

Causes of Seasonal Out-Migration in the Terms of Agricultural Perspectives in Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram, Bangladesh

Abstract

This paper explores the major push-pull and self-selective factors driving seasonal out-migration in Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram District, from an agricultural perspective. Seasonal migration, especially during lean agricultural periods, is a longstanding livelihood strategy in this region. The study utilizes primary and secondary data to understand the agricultural dynamics influencing past and present migration trends. Key factors contributing to seasonal out-migration include flooding and river erosion, agricultural off-seasons, landlessness, poverty, limited employment opportunities, climatic variability, debt, economic pressure, social networks, and migration traditions. The research reveals that natural vulnerabilities and seasonal food insecurity continue to drive migration. Most migrants are agricultural wage laborers, landless, and marginal farmers. The study also highlights that households' coping capacity is closely linked to the socio-economic status of the household head, with illiterate and low-income groups being more vulnerable than their educated and higher-income parts. This study identified the significant role of agricultural changes in shaping migration decisions and suggests that interventions aimed at reducing dependency on seasonal migration could foster sustainable development. The push factors, such as poverty and unemployment, are more influential than pull factors. Empowering migrants through education, safety nets, and diversified income opportunities, both in their villages and at migration destinations, can transform migration from a necessity into a choice. Collaboration works among communities, government, NGOs, and other stakeholders is important for implementing sustainable and impactful policies and strategies.

Keywords: Seasonal out-migration, agricultural perspectives, Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram.

1. Introduction

Internal migration, mostly composed of young adults and the poor, constitutes the largest flow of people in developing countries (UNDP, 2009). In developing countries, where households face labor and financial market constraints, migration can be a strategy to diversify income sources and cope with risks (Rosenzweig and Stark, 1989; Protik and Kuhn, 2006). In

Bangladesh, a small South-Asian country bordering India and Myanmar, seasonal hunger afflicts a large portion of the rural population, especially those living in the northwest region of Rangpur. During the annual seasonal famine, income decreases by 50-60% and spending on food drops by 10-25%. About 15.4 million people live in Rangpur. Approximately 13.6 million of these people live in areas where during the yearly pre-harvest season, there is a decline in labor demand and wages causing households that don't own land to regularly skip meals. The limited income opportunities during the lean season drive residents to migrate temporarily to urban areas or neighboring regions for work, particularly in construction and the service industry (Rahman et al. 2020). Simultaneously, low-skill labor opportunities become available in other regions of the country. Seasonal migration for these jobs, which generally entails leaving farms to move to more lucrative cities, is a common practice. It is a practice that the rural poor in Bangladesh use to provide for their families so they can eat regularly (Sarah Uddin, 2020).

This research aimed to understand the patterns, causes, and impacts of seasonal out-migration among agricultural workers in Bangladesh, and to explore how this phenomenon influences agricultural productivity, rural economies, and socio-economic conditions of Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram. Environmental conditions particularly the impacts of climate change play a crucial role in seasonal migration patterns in Phulbari. The region is prone to flooding and other climate-related challenges, which significantly affect the agricultural productivity. Adverse weather conditions compel many residents to seek temporary employment elsewhere, particularly during the monsoon season when agricultural activities are hindered (Hossain et al. 2019). The study region faces ongoing challenges related to climate change and economic instability, addressing the implications of seasonal migration is essential for development and community resilience.

2. Data and Methods

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the patterns, causes, and impacts of seasonal out-migration in Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the migration dynamics within the context of rural Bangladesh.

To conceptualize migration decision-making of rural people in northern Bangladesh (Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram), individually utilize qualitative data collected through individual interviews and questionnaire survey and utilize quantitative data through questionnaire survey. These are the primary sources of data. Some secondary sources of data used also. Different published research (BBS, Researchgate.net, IOM, UNHCR and some individual research paper published by other website), unpublished dissertation and field report, Union Parishad, Upazila Parishod used as secondary data source.

