

Bibliometric analysis of forced migration

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Abstract

This bibliometric analysis systematically examines the evolution of scientific research on forced migration between 1974 and 2025. Using data extracted from the Scopus database and processed through the Bibliometrix package in R, the study investigates publication trajectories, international collaboration patterns, and thematic developments across five decades. The analysis aims to identify major research areas, influential authors and institutions, and emerging conceptual directions within this geographically diverse field. Results indicate a steady and substantial growth in scholarly output, with an annual growth rate of 9.41% and an average of 15.56 citations per document, reflecting the increasing global relevance of displacement as a social, political, and humanitarian challenge. Collaboration networks show strong academic linkages among Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, although notable regional disparities persist, particularly in areas heavily affected by displacement but underrepresented in academic production. Thematic clustering and Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) reveal three dominant research fields, including determinants and governance of migration, humanitarian responses and conflict induced displacement, and typologies and trajectories of forced migration. These findings clarify the field's conceptual landscape and emphasize the need for broader international engagement and increased research contributions from understudied regions. The analysis offers a structured foundation for future investigations and supports the development of more informed and context sensitive approaches to understanding contemporary displacement dynamics.

Keywords: forced migration, bibliometric analysis, research trends, population movements, armed conflicts, refugee displacement

Introduction

Forced migration represents one of the most complex and persistent forms of human mobility, with profound implications for security, development, and human rights. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2023a), over 110 million people are displaced globally due to a wide range of causes, including armed conflicts, political persecution, natural disasters, economic collapse, and imposed development projects. In a global landscape marked by instability and interdependence, forced migration is no longer a marginal phenomenon but a reality of the 21st century.

Despite its scale, academic research on forced migration remains fragmented and dispersed across disciplines and methodological approaches. Studies often focus on specific regional contexts, particular types of migration such as displacement caused by armed conflict or natural disasters, legal and humanitarian dimensions. This diversity, while valuable, makes it difficult to achieve an integrated understanding of the evolution of scientific knowledge in the field.

In this context, bibliometric analysis becomes an essential tool for identifying dominant trends, influential authors, recurring sources, and areas of insufficient thematic coverage. Using the Bibliometrix platform, this article aims to provide a systematic synthesis of the scientific literature on forced migration, analyzing articles indexed in the Scopus database over recent decades.

The main objective is to highlight the dynamics of research on forced migration, identify emerging themes, and contribute to the consolidation of a coherent conceptual framework. In a world where imposed mobility is increasingly frequent, understanding how forced migration is addressed in scientific literature is not only relevant but urgent.

Recent studies have documented a significant increase in scholarly attention to forced migration, particularly in relation to its economic, social, and policy dimensions. Forced migration is not a homogeneous phenomenon but a heterogeneous field shaped by distinct drivers, legal categories and research traditions. For instance, Quinn & Ruiz (2022) highlight the challenges of integrating forced migrants into host economies and the policy frameworks required to support them effectively. Similarly, Roza & Grossman (2025) identify over 250 studies published

between 2010 and 2024 that examine the effects of forced displacement using experimental and quasi-experimental methods, reflecting a surge in evidence-based research on this topic.

In the same direction, Crawley & Skleparis (2018) analyse how the Syrian conflict has reshaped research on refugee governance and border regimes, while Schrooten (2025) examines how the Ukrainian refugee crisis has generated new research on temporary protection, solidarity mechanisms, and the reconfiguration of European migration governance. Likewise, Alam (2019) explores the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and shows how its historical depth and the dynamics of statelessness have stimulated extensive scholarship on forced displacement and minority persecution.

A growing body of work by authors such as McAdam (2020), who analyses the protection gaps faced by people displaced by climate impacts through the framework of international human rights law, and Boas et al. (2019), who challenge dominant narratives surrounding climate related mobility and show how political and epistemic assumptions shape interpretations of environmental movement, illustrates the consolidation and maturation of research on climate induced displacement and environmental mobility.

These contributions reveal both the richness and fragmentation of the field, reinforcing the need for a systematic bibliometric analysis to map dominant trends, identify underexplored areas, and support the development of a more integrated research agenda.

Theoretical framework

Conceptualizing forced migration

Forced migration is a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of political violence, structural inequalities, environmental pressures, and development dynamics. In institutional definitions, forced migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups compelled to leave their habitual residence due to factors beyond their control. As noted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2023b), displacement arises from persecution, armed conflict, generalized violence, or systematic human rights violations. The International Organization for Migration (2019) expands this definition by including disaster-induced displacement, environmental degradation, and development-induced relocation.

Academic literature has progressively refined this conceptual field. Castles (2003) emphasizes the structural and political determinants of displacement, arguing that forced migration is embedded in global systems of inequality and conflict. Richmond (1994) introduces the continuum between voluntary and involuntary mobility, challenging binary distinctions and highlighting the role of constrained agency. Black (2001) further conceptualizes

forced migration as a spectrum shaped by coercion, vulnerability, and limited decision making capacity.

Debates in forced migration studies and the interdisciplinary nature of the field

Forced migration studies are shaped by several enduring conceptual debates that reflect both the complexity of displacement processes and the diversity of disciplinary approaches that examine them. One of the most persistent debates concerns the distinction between voluntary and involuntary mobility. Rather than treating these categories as mutually exclusive, scholars argue that most migration decisions fall along a continuum of constraint. Richmond (1994) articulated this position through his influential concept of a continuum of coercion, emphasizing that displacement is rarely the result of entirely free choice or absolute compulsion, but instead emerges from varying degrees of structural pressure, risk, and limited agency.

A second major debate revolves around the tension between agency and victimhood. Early research tended to portray displaced persons primarily as passive victims of conflict, persecution, or structural violence. More recent scholarship challenges this reductionist view by highlighting the capacity of displaced individuals to act, negotiate constraints, and develop adaptive strategies. Bakewell (2010) argues that migration theory must account for the agency of individuals even in highly constrained contexts, while Malkki (1995) demonstrates how humanitarian narratives have often simplified the lived experiences of refugees by reducing them to administrative labels and legal categories.

The securitization of migration constitutes another central area of debate. In many political contexts, states increasingly frame forced migration as a security issue, shaping border regimes, asylum procedures, and humanitarian responses. Huysmans (2000) shows how the European Union has incorporated migration into broader security discourses, while Bigo (2002) explains how practices of surveillance and control emerge from what he terms the “governmentality of unease,” producing new forms of exclusion and regulation.

A further conceptual tension concerns the divergence between legal and sociological definitions of displacement. Legal categories such as “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” and “internally displaced person” are essential for international protection frameworks, yet scholars note that these classifications do not always capture the complexity of lived experiences. Zetter (2007) argues that legal labels are political and administrative constructs that can obscure rather than clarify the realities of displacement, and Turton (2003) emphasizes that social experiences often transcend the rigid boundaries imposed by international law.

These debates unfold within a field that is profoundly interdisciplinary. Forced migration research draws on

geography, sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, law, and environmental studies, each discipline contributing distinct theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (2014) highlight the breadth of theoretical and methodological diversity within the field, while Castles et al. (2014) situate forced migration within broader global transformations. Black (2001) traces the evolution of refugee studies from normative and policy-oriented approaches toward more analytically complex frameworks that account for structural forces, agency, and global change.

This interdisciplinarity produces a rich but fragmented body of literature in which concepts, methods, and terminologies vary significantly across fields. Such fragmentation underscores the value of a bibliometric analysis, which can systematically map dominant paradigms, emerging themes, and structural gaps in knowledge production. Aria & Cuccurullo (2017) demonstrate that bibliometric methods are particularly well suited for synthesizing research in interdisciplinary domains, while Börner (2010) shows how science mapping and network visualization can illuminate the conceptual architecture of complex research fields.

