

CLIMATE REFUGEES: THE UNSEEN VICTIMS OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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Abstract

The climate crisis and the ecological problems that we are facing today is reshaping our world, as the climate of our common home is changing in an alarming phase at any point in the history of our earth. Along with social, economic, and environmental problems, climate change can also adversely affect the food, water, and economic security of the common people and nation. Another effect of climate change which this article would like to highlight is its impact on the displacement (forced or voluntary displacement) of person. This article presents the problems of climate migrants/refugees, which are often not noticed by the international community. Recently, the UN and many developed nations have taken certain actions to cushion the problems of these people. Pope Francis was a forerunner in this matter, and he explained clearly their issues in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. After taking this issue to the public with the writings, speeches and deeds of Pope Francis, world leaders also began to respond to the needs of climate refugees.

Key Words: *climate migrants, climate refugees, environmental refugees, displaced person*

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Introduction

The climate crisis and the ecological problems that we are facing today is reshaping our world, as the climate of our common home is changing in an alarming phase at any point in the history of our earth. Along with social, economic, and environmental problems, climate change can also adversely affect the food, water, and economic security of the common people and nation. Another effect of climate change which this article would like to highlight is its impact on the displacement (forced or voluntary displacement) of person. The UN agency for refugees makes the following comment with regard to the relation between climate change and mobility. “As extreme weather events and environmental conditions worsen with global heating, they are contributing to multiple and overlapping crises, threatening human rights, increasing poverty and loss of livelihoods, straining peaceful relations between communities and, ultimately, creating conditions for further forced displacement.”¹ According to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an average of 21.5 million people were forcibly displaced every year by climate change and related issues between 2008 and 2016, and thousands more are moving every year due to climate change.² According to the study of World Bank on climate change and its impacts on migration, there can be around 143 million people in three regions - Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America may forcibly displaced from their region by 2050.³ Even though environmental calamities caused the migration of many people in the past, modern people are more aware of the existing dangers of climate change, especially with global warming. Stephan Castles says, “Concerns about climate change-included migration have emerged in the context of debates on global warming and the inability of states to

¹ UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), “The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee,” <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/climate-change-and-displacement>, accessed on 20 April 2024.

² UNHCR, “Frequently asked questions on climate change and disaster displacement,” <https://www.unhcr.org/enus/news/latest/2016/11/581f52dc4/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-disaster-displacement.html>, accessed on 13 April 2024, accessed on 11 April 2024

³ Rigaud KK, De Sherbinin A, Jones B, Bergmann J, Clement V, Ober K et al, “Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration,” Washington: The World Bank 2018, <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8Z33FNS>, accessed on 13 April 2024.

take effective action to mitigate it through regulation of carbon emission.”⁴

Pope Francis, a man who holds God in one hand and man in the other hand, expresses his deep concern for the environment and the need for our collective responsibility to care for it through his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) and his 2023 Apostolic Exhortation *Laudato Deum*. *Laudato Si'* is really a significant document, since it highlights the intricate connections between ecological well-being, social justice, and human dignity. Through *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasises the need for responsible stewardship of our common home and the urgent attention for fruitful dialogues and actions worldwide to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable living. Pope Francis also emphasises the interconnectedness of all creation and calls for an integral ecology that considers the social, economic, and physical wellbeing of all creatures. The document reflects on the ethical and moral dimensions of humanity's relationship with the environment, highlighting the impacts of climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity, and throwaway culture. Like *Laudato Si'*, *Laudato Deum* also expresses its concern for the rapid changes that is happening to our nature and its impact on the most vulnerable people in the developing countries, who are forced to leave their homes, areas and even nation, to escape from the rapid climate change and global warming and related environmental issues. This article tries to understand who these climate refugees/migrants are, what their issues are in the international recommendations, and finally, what is to be done for the betterment of these Refugees.

Who are these “Climate Refugees”

As the climatic and environmental crisis around the globe is rising at an alarming rate, a good number of people are badly affected and are being forced to flee their homes, states, and nations due to different types of natural disasters like, droughts, flood, Storme etc. These people are called by different names like “climate refugees,” “environmental refugees” etc. The term ‘environmental refugees’ was used for the first-time in 1985 to refer to people who were forcefully moved from their place due to environmental problems.⁵ Now there

⁴ Castels, Stephan; De Haas, Hein and Miller Mark J, *The Age of Migration, International Population Movements in the Modern World* (5th Edition), London 2014, 209.

