

1. Migration fuelled by Pollution crisis? Climate Change

Amplifying Vulnerabilities

Context:

- A recent survey indicated that the choice to migrate due to pollution has seen an increase from 35% in last year's survey, with this being dependent upon the ability to find job opportunities elsewhere.

Migration due to Pollution:

- Examining human mobility in response to changes in air pollution is a complex task because there are economic benefits of living in big cities—more job opportunities, higher pay, better medical and education facilities, superior infrastructure, etc—which make them susceptible to higher pollution.
- These factors actually cause massive flows of in-migration into such areas, where economic prosperity is a trade-off against the harms of pollution.
- However, in the face of increasingly toxic environments, people have decided that the economic opportunities presented by polluted cities are not worth the cost to their health and their children's future.
- This cluster of **“pollution refugees” or “air pollution migrants” has been growing steadily, temporarily or sometimes even permanently**, resettling in places with a better quality of air and life.
- Research across the world has demonstrated that air pollution, and environmental degradation has a significant impact on the inflows and outflows of migration.
- **China is a notable example** in this context, where following high-profile global coverage of the 2013 “airpocalypse”, **Beijing declared a “war on pollution”**.

Effects of Climate Change:

- When anthropogenic disasters are assessed in the larger context of climate change, we see an impending crisis needing immediate attention.
- Throughout the world, the effects of climate change can be witnessed in the form of rising sea levels, inundation of coastal lands, destruction of fragile ecosystems, and natural disasters, like floods, cyclones, droughts, etc, increasing in frequency and intensity.
- As a response, human mobility in and out of climate ‘hotspots’ is steadily rising, and most of this migratory flux is internal.

- According to a recent report by the **World Bank**, “**worsening impacts of climate change in three densely populated regions of the world could see over 140 million people move within their countries’ borders by 2050**, creating a looming human crisis and threatening the development process”.

Impact of Climate Change on India:

- India is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with around **68% of the country being prone to drought, 60% to earthquakes, and 75% of the coastline being vulnerable to cyclones and tsunamis.**
- These physical factors, in combination with the country’s high population density, poverty levels, rapid urbanisation, and environmental degradation, make it the country most at risk of damage and displacement associated with disasters in South Asia.
- However, there is little recognition of the impact of climate change on human mobility in India, and there is a notable lacuna in policies at the intersection of climate change and migration at both the national and state levels.

Addressing lacuna in Policies Interlinking Climate Change and Migration:

- Policymakers must look to **Integrate Resilience into India’s environment-dependent Agrarian Economies**, and explore the adaptive capacities of the communities that manage to cope without migration.
- **Policies must address urbanisation and Sustainable Development**, and be geared towards mainstreaming migration into development planning.
- Any meaningful corrective action is possible only with **a proper statistical database**, the creation of which urgently requires systematic data collection and scientific analysis on the issue of climate-mediated migration.

Conclusion:

- We need to better understand the demographics of pre- and post-migration, income and household profiles of those who decide to migrate, migration trends in terms of ‘climate hotspots’ that send and receive migrants, impediments and facilitators of environmental migration, and the duration and nature of migration, whether temporary or permanent.
- India, being particularly vulnerable to climate change, needs to plan ahead to avoid large-scale loss and damage.