
Islamic Perspectives on Climate Migration: Reinterpreting *Hijrah* and *Dar al-Aman* in the Context of Pakistan's Climate-Displaced Populations

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Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan through the lens of Islamic ethical and legal traditions. With Pakistan ranked among the top ten most climate-vulnerable countries globally, recurring floods, droughts, sea intrusion, and glacial melt have displaced millions, creating a new category of migrants often overlooked in both policy and religious discourse. Drawing upon classical Islamic concepts—particularly *Hijrah* (migration for moral or existential preservation) and *Dar al-Aman* (abode of safety)—this study proposes a faith-based framework for understanding, legitimizing, and responding to climate migration. By reinterpreting these concepts in light of contemporary environmental crises, the article argues that Islamic jurisprudence offers robust ethical imperatives for protecting climate-displaced persons, ensuring their dignity, and assigning communal responsibility for their welfare. The analysis is grounded in Pakistan's socio-ecological realities, constitutional commitments, and Islamic identity, offering policy-relevant insights for state and non-state actors. The

study concludes that an islamically informed approach to climate migration can strengthen national resilience, uphold human dignity, and fulfill Pakistan's obligations under both *Shariah* and international humanitarian norms.

Keywords: Climate Migration, *Hijrah*, *Dar Al-Aman*, Islamic Ethics, Environmental Justice, Pakistan, Climate Displacement

Introduction

Pakistan stands at the confluence of a deep Islamic civilizational heritage and an escalating climate emergency. Ranked eighth on the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, the country faces existential threats from erratic monsoons; glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), desertification, and sea-level rise along its 1,000-kilometer coastline.¹

The 2022 floods alone submerged one-third of the nation, affecting 33 million people and displacing over 8 million—many of whom remain in protracted displacement with limited access to shelter, livelihoods, or legal recognition.² Unlike conflict-driven refugees, climate migrants lack formal protection under international law, rendering them invisible in legal and policy frameworks.

Within this vacuum, Islamic ethical and legal traditions offer a potent yet underutilized resource. Classical Islamic thought developed sophisticated doctrines to address forced migration, sanctuary, and communal responsibility—most notably through the concepts of *Hijrah* and *Dar al-Aman*. Traditionally, *Hijrah* refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, an act that established not only a new political community but also a moral paradigm for relocating in the face of persecution or existential threat.³ While classical jurists primarily framed *Hijrah* in theological or political terms, contemporary scholars have begun to expand its scope to include environmental and economic duress.⁴

Similarly, the concept of *Dar al-Aman*—the “abode of safety”—emerges in Islamic legal discourse as a space where Muslims (and often non-Muslims) can live securely under just governance, free from fear and oppression.⁵

Though historically contrasted with *Dar al-Harb* (abode of war), modern reinterpretations emphasize *Dar al-Aman* as any territory that guarantees human dignity, rule of law, and environmental sustainability—criteria increasingly relevant in the age of climate collapse.

This article contends that these Islamic concepts can be ethically and jurisprudentially reconfigured to address the plight of Pakistan’s climate-displaced populations. By anchoring climate migration in Islamic moral vocabulary, the state and civil society can mobilize religious legitimacy to advocate for protection, inclusion, and redress. The study proceeds in five parts: (1) a review of Pakistan’s climate displacement crisis; (2) a theological and jurisprudential analysis of *Hijrah*; (3) a re-examination of *Dar al-Aman* in ecological terms; (4) an assessment of current state and civil society responses through an Islamic lens; and (5) policy recommendations grounded in Islamic ethics.

Climate Displacement in Pakistan: Scale and Patterns

Pakistan’s geography renders it acutely vulnerable to climate shocks. The Indus River basin—home to over 60% of the population—is prone to both flooding and water scarcity. In Sindh and southern Punjab, rising temperatures and saline intrusion have decimated agriculture, forcing rural communities to migrate to urban peripheries like Karachi, Hyderabad, and Lahore.⁶

In Baluchistan, prolonged droughts since the early 2000s have displaced pastoralist communities, many of whom now reside in informal settlements without access to basic services.⁷

Along the coast, sea-level rise threatens the existence of entire villages in Thatta and Badin districts, with some communities already relocating inland.⁸

Unlike voluntary economic migrants, climate-displaced persons often move under duress, with minimal resources and no legal status. They are not recognized as “refugees” under the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor does Pakistan have a domestic

legal framework for internally displaced persons (IDPs) beyond ad hoc responses to conflict-related displacement (e.g., in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa post-2009).⁹

Consequently, climate migrants fall into a protection gap, facing eviction, labor exploitation, and social marginalization.