Analytical structure of forced migration studies

Forced migration studies have developed as an interdisciplinary field situated between anthropology, geography, sociology, political science, and international law. Since the 1980s, the field has progressively moved beyond the narrow legal definition of the refugee, shifting toward the analysis of social, political, and spatial processes that generate constrained mobility (Castles et al., 2014). This evolution has produced a diversified methodological landscape in which qualitative, quantitative, and spatial approaches are combined to explain coercion, structural violence, and the governance of mobility (Turton, 2003).

Qualitative approaches remain central because they capture the lived experiences of displacement and the meanings individuals assign to coercion. Ethnographic fieldwork documents processes of uprooting, identity reconstruction, and interactions with state institutions (Malkki, 1995). In depth interviews trace mobility trajectories, coping strategies, and perceptions of constraint, while discourse analysis examines how institutional actors construct categories such as refugee, asylum seeker, or internally displaced person (Zetter, 2007). These methods illuminate the symbolic, identity related and political dimensions of forced migration.

Quantitative and demographic perspectives analyse the scale, direction, and socio demographic characteristics of displaced populations (Castles et al., 2014). Statistical modelling identifies structural drivers of forced migration, including conflict, institutional collapse, and environmental disasters (Hatton & Williamson, 2003). Survey data measure living conditions, access to services,

and socio economic integration, while demographic reconstruction examines mortality, fertility, and age structures in crisis contexts (Bilsborrow, 1992). These techniques enable comparability and generalisation, complementing qualitative insights.

Spatial and geographical approaches provide tools for understanding territorial patterns and constrained mobility. GIS mapping visualises displacement routes, camp locations, conflict zones, and humanitarian corridors (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Spatial network analysis models the connections among actors, territories, and infrastructures of control, while diachronic mapping traces temporal changes in territorial distributions (Hyndman, 2000). These procedures clarify the spatiality of coercion and the territorial governance of mobility.

Critical and post structural approaches have expanded the field since the 1990s by analysing how states and international organisations produce, classify, and manage forced mobility. Governmentality studies examine technologies of control and surveillance (Bigo, 2002). Labeling theory investigates how institutional categories shape social and political outcomes (Zetter, 2007). Securitization theory explains how migration becomes framed as a security issue (Bigo, 2002), while post colonial perspectives explore power relations, representation, and global hierarchies (Malkki, 1995). These approaches foreground the institutional and political dimensions of forced migration.

Forced migration studies are characterised by pronounced methodological pluralism. Researchers combine qualitative methods to analyse experiences and representations, quantitative methods to measure large scale patterns, spatial methods to understand territorial distributions, and critical approaches to examine institutional and political structures. This pluralism enables a comprehensive understanding of displacement as both a human experience and a structural phenomenon.

In a fragmented and rapidly expanding field, bibliometric analysis offers a systematic tool for identifying thematic evolutions, mapping networks of authors, institutions, and concepts, highlighting dominant paradigms and epistemological shifts, and understanding how the field reconfigures in response to political and institutional transformations (Börner, 2010). Through its capacity to synthesise large bodies of literature, bibliometrics contributes to clarifying the intellectual structure of forced migration studies.

Mehodology

Bibliometric analysis provides a structured pathway to transform dispersed scholarly outputs into cumulative scientific knowledge. This method provides a systematic and quantitative approach to evaluating scholarly production, dissemination, and utilization. As a methodological framework, bibliometrics employs

statistical and mathematical techniques to assess both the quality and quantity of academic outputs, including journal articles, books, and reviews (Durieux & Gevenois, 2010).

The bibliometric approach unfolds through a sequence of stages that include defining the research problem, reviewing the relevant literature, selecting appropriate databases, search terms, and inclusion or exclusion criteria, establishing the methodological framework and analytical software, collecting and organizing the data in line with the research objectives, importing the dataset into the software for analysis, and finally visualizing and reporting the results.

In this study, bibliometric methods are applied to the domain of forced migration research with the aim of identifying publication trends, citation networks, and thematic clusters. The dataset was extracted from the Scopus database, which offers comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across disciplines. The analysis focuses on publications between 1974 and 2024, ensuring both historical depth and contemporary relevance.

Bibliometric indicators were computed using the Bibliometrix R package through its Biblioshiny interface, which provides integrated tools for descriptive statistics, network construction, and thematic exploration. The methodological approach combined quantitative indicators with visual mapping techniques to capture publication dynamics and conceptual structures within the literature on forced migration.

Database selection and justification

Scopus was selected as the primary data source because it provides broad multidisciplinary coverage of peer reviewed journals and is widely used in scientometric research across the social sciences. Its structured metadata, standardized indexing of authors, affiliations, and keywords, and advanced search functionalities make it suitable for mapping publication trends and thematic structures in an interdisciplinary field such as forced migration.

At the same time, several limitations of Scopus must be acknowledged. In this regard, Mongeon & Paul-Hus (2016) show that major bibliographic databases tend to privilege English language and Western journals, which leads to the underrepresentation of research produced in the Global South or published in regional outlets. Similarly, Chavarro et al. (2018) demonstrate that commercial indexing systems reproduce structural imbalances in global knowledge production, particularly affecting fields with strong regional or interdisciplinary components. Scopus also offers limited coverage of legal sources, policy documents, and institutional reports, materials that are highly relevant for forced migration studies.

Search strategy, data collection and sampling

The dataset used in this bibliometric study was obtained from Scopus, one of the main international databases widely employed in academic research. Scopus has been consistently used for bibliometric analyses across various scientific fields (Baas et al., 2020). For the present analysis, records related to forced migration and associated topics were identified through the application of specific search terms and logical operators (Table 1). The use of English language search terms is justified by the fact that most publications indexed in Scopus are written in English, and for articles published in other languages, abstracts and keywords are generally provided in English as well. The database was queried on 3 November 2025, ensuring the inclusion of the most recent publications available at that time.

Table 1. Search parameters employed in the Scopus database

Search terms and logical operators
"displacement" AND "forced migrations"
OR
"deportation" AND "forced migrations"
OR
"refugees" AND "forced migrations"

The resulting dataset covered the period 1974-2025. This time span was not predefined by the authors but reflects the chronological range of the publications retrieved by Scopus, with 1974 representing the earliest indexed document matching the search criteria and 2025 the most recent year with available records. The temporal interval therefore corresponds to the distribution of the literature identified through the search strategy rather than to an a priori selection of years.

Because Scopus indexes multiple document types, the initial search results included journal articles, books, and book chapters, all of which were retained in the dataset. The inclusion of books and book chapters is justified by the fact that forced migration is an interdisciplinary field in which significant theoretical and conceptual contributions are frequently published in monographs or edited volumes.

A key stage in bibliometric research on forced migration is the establishment of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide the selection of relevant publications. Transparent and well defined rules ensure consistency, reproducibility, and validity in the search process, while reducing errors and securing comprehensive coverage of the literature. Clearly delimiting the scope of the review is therefore essential to maintaining methodological rigor and to capturing the complexity of scholarly contributions addressing this phenomenon.