Phulbari upazila in Kurigram district is purposefully selected for this study. Phulbari Upazila area 156.61 square km, located in between 25°32' and 26°04' north latitudes and between 89°28' and 89°40' east longitudes. It is bounded by West Bengal state of India on the north, Kurigram Sadar, Rajarhat and Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila on the south, Nageshwari upazila on the east, Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila on the west. Literacy rate and educational institutions Average literacy 44.8%; male 50.0%, female 39.8%. Main sources of income agriculture 74.28%, non-agricultural laborer 5.18%, industry 0.25%, commerce 9.31%, transport and communication 1.70%, service 3.81%, construction 0.65%, religious service 0.18%, rent and remittance 0.17% and others 4.47%. (Banglapedia)

Questionnaire survey conducted among 50 samples by random sampling. Some KII and FGD conducted. Data collection took place during the Aman period in September 2024, when the most of the temporary migrants were present in their home place. Collected data analyzed after data cleaning process. After analysis the data represented in graphs, tables, pie-chart and diagrams.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio economic status

Field Survey, July 2024 shows that highest proportions of the migrants (54%) were adults and most of the respondents are male about 90% and female 10%. Most of the households are nuclear family (84%). Married respondents are 80% of total sample; some of the others are single 10%, widowed 6% and last is divorced 4%.

Table: 1 Age distribution of the respondents

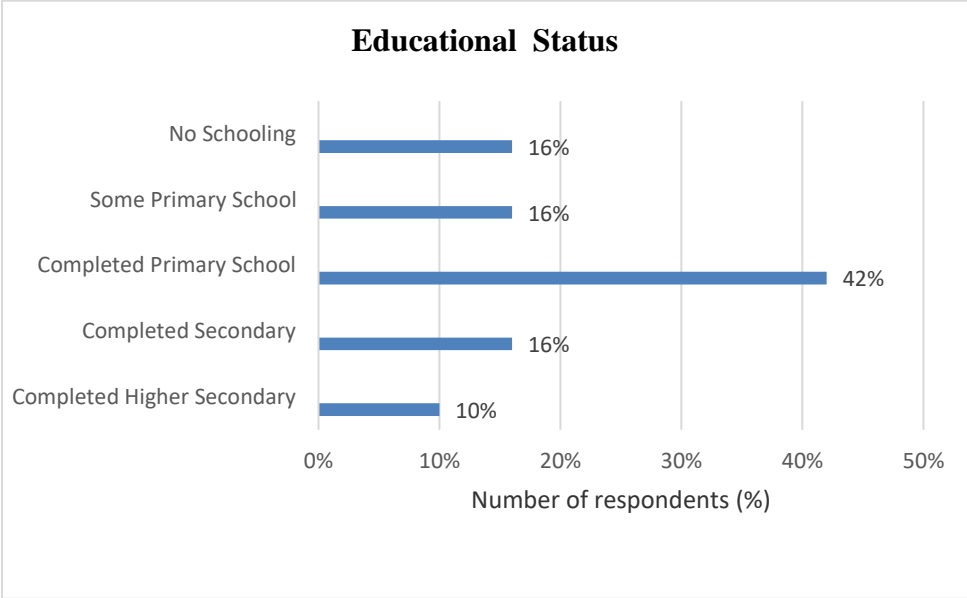
Age frequency	Percentage
18-25	18%
26-35	54%
36-45	24%
46 and above	4%
Total	100%

Source: Field Survey, July 2024

Figure: 1 represents that, most of the respondents are completed primary school (42%), illiterate is about 16%, some person went school but didn't completed their primary level is about 16%, completed secondary level is about 16% and completed higher secondary level is about 10%.

