle of competition over resources. This can push many of them to migrate toward the Global North. Hence, influx of migrants can come into two forms: direct from the conflicted area or as a second phase of internal displacement.

Countries in North Africa and Southern Europe are deeply affected by this direction of migration and its repercussions, as they serve as transit and entry points to reach the rest of Europe. Climate migration imposes threats to the border security of these countries, exert a burden on their financial resources, and affect the overall demographic conditions.



Source: Henrico, Ivan, and Bohumil Doboš. 2024. "Shifting Sands: The Geopolitical Impact of Climate Change on Africa's Resource Conflicts." *South African Geographical Journal*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2024.2441116>



With the assumption that the pace of climate degradation would continue and its security and economic consequences increase, more of the population in the affected areas might seek migration to the Global North for survival and better living conditions. As such, North African and Southern European countries will face a massive influx of climate migration, resulting in escalating pressure on these states and raising friction within and between transit, entry, and destination countries. Primary effects will be a spike in irregular sea crossings, economic and security hardships, entry states moving to form a stronger bilateral accord with transit states, accompanied by a backlash in the EU over its migration policies, and a rise in the popularity of the far-right in Europe, promoting anti-migration policies.

Potential Implications on North Africa and Southern Europe

The destabilising potential of climate-induced migration is most visible in the interconnected effects on transit states in North Africa and entry states in Southern Europe. Transit states face the dual burden of controlling irregular immigration and its spill-over, including smuggling and trafficking crimes, strain on resources, and terrorist groups taking advantage of this flow of migration. Entry states, on the other hand, deal with political polarisation, resource strains, and social fragmentation as irregular migrants increase.

The Route of Migration to The EU





A. Effects on Transit States

North African transit states, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, are located in a pivotal area linking migrants from South to North, placing a wide range of economic, social, and security challenges on these countries. The flow of migration is expected to put more pressure on the countries' economic resources, further strengthen violent smuggling networks, and strain the relations with European destination states.

First, migrants who are forced to stay temporarily in transit states, due to unexpected financial struggles, would exert pressure on the already-overloaded social services, such as housing, education, and healthcare. Consequently, the increased demand compared to limited local resources would be a significant economic challenge to the transit states. Second, the increased climate-induced migration would drive up the cost of border protection with guards and surveillance disproportionately to the country's financial situation. For economically challenged countries, such measures will be expensive, straining the governments' financial resources. The question of the economic capabilities of such states to afford the cost of implementing these measures remains uncertain.

Regarding social cohesion and public safety, concerns have been raised about the increase of neighbourhoods that are densely populated by sub-Saharan migrants, as well as camps housing homeless people. This situation causes increased dissatisfaction from locals who believe that changes in their area harm its social structure and safety, leading to amplified tensions between migrants and locals. Accordingly, as climate change continues to drive increased migration and migrants settle temporarily in these countries, violence between migrants and locals might be the main feature, destabilising local communities.

In addition, the issue poses several threats to the border security of the transit states; smuggling networks and terrorist activities are considered the immediate risks inflicted by the migration process. Transit states – Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria – already experience deep grievances combating border crimes, imposing strains on their economy. Border security is impeded by corruption and underpaid border guards, where bribery facilitates the smugglers' movement. Moreover, smugglers are now armed, and terrorist groups are engaging in the smuggling process. Transit states are fighting these threats but are constrained by limited resources, political rivalry, and fragmentation.



Looking into the future, illicit activities, including weapons and illegal substances, might prevail and become more violent, and not being able to combat such smuggling could put national governments at risk, especially with fragile governments such as that of Libya. Similarly, the likelihood of terrorism widening and threatening the entire North African countries, particularly amid the deteriorating economic and living conditions of the nationals, especially those living in the borderlands. Fragile governments won't be able to counter the growing numbers of militants and terrorist groups, as they are increasing in their numbers and capacity, while these governments are burdened with financial and stability constraints.

Furthermore, the huge influx of climate migrants might create friction between transit states and their European counterparts. Transit states could weaponize migrants for political gains or exert pressure on a specific issue. The bilateral relations between the transit states and the European states witnessed strains on several occasions, and the probability of increasing the rate of climate migrants; these political implications could reach deeper levels. For instance, Morocco has repeatedly used the threat of loosening border controls to pressure Spain and the EU in disputes over Western Sahara in 2016 and 2021, for example, causing a massive border crossing of migrants into Spain.

