

EBB AND FLOW: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Ebb and Flow explores the why, who, where, and what at the nexus of water and migration, and the implications for economic development. It comprises two volumes.

VOLUME 1

Ebb and Flow: Water, Migration, and Development, provides the first ever global assessment of these issues and how they relate to migration within national borders.

VOLUME 2

Ebb and Flow: Water in the Shadow of Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, provides a regional deep dive and examines the interplay of conflict with water and migration dynamics.

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VOLUME 1

Prolonged dry episodes play a significant role in influencing migration, with rainfall-induced water deficits resulting in five times as much migration as water excess. But there are important nuances in why and when this migration occurs.

Where there is extreme poverty and migration is costly, water deficits are more likely to trap people than induce them to migrate. Low-income country residents are 80 percent less likely to move, relative to higher-income residents. These trapped populations are often hidden from media headlines, yet they represent a policy concern just as serious as migration.

Water shocks affect not only the number of people who move but also the skills they bring with them. Workers who leave regions because of water deficit often bring with them lower levels of human capital and can face a wage gap of up to 3.4 percent at their destination. This has profound implications for the migrants themselves as well as for the regions they move to.

Cities are the destination of most internal migrants, yet even in cities water scarcity can haunt them. High-profile urban droughts in Cape Town, São Paulo, and Chennai show that some of the world's megacities are increasingly facing "day zero" events, when water supplies become threateningly low. Dozens of smaller cities across the globe face similar fates but don't make international headlines. Depending on the size of the water shock, city growth can slow by up to 12 percent during a water deficit, enough to reverse critical development progress.

An arsenal of overlapping and complementary policies that target both people and places is needed to improve livelihoods and turn water-induced crises into opportunities for long-term resilience. Local circumstances and local perspectives need to play a central role in assessing the best policy choices.

VOLUME 2

Contrary to common belief, the evidence linking water risks with conflict and forced displacement in the Middle East and North Africa is not unequivocal. Case studies and event data suggest that historically water issues have more frequently been related to cooperation than conflict, both at the domestic and international level. The context-specific nature of water risks, forced displacement, and conflict relationships cautions against claims of water migrants and water wars.

While conflict is an uncertain consequence of water risks, the reverse is real and concerning: since 2011, there have been at least 180 instances of targeting of water infrastructure in conflicts in Gaza, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Access to safe drinking water is a daily struggle for millions of displaced Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Yemenis, and Libyans and international migrants. Tanker trucks often fill the gap; however, issues of water quality,

reliability, and affordability remain. Host communities also face localized declines in water availability and quality, and they experience unplanned burdens on water services.

The reality of protracted forced displacement requires a shift from humanitarian support toward a development approach for water security, including a master planning vision to deliver water services and sustain water resources.

When working toward improved coordination with humanitarian, security, and development interventions, policy makers will face trade-offs between short-term measures to respond to immediate needs and long-term measures to address structural water sector issues. Failure to recognize and manage these trade-offs could undermine water security prospects.

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