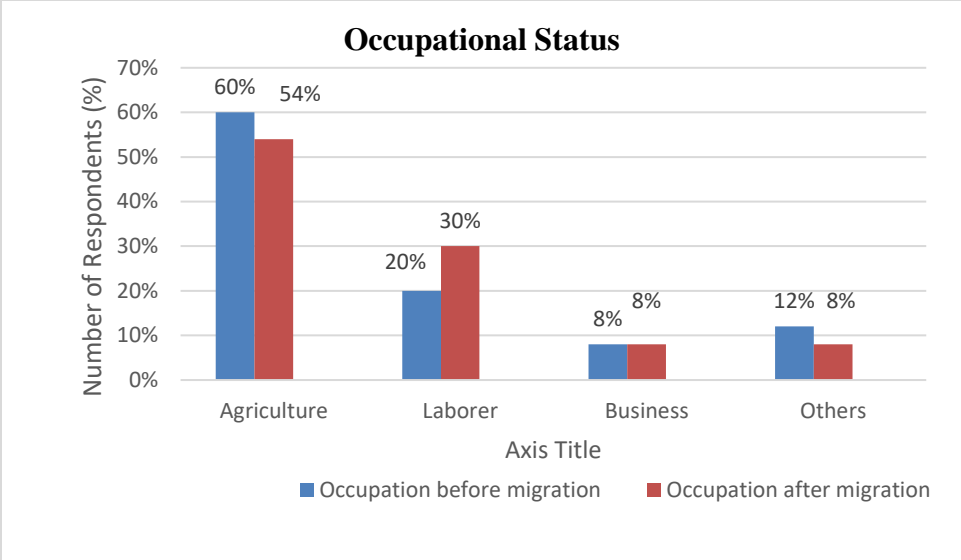
Figure: 2 shows that, 60% of the respondents engaged with agriculture activities before migration, but after migration it gone lower down to 54%. Labor work increased among the respondents after migration. All about 30% respondents engaged in labor work after migration while it was 20% before migration. There is no difference between after and before migration among the business works.

Figure: 1 Education Status of the respondents



Source: Field Survey, July 2024

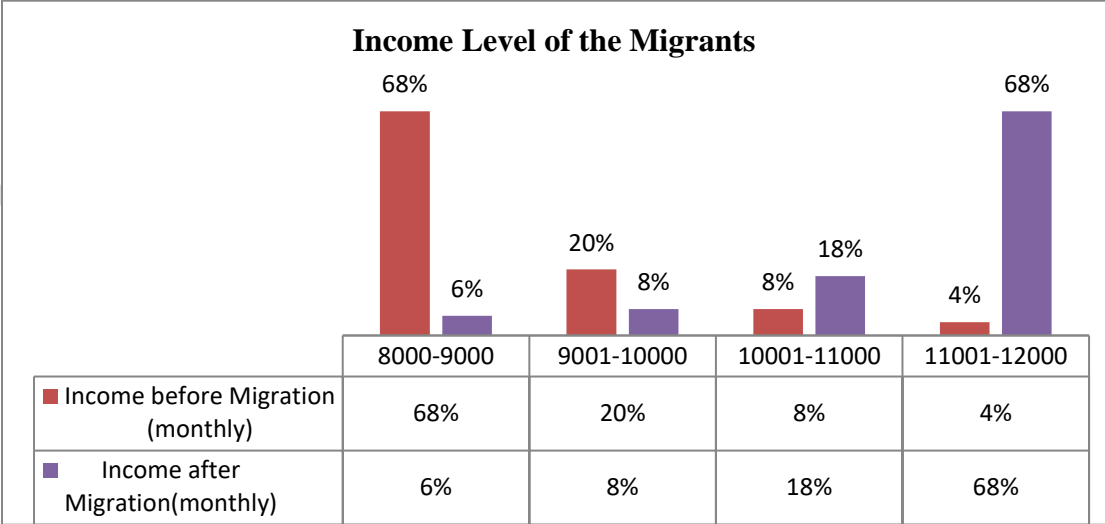
Figure: 2 Occupational Status of the respondents



Source: Field Survey, July 2024

The figure: 3 represents that, income level is higher in destination than origin area. The figure shows that the highest income (68%) in origin place ranges from (8000-9000) and in the destination highest income (68%) ranges from (11001-12000).