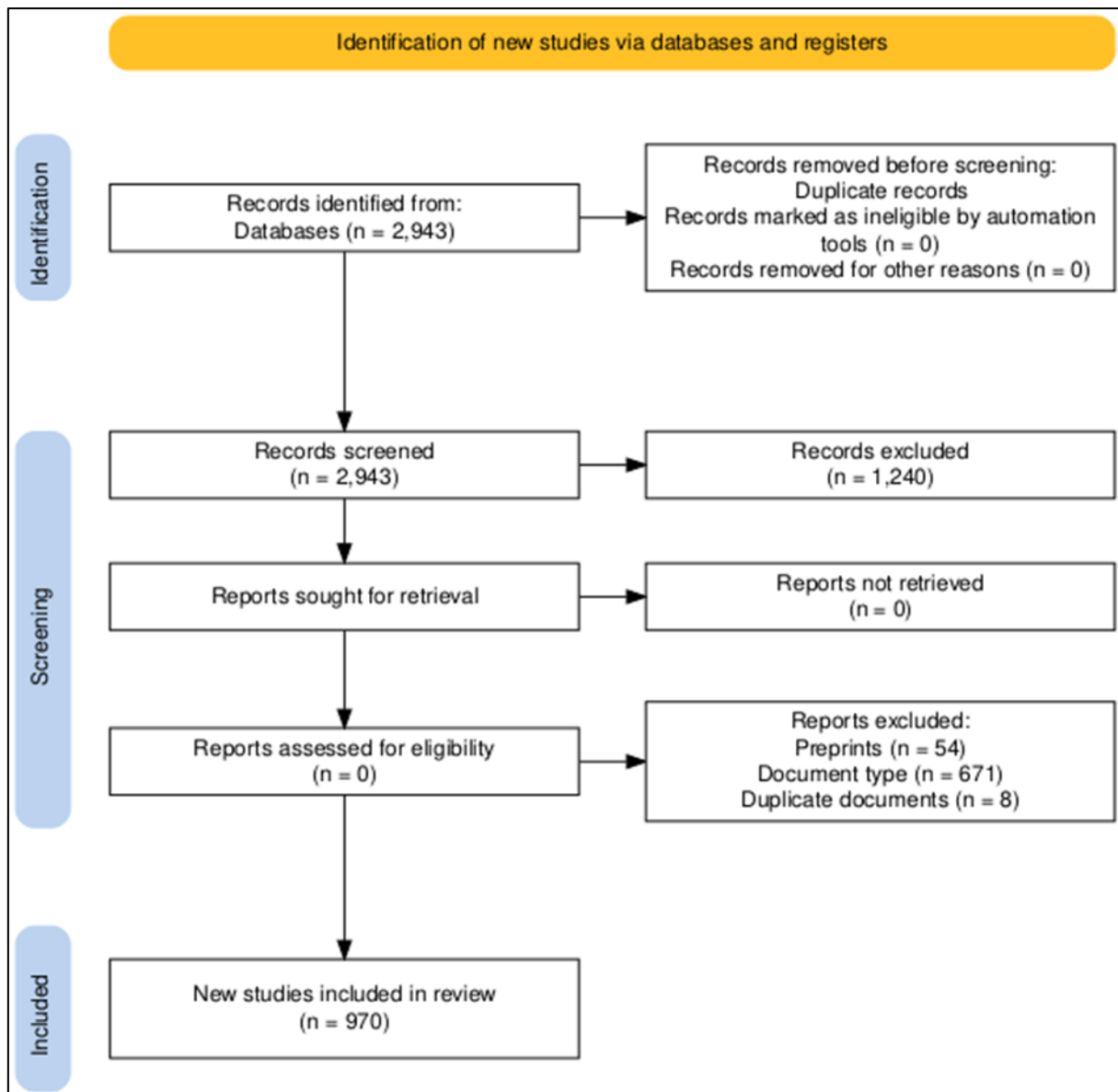


Figure 1. Selection process of studies included in the analysis according to PRISMA 2020 criteria

To support standardized reporting, the study follows the PRISMA 2020 framework, which enables systematic documentation of the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion stages. The application of PRISMA is particularly relevant in interdisciplinary fields such as forced migration, where conceptual boundaries may be fluid and the bibliographic corpus must be clearly and reproducibly defined (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). The PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1) synthesizes the decision making pathway and illustrates how the final dataset was constructed, thereby strengthening methodological transparency and facilitating comparability with other studies (PRISMA Statement, 2025).

The selection process began with the exclusion of records that did not explicitly address forced migration. At this initial stage, duplicate entries were not removed due to the large number of documents retrieved. Subsequent filtering applied predefined inclusion criteria, retaining

only publications that substantively engaged with forced migration or related phenomena. Eligible studies were required to fall within relevant disciplinary domains, particularly the social sciences and Earth and planetary sciences. Duplicate records were removed at a later stage.

The final corpus was constructed through a systematic screening procedure illustrated in Figure 1 which documents the number of records identified excluded and retained at each stage. This structured approach ensures transparency and reproducibility in delimiting the analyzed literature.

Data processing and analysis

Before conducting the bibliometric analysis, the dataset underwent a structured cleaning and pre processing procedure to ensure accuracy, consistency, and analytical reliability. The bibliometric data retrieved from Scopus were exported in CSV format and imported into

the R statistical environment, where the Bibliometrix package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) automatically performed an initial validation of the dataset. This automated step included the detection of incomplete records, the standardization of basic metadata fields, and the identification of potential inconsistencies in author names, affiliations, and keywords.

Following this automated validation, additional manual checks were carried out to refine the dataset. Duplicate records, initially retained during the screening phase due to the large number of retrieved documents, were identified and removed at this stage. Author names were standardized to correct variations in spelling, initials, and diacritics, ensuring accurate attribution in subsequent analyses of productivity and collaboration networks. Institutional names were harmonized to address inconsistencies arising from alternative spellings or changes in institutional structure over time.

Keyword harmonization constituted another essential step in the pre processing workflow. Because Scopus records often contain heterogeneous author provided keywords, synonymous or semantically overlapping terms were unified to improve the accuracy of co occurrence and thematic analyses. This process enhanced the interpretability of conceptual structures and ensured that related terms were consistently grouped within the same analytical categories.

This process resulted in a corpus of 970 studies, which were examined through a comprehensive bibliometric approach. The analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix package within the R statistical environment (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). As an open source tool, Bibliometrix offers an extensive set of functions for quantitative research in scientometrics and bibliometrics, enabling detailed investigation of publication patterns, citation structures, and the intellectual and social networks that characterize the analyzed literature.

Once the dataset was cleaned and standardized, Bibliometrix extracted citation networks and generated the matrices required for advanced bibliometric techniques, including co citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co occurrence. All visualizations, such as thematic maps, collaboration networks, and citation trend plots, were produced using functions within Bibliometrix, supplemented by the ggplot2 package in R for enhanced graphical representation (Wickham, 2009).

The analysis was conducted in two sequential phases. The first phase consisted of a descriptive analysis designed to provide an overview of the bibliometric data on forced migration. This step offered a preliminary understanding of the dataset by summarizing key indicators such as publication volume, citation counts, and the distribution of contributions across units of analysis including authors, institutions, countries, and journals. These metrics, presented in Table 2, highlighted the productivity and impact of different entities within the field.

In the second stage, bibliometric techniques were applied to analyse thematic, collaboration, and co citation networks for the period under review. This included the examination of co-citation patterns, bibliographic coupling, and collaboration structures, enabling a deeper understanding of the thematic development and scholarly interactions shaping research in this domain.

Table 2. Essential data related to the analyzed scientific papers

Topic	Total period (1974-2025)
Sources	316
Documents	970
Annual growth rate	9.41%
Authors	1826
Authors of single-authored documents	0
International Co-authorship	16.8%
Co-authors per document	3.68
References	7261
Average citation per document	15.56

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was applied to identify the most frequently used terms and their interconnections. In this approach, keywords are represented as nodes and their co-occurrence as links, thereby forming a network that reflects the conceptual proximity of terms. The strength of the links indicates how often keywords appear together within the same publication. This method enables the identification of core research topics and their relationships, the detection of emerging or declining themes based on keyword frequency over time, and the recognition of interdisciplinary connections and hybrid research areas (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

As a complementary technique, multiple correspondence analysis was employed to explore the relationships between categorical variables such as authors, institutions, countries, and research themes. Multiple correspondence analysis reduces the dimensionality of the dataset, facilitating the visualization of complex associations in a low-dimensional space. This approach provides a clear representation of structural patterns and enhances the interpretation of categorical data in bibliometric studies (Di Franco, 2016).