⁵ E.E. Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees*, New York: United Nations Development Program, 1985.

are many terms used to denote climate migrants, such as “disaster displaced person,” “environmentally displaced person,” “climate refugees,” “environmental refugees,” climate migrants etc.⁶ The pattern of climate migrants varies with place and person. It can be internal or external, voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent. Forced or involuntary environmental migration “might result from an environmental catastrophe such as a tsunami or flood, or a government instigated relocation, while a more gradual process of migration could be caused by slow onset environmental deterioration such as the long-term effects of drought, etc.”⁷

Migration as a result of climate change may range from “mobility as a proactive adaptation strategy to forced displacement in the face of life-threatening risks,”⁸ as it is mentioned above as voluntary and forced environmental refugees. This movement can occur within country limits (internal migration) or across international borders (international migration). But mostly this mobility is within the country and specially from the climate hit areas to urban areas. “Although most people displaced or migrating as a result of climate impacts are staying within their countries of origin, the accelerating trend of global displacement related to climate impacts is increasing cross-border movements, too, particularly where climate change interacts with conflict and violence.”⁹

Climate migration or climate displacement are terms that describe a multitude of climate change related migration scenarios.¹⁰ Climate migration or refuge has a specific meaning, and it is distinct from planned relocation. Climate migration can be temporary or permanent, seasonal or circular, or it can be either voluntary according to the gravity of the circumstances. “Planned relocation is, generally, a relocation of an entire community made by relevant governments and, ideally, in partnership with affected communities.”¹¹ Climate

⁶ In this article, the author prefer to use two terms, ‘climate migrants’ and ‘climate refugees.’

⁷ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁸ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁹ UNHCR's Global Trends Report 2020, 26, (<https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends2020>).

¹⁰ Walter Kälin and Nina Schrepfer, “Protecting People Crossing Borders in the Context of Climate Change: Normative Gaps and Possible Approaches,” Legal and Protection Policy Research Series, UNHCR, Division of International Protection, Feb. 2012, PPLA/2012/

¹¹ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

migration or refuge, used in this article is an umbrella term describing the impact of climate change on the mobility of the human population including the situation of people who have no other option other than migration because of climate disasters. Often, the existence of such people are not noticed by the authorities and media.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in its “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030” which was published in March 2024, clearly states in its introduction “Climate change is increasingly linked to conflict and human displacement. Growing numbers of people fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters will need international protection.”¹² It states further “In 2022, 70 percent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 56 per cent in 2012.”¹³ According to the UN Reports, in the year 2020, only one percent of refugees were able to return home.¹⁴ Relocation of the climate refugees and giving them a dignified living standard is a challenge for all nations since the climate change is further deteriorating the basic living conditions in the climate hit areas. UNHCR further writes in the same report, “... a significant percentage of forcibly displaced and stateless people are living in the most climate-vulnerable situations in the world, where – together with their host communities – they lack access to environmentally sustainable resources and resilience to the impacts of climate change. Women, girls, and other groups with specific needs, often face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms.”¹⁵

The Problem in identifying the Climate Refugees

The Letter, A Message for our Earth, A Documentary film based on *Laudato Si'*, directed by Nicolas Brown depicts the stories of four people, hailing from Senegal, the Amazon, India, and Hawaii. The film begins with the story of the utter poverty of Senegal due to climate

¹² UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” March 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/climate-action-focus-area-strategic-plan-2024-2030? 4>, accessed on 20 April 2024,

¹³ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” 4.

¹⁴ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2020), online.

¹⁵ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” 5.

change. The only solution for the people to escape from this situation is migrating to Europe, taking the most dangerous Mediterranean Sea-route to Lampedusa – the “Island of tears.”¹⁶ About the situation of these poor people who travel through this Sea rout Tina Catania writes, “As of October 2014, 21,439 migrant deaths have been documented in the Mediterranean since 1998, to say nothing of those which had no witness and will always remain uncounted, unnameable, and unknown.”¹⁷ Another important Problem that they are facing at Europe is that they will be considered illegal migrants or undocumented migrants and they are always in fear of imprisonment and deportation. Highlighting this situation of the of the African forced migrants/refugees, the film continues with the homily of Pope Francis at Lampedusa in which Pope Francis lament over the “globalisation of indifference” towards the needs of these climate refugees.¹⁸ Often, they are not counted among refugees. That is why many of the international rights of the refugees are denied to this climate refugees.