Figure: 3 Income Levels of the Migrants



Source: Field Survey, July 2024

Table: 2 Crop periods in the study area

Activity	Months
Boro planting time	Magh
Boro harvesting time	Choitra
Aush planting time	Falgun
Aush harvesting time	Boishakh
Aman planting time	Srabon
Aman harvesting time	Kartik-Ograhaon

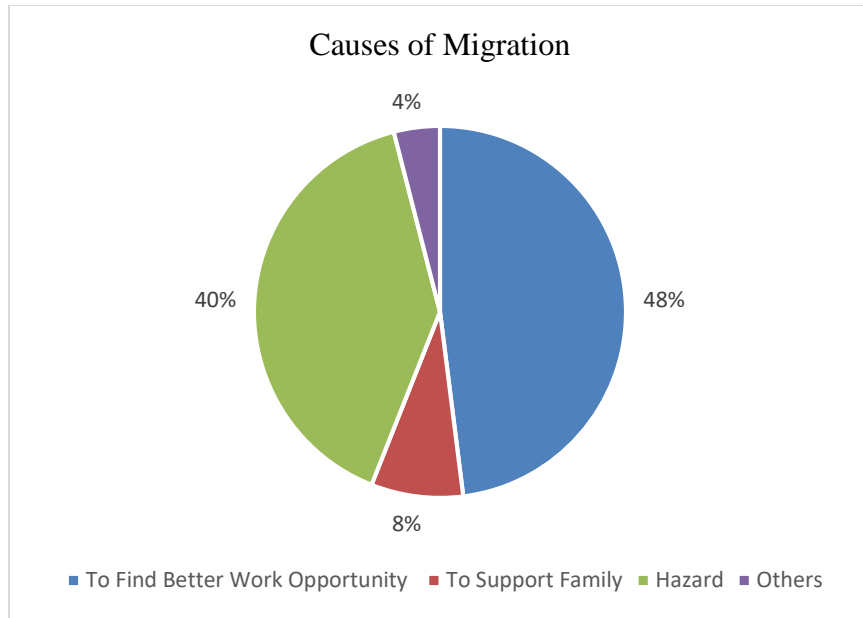
Source: Field Survey, July 2024

The respondent said that indeed there are ample job opportunities in their home region in “Boro”, “Aush” and “Aman” planting and cutting season. But they suffer much lack of job opportunities during “mid-Falgun to mid-Choitra” and “mid-Ashwin to mid-Kartik”. At that time they went in search of work in different areas within Bangladesh like Jatrapur, Barishal, Pabna, Kumilla, Bogura, Munsiganj, Feni, and Dhaka etc. Could be said that, the study area is full of job opportunities in the agricultural season but off season in agricultural work most of the respondent are suffer mostly.98% respondents said “yes” in agricultural off season it is hard to find work in the study area and 2% said no.

3.2 Causes of migration

The pie chart in figure: 4 reveals that, most of the migrants (48%) migrated for better work in the agricultural off season and the other most important cause for migration is hazards like floods is about 40%; then, to support family economic condition is about 8% and others is about 4%.The respondents said that often they are inspired by their family members, friends and neighbors to migrate. The field survey, 2024 shows 80% people are inspired to migrate by friends and family members. Neighbors also influences to migration and is about 16% and 2 respondents migrated by themselves.