Analytical procedures and Bibliometrix functions

The analytical procedures applied in this study were implemented using Biblioshiny, the graphical user interface of the Bibliometrix package in R (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Biblioshiny integrates the core functions of Bibliometrix into an interactive environment, allowing the execution of descriptive, network based, and multivariate bibliometric analyses without requiring direct scripting. This interface provides access to the full analytical capabilities of Bibliometrix while ensuring reproducibility and methodological transparency.

Within Biblioshiny, descriptive indicators, such as annual scientific production, citation counts, and author productivity, were generated using the platform's built-in modules for summary statistics. These modules rely on the underlying Bibliometrix functions for data conversion, descriptive analysis, and metric computation, but present the results through an interactive dashboard.

Network analyses were conducted using Biblioshiny's dedicated tools for constructing co-citation, bibliographic coupling, co-authorship, and keyword co-occurrence networks. These modules internally call the Bibliometrix routines responsible for generating adjacency matrices and visualizing network structures, allowing the exploration of intellectual, social, and conceptual relationships within the dataset. Thematic mapping and conceptual structure analysis were performed through Biblioshiny's co-word analysis interface, which identifies thematic clusters and illustrates their interconnections. Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was also carried out within the platform, providing automated dimensionality reduction and graphical representations of

associations between categorical variables such as authors, institutions, countries, and research themes. When necessary, graphical outputs generated by Biblioshiny were refined using the ggplot2 package (Wickham, 2009), which offers enhanced control over visual aesthetics.

Results and discussions

Research productivity

The growing interest in forced migration is highlighted by the notable annual growth rate of publications (9.41%) and the solid average number of citations per document (15.56). These indicators suggest that forced migration has not only remained a relevant issue throughout the study period, but has also consistently attracted scholarly attention.

These statistics indicate that forced migration has emerged as an increasingly significant issue in recent years (Fig. 2).

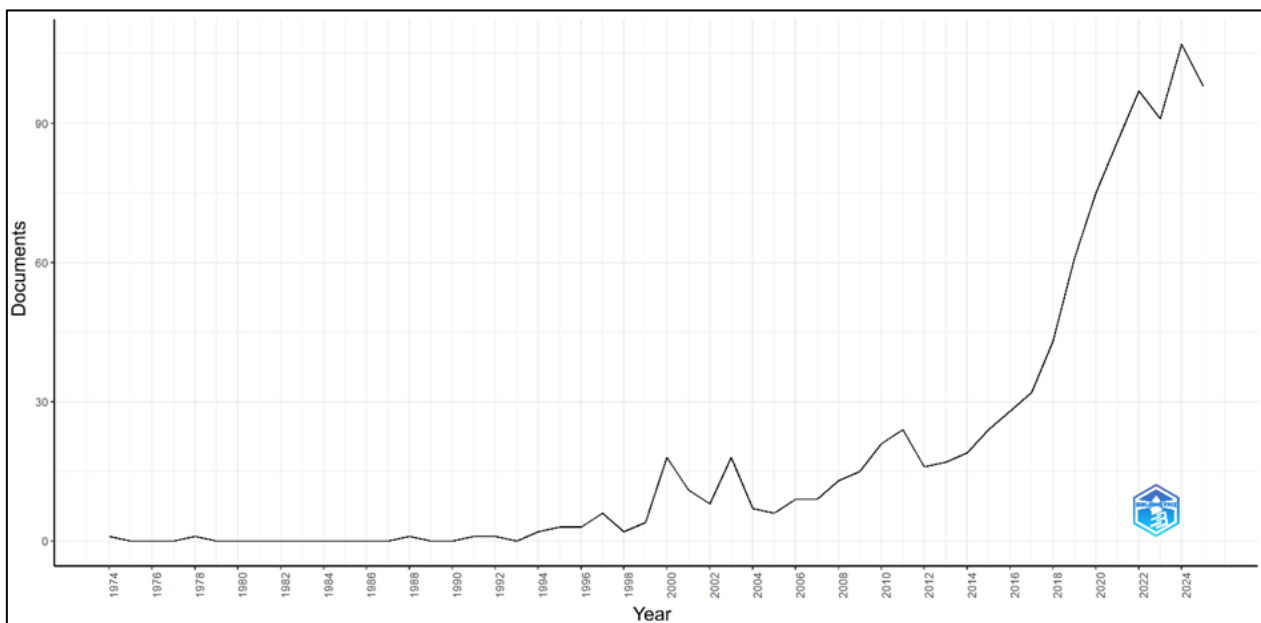


Figure 2. Research papers published annually

The annual growth rate is further emphasized by the fact that a significant share of documents has been concentrated in recent years, reflecting the intensification of research activity. Moreover, nearly one-sixth of the publications (16.8%) were produced through international co-authorship, underscoring the collaborative potential of this field. This tendency towards cooperation illustrates the increasingly global character of research on forced migration.

The temporal evolution of publications shows a pronounced increase after 2022, reflecting the academic response to the large-scale displacement triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This surge corresponds to a growing body of research that examines

the dynamics, motivations, and social consequences of Ukrainian forced migration. Tarkhanova & Pyrogo (2024) analyze the decision-making processes underlying displacement, highlighting how individuals navigate uncertainty, risk, and rapidly changing security conditions. Complementing this perspective, Maidanik (2024) documents the evolving drivers of mobility in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, emphasizing how shifting frontlines and institutional responses shaped migration trajectories. At the same time, Malynovska (2024) explores the broader demographic and geopolitical implications of the exodus, noting the potential for subsequent waves of emigration as the conflict endures. From a host country perspective, Fomina & Pachocka

(2024) examine the initial reactions of Polish society to the arrival of Ukrainian forced migrants, illustrating how public attitudes and community responses influenced early reception conditions. Together, these studies demonstrate that the post 2022 rise in publications is closely tied to the unprecedented scale and complexity of displacement from Ukraine, underscoring the field's responsiveness to major geopolitical shocks.

Beyond the quantitative increase, the diversification of subject areas indicates that forced migration research has become increasingly interdisciplinary. Contributions now emerge not only from sociology and political science but also from geography, environmental studies, public policy, and development research, reflecting a broader integration of methodological and conceptual approaches. This expansion suggests a progressive shift toward a more cross sectoral understanding of displacement and its multifaceted implications.

A further structural pattern concerns the mismatch between the geography of displacement and the geography of knowledge production. As already noted by Chimni (1998), refugee and forced migration studies have long been shaped by epistemic hierarchies in which institutions from the Global North dominate the conceptual framing, methodological agendas, and visibility of research. This pattern persists today: while the vast majority of forcibly displaced populations are located in the Global South, most academic publications originate from universities and research centers in Europe and

North America. Such asymmetry reflects enduring inequalities in research capacity, funding, as well as access to global academic publishing networks, and underscores the need for greater inclusion of perspectives from regions most directly affected by forced migration.

Sources

The analysis of the most relevant sources (Fig. 3) highlights the journals that have made substantial contributions to the field of forced migration research. The Journal of Refugee Studies emerges as the most productive outlet, with 183 documents (18.87%), followed by Refugee Survey Quarterly (77 documents, 7.94%) and International Migration (60 documents, 6.19%). Together, these three journals account for over one-third of the total publications analyzed (970 documents), underscoring their central role in shaping scholarly discourse on displacement, refugee policy, and migration governance. Other notable sources include Refuge (20 documents, 2.06%), Migration Studies (14 documents, 1.44%), and Disasters (13 documents, 1.34%), reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field, which spans humanitarian response, development practice, and crisis management.

The presence of journals such as the Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies and the Journal of Development Studies further illustrates the thematic diversity and evolving scope of forced migration research.