The 2022 floods exemplify this crisis. Despite massive humanitarian mobilization, recovery efforts prioritized infrastructure over human security. Displaced families in Sindh and Balochistan reported being excluded from compensation schemes due to lack of documentation or political connections.¹⁰ Women and children, in particular, faced heightened risks of trafficking, early marriage, and disease in overcrowded camps.¹¹

This systemic neglect contradicts both Pakistan's constitutional ethos—Article 9 guarantees the right to life, interpreted by courts to include a healthy environment¹²

Reinterpreting Hijrah in the Age of Climate Crisis

The concept of *Hijrah* occupies a central place in Islamic history and jurisprudence. The Prophet's migration from Mecca was not merely a physical relocation but a transformative act of seeking justice, safety, and the ability to practice faith freely. Classical jurists such as Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah viewed *Hijrah* as a continuing obligation whenever a Muslim's faith, life, or dignity is threatened.¹³

Ibn Qayyim, in *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn*, argued that *Hijrah* is not confined to geography but encompasses any movement toward moral and existential preservation.¹⁴

Contemporary scholars have extended this logic to non-persecutory threats. Fazlun Khalid, a leading Islamic environmentalist, posits that environmental degradation constitutes a form of *fasād fil-arḍ* (corruption on earth), which the Qur'an explicitly condemns.¹⁵

When land becomes uninhabitable due to human-induced climate change—a manifestation of *fasād*—migration becomes not only permissible but ethically

warranted. This aligns with the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law), which prioritize the preservation of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and environment (*ḥifẓ al-bī'ah*, an emerging fifth or sixth *maqṣad*).¹⁶

In the Pakistani context, climate-induced *Hijrah* is not a theoretical abstraction but a lived reality. Farmers in Jacobabad, where temperatures exceed 52°C, migrate seasonally to avoid heatstroke and crop failure. Coastal fisherfolk in Gwadar abandon ancestral homes due to saline water and cyclones. These movements are not acts of abandonment but survival strategies rooted in the Islamic imperative to preserve life. Recognizing them as forms of *Hijrah* confers moral legitimacy and shifts the narrative from “displacement” to “rightful relocation.”

Moreover, the ethics of *Hijrah* impose duties on host communities. The Ansar (residents of Medina) welcomed the Muhajirun (migrants from Mecca) with generosity, sharing homes and resources. The Qur'an praises this solidarity: “Those who, before them, had established residence in the abode [Medina] and [adopted] the faith—they love those who emigrated to them and find no hesitation in their hearts in helping them” (Qur'an 59:9).¹⁷

This verse establishes a normative model of hospitality that can guide urban communities receiving climate migrants in Karachi or Lahore.

Dar al-Aman as an Ecological and Ethical Imperative

The classical Islamic legal division of the world into *Dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam), *Dar al-Harb* (abode of war), and *Dar al-'Ahd* (abode of covenant) has been widely critiqued as outdated in a globalized, pluralistic world.¹⁸

Modern scholars like Abdullahi An-Na'im and Khaled Abou El Fadl advocate for reconceptualizing territorial categories based on justice and human dignity rather than religious demography.¹⁹

Within this framework, *Dar al-Aman* emerges as a functional and ethical concept: any space—urban, rural, national, or transnational—that provides safety, rule of law, and environmental sustainability qualifies as an abode of safety.

In Pakistan, the erosion of *Dar al-Aman* is evident in climate-vulnerable regions. When a village in Tharparkar loses its water sources due to over-extraction and drought, it ceases to function as a *Dar al-Aman*. The state, as the guardian (*walī al-amr*), bears responsibility to either restore safety (through water management, afforestation, disaster resilience) or facilitate dignified relocation. The failure to do so constitutes a breach of the social contract implicit in Islamic governance.

Conversely, cities receiving migrants must strive to become *Dār al-Amān* for newcomers. This requires more than physical shelter; it entails legal recognition, access to education and healthcare, protection from exploitation, and participation in community life. The Prophet’s Constitution of Medina—a pluralistic charter granting rights to Jews, Muslims, and others—exemplifies how *Dar al-Aman* can be institutionalized through inclusive governance.²⁰

Applying this model today, local governments in Karachi or Multan could establish migrant inclusion councils, issue provisional identity documents, and integrate climate-displaced persons into urban planning.

Importantly, *Dar al-Aman* is not static but dynamic. A city may be safe for some but not for others—e.g., climate migrants living in flood-prone katchi abadis. Thus, the pursuit of *Dar al-Aman* demands continuous environmental and social auditing, ensuring that no group is rendered vulnerable by policy neglect or ecological injustice.