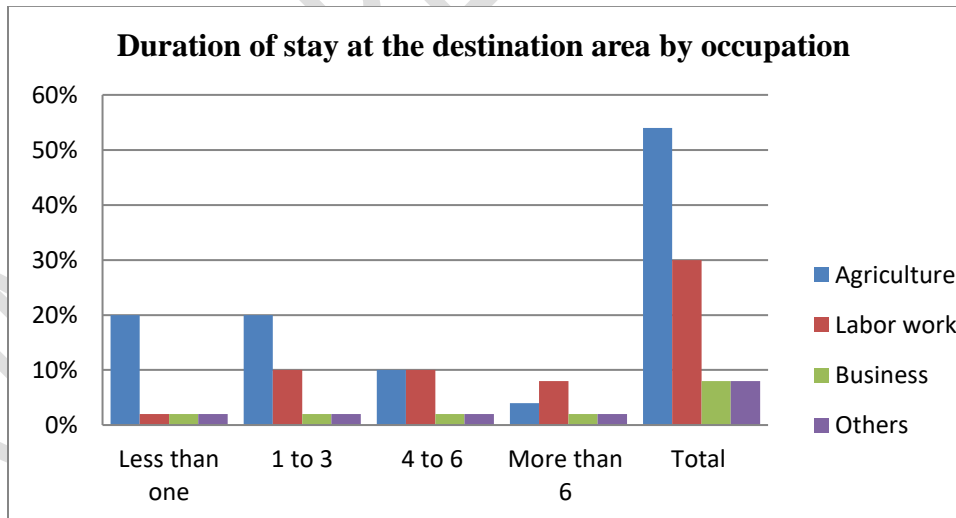
Figure: 4 Causes of migration



Source: Field Survey, July 2024

3.3 Duration of Stay at the Destination area by Occupation

Figure: 5 Duration of stay at the destination area by occupation



Source: Field Survey, September 2024

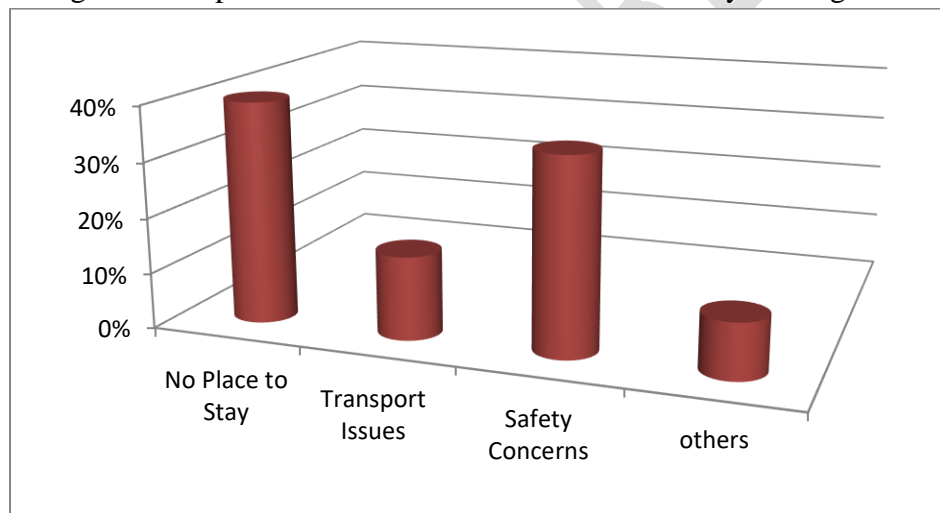
According to the respondent information after migration 54% work in agriculture, 30% work in laborer, 8% work in business and 8% work in others sector.

Total 26% respondents are migrated for less than one-month in agriculture (20%), in labor work (2%), business (2%) and others sector (2%). Total 34% migrants are migrated for 1-3 months in agriculture (20%), in labor work (10%), business (2%) and others sector (2%). Total 24% migrants are migrated for 4-6 months in agriculture (10%), in labor work (10%), business (2%) and others sector (2%). Total 16% migrants are migrate for more than 6 months in agriculture (4%), in labor work (8%), business (2%) and others sector (2%).

3.4 Problems Faced in Destination Area

The migrants faced lots of problem in their destination areas. The problems are broadly three categories: no place to stay 40%, transport issues 15%, safety concerns 35%. Another problems are low social status, lack of cooperative organization and inequality in wage.

Figure: 6 the problems faced in the destination area by the migrants:



Source: Field Survey, September 2024, Phulbari Upazila, Kurigram

4. Conclusion

Phulbari Upazila in Kurigram, is prone to riverbank erosion and seasonal flooding due to its location near major rivers like the Dhorla and Teesta, which forces farmers to seek seasonal work elsewhere. The loss of land from erosion and siltation diminishes farming opportunities, pushing families to migrate for alternative sources of income during off-peak agricultural seasons. Phulbari experiences the "monga" period a time between planting and harvest seasons,

especially in pre-harvest months. During this period, lacking of agricultural work created, causing a scarcity of income and food insecurity. As a result, people migrate to urban areas or other districts to find temporary employment.