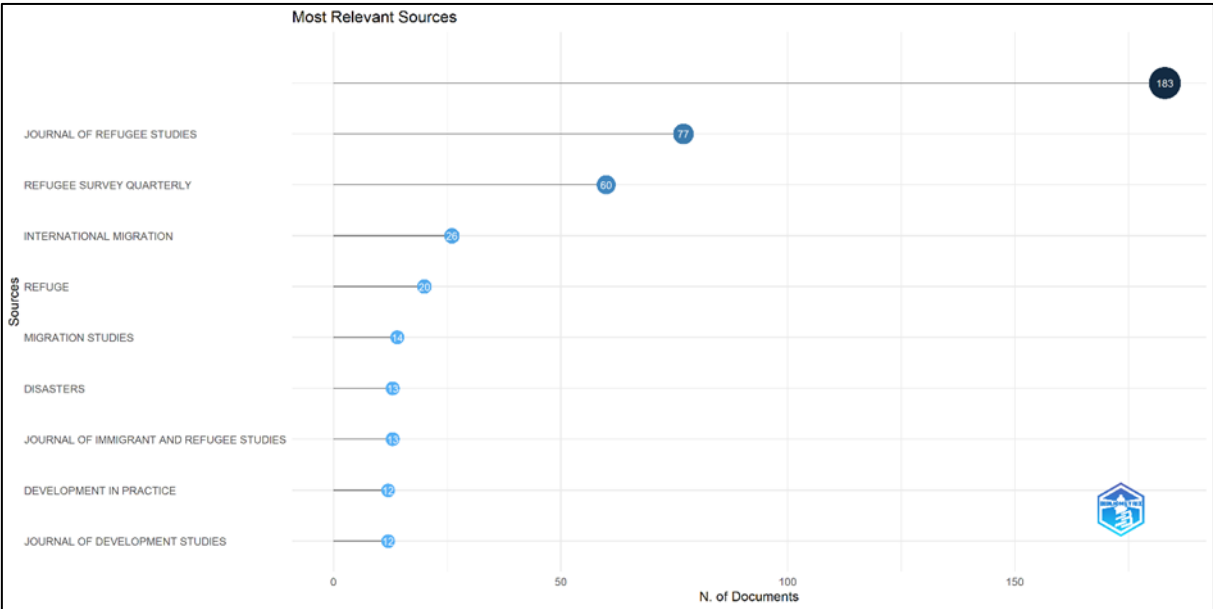


Figure 3. Distribution of documents across sources

The temporal analysis of source productivity reveals a sustained upward trajectory in the number of publications across the principal journals in forced migration research, particularly from the early 2000s onward. The Journal of Refugee Studies exhibits a consistent increase in scholarly output, with a marked acceleration after 2010, reflecting

its central role in shaping academic discourse on displacement and refugee governance. Refugee Survey Quarterly follows a similar pattern, registering notable growth in recent years and consolidating its position as a key outlet in the field. This trend points to a growing academic engagement with issues of forced migration,

policy frameworks, and transnational mobility. The data also indicate the emergence of newer journals, such as *Migration Studies* and the *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, which, despite lower publication volumes, contribute meaningfully to the diversification of research agendas and the incorporation of interdisciplinary approaches. Overall, the distribution of publications across these sources illustrates the dynamic evolution of forced migration scholarship, where established journals continue to dominate, while newer

platforms contribute to broadening thematic scope and advancing methodological approaches.

Author affiliations

The analysis of the most relevant authors' affiliations reveals a strong concentration of research productivity in a few key institutions (Fig. 4), with a notable presence of European and North American universities and research centers.

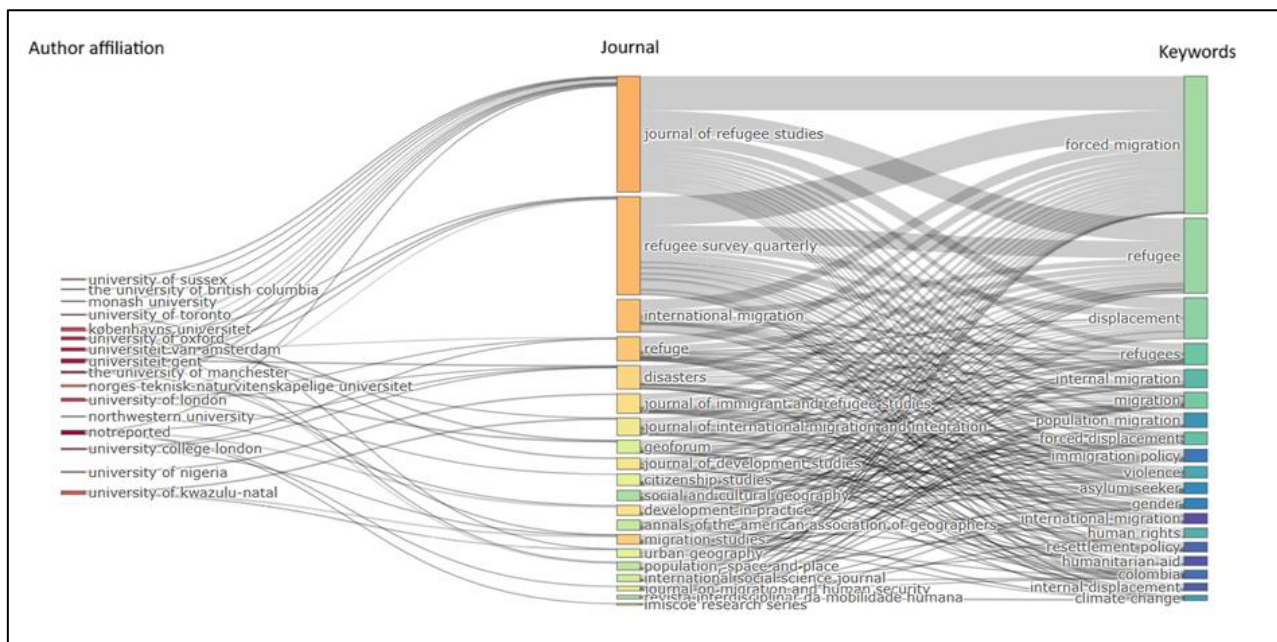


Figure 4. Three way plot illustrating the connections between leading affiliations, publication sources and document keywords

The University of Oxford, Universiteit Gent, and the University of British Columbia lead with 11 documents each, underscoring their significant contribution to the field. They are followed by the University of Manchester (10 documents) and the University of London (9 documents), ranking among the top five most productive affiliations. Other prominent institutions include Københavns Universitet and University College London (8 documents each), which reflect Europe's long standing expertise in migration and refugee studies. Additionally, the presence of universities such as the University of Sussex and the University of Toronto (7 documents each) indicates a strong contribution from both European and North American academic environments. Overall, the data illustrate a global network of research collaboration, with a particular emphasis on the leading roles played by European and Anglophone institutions in advancing knowledge in forced migration scholarship.

Country production and cooperative networks

The analysis reveals a strong concentration of research contributions from the United States and the United Kingdom, which lead the field with 332 and 257

publications, respectively (Fig. 5). This highlights the prominent role of Anglophone academic environments in shaping forced migration scholarship. Following these top contributors, Canada (107 publications), Germany (94 publications), and Australia (79 publications) also demonstrate significant research output, reflecting their active engagement in global debates on displacement and refugee governance.

Other notable contributors include Mexico (47 publications), Spain (44 publications), and the Netherlands (43 publications), which further emphasize the diverse European and transatlantic involvement in the field. The presence of countries such as Colombia (40 publications), India (40 publications), and Brazil (35 publications) underscores the growing participation of institutions from the Global South. Collectively, the data illustrate a geographically distributed and interconnected research landscape, with contributions from both established and emerging academic hubs worldwide.

Beyond showing spatial patterns, the network map highlights the structure of international collaborations in forced migration research (Fig. 6). Each cluster is represented by a distinct color, allowing for a clear

depiction of regional and thematic groupings. This graphical representation provides valuable insights into the global structure of scholarly collaboration and the dynamics of knowledge production in the field.

