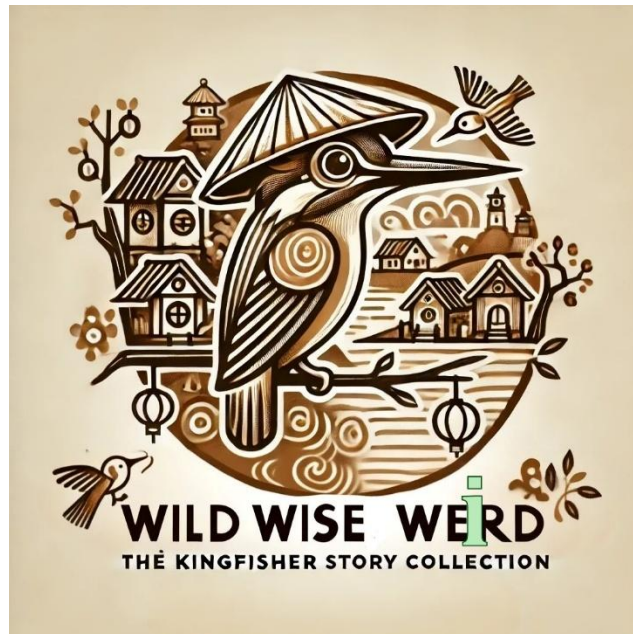


# Involuntary Immobility: The Overlooked Climate Crisis

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“Trembling up a high branch after nearly dying by Kitty’s mouth, Kingfisher stealthily looks down; beneath him stands Kitty—drooling with saliva, dazed, and clearly disappointed.”

In “Dream”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]



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When discussing the human consequences of climate change, migration is often at the forefront—people fleeing from environmental hazards to seek safety and opportunity elsewhere. However, an often-overlooked phenomenon is involuntary immobility, when individuals wish to move but are unable to do so due to financial, legal, political, or infrastructural barriers [2].

Involuntary immobility results from a misalignment between migration aspirations and capabilities. While some individuals voluntarily stay in their communities, others remain trapped in areas highly vulnerable to climate-related risks, including floods, droughts, and sea-level rise [2,3]. This condition is particularly concerning because it intensifies the suffering of already marginalized populations who lack the means to relocate to safer regions.

The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework provides a useful lens for understanding involuntary immobility. This model posits that migration is determined by both the desire (aspirations) and the ability (capabilities) to move [4]. Those who aspire to leave but lack the means to do so are classified as “trapped populations” [2].

Economic hardship is a major driver of involuntary immobility. Smallholder farmers in Nepal, for example, face increasing financial constraints that hinder their ability to relocate as climate change diminishes their agricultural productivity. Similarly, in Bangladesh, rising sea levels and frequent flooding paradoxically push vulnerable populations toward already precarious coastal areas, as they lack the economic resources to migrate inland [2].

Political and legal restrictions further entrench involuntary immobility. Refugees, such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh, are often confined to densely populated camps with limited rights to movement, making them especially vulnerable to climate-induced disasters [2]. Likewise, restrictive immigration policies can prevent individuals from seeking refuge in safer countries, exacerbating their exposure to environmental hazards.

A crucial challenge in addressing involuntary immobility is the persistent “mobility bias” in migration research. Studies have traditionally focused on the factors driving migration while neglecting the forces that prevent movement. This bias obscures the realities of those who are unable to leave, reinforcing a policy framework that fails to account for their needs [3].

To address involuntary immobility, climate policy and disaster planning must prioritize targeted interventions. This includes financial support for vulnerable communities, investment in resilient infrastructure, and the removal of legal and bureaucratic barriers that restrict movement. Recognizing involuntary immobility as a critical issue in climate adaptation strategies will help ensure that the most at-risk populations are not left behind [5].

The accelerating pace of climate change demands a comprehensive approach to human mobility—one that acknowledges not just those who migrate but also those who remain trapped in hazardous environments. By addressing involuntary immobility, we can foster resilience, promote social justice, and create more inclusive climate policies.

## References

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