Seasonal out-migration in Phulbari Upazila is deeply tied to the vulnerabilities and constraints faced by the agricultural sector. In the study area, seasonal out-migration is a common response to the agricultural off-season, driven primarily by unemployment, food insecurity, and environmental challenges such as floods and river erosion. Migration offers short-term financial relief through remittances but poses challenges to the long-term sustainability of local agricultural productivity. From an agricultural perspective, this pattern of migration creates labor shortages during critical farming seasons, impeding agricultural development and limiting the region's potential for growth. The frequent outflow of labor also constrains innovation in farming practices, as people often lack the stability or resources to invest in more productive, sustainable agricultural methods. The complex interplay between environmental factors, economic vulnerability, and agricultural dependence highlights the need for targeted interventions. Policies that promote livelihood diversification, climate-resilient agriculture, and improved infrastructure, such as irrigation and flood management, can significantly reduce the pressure to migrate. Additionally, government support through employment schemes, access to agricultural technology, and market connectivity could enhance local agricultural productivity, mitigating the need for out-migration. While seasonal out-migration serves as a coping mechanism for Phulbari's rural households, it is not a sustainable solution to the deeper issues of agricultural vulnerability and economic insecurity. A long-term strategy that focuses on strengthening local agriculture, promoting alternative livelihoods, and building climate resilience will be essential to reduce dependency on migration and ensure the socio-economic stability of the region.

5. References

- Ali, M. (2018). "Migration Patterns in Rural Bangladesh: A Case Study." *Journal of South Asian Studies*.
- Amnesty International. (2024). "The Rate of the World's Human Rights."
- Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council. (2022). *Economic Analysis of Agricultural Wages*.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Agricultural Census 2019*. www.bbs.portal.gov.bd.
- Barham, B., & Boucher, S. (1998). Migration, remittances, and inequality: estimating the net effects of migration on income distribution. *Journal of Development Economics*, 30, 55(2): 307-311.
- FAO. (2023). *Rural Development and Food Security in Bangladesh*.
- Hossain, M. (2017). "Economic Opportunities and Migration in Bangladesh." *Bangladesh*

Economic Review.

- Hossain, M. (2019). "Rural Labor Market in Bangladesh: Dynamics and Challenges." *Journal of Agricultural Economics*.
- Hossain, M., Islam, R., & Ahmed, S. (2019). Climate Change and its Impact on Migration Patterns in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Kurigram. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 101, 25-34.
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2022). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022*.
- International Labor Organization (ILO). (2021). "World Employment Social Outlook 2021."
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2019). "World Migration Report 2020."
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*.
- Islam, M.R., & FOK, S. (2016). The Role of Social Networks in the Migration of Rural Workers: Evidence from Bangladesh. *Migration Studies*, 4(3), 307-327.
- Khan, R. (2020). "Climate Change and Rural Migration: The Case of Kurigram." *Environmental Studies Journal*.
- Kone, J., & Patz, J.A. (2018). "Climate Change and Migration: A Systematic Literature Review." *Environmental Research Letters*, 13(12), 123006. Doi: 10.1088/1748-9326/aae665.
- Maqsood, M. (2019). "Adapting to Climate Change: Rural Migration in Bangladesh." *Journal of Environmental Research*.
- Martin, P.L., & Tylor, J.E. (2015). "The Anatomy of a Migrant Labor Market: Seasonal Work in Agriculture." *International Migration Review*, 49(1), 14-42. Doi: 10.1111/imre.12112.
- Mastorillo, M., et al. (2016). "The Impact of Seasonal Migration on Rural Household Income." *World Development*, 82, 84-96.
- National Geographic Society. (2021). *Migration National Geographic*.
- Porte, A., & Rumbaut, R. (2014). *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. University of California Press.
- Protik, A., & Kuhn, R. (2006). *The Hidden Cost of Migration: Effects of Brother's Migration on Sister's Marriage Outcomes in Rural Bangladesh*. Unpublished Manuscript, Department of Economics, Brown University.
- Rahman, A. (2016). "Diversifying Income Sources: Migration as a Strategy." *Asian Journal of Development Studies*.
- Rahman, M.M., Hossain, M., & Rahman, S. (2020). Economic Drivers of Seasonal Migration in Bangladesh: A Focus on Phulbari. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 6(1), 45-58.
- Rosenzweig, M.R., & Stark, O. (1989). Consumption Smoothing, Migration, and Marriage: Evidence from Rural India. *Journal of Political Economy*, 97(4), 905-926.
- United Nations Development Program. (2009). *Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development: Human Development Report 2009*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021). In *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020*.