The central position of the United States is significant, as it appears as the largest node with extensive connections to countries such as India, France, Nigeria, Switzerland, Australia, and South Africa. This indicates a

high level of international engagement and a coordinating role in global research efforts. Surrounding this core, several regional clusters emerge, including a European group (France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Greece), a South American cluster (Brazil, Chile, Peru, Argentina), and a set of African countries (South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia) that reflect linguistic, cultural, or historical collaborative connections.

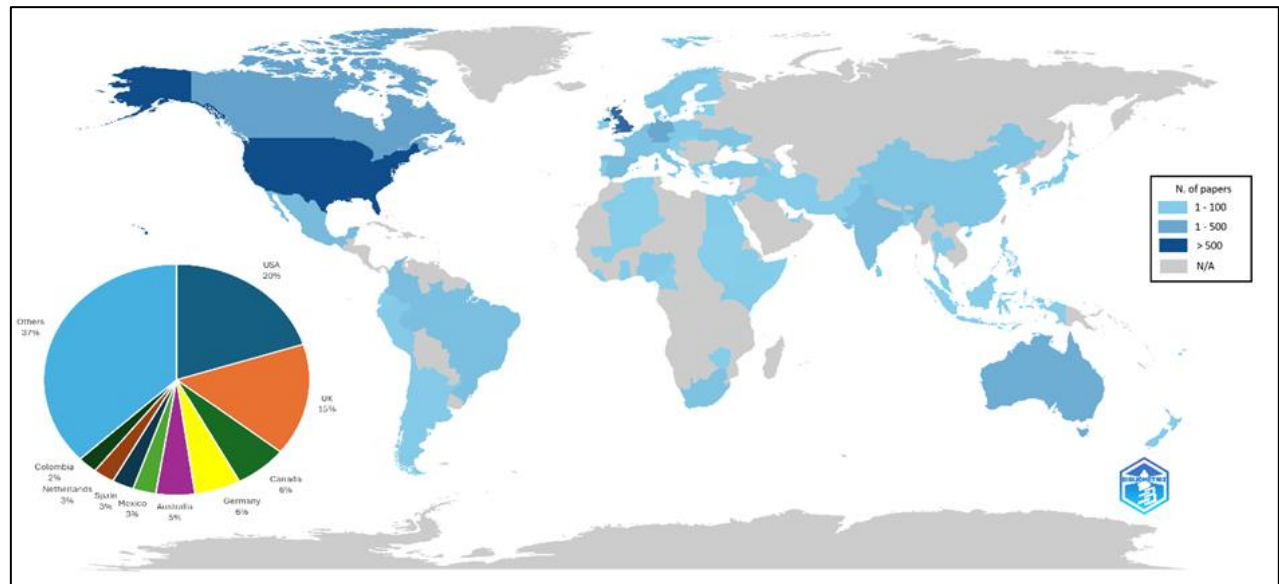


Figure 5. Geographic distribution of research output in the analyzed field

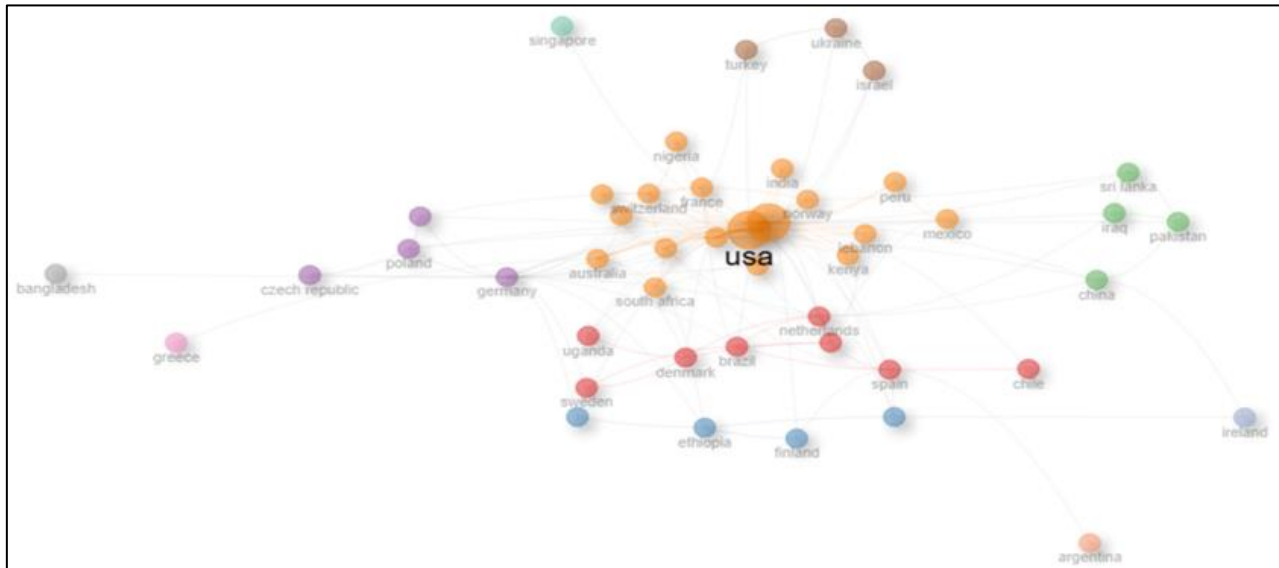


Figure 6. The collaborative network linking the authors of the analyzed studies

A less cohesive cluster includes countries from South and East Asia, such as China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Iraq, suggesting more limited integration into the central research network. Ukraine, Poland, and Czech Republic appear as isolated nodes, indicating weaker collaborative links with major international research centers.

This lack of connectivity may hinder knowledge exchange and limit the visibility of regional scholarship. Addressing these gaps through targeted partnerships and inclusive funding mechanisms is essential for fostering a more equitable and interconnected global research landscape.

Research trend topics

Bibliometric analysis offers critical insights into the thematic evolution of forced migration research, enabling the identification of dominant concepts, geographic patterns, and emerging areas of scholarly interest. A more detailed inspection (Fig. 7) reveals distinct thematic clusters and shifting patterns of scholarly attention,

reflecting the evolving priorities and conceptual developments within forced migration research.

Foundational concepts such as “refugees,” “forced migration,” and “displacement” maintain a persistent presence across the entire period, underscoring their central role in shaping academic discourse. Their sustained prominence indicates the enduring relevance of core debates surrounding involuntary mobility, protection frameworks, and humanitarian governance.

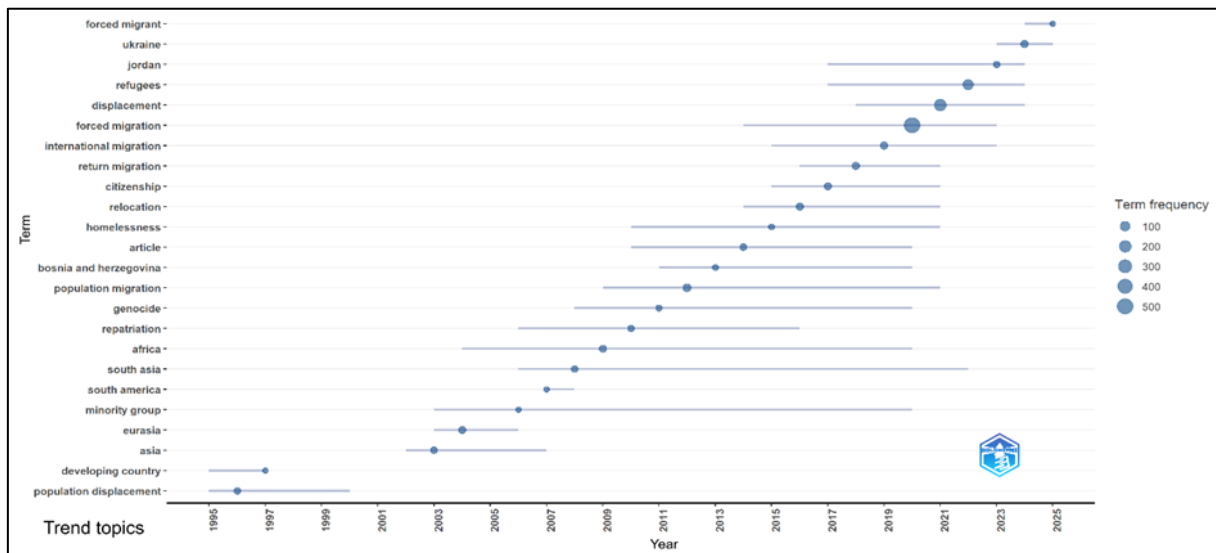


Figure 7. Evolution of research topics over recent decades

Geopolitical references including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Jordan, and the African continent appear in concentrated temporal intervals, often corresponding to major displacement crises or regional conflicts. The increased visibility of Ukraine in the 2010s and 2020s, for example, reflects the scholarly response to escalating conflict and mass population movements.

