

## Where is climate asylum?

This editorial discusses an alarming issue in the time of climate change: climate mobilities and, particularly, forced climate migration and the need for climate refuge and climate asylum. The focus is on the European Union (EU) where migration and asylum policies are being currently developed under the 'New Pact', yet with little intention to relate with climate mobilities of any kind. Neither does the EU's environmental and climate policy Green Deal give much attention to human mobility. At the same time, the EU has commenced many briefings on the topic, which shows that the subject matter itself is well known. The editorial hence asks, where is climate asylum if not in the EU, and when, if not at this juncture of creating new asylum policies?

Keywords: climate asylum, climate migration, climate refuge, refugees, displacement, mobilities

The EU has a long-established human rights-based approach to international affairs. This should extend to the protection of those driven abroad by natural disasters. Through its cooperation with the countries affected, the EU can put in place **safe legal pathways for climate migrants**. The new pact on migration and asylum, launched by the European Commission in 2020, addresses the safety of refugees, but does not, as yet, refer to the **needs of individuals affected by climate-related events**. The 1951 Refugee Convention predates the global recognition of the dangers of climate change, and does not recognise **climate stress as grounds to seek refugee status**. It would be in keeping with its role as a leading actor against climate change were the EU to push for the **recognition of the status of climate refugee**. (Noonan 2022, my emphasis)

The above excerpt from the document *The Future of Climate Migration* is a kind reminder by Eamonn Noonan (with Ana Rusu), a specialist at the Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), to the European Parliament. The brief report draws from a study *Climate Change and Migration*, requested by the Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs a couple of years back, along with other documentation about this increasingly alarming issue (Kraler *et al.* 2020). In parallel to these, the Parliament ordered another

related briefing from the EPRS, *The Concept of 'Climate Refugee': Towards a Possible Definition*. This report, first delivered in 2019 and updated two years later, begins by identifying the global scope of climate change-related displacement:

Since 2008, over 318 million persons have been displaced because of climate disasters, this is the equivalent of **one person being displaced every second**, or the entire Australian population being displaced every year. In 2020 alone, 30.7 million people were displaced because of environmental disasters, notably linked to climate change. As **the number of people affected by climate change could double by 2050** according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the annual displacement of millions of persons worldwide due to environmental disasters needs to be addressed. (Apap 2019/2021, my emphasis)

This briefing, written by Joanna Apap (2019/2021, 7), reminds the European Parliament that, in 2009, the Council of Europe suggested that the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement from 1998 “could be taken as a model to develop a global guiding framework for the protection of displaced persons crossing international borders as a result of climate change and natural disasters”. This suggestion was followed by the international Nansen Initiative setting the first broadly acknowledged agenda for the protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change. It stresses the responsibility of states, specifically, in the provision of this protection – an issue fiercely debated ever since in the UN COP meetings. The latest summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, in 2022, resulted in a decision to establish a loss and damage fund that can be used to compensate for internal displacement and relocation expenses. Collective decisions regarding international climate mobilities, instead, remain unmade.

The suggestion in Noonan's (2022) report, for the EU to act as a vanguard, seems well justified when placed in the framework opened in Apap's (2019/2021) briefing. Yet in the current political climate in Europe, it is a very radical proposal. In my own ongoing research on the New Pact, with Gintarė Kudžmaitė and Jouni Häkli, we have found that the current and developing EU policies framing migration and asylum governance express hardly any views on climate migration, and the same applies to policies of environmental governance. The documents outlining the New Pact on Migration and Asylum – launched in 2019 and intended to be finalized by the spring of 2024 – mention climate change altogether five times (Communications and Factsheet, both from 2020). Two of these mentions are made in connection with migration in general but none of them are related with refuge, asylum, or displacement. They are characterized by a declarative tone, without any commitment from the EU:

Key societal challenges faced by the world today – demography, climate change, security, the global race for talent, and inequality – all have an impact on migration. (European Commission 2020a, 1)

Demographic and economic trends, political instability and conflict, as well as climate change, all suggest that migration will remain a major phenomenon and global challenge for the years to come. (European Commission 2020a, 17)

In addition to these, climatic and environmental factors potentially impacting asylum, migration or border management of the EU are brought up in the *Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint* (European Commission 2020b, 31), in the context of discussions with “representatives of the main third countries of origin, transit and/or destination as well as representatives of key international partners and stakeholders”. They are introduced in parallel with migratory flows and smuggling activities that are considered problems to be solved with the mentioned representatives (preferably outside the EU territory), and *not* as matters to be faced with them in a humanitarian manner.