There are many scholars who believe that the term refugee does not suit the person who leaves his/her nation because of climate change, since they are not included in UN definition of 1951 on refugees. Accordingly, they argue that ‘refugee’ can be applied only to a person who flees from his/her homeland because of war or governmental policies.¹⁹ But the 16th annual meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP16) in 2010 suggested that there should be strategies addressing the vulnerable migrant communities affected by climate change. COP 21 in 2015 gave the following direction, “.existing bodies and expert groups under the Convention including the Adaptation Committee and the Least Developed Countries Expert Group, as well as relevant organisations and expert bodies outside the Convention, should develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert,

¹⁶ Thomas Massaro, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018) 132.

¹⁷ Tina R Catania, “Making Immigrants Visible in Lampedusa: Pope Francis, Migration and the State,” *Italian Studies* 70, no. 4 (2015): 467,68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2015.1120951>.

¹⁸ Massaro, *Mercy in Action*,132.

¹⁹ McAdam, Jane, *Climate Change, Forced Migration and Internal Law*, Oxford 2012, 41.

minimise and address displacement related to the adverse impact of climate change.”²⁰

Another major problem faced by nations is establishing the link between climate change and migration. Often, the links between climate change and migration are very complex. The causes of migration are generally multi-layered. It can be economic, social and political. But the climate condition can be an additional cause to accelerate migration.²¹ Understanding the relation between these local effects and human mobility can be difficult for two reasons. First, human mobility in the context of climate change is often multi-causal: environmental change interacts with a wide range of other factors to influence a decision to move and the degree to which this decision is voluntary. In some cases, this interaction may render an individual unable or unwilling to move, despite facing increasing environmental challenges.²² People may also move as a way to adapt or to proactively avoid severe impacts. This underscores the fact that much movement—and indeed most movement related to environmental factors—is not entirely forced or voluntary, but rather falls somewhere on a continuum between the two, with multiple factors contributing to whether a person moves, where they move, and how.²³

Surke argues, in his paper, “From a broader development perspective, environmental degradation appears as a proximate cause of migration. The underlying causes are found in increasing population pressures on land and the pattern of resource use”²⁴ “The Carteret Islanders are frequently mentioned as a prime example of people forced from their lands due to climate change – often referred to as the world’s first climate refugees - with major relocations of its population to Bougainville having taken place over the last few

²⁰ Report of the conference of the Parties on its 21st Session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015, Decision 1/CP.21, para 49.

²¹ European Commission, Science for Environment policy, Thematic Issue: Migration in Response to environmental Change, Bristol 2015, 1.

²² See Foresight, ‘Migration and Global Environmental Change’ (UK Government Office for Science 2011) Final Project Report 11-14.

²³ See Graeme Hugo, ‘Environmental Concerns and International Migration’ (1996) 30 *The International Migration Review* 105, 107; Walter Kälin and Nina Schrepfer, ‘Protecting People Crossing Borders in the Context of Climate Change Normative Gaps and Possible Approaches’ (UNHCR 2012) 22.

²⁴ Suhrke, A, *Pressure Points: Environmental Degradation, Migration and Conflict*, prepared for a conference organised by the American Academy of Arts and Science at the Brookings Institute, Washington 1992, 5.

years.”²⁵ According to UN studies, around 50 million people will be moved due to desertification in the next decade.²⁶ According to the Atlas of Environmental Migration, between 2008 to 2014 around 157 million people were displaced temporarily or permanently around the world due to climate related events.²⁷ According to UN Studies, around 36 million people had been displaced due to sudden disasters in 2008, of which around 20 million were shifted due to climate related disasters.²⁸ According to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, around 200 million people will be shifted permanently by 2050 due to climate change.²⁹ Although this figure is subject to debate, all these figures are indicators for the present generation, so that they do less harm to their future generation.

