

On March 11 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic¹. As COVID-19 spread worldwide, governments took measures to restrict international mobility in order to reduce the impact of the pandemic. Even though most of these restrictions applied on international travels, several countries have also limited internal movements. The implications on the situation of the pandemic in climate mobility in South America must be analysed and addressed in integral approach².



TEMPORAL MIGRATION AND RESTRICTIONS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Throughout the region, many households in environmentally degraded areas rely on temporal internal migration to complement their incomes³. This seasonal migration originated in rural areas and bound towards cities and different agricultural areas supports livelihood diversification. This is the case for instance, in Chile⁴, Argentina⁵ or Peru⁶. However, mobility restrictions created by the pandemic may limit the capacity of these migrants to access employment opportunities. This situation puts them in a particularly vulnerable condition as they subsist in areas where environmental challenges do not enable the fulfillment of their needs.

On the other hand, displacement often results from extreme natural events which are relatively recurrent in South America. In the current pandemic setting, it should be considered that usual practices in disasters, such as displacement, evacuations and concentration in temporary shelters, may contradict recommendations to fight COVID-19 (lockdowns, isolation and social distancing). This situation requires specific efforts in disaster preparedness around shelter and camps management, mobility and humanitarian assistance.

RETURN MIGRATION AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: THE PERUVIAN CASE

Following the declaration of national emergency on March 15, residents of Lima have been returning to their communities of origin as they are unable to face the economic difficulties created by the pandemic. These are internal migrants who had moved to Lima, often leaving vulnerable situations in their areas of origin. Their return implies an environmental impact that must be taken into account, since some of them return to areas with limited resources. This situation also reflects the precariousness of their income and their livelihoods in their area of residence, as they had to move not being able to subsist in the pandemic scenario.



SYSTEMIC RISK AND CUMULATIVE VULNERABILITIES

Except for disasters created by natural hazards, environmental and climatic factors rarely appear as the unique reason behind migration movements. However, combined with other social, economic or political factors, they might exceed the resilience capacities of households who decide to migrate. In the current context of the pandemic, these vulnerabilities must be considered in a systemic risk approach in which multiple hazards affect the situation of vulnerable communities.

The border between Brazil and Venezuela offers evidence of environmental pressures in the areas of origin of Warao migrants from Venezuela arriving to Roraima. Brazilian host communities also face situations of resource scarcity and environmental degradation, which are aggravated by migration movements⁷. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions may prevent communities at risk from migrating, but also affect the livelihoods of migrants, their health, their ability to access income opportunities and their well-being.



CLIMATE MIGRATION AND ZOOONOSIS

The emergence of new zoonotic pathogens (which transmit diseases from animals to humans) is related to environmental migration since the advance of the agricultural border, deforestation and the establishment and growth of new settlements bring communities into contact with animals, which might facilitate the transmission of new diseases⁸. This migration often responds to the search for new natural resources and greater productivity in previously preserved areas.

The Amazon region is particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon. Deforestation and the advance of the agricultural border facilitate contacts between wildlife and human communities, affecting the ecosystems and stimulating the transmission of pathogens which were controlled in the rainforest environment⁹. In addition, fires that affect the Amazon play a similar role and represent another source of risk¹⁰. In view of this situation, risk monitoring and prevention efforts are crucial and should consider processes of environmental degradation as well as the emergence of factors that facilitate the transmission of new diseases.

1- <https://www.who.int/es/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020>

2- <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/default/files/MECC%20COVID19.png>

3- <https://robuenosaires.iom.int/sites/default/files/publicaciones/Migraciones%2C%20ambiente%20y%20cambio%20clim%C3%A1tico.PDF>

4- https://scielo.conicyt.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0719-27892019000100033

5- http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1405-74252012000200003

6- <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/clacso-crop/20131206124645/Sihuaytrabajofinal.pdf>

7- <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/venezuela-situation-piling-pressure-brazils-environment>

8- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK215318/>

9- <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/04/rapid-deforestation-of-brazilian-amazon-could-bring-next-pandemic-experts/>

10- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31494225>

These infosheets have been elaborated by the Migration Analysis Unit of the IOM Regional Office for South America. These documents are designed to capture the most recent information in a fast-moving environment.



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