Another key strategy of the EU where climate mobilities ought to be discussed is the Green Deal. Its initial portrayal, from 2019, refers to migration only once, in the context of so-called ‘multicrisises’ that the EU sets out to prevent globally:

The EU also recognises that the **global climate and environmental challenges** are a significant **threat multiplier and a source of instability**. The ecological transition will reshape geopolitics, including global economic, trade and security interests. This will create challenges for a number of states and societies. The EU will work with all partners to **increase climate and environmental resilience to prevent these challenges from becoming sources of** conflict, food insecurity, **population displacement and forced migration**, and support a just transition globally. Climate

policy implications should become an integral part of the EU's thinking and action on **external issues**, including in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy. (Green Deal 2019, my emphasis)

This policy line is very passive, if not hostile, towards climate-induced migration. Linking the “prevention of challenges from becoming sources of [...] population displacement and forced migration” (Green Deal 2019) with security and defense policies hints toward border control and migration management instead of humanitarian asylum policy, which is in line with the previously mentioned Blueprint linked with the New Pact.

Hence, the conclusion from these two key EU policies regarding climate mobilities is that people whose habitats become ruined and whose livelihoods diminish due to climate change effects, and whose vulnerabilities thus increase, are not welcome in the EU. Where is the climate asylum then, if not here, and when, if not now? This is what many European scholars and activists are thinking about.

There are many obvious reasons why the EU should stand at the humanitarian forefront in the global climate crisis. First, the prosperity of EU countries stems from the colonization of the rest of the world. This wealth makes Europe more resilient in the face of the effects of climate change. Second, carbon emissions – direct and indirect, previous and present – are multiple in the EU compared to most (if not all) countries where impacts of climate change are bigger and whose adaptive capacities are poorer. Third, the EU manifests itself globally as the leading figure of democracy with human rights at its heart. If none of the millions of people forced to leave their places of origin due to the negative impacts of climate change are recognized as climate refugees in the EU's evolving migration and asylum policy, how does the Union position itself geopolitically?

Another, yet connected paradox that critical migration studies scholars are pondering these days in Europe is the expressed need – or perhaps better desire – of many states to recruit labor from beyond the EU. Instead of organizing safe routes and passages for climate migrants and other asylum seekers to enter the EU member states legally, with work permits, my home country Finland for instance is seeking to invite thousands of labor migrants yearly, from places of its choosing. While it is openly declared that their role would be to work for the Finnish society – to take care of our elderly and ill, to grow and deliver our food, to clean our facilities, to build our infrastructures – it is not clarified why the people who *have to* leave their places of origin and may even *choose to* come to Finland are not welcome to do this work. Given that Finnish language is not spoken by anyone else but Finns, and that even trained professionals coming from beyond the EU are requested to accomplish a Finnish degree to be qualified in the labor market, there is no place in the world from where people could just come and start working in Finland.

One explanation to the current strategy in Finland and other EU members states can be found from what Baldwin (2014) calls ‘new racisms’. The present and emerging policies are actively continuing the continent's colonial history by categorizing people beyond the EU borders by race, class, and nationality, and allowing some of them to fulfill our needs while leaving others to struggle with the consequences of our unsustainable and exploitative lifestyles. In such policy climate, the recognition of climate refugees as suggested by Noonan (2022) and Apap (2019/2021) in their recent briefings to the European Parliament seems utopic. Indeed, the statement “the opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament”, included in both reports (*ibid.*), seems very necessary. That said, a seed of hope lies in these very documents: The Parliament has been informed about the alarming climate mobilities situation in the world and the EU's current disregard of it. Perhaps the Members of the Parliament, also representing many of us European scholars, will respond to the call. I truly hope to see this happening in the finalization of the New Pact during the next year.