World Responses on the issues Climate Refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR or UN agency for Refugees) under UN takes different steps to alleviate the burden of these people. Though climate migrants do not come strictly under the term “refugee” according to the Refugee Council of 1951, as mentioned above the 16th annual meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP16) in 2010 and COP 21 in 2015 directed the Adaptation Committee and the authorities of different nations to give creative recommendations to minimise the adverse condition of the climate refugees. In this connection many nations have taken positive steps to identify the problems of climate refugees and given creative suggestion to solve the problem. Some of the international and national level steps taken to fight with this situation is highlighted below.

²⁵ Behrman, Simon and Kent, Avidan, *Overcoming the Legal Impasse? Setting the Scene, in Climate Refugees, Beyond the Legal Impasse*, Behrman, Simon and Kent, Avidan (eds.), London 2018, 3.

²⁶ UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), *Desertification land degradation and drought - some global facts and figures*, www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/WDCD/DLDD%20Facts.pdf, accessed on 11 July 2018.

²⁷ Ionesco, Dina; Mokhnacheva, Daria and Gemenne, Francois, *The Atlas of Environmental migration*, London 2017, 17.

²⁸ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the Norwegian Refugee Council, *Monitoring Disaster Displacement in the Context of Climate Change: Findings of a Study by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, UN 2009, 8.

²⁹ N., Stern, 2006 *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, London 2006.

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

“Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” which was prepared by the UN Refugee agency is a guideline for further actions for all nations. In this report, they take a detailed study on the issue of climate change and its impact on human mobility, the unparalleled situation of the people who are moved by the adverse climate conditions, and the inefficiency or insufficiency of the different governments and the world community to relocate them in a way that the human dignity of these people may not be diminished.

In order to achieve this goal by 2030 UNHCR's Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 precisely sets the following goal in its third point “Vision and Objectives.” It states, **“By 2030, increasing numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless people fleeing from climate-fuelled crises and/or living in climate-vulnerable countries find solutions, are protected and resilient to the impacts of climate change, and have the means to live self-sufficient lives.”**³⁰ In order to achieve this goal or vision, UNHCR set the following four interdependent objectives for “protection, solutions, resilience and adaptation to be achieved by 2030 together with its partners.”³¹

1. People fleeing persecution, violence, and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters who need international protection are effectively protected.
2. Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have increased access to services that promote the rights-based, sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment.
3. Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved physical and economic means to prepare, withstand, recover and be protected from the impacts of climate change.
4. UNHCR operates sustainably with systems in place to minimise negative impacts on the environment ³²

UNCHR clearly makes it a point that these goals can be achieved only with the cooperation of host governments, humanitarian and development organisations and even with the help of people in the private sector. In order to realise the first objective that is to ensure the

³⁰ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” 15.

³¹ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” 15.

³² UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030,” 15.

effective international protection of climate refugees, UNHCR will be taking the following actions.

- UNHCR is assisting States to protect and support their citizens in situations of internal displacement and supporting the development of laws and policies relevant to internal displacement in the context of climate change.”³³

With regard to the realisation of the second objective that is for the sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment, UNHCR takes the following steps.

- “UNHCR is engaging with displaced communities to preserve and rehabilitate the environment, transition to renewable energy and increase displaced people’s access to climate-smart water and sanitation services.”³⁴

In order to achieve the third objective that to protect the people from the impacts of climate change.

- “UNHCR is working with authorities and local responders to strengthen social protection services for displaced people affected by climate shocks and disasters. We also provide sustainable and climate-resilient shelter to shield displaced people from heavy rains and floods, as well as cash assistance.”³⁵

And finally, to achieve the last goal, it urges the nations to “reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to renewable energy sources, and improving the sustainability of our supply chain.”³⁶

The Supreme Court of India

In the context of the existence of climate refugees and their unattended problems, the Supreme Court of India issued a very recent verdict upholding the rights of people who are on the move due to climate change. In this verdict we read,

The right to equality under Article 14 and the right to life under Article 21 must be appreciated in the context of the decisions of this Court, the actions and commitments of the state on the national and international level, and

³³ UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), “The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee.”

³⁴ UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), “The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee.