Newly prominent terms such as “citizenship,” “return migration,” and “repatriation” signal increasing scholarly attention to post-displacement trajectories, integration processes, and the legal-political dimensions of mobility. Meanwhile, concepts like “homelessness” and “relocation” underscore the intersections between forced migration, urban vulnerability, and social exclusion.

Broader regional identifiers comprising South Asia, South America, Eurasia, and Asia, together with categories like minority group and developing country, point to the widening geographic and sociopolitical scope of the literature. Their presence reflects a growing shift toward comparative, interdisciplinary, and development oriented perspectives that draw on multiple disciplinary frameworks.

The thematic structure of the field indicates that research on forced migration remains dominated by policy oriented and protection focused approaches, particularly those examining legal frameworks, asylum governance, and state responses. These themes form the core of the largest clusters, suggesting that institutional and

regulatory perspectives continue to shape the mainstream of the literature.

In contrast, topics related to long term integration, psychosocial well being, and everyday experiences of displacement appear comparatively underrepresented. These themes emerge in smaller clusters with lower centrality, indicating that micro level and experiential perspectives, although present, have not yet achieved the same visibility as macro institutional analyses.

The temporal distribution of keywords suggests a gradual decline in studies focused on protracted refugee situations and camp based governance, themes that were more prominent in earlier decades. Their decreasing frequency reflects a shift away from traditional humanitarian settings toward more diversified forms of mobility and displacement. Several niche topics also appear, including climate induced displacement, statelessness, and digital migration infrastructures. Although these areas generate coherent micro clusters, their limited size indicates that they remain emerging rather than consolidated research directions.

Such trends are further exemplified by several recent studies. Howlader et al. (2025) examine the Rohingya crisis as a complex humanitarian and geopolitical challenge, showing how protracted statelessness, regional insecurity, and limited international accountability shape one of the most complex forced displacement situations in South Asia. At a broader regional scale, Hadibi et al. (2025)

analyze the contemporary genealogy of forced displacement in Africa, demonstrating how border conflicts interact with colonial legacies, local governance, and evolving security dynamics to produce heterogeneous displacement patterns across the continent.

Boom-Cárcamo et al. (2025) document how displaced women in northern Colombia experience intersecting violations of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, highlighting the structural inequalities and stigmatization that shape everyday survival in informal settlements. Extending the focus to transcontinental mobility regimes, Lumley-Sapanski & Schwarz (2025) investigate the selective (in)visibility of Eritrean migrants along the Central Mediterranean Route, revealing how hypervisibility, invisibilization, and strategic border governance contribute to a trafficking industrial complex that exploits the precarious conditions faced by migrants.

Lastly, within the European context, Rock & Yanaşmayan (2025) analyze the experiences of Ukrainian refugee mothers in Germany, showing how displacement reshapes maternal subjectivity through urgency, protective labor, and forms of “active waiting” that help rebuild stability amid temporal disorientation.

Overall, the field shows a clear thematic shift from classical humanitarian and legal perspectives toward more interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate geography, sociology, public policy, and development studies, reflecting an expanding interest in the social, spatial, and political complexities of forced mobility and the growing analytical breadth of contemporary forced migration research.

Conceptual framework and thematic connections

The conceptual landscape of the field has been clarified through the mapping of frequently co-occurring terms and their relational patterns. This method enables the construction of thematic clusters and network maps that reveal both overarching and specialized areas of inquiry within forced migration research. As illustrated in the co-occurrence network (Fig. 8), three principal thematic clusters emerge: policy-oriented and environmental drivers of displacement, including terms such as “climate change,” “war,” and “resettlement policy”; socio-political and humanitarian dimensions, reflected in concepts like “refugees,” “gender,” “violence,” and “humanitarian aid”; and geographic and demographic markers, notably “Asia,” and “Eurasia”. Together, these groups show the diverse directions of forced migration research and how it connects to global governance, vulnerability, and mobility of affected populations.

In order to enhance the analysis of the conceptual architecture underpinning forced migration research, Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was conducted on the most frequently occurring terms within the selected corpus (Fig. 9). This technique facilitated the delineation of three core thematic clusters, each corresponding to a specific domain of scholarly inquiry:

- *Migrantion determinant and population migration.*

This cluster synthesizes research on the factors that generate and redirect population movements, focusing on the interplay between demographic pressures, economic opportunities, and spatial mobility. Studies in this domain examine how determinants such as labor market disparities, demographic transitions, political instability, and regional development inequalities influence both internal and international migration flows. For example, Gómez-Álvaro & Caro-Carretero (2025) show that migratory movements in West and East Africa are shaped by a set of push factors, including economic instability, environmental triggers, demographic pressures, and governance deficits, which interact to generate distinct regional mobility patterns. Drawing on a comparative framework, their analysis demonstrates how variations in state capacity, livelihood vulnerability, and exposure to climatic risks produce differentiated migration trajectories, thereby underscoring the centrality of structural determinants in explaining population movements across African regions. Viewed in this cluster, migration outcomes reflect the combined influence of economic restructuring and demographic pressures, highlighting the need for integrated frameworks that explain how population mobility patterns take shape.

- *Political conflict and violence.* This thematic core centers on the role of political conflict and violence as primary forces shaping patterns of forced displacement and influencing the broader dynamics of population mobility. Scholarship in this thematic area focuses on uncovering how political conflict and violence shape the conditions that lead to forced displacement and reconfigure broader mobility dynamics. In particular, Czaika & Kis-Katos (2009) demonstrate that variations in armed clashes, military presence, and insurgent activity systematically alter local security conditions, thereby increasing the likelihood of household displacement and revealing how micro level exposure to violence translates into broader forced migration patterns. A notable case is provided by Fakhoury & McCulloch (2023), who investigate how Lebanon’s political order responds to conflict induced displacement, demonstrating that patterns of mobility are deeply conditioned by sectarian power sharing arrangements, institutional fragmentation, and the strategic deployment of violence by political actors. Their work reveals how conflict dynamics simultaneously generate displacement and shape the political environments into which displaced populations must navigate, highlighting the intricate interplay between violence, governance, and forced migration. Mulaj (2008) offers an in depth examination of the Darfur conflict, showing how systematic violence, state supported militias, and targeted attacks on civilian groups generate large scale displacement while complicating the legal and political classification of the crimes committed. His analysis highlights how forced migration in Darfur emerges not only from acute insecurity but from

deliberate strategies of territorial control and demographic engineering, illustrating the central role of political violence in shaping mobility outcomes. Analyses within this cluster frequently rely on advanced approaches developed in conflict studies and security analysis, employing event based modeling, spatial analysis, and long term assessments of violence dynamics to clarify how armed confrontations, coercive state practices, and localized insecurity evolve over time, ultimately shaping the mechanisms through which political conflict produces forced displacement and reconfigures broader mobility patterns.