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## Content of the issue

This issue of Fennia includes five Research Papers, of which one is based on the Fennia Lecture 2022 from the Finnish Geography Days, one Review Article, and in the Reflections section we have five commentaries to articles and one *lectio praecursoria*. Moreover, developing one step further our dialogical publication practices, we have asked for brief reflections from Ilse van Liempt to the commentaries she received to her lecture-based article. Her views are included below as part of the introduction.

In 2022, we organized exceptionally two Fennia Lectures, due to the postponing of the NGM conference because of the pandemic. The Nordic Geographers Meeting (NGM) lecture held at Joensuu, by Josefina Syssner (2022), led to [a special issue on rural Nordic geographies](#) published in our previous issue. The second one, by Ilse van Liempt, took place in Tampere in November, and is included in the present issue. It is accompanied by four commentaries, two of which are coming from the discussants at the site and two from the open peer review process carried out during the spring (one of these will be published in a later issue).

Ilse van Liempt's article *Becoming part of the city: local emplacement after forced displacement* resonates to some extent with the theme of the editorial, with focus on the city as a place of asylum, in the context of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Taking the perspective of asylum seekers and refugees – their experiences and mundane activities – van Liempt (2023) seeks to broaden the scope for seeing the city as a multi-sited context where 'organic emplacement' enacted by refugees takes place, alongside with top-down activities by state institutions. Sometimes these activities are made in collaboration with local NGOs, grassroots organizations, and local people, but she has identified also rather personal ways in which refugees take space in the city. Van Liempt talks about the importance of making the city a home to oneself, by engaging with urban life in places of one's own liking, including beyond the neighborhoods and facilities appointed by the state. This social, material, and mental homemaking in public and semi-public spaces offers a break away from the 'stuckness' of being a stranger to oneself and to others – the refugee.

In a new dialogical format for the journal, we include in this issue commentaries to van Liempt, by Mélodie Sommier, Aura Lounasmaa, and Katharyne Mitchell, and as promised a response from the author in this editorial. Sommier (2023) exposes the racial structures at play in academia and acknowledges the position of power from which she speaks, turning attention to the experience of becoming part of the city for racialized immigrants. Lounasmaa (2023) draws from experiences of hostile bordering practices, and explores the meaning of home in a time of the 'techno-borderscape' that has increasingly moved arrival infrastructures online. Mitchell (2023) focuses upon spaces of embodied migrant agency to counter static concepts, resisting temporal and spatial logics that seek to manage and contain migrant bodies.

Rather than introducing these commentaries further as we might in a traditional editorial, we instead connect descriptions of these reflections to the comments that follow by van Liempt. In her own reflections on the commentaries, van Liempt first acknowledges what a treat it is when people read your work with care and take the time to respond, and how lucky she felt to be read by three great female scholars and receive their take on her work (the fourth commentary by another female geographer forthcoming later this year).

In Mitchell's response, van Liempt finds a fascinating comparison between her work and the work on the flaneur. The commentary pays attention to how her work provides a more complicated and nuanced way of how strolling around the anonymous city is experienced by newcomers. To continue this thought, van Liempt says: "While strolling around offers freedom and can be liberating, the capacity to stroll 'unnoticed' is limited for those 'who stand out'. That is, the anonymity of the city (and the crowd) can very well be liberating, but at the same time alienating."

In connection with this van Liempt notes that, in her response, Sommier rightly reminds us that it is important to always connect migration and space to race, in order to expose the complexities and nuances of the experiences of becoming part of the city for racialized migrants. The combination of Mitchell's and Sommier's responses reminded her of a quote by Teju Cole, a member of the Walking

Artist Network, on how it is not possible to be black flâneur. After two Black men got arrested in a Starbucks in 2018, he posted a social media comment:

This is why I always say you can't be a black flâneur. Flânerie is for whites. For blacks in white terrain, all spaces are charged. Cafes, restaurants, museums, shops. Your own front door. This is why we are compelled, instead, to practice psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can't relax, black.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding Lounasmaa's commentary, van Liempt finds herself in strong agreement with that home can be a hostile place, too, and that it is equally important to include non-belonging in our analysis instead of romanticizing this idea of home and belonging as a happy place. Lounasmaa's references to work on 'queering the home' she considers inspiring, as it points to that a home needs to be built around people and that it is a place where you can be yourself. This creates an interesting relation to her own findings around how people can feel at home in a city or certain parts of the city.