³⁵ UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), “The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee.

³⁶ UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), “The climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee.

scientific consensus on climate change and its adverse effects. From these, it emerges that there is a right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change. It is important to note that while giving effect to this right, courts must be alive to other rights of affected communities such as the right against displacement and allied rights.³⁷

The above verdict given by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Dr Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, on 24 March 2024 upholds the rights of the “climate migrants” or “environmental refugees” whose rights were ignored by international communities. Even when we speak loudly about issues related to environmental crisis, climate change, justice for future generations, etc., the governments, international and national agencies for climate change and religious groups often fail to respond to the needs of the real prey of environmental issues. Considering the fast-changing climate and its effect on human mobility, the verdict of the Supreme Court of India on the rights of climate refugees is very relevant. This verdict may force the authorities to take note of the situation and respond to it.

“Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration”³⁸ The White House’s Response

In connection with the impacts of climate change on migration, on February 9, 2021, President Biden signed an Executive Order (E.O.) “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration,” in which he asked the National Security Advisor to make a report on climate change and its impact on migration. This report on the impacts of climate change and migration came out in October 2021. This report shows the link between climate change and migration.³⁹ In its report, it gives a detailed analysis of the global political, economic, and security dynamics of climate-related migration/refugee, the relationship between Climate Change and migration and its impact on local and global politics. This report also makes an analysis of the

³⁷ Gyanvi Khanna, “For First Time, Supreme Court Recognizes Right To Be Free From Adverse Effects Of Climate Change,” 2024 Live Law (SC) 286, also see the Supreme Court verdict nos. 20, 21, 22 on 24th March 2024, https://scourtapp.nic.in/supremecourt/2019/20754/20754_2019_1_25_51677_Judgement_21-Mar-2024.pdf.

³⁸ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.” Washington: The White House, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-on-the-Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Migration.pdf>, Accessed on 13, April 2024.

³⁹ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

foreign assistance given by the US Government to other nations. This assistance includes, existing programmes with the potential to reduce the risk of forced migration and displacement, assistance to build local and national capacity for using climate information in decision making, programmes that support adaptation to the impacts of climate change and assistance to support migrants, displaced people, and their host communities.⁴⁰ We read in the report, “U.S. humanitarian assistance supports people forcibly displaced by conflict and violence, persecution, and climate events, as well as those unable to flee. In Fiscal Year 2020, the U.S. Government provided nearly \$10.5 billion in life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection, supporting IDPs, conflict victims, refugees, stateless persons, and migrants in vulnerable situations, many of whom climate change disproportionately impacts. Recognising that migration can be an important adaptation strategy, U.S. Government programming has supported safer migration that is more likely to benefit migrants and their families.”⁴¹ Further, this report says, “However, current funding levels, structure, and coordination of U.S. foreign assistance is inadequate to meet the challenge of comprehensively addressing climate-related migration and displacement. Looking forward, it is vital for the United States Government (USG) to focus on the complex interplay between climate change and migration, rather than approaching these as separate issue sets.”⁴²

Apart from this, this report also speaks about the means and ways to reduce the risk for people in their homeland. The documents continue “It is also critical to support people who desire to stay as long and as safely as possible in their home areas through investments in disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures and local adaptation, including capacity building to assist countries with managing environmental risks and land use. When migration presents itself as the preferable form of adaptation, or in situations when people are forced to flee the impacts of climate change, the United States has a compelling national interest in strengthening global protection for these displaced individuals and groups.”⁴³ Through this report, the US shows its interest in safe migration management and its interest in the regional stability of all nations and its sustainable development.

⁴⁰ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁴¹ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration,” 17.

⁴² The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.” 18.

⁴³ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.” 18.