State and Civil Society Responses: An Islamic Assessment

Pakistan’s response to climate displacement has been largely reactive and fragmented. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) focuses on emergency relief but lacks a long-term displacement strategy. Provincial authorities

in Sindh and Balochistan have initiated relocation projects (e.g., the “Model Climate-Resilient Villages” in Badin), but these often suffer from poor implementation and community consultation.²¹

Crucially, there is no legal category for “climate-displaced persons,” leaving them without rights to compensation, resettlement, or social protection.

From an Islamic perspective, this institutional gap violates the principle of *maṣlaḥah* (public interest). The state’s duty to ensure *maṣlaḥah* includes protecting citizens from foreseeable harm—a duty increasingly tied to climate adaptation. The Qur’an states: “And do not throw yourselves into destruction with your own hands”, a verse interpreted by scholars as a prohibition against neglecting preventive measures.²²

Failure to plan for climate displacement is thus not merely administrative inefficiency but a moral failing.

In contrast, civil society organizations rooted in Islamic ethics have demonstrated more responsive models. The Edhi Foundation and Al-Khidmat Foundation provide emergency shelter, food, and medical aid to flood-affected populations, often before state agencies arrive.²³

Their work embodies the Prophetic tradition: “The believer who mixes with people and endures their harm is better than the one who does not mix or endure.”²⁴

More innovatively, the Islamic Relief Pakistan has piloted “climate-resilient livelihoods” programs in Sindh, combining *zakāt*-funded microfinance with drought-resistant agriculture training.²⁵

Such initiatives align with the Islamic concept of *ta’āwun* (mutual cooperation) and demonstrate how faith-based actors can fill governance gaps.

However, even these efforts remain ad hoc. What is needed is a national framework that integrates Islamic ethics into climate displacement policy—recognizing

migrants not as burdens but as fellow trustees (*khalīfah*) of God’s creation, deserving of dignity and support.

Toward an Islamic Framework for Climate Migration Policy

Building on the reinterpretation of *Hijrah* and *Dar al-Aman*, this section proposes a policy framework grounded in Islamic principles:

- 1. Legal Recognition of Climate Displacement:** Pakistan should enact a National Climate Displacement Protection Act that defines climate-displaced persons, guarantees their rights (shelter, documentation, non-refoulement to unsafe zones), and establishes a dedicated implementation authority. This fulfills the Islamic duty of *‘adl* (justice) and *ḥimāyah* (protection).
- 2. Integration of Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah into Climate Policy:** National and provincial climate adaptation plans should explicitly reference the *maqāṣid*, particularly *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (life) and *ḥifẓ al-bī‘ah* (environment). Environmental impact assessments must include social vulnerability analyses to prevent displacement.
- 3. Urban Inclusion as Dar al-Aman:** Municipalities receiving climate migrants should develop “Inclusive City Charters” inspired by the Constitution of Medina. These would ensure access to housing, education, and healthcare, and create community mediation forums to resolve tensions.
- 4. Mobilization of Zakāt and Waqf for Resilience:** The federal *Zakāt* system and provincial *waqf* boards should allocate funds for climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable areas and livelihood support for displaced families. This transforms religious obligations into social protection mechanisms.
- 5. Islamic Environmental Education:** Curricula in schools and mosques should teach climate ethics as part of Islamic stewardship (*khilāfah*). Sermons during Ramadan and Hajj can emphasize environmental *ḥisbah* (accountability) and the sin of ecological waste (*isrāf*).
- 6. Regional Solidarity:** Pakistan should advocate in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for a collective Islamic response to climate migration, including shared early-warning systems, cross-border relocation protocols, and green finance mechanisms.

These measures do not require new theology but a renewed commitment to applying existing Islamic principles to emerging crises. They also align with Pakistan’s international commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Conclusion

Climate migration is not a future scenario for Pakistan—it is a present reality demanding urgent ethical and institutional responses. Islamic tradition, far from being silent on this issue, offers a rich reservoir of concepts and values that can guide compassionate and effective action. By reinterpreting *Hijrah* as a legitimate response to environmental duress and reimagining *Dar al-Aman* as an ecological and social imperative, Pakistan can develop a uniquely Islamic model of climate justice.

This model affirms the dignity of the displaced, assigns clear responsibilities to the state and society, and roots policy in the nation's deepest moral commitments. In doing so, it not only addresses a humanitarian crisis but also revitalizes the ethical core of Pakistan's Islamic identity. As the Qur'an reminds: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam"

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