Going back to Mitchell's comments, van Liempt picks up a link with yet another concept that seems fascinating to her: the geosocial. It triggered her a lot and made her think of how it is indeed a helpful way to further conceptualize global-local interdependencies and to situate newcomers' emplacement in a more concrete spatial-social context. The journal editor is very happy about this connection, too, as the concept has been developed in their collaborative research, and thus this open review process on van Liempt's article is taking forward their joint work as well (Mitchell & Kallio 2017). Referring back to her own article, van Liempt underlines that new spatial scales and new societal forms are indeed created through giving meaning to events and places that are important to newcomers; hence foregrounding transnational relations and the explanatory power of this frame to better understand the transnational in everyday practices is highly relevant. Van Liempt thus finds that the concept of the geosocial really helps to critique global-local binaries and provides a good framework to study interconnectedness across scales in a more nuanced way. Looking at her data again, she started to wander how to conceptualize the moments of emplacement where newcomers want to break with the transnational context and try to be local, very local, and just local. These ruptures and challenges of borders, also from the inside, are worth more attention in her mind.

The editors of Fennia wish to thank the lecturer, the two discussants, and the two reviewers for their engaged work on this dialogical publication. We have learned a lot during the process, again, about how respectfully delivered and received critique works, and how openness in publication processes can be inspiring and supportive, leading to new ideas and perhaps new collaborations. While it requires engaged work from everyone involved, it also gives back.

Following the lecture, our Research Papers section includes four original articles. The first of these is by Oleksiy Gnatiuk, Kostyantyn Mezentsev and Grygorii Pidgrushnyi. We want to acknowledge that they have produced the article in Lviv, Ukraine, during the past year of war. Titled *Travelling abroad and geopolitical preferences – case of Kharkiv, Dnipro and Mariupol, Ukraine*, the paper offers a cross-analysis of East Ukrainians' geopolitical preferences vis-à-vis their travel experiences in European countries and in Russia (Gnatiuk *et al.* 2023). While the analysis itself concerns people's expressed views in 2018–2020, the paper reflects upon the findings to some extent in the current geopolitical situation. The main result is that especially long-term visits in Europe clearly correlate with pro-European attitudes and connect with weaker pro-Soviet sentiments, and respectively, those who travel mostly in Russia express less support for European geopolitical and cultural integration and have stronger pro-Soviet sentiments. While this may seem an obvious outcome, many nuances in the analysis support the authors' argument that migration policy, including the visa-free regime, is an "effective tool for the EU to improve attitudes towards the European project in Ukraine", and to support the Westernization of the country more broadly (Gnatiuk *et al.* 2023, 41).

The third article by Eerika Albrecht, Jani Lukkarinen, Miikka Hakkarainen and Niko Soininen is accompanied by a commentary in the Reflections section, stemming from the open peer review process with Hanna Lempiäinen as one of the reviewers. Their paper *Hydropowering sustainability transformation: policy frames on river use and restoration in Finland* concerns a hot topic in current debates over environmental and energy policies (Albrecht *et al.* 2023). The authors offer a critical frame analysis of the Finnish system of water governance and regulation, drawing from two sets of



research materials: First, expert interviews with representatives from the hydropower industry, public administration, and NGOs (carried out in the spring of 2021), and second, a broad collection of news articles published by the national broadcasting company (from 2017–2021). They align with recently presented concerns by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) where closer attention to climate and biodiversity interactions is demanded, as this nexus is often harmfully overlooked in transformative policies. This is true also in Finland where discussion on climate and nature policies is typically decoupled or juxtaposed. Based on the results that reveal three main framings from the policy debate, the paper calls for socio-ecological-technical transformations in aquatic ecosystems where, first, reconciliation of interest in river restoration, second, recreational uses of aquatic environments, and third, the flexible energy function of hydropower in energy transition are center-staged.