- *Internal displacement and refugee.* The last cluster brings together research centered on internal displacement and refugee movements, examining how these forms of forced mobility unfold across diverse social, geopolitical, and institutional contexts. A key example is provided by Abebe (2010), who presents a detailed examination of internal displacement across African contexts, showing how armed confrontations, coercive state practices, and chronic insecurity converge to uproot communities and erode the institutional mechanisms intended to safeguard them. His analysis underscores that

violence operates not merely as a triggering event but as a persistent structural force that shapes the trajectories, vulnerabilities, and long term prospects of displaced populations. A relevant case comes from Lanjouw et al. (2000) as they examine the dynamics of internal displacement in Burma, showing how military operations, forced relocations, and systematic human rights violations disrupt local livelihoods and compel communities to move repeatedly, thereby revealing how state driven violence and territorial control shape the everyday realities of displaced populations. Mithun & Arefin (2020) explore the situation of Hindu Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, tracing how persecution, targeted violence, and successive waves of conflict induced displacement shape their migration trajectories and everyday life in the camps, thereby showing how minority status and prolonged insecurity compound vulnerability within refugee settings. As a whole, this cluster reflects a consolidated body of scholarship that advances a deeper understanding of internal displacement and refugee experiences, highlighting how violence, repressive state practices, and protracted insecurity shape the trajectories and everyday realities of affected populations.

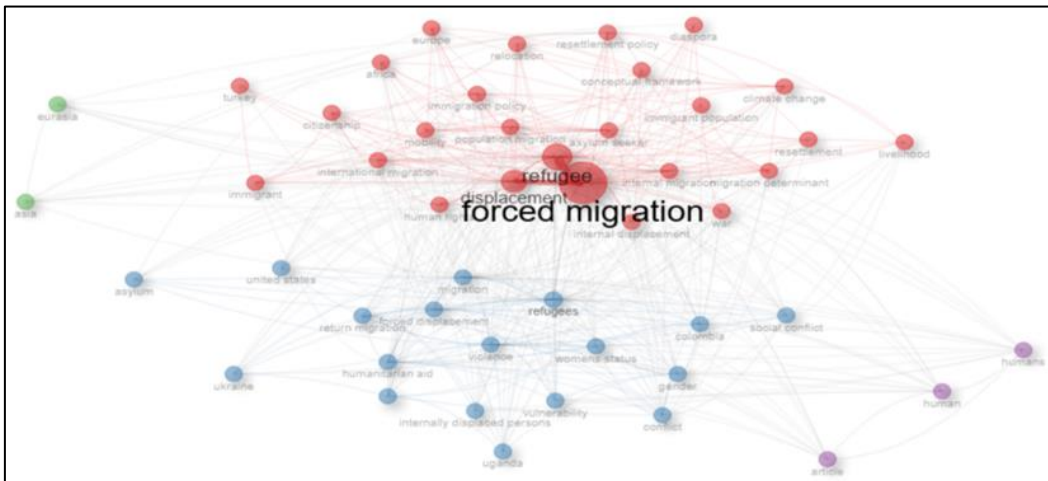


Figure 8. Co-occurrence network of the most common terms in the dataset

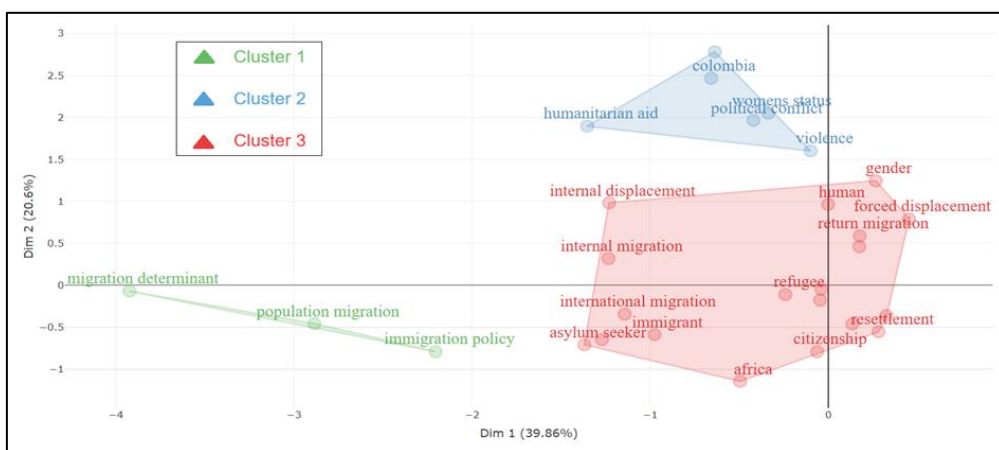


Figure 9. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) of the most frequent terms in the reviewed literature

The methodological choices informing this study, which employ Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to identify conceptual clusters, differ substantially from the bibliometric techniques used in recent analyses. Whereas many studies rely on citation network analysis or keyword co occurrence mapping to identify research trends, this approach focuses on term based conceptual relationships that reveal deeper thematic linkages across the literature. Other research directions employ process based modelling or systematic reviews to investigate specific mechanisms, offering fine grained insights but without structurally portraying broader thematic configurations. Taken together, these methodological approaches prove complementary: bibliometric analyses trace the evolution of research fields, MCA uncovers underlying conceptual structures, and process oriented studies help substantiate the dynamics they examine.

In any event, some limitations need to be acknowledged. The analysis depends on term frequencies within the selected corpus, which may introduce a systematic selection error if certain disciplinary niches or regional contexts are represented more heavily than others. Terminological inconsistencies across studies may further obscure thematic connections. A further structural limitation concerns the well documented dominance of Global North publications in forced migration research, which shapes both the visibility of specific topics and the conceptual frameworks through which displacement is analyzed. This imbalance may lead to the underrepresentation of perspectives from regions most affected by forced mobility, thereby reinforcing existing epistemic asymmetries within the field.

Conclusions

This bibliometric analysis, covering the period 1974-2025, provides a comprehensive examination of research on forced migration, tracing the evolution of scholarly interest, thematic orientations, and collaborative structures within this increasingly complex field. By applying bibliometric methods, the study examines how academic production has expanded, diversified, and reorganized in response to shifting geopolitical contexts and humanitarian crises.

The findings indicate a sustained growth in publications, driven by the intensification of global displacement and the rising visibility of forced migration as a geographically diverse research domain. Strong scholarly engagement emerges particularly from Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, reflecting both the geographic distribution of academic infrastructures and the uneven global exposure to displacement dynamics. These patterns underscore the dual nature of forced migration research: global in relevance yet regionally shaped by specific historical, political, and institutional conditions.

Through co-occurrence networks, Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), and thematic analysis, the study identifies several well established research clusters, such as refugee protection, conflict induced displacement, integration policies, and human rights, alongside emerging areas including climate induced mobility, border governance, and quantitative modeling of displacement flows. This thematic landscape illustrates the field's growing interdisciplinarity, where insights from demography, political science, sociology, geography, and environmental studies converge to address the multifaceted realities of forced migration.

Despite these advances, the analysis points to enduring asymmetries, especially regarding imbalanced geographical representation and limited international scholarly engagement. Strengthening these dimensions will be essential for developing a more comprehensive and analytically robust understanding of displacement dynamics.

In summary, this bibliometric analysis contributes a structured overview of the conceptual landscape of forced migration studies. By documenting long term trends, identifying emerging themes, and revealing collaborative dynamics, it provides a foundation for future research aimed at strengthening comparative perspectives, enhancing methodological diversity, and broadening the inclusion of underrepresented regions and perspectives within the global study of forced migration..

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Author contribution

Conceptualization, methodology, data curation, writing, LB; supervision, review, IM. All authors have read and agreed to the published.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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