

Environmental Influences and International Migration: An Investigation

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Context

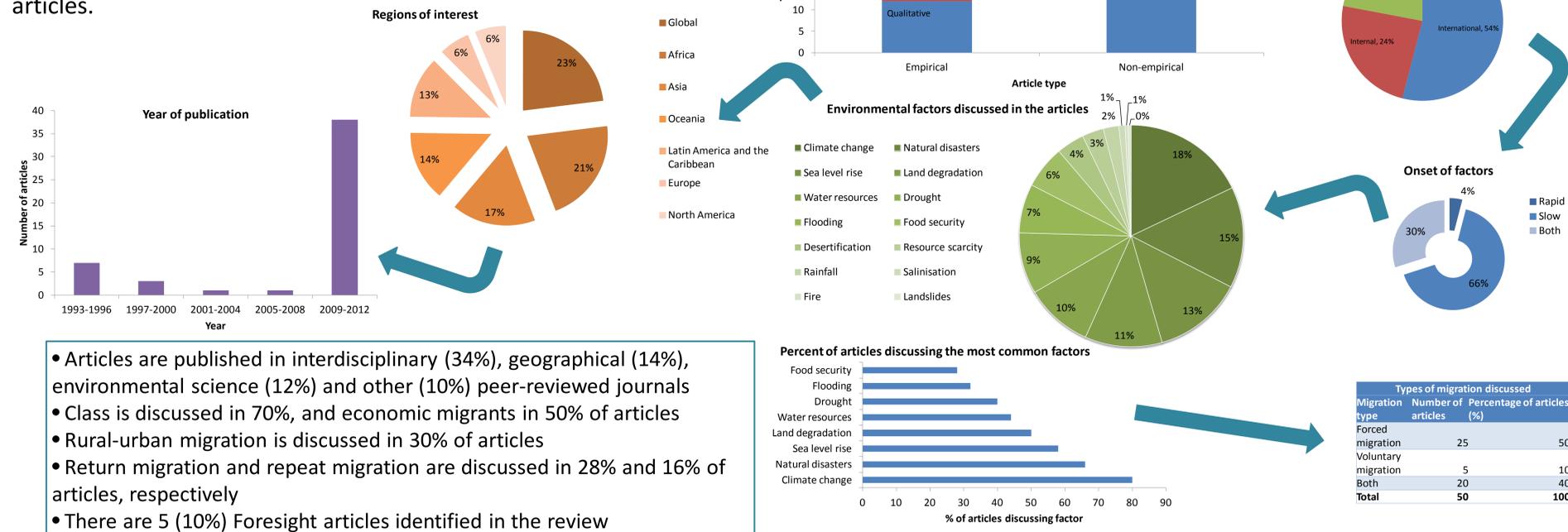
The Environmental Influences and International Migration to Canada project is a SSHRC-funded collaborative project led by Drs. Robert McLeman (Geography and Environmental Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University), Luisa Veronis (Geography, University of Ottawa) and Nadia Abu-Zahra (School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa). This is the first study to investigate how environmental factors in the countries of origin influence migration to Canada and, if so, how environmental factors may affect the settlement and incorporation prospects of migrants once they arrive. This project aims to provide policymakers and agencies engaged in migrant settlement additional, empirically based information about the motivations and needs of newcomers to Canada to assist in long-term planning, supporting fact-based analysis and planning.

Introduction

It has been suggested that migration patterns in many parts of the world are being affected by environmental hazards, which will increase in the future due to climate change. Canada is a leading destination for international migrants. The main objective of the project is to examine whether and how environmental conditions in key immigrant source countries influence people's decisions to come to Canada, directly or indirectly. In particular, the focus is on how differences such as class, gender, race/ethnicity, family status and so on shape migrants' decisions as well as strategies of migration. But first, we completed a systematic literature review of all the English language peer-reviewed articles linking international migration and environmental factors to get a better grasp of the main issues and debates in the field.

Results

A total of 75 articles are included; 25 (33%) are empirical and 50 (66%) are non-empirical. The focus of analysis is on the non-empirical articles.



Discussion

General debates

- Lack of clear definition of central concepts leads to debates regarding refugee law, international policy, funding schemes and quantification of migrant flows.
- A number of articles focus on predicting how many environmental migrants will occur; others focus on where environmental migrants will move to.
- Many articles are broad studies focusing on global climate change; fewer articles examine local and factor-specific environmental change.
- An important share of articles focus on policy and legal debates; theoretical issues are also widely discussed.
- Literature tends to make a distinction between local human-made environmental change (land degradation, industrial disasters) and global environmental change (climate change, sea level rise and natural hazards).

Nexus between economic and environmental factors

- Economic factors are portrayed as significant both independently and in combination with environmental factors.
- Many articles discuss economic migration and issues related to class, livelihood and adaptation capacity.
- Economic factors and class are examined in relation to resilience of an area and opportunities for migration.

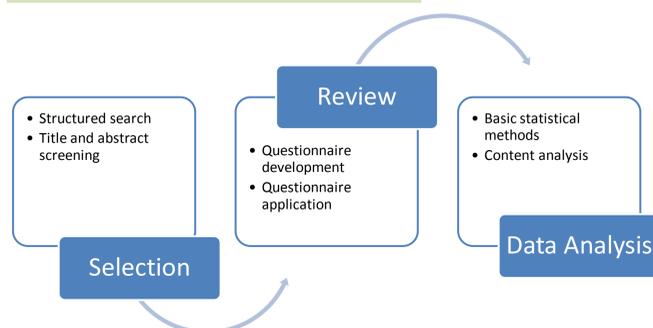
Methodology

- In a systematic literature review it is difficult to be truly systematic; constant judgement calls about what to include or exclude.
- Results are influenced by choice of keywords (ours and those of the article), language, database and articles available digitally.

Future directions

- There is a need for more empirically-based, location and factor specific studies.
- The main focus remains internal migration; more research is needed on international aspects of environmental migration.

Methodology



This study uses a systematic literature review methodology adapted from Berrang-Ford et al., 2011, which is summarized at left. This is an organized method, which clearly keeps track of which articles are included in the literature review and why, allowing the selection, review and analysis of the documents to occur in a systematic fashion. The 75 articles were selected based on keyword searches in Web of Science, and their appropriateness for inclusion was verified through the title and abstract.

We developed a questionnaire touching on important themes for our project. The questionnaire collects information about how the articles explore the nexus of environment and migration. The data collected through the questionnaire was incorporated into a database and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Collecting information in this manner allows the researcher to examine key themes within the literature.

References

Berrang-Ford, L., Ford, J.D. & Paterson, J. (2011). Are we adapting to climate change? *Global Environmental Change*, 21, 25-33.

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