Catholic Church on Climate Refugees

Laudato si (Praise be to you my Lord) is the second encyclical of Pope Francis come in the year 2015, where he explains about the care of our common home.⁴⁴ In this encyclical, Pope Francis makes references to the widespread indifference towards environmental migrants. Their tragedy is often overseen by the world and the world media. The extreme drought or the sinking of entire land in water due to global warming and climate change affects some of the regions of Africa in a special way. Since it is not an often discussed issue, Pope Francis wanted to bring this issue to the public through his encyclical *Laudato si*. He writes in this document, “There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognised by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.”⁴⁵ After explaining about the existence of such migrants, Pope Francis in the same paragraph laments the indifference of the world to their situation.⁴⁶

Laudato Si' no. 25. “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods... Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited.” He further says even the animals and plants which cannot adjust to the given climate either wither out or migrate. This is the case of the poor people in developing countries who are badly affected by climate change. Since they do not have anything for their livelihood either they have to die or they have to migrate to a safer place. In order to overcome this disaster situation, they often prefer dangerous and illegal routes to migrate. Pope Francis explain this situation in LS 25; “...who are forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty, for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from

⁴⁴ Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Care for our Common Home: Laudato Si'* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), § 2.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, § 25.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, § 25.

the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognised by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection, whatsoever." (LS 25). The Pope also laments over the indifference of his beloved sisters and brothers towards the unassumable condition of these people.

One of the most important themes of *Laudato Si'* and *Laudato Deum* is "integral ecology." "Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'* introduces the concept of integral ecology, emphasising an interconnected vision of the environment that includes both the natural world and human societies."⁴⁷ "This holistic perspective recognises the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems, rejecting a reductionist view that isolates environmental issues from social, economic, and cultural contexts."⁴⁸ The encyclical calls for an integral approach that addresses environmental, social, and economic challenges simultaneously, reflecting the interdependence of all aspects of creation. Another important theme of *Laudato Si'* "is the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Pope Francis emphasises that the environmental crisis is not isolated but is part of a complex web of relationships."⁴⁹ This interconnectedness extends beyond the human realm to include the entire community of life.

Through these concepts of integral ecology and the interconnectedness of all living beings, Pope Francis challenges us to respond to the needs of these unseen sufferers of climate change through our writings, words, and deeds. Pope Francis has set us a model for this through his encyclicals, speeches and deeds. And let us not turn a deaf ear to their cries.

Conclusion

This article was entirely focused on the dynamics of climate-related migration and its implications for the political, social and economic life of the human beings. This document also tried to explain who these climate migrants or refugees are and what are their difficulties, and specially the difficulties with regard to their identity. Often these people are not considered as refugees, rather considered only as

⁴⁷ Ignacimuthu, *Environmental Spirituality*, Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 2010, 83.

⁴⁸ Ignacimuthu, *Environmental Spirituality*, 88.

⁴⁹ Francis Antonisamy, *Integral Ecology: Reflection on the Eco-Teachings of Pope Francis* Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 2021, 21.

migrants so that they may not enjoy the rights of the refugee in a new nation. They are considered as illegal migrants since they do not get access to legal migration. Even though *Laudato Si* is a Catholic encyclical on environmental issues, it gives a good room for the issues of these climate refugees. Recently the UN, and many developed nations conducted a study on the issues of climate refugees. But they are not sufficient to face the issues of climate refugees since their number are increasing in an alarming manner. Here, we need the cooperation between nations, states and all human beings to create a conducive environment for the integral living of all living beings.

ENVIRONMENTAL INSIGHTS FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: NORTHEAST INDIA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Indigenous people live with nature and survive on the natural resources around them. With the worldwide introduction of the Doctrine of Discovery in the mid-fifteenth century, superior powers conquered and controlled many lands. Due to the colonisation of lands, many traditional practices are neglected, forgotten, and intentionally silenced in Northeast India. With globalisation, modern science has hastened the manipulation of nature through unrestrained commercial growth. On the pretext of development, poor people are displaced from their homes and the forest they live in, and they become ecological refugees in their land. Forest and indigenous ways of relation to nature are critical for survival. Tribals have their own indigenous ecological traditions. Environmental insights from indigenous people in Northeast India can offer valuable lessons for sustainable development, conservation initiatives, and climate resilience efforts. Locally available tribal ecological prudence could enhance ecological health and benefit humans. Amid the universal ecological crisis, there is an urgent need to inculcate the tribal ethos of seeing the unseen spirits in the natural elements – trees, stones, animals and streams and accord respect and restrain. This paper orients us for a fresh analysis of our present environmental condition for the common good.

Key Words: *human-nature relationship, Northeast India, tribals, traditional ecological knowledge, ecological prudence*