B. Effects on Entry States

Southern European entry states, principally Italy, Spain, and Greece, bear the immediate burden of climate migration. Positioned on the frontline of irregular arrivals, they are challenged by profound economic, political, security, and cultural implications. European borders witness a flow of maritime border crossings primarily from the Mediterranean and Northwest Africa; by the end of June 2025, a total of 66,155 migrants arriving via sea route were recorded since the beginning of the year, according to UNHCR.

These dynamics reverberate beyond their borders, shaping the trajectory of the entire European Union (EU). If Southern European states are overwhelmed by arrivals of irregular migrants and the EU fails to agree on burden-sharing, then national governments might shift their coordination toward ad hoc bilateral deals with Transit states, instead of multilateralism with the EU. Trust within the European countries will most likely diminish around migration policies and securitisation of borders, causing erosion of EU cohesion on migration policy.



On the political landscape, the rise of far-right popularity will be inevitable, as parties that focus on anti-immigration policies will lead all electoral programmes. The populist right wing will have severe consequences on restrictions of civil and political liberties, as well as undermining checks and balances. The shift in the voters' political affiliation toward far-right parties would flip the electoral results, causing changes in governance and democratic institutions. Forecasts indicate the disillusionment of the public on immigration issues and its effects on governing leftist parties in future elections.

Even if there was no electoral success for nationalist parties, their presence in the legislative branch would overshadow the liberal governments, as they are accumulating more seats than they used to in previous elections. For instance, Italy, as an entry state, Brothers of Italy (Fdi), led by Giorgia Meloni, won 25.99% of the votes in the 2022 Parliamentary elections compared to their 4.4% vote share in 2018. While Germany, as a destination state, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 20.8% of the votes in the 2025 Federal elections compared to 10.4% vote share in 2021. This pattern is projected to continue with the rest of the entry and destination countries, such as Spain, Greece, and the Netherlands, with the potential to restrict migration from the Global South. The increasing vote share for such parties will be an indicator for winning more seats in the European parliament, which will hold severe changes in the direction of EU policies toward migration.

The cultural polarisation intersects with the political aspect, as the populist right-wing often paints a picture of migrants as a threat to traditions and customs, as well as frames them as the cause of unemployment, low wages, and crimes. In the same sense, cultural polarisation also undermines democratic resilience. As societies become more divided over migration, governments adopt restrictive measures to appease anti-immigrant electorates, curtailing civil liberties and eroding human rights protections. Continuous flow of climate migrants could intensify political and cultural polarisation both within Southern European countries and across the entire European continent, leading to the electoral success of the far-right parties throughout Europe and their implications on democratic governance.

Identity politics and nationalism will be the main guide for Europe under the far right, constraining the entire migration system. The world is now witnessing an increasingly polarised political landscape in Europe, and due to the pressuring unresolved issue of climate migration, far-right nationalist parties will dominate governments and/or parliaments in Europe. Similarly, hostility in proving each side's point will prevail, as seen in the latest U.K. demonstrations between the rightist anti-immigrant stance and the leftist counter-stance. The same anti-immigration environment is occurring in other European countries. Accordingly, climate migration could accelerate the widespread anti-immigration stance across Europe.



Climate migration imposes similar economic and security implications on the entry states. Southern countries carry the financial burden of managing the influx of illegal migrants and the terrorism associated with irregular migration. Increasing the number of trained border control guards and relevant marine surveillance, patrol vessels and sensors impose cost burdens on these states. Similarly, organised crime groups and human trafficking groups engage in the process of smuggling migrants from North Africa to Southern Europe, striking security threats in these countries. Moreover, routes used by migrants and asylum seekers could be used by terrorist groups and serve as a low-cost channel for moving terrorist operations.

What Can Be Done?

The destabilising potential of climate migration requires policy responses that address both immediate pressures and long-term structural drivers. Several initiatives have been introduced to address support for migration driven by climate change; for instance, the Nansen Initiative, which has since evolved into the Platform for Disaster Displacement. This initiative specifically addresses the protection needs of people displaced across borders by natural disasters, filling a critical gap in international protection mechanisms. Nevertheless, reactive, ad hoc measures have proven insufficient; policymakers need comprehensive strategies that combine humanitarian responsibility with political and security resilience. The following proposed options outline a way forward.

1. Strengthening Resilience in Transit States

Funding resilience programmes tailored for the needs of countries in the global south. It is important to tackle lingering problems that vary from one area to another. The European Union could redirect the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), set for the period 2021-2027, and strategies for the remaining two years to incorporate the education and training programmes in the job market realities in each country. Nationals from these countries should be consulted by the AMIF team, as lessons learnt show that destination states' criteria and needs are not applicable to the Global South's needs. Eurocentrism-based policies targeting irregular migration from Third World countries are problematic in meeting the demands and needs of these countries. The unsuccessful attempt to tackle nationals' economic and health needs in these countries will continue to trigger migration, and the AMIF might not be able to solve the root cause of the problem.