The fourth original article takes us back to the theme of migration in Europe yet, this time, at focus is voluntary migration for education and, also, for work. In his article *South Asian students' migration to, within and from Finland and Sweden: connecting the dots to arrivals and departures*, Zain Ul Abdin shows that the stay-or-leave migration decisions of international students in higher education are often preceded by mobilities in the host country (Abdin 2023). During his fieldwork in 2018, he familiarized with the experiences and views of students from India and Pakistan in four major Nordic cities with respected universities and polytechnics: in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden, and in Helsinki and Turku, Finland. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, including informal associations, Abdin – who has a decade-long personal experience of being an international student from South Asia in the two countries – gained a good understanding of how the students navigate in their everyday lives and which matters influence their decisions to leave or stay in the country or the region. Based on his findings he emphasizes the importance of translocal analysis alongside with the transnational perspective, in understanding the (im)mobilities of international students.

Our final full-length article is by Katri Gadd and Faleha Ubeis, whose paper *“Freedom is a treasure that only those who lose it can know”: a spatiotemporal exploration of 22 Iraqi women's interlegalities* delves into legal geographies as experienced by Iraqi women. With a survey with close to 200 participants, and in-depth group and individual interviews with 22 women – interviewed remotely due to the pandemic, several times during the research – they have sought to understand how women in Iraq, including in Kurdistan, find themselves in the legal spaces and normative orders of their society (Gadd & Ubeis 2023). Through metaphorical mapping, they have explored together with the participants the complex landscapes of ‘interlegalities’ where state laws and people's knowledge of them entangle with religion, traditions, ideologies, experiences, and beliefs. This experiential perspective opens an important window to legal landscapes in this Middle Eastern context where gender plays an important role.

In addition to the original articles, this issue includes one Review Article by Jussi Jauhiainen who has assessed co-authored international peer-reviewed scientific articles between African scholars and researchers in EU countries, Finland specifically. His paper titled *Research collaboration outputs between the European Union and Africa: the case of co-authored scientific articles between Finland and Africa* is motivated by a broadly acknowledged need to develop research practices originating and based in Africa, to promote more grounded development in African societies. This aim is encouraged and funded also by the European Commission. Jauhiainen (2023) finds great potential in Finland's competences in technology and innovations for scholarly co-operation and related development work: commitment to economic competitiveness, RDI, carbon-free sustainability transition, people's welfare, and anticorruption measures are identified as the country's internationally respected achievements. The review ends with a recommendation for equal and symmetric long-term partnerships *with* African actors, which should include a wide range of partners. Co-authorships in journals like *Fennia* that are open to high-quality contributions from everywhere in the world are one practical way to promote this development.

In the Reflections section, we have two more commentaries by Elisa Pascucci and Hanna Lempinen and one lectio praecursoria by Violeta Gutierrez-Zamora. Pascucci (2023) reflects upon Refstie's (2021) article *Reconfiguring research relevance – steps towards salvaging the radical potential of the co-productive turn in searching for sustainable solutions* published in a previous issue of the journal.

Extending the four commentaries published last year by [Häkli \(2022\)](#), [Lyytinen \(2022\)](#), [Vela-Almeida \(2022\)](#), and [Lorne \(2022\)](#), Pascucci argues project-based research funding is a politicized and coercive tool, and that (gendered and racialized) precarization and even abuse have a longer and more ingrained history than what we commonly identify as the 'neoliberalization' of academia.

Lempinen (2023) reflects upon a paper by Eerika Albrecht, Jani Lukkarinen, Miikka Hakkarainen and Niko Soininen in this issue of the journal called *Hydropowering sustainability transformation: policy frames on river use and restoration in Finland* (Albrecht et al. 2023). Lempinen responds by emphasizing the political and affective nature of all resource-related societal developments, acknowledging localized injustices generated as externalities of existing nature-related governance frameworks.

Extending emergent interconnections between the environment, climate, injustice, migration and extraction in this issue of the journal, Guttierrez-Zamora (2023) shares her *lectio praecursoria*, *Recognizing the plurality of knowledge, values, and experiences interwoven in Mexican community forestry*. In the Sierra Sur of Oaxaca, Guttierrez-Zamora deeply explores community forestry, an alternative form of forest management. Feminist political ecology, the neoliberalization of nature, and environmental justice are engaged with in an ethnographic study which describes the collective efforts of rural populations to maintain and manage forests in sustainable ways. We are put in mind here once more of climate displacement. Specifically, the destruction, extraction, and long-term contamination of habitats which leads to the landscape no longer being able to support life, displacing local communities.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Teju Cole, "The Starbucks thing hit me harder than expected," [Facebook](#), 18 April 2018.

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