In case of emergencies, the Thematic Facility would be directed toward the humanitarian catastrophes on the borders between transit and entry states. This might require high flexibility and coordination with local authorities. Auditors and indicators will be beneficial to track the progress and effectiveness of the emergency facilities provided by the AMIF. Coordination with countries of origin and transit local authorities would benefit in estimating the economic needs driven by worsening climate conditions, numbers of illegal migrants, and challenges in managing migration flow. Civil society organisations would strengthen coordination between local authorities in origin and transit states with entry and destination states' authorities. Moreover, AMIF investments directed toward origin and transit states should be of a long-term nature to maintain sustainability in tackling the irregular migration causes: meeting nationals' economic needs and limiting the spill-overs of climate haphazardness.

2. Redefining Migration Diplomacy

Revisiting migration diplomacy is necessary. Destination countries will be increasingly compelled to offer more attractive economic, political, and social incentives to transit states, directing investments toward areas of greatest need. These incentives should be tailored to each country's specific context and designed to help manage migrant flows within their borders. In parallel, destination hubs could promote institutionalised cooperation by further integrating migration management into broader regional frameworks, such as the African Union (AU) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), encouraging these bodies to take on more active roles than they already have in coordinated responses. Their deeper understanding of the region's dynamics can help steer counter-migration policies in a more effective and context-sensitive direction.

3. Preparing for Long-Term Climate Proactive Measures

Policymakers must acknowledge that climate migration is not a temporary crisis but a structural challenge. Preventive action is as critical as reactive management. Firstly, North African countries could adopt pre-emptive measures by establishing essential regional institutions that encourage collaboration and collective measures to adapt to climate challenges. It could include research and initiatives to complement resource shortages due to climate change. Secondly, EU could expand funding for adaptation projects in vulnerable regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Technical and financial assistance could target minimising greenhouse and toxic gas emissions, enhancing the productivity of harvests and breeds, diversifying them, and optimising water use. Funding such projects could lessen the impact of climate deterioration and the urge to migrate from the origin country.



Lastly, employ early warning systems and pre-emptive models to anticipate probable impacts of climate-related migration and plan for the needed strategies to control the influx of migrants, along with preparing necessary services to accommodate the number of migrants coming without harming the interests of the locals of the transit-entry countries.

In conclusion, climate change affects the most fragile areas around the world, and Sub-Saharan Africa is heavily impacted. Conflicts driven by scarce resources and crop failure due to weather irregularities push individuals to migrate for a better life. Climate migration is becoming an increasingly pressing issue, bringing a destabilizing impact on North African and Southern European states.

Being the hub for Global South migrants, these North African regions are going to be burdened with more threats to their borders by militias and criminals. Moreover, monetary pressure will grow on these countries to protect their borders and provide already-limited local services. Lastly, increased tensions between locals and migrants might further destabilize the country's social cohesion. Similarly, financial and security implications will be distressing on the entry states, and they might direct their efforts in coordinating with the transit states to mitigate the migration problem instead of coordinating with the EU, which affects the overall cohesion of the Union. Furthermore, estimated changes in the EU dynamics might be reflected in the rise of the far-right parties on both national and Union levels, relying mainly on an anti-immigration agenda.

The common objective for transit, entry, and destination states is to limit the presence of irregular migrants within their territories. Hence, initiatives must be effective and efficient in tackling climate-induced migration. First, resilience programs offered by destination states should be tailored for the needs of the origin countries and incorporate local civil society organizations to address the right economic, security, and health concerns. Second, the EU needs to reshape its migration diplomacy and offer attractive programs for transit states in the financial and development sectors. Third, long-term proactive programs will further help the case, such as pre-emptive measures for climate change, funds directed toward alternative agriculture projects that adapt to weather irregularities, and early warning systems to predict and act in accordance.



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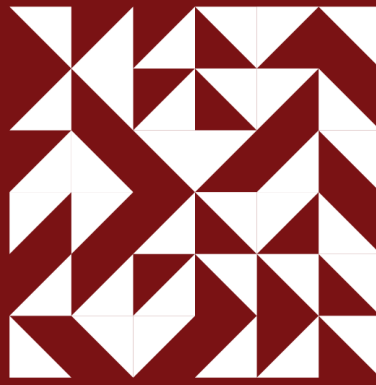
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