

Migration and Human Sustainability: An Overview from the Perspective of Islamic Civilization

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Abstract

This article discusses the phenomenon of migration and its relation to human sustainability from the perspective of Islamic civilization. Migration is commonly understood as physical relocation; however, Islam emphasizes a broader dimension that encompasses faith, law, and ethics, intending to safeguard the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*—namely, religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. History demonstrates that migration, particularly the Prophet Muhammad's *hijrah*, profoundly impacted the development of Islamic civilization in the political, economic, educational, and social spheres. This study employs a qualitative approach through document analysis, examining primary sources such as the Qur'an, hadith, and classical works of Muslim scholars, as well as secondary sources including books, journal articles, international reports, and human rights declarations. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify definitions, legal rulings, and the implications of migration for the construction of civilization and human sustainability. The findings indicate that migration is not merely a means to fulfill worldly needs but also serves as an act of worship that contributes to the development of civilization and the well-being of humankind.

Keywords: Migration, Human Sustainability, Islamic Civilization, Maqasid al-Shari'ah, Hijrah

Introduction

Human sustainability is an essential goal that must be pursued in line with the development of civilization. The advancement of civilization seeks to create a better and more progressive quality of life for all individuals. This encompasses not only physical and mental well-being, but also spiritual balance, comfort, and prosperity. Within the framework of civilization, human sustainability covers a broad scope, as individuals are generally regarded to have attained it when achieving success across various domains such as health, education, employment, economic stability, adequate wealth, family happiness, and harmonious social relations.

Beyond material well-being, sustainability in Islam is also rooted in ethical and spiritual values. Recent scholarship emphasizes that Islamic teachings inherently support sustainability, particularly through integrating *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* with contemporary sustainability discourses. Rahardjanto (2025) argues that Islam provides a comprehensive framework that not only safeguards human dignity and welfare but also promotes environmental balance and intergenerational justice. However, this paper specifically focuses on the phenomenon of migration, which represents a vital civilizational process with profound implications for human sustainability.

Migration and Human Sustainability in Islamic Civilization

Conventionally, migration is understood as the movement from one place to another. However, migration cannot simply be defined as any movement between places; it requires further specification regarding distance, type of boundary crossed, duration of stay, purpose of relocation, and other relevant criteria to serve as a benchmark for migration. This has led to differences among scholars in defining migration. For instance, Eisenstadt (1953) defines migration as the physical movement from one social group to another. Lee (1966) offers a broader definition, describing migration as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, irrespective of distance, whether voluntary or forced, and without distinction between internal and international migration. Goldscheider (1971) defines it as movement from one place to another with the intention of settlement, while Weeks (1989) views it as the movement across state, national, or international borders.

From an Islamic perspective, migration (*hijrah*) can be defined both linguistically and terminologically. Linguistically, *al-hijrah* in Arabic means leaving or moving from one place to another (al-Juhari, n.d.) or from one country to another (al-Fayruz Abadi, 2005), with the intention of settling (Abi al-Husayn Ahmad, n.d.). Terminologically, *hijrah* carries several meanings, including: migration from non-Muslim lands to Muslim lands for the purpose of safeguarding one's faith (Ibn Qudamah, 1984; al-Jurjani, n.d.); moving from a land filled with *fitnah* to one with less *fitnah* (Abu Basir, n.d.); leaving a land of *bid'ah* for one where Islam is practiced in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah (al-Jaza'iri, 1992); moving from a land that threatens one's property, honor, and health (Zuhayli, 1991); or turning away from sinful acts toward righteous deeds to draw closer to Allah SWT and His Messenger (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, n.d.).

Based on these Islamic definitions, although various descriptions are presented, they remain within a similar scope that incorporates elements of faith, law, and ethics. Thus, *hijrah* can be summarized as the act of moving from one place to another to preserve the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*—religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—against harm or violation. This definition clearly distinguishes Islamic migration from conventional migration, which emphasizes only physical relocation without incorporating spiritual or religious values.

Within the context of civilization, migration is closely intertwined with civilizational processes. Ali Shariati explained that migration is one of the key phenomena in the development of human civilization, noting that the great civilizations of the world emerged as a result of migratory processes (Teh, 1997).

The history of Islamic civilization itself demonstrates this, particularly through the migrations of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which profoundly shaped Islamic civilization. Historical accounts highlight three major early migrations: the first and second from Mecca to Abyssinia, and the third from Mecca to Medina. Muslims migrated due to the intense opposition of the Quraysh of Mecca against Islam. Their hostility was not only internal, expressed in anger and hatred, but also external, manifesting in persecution and torture that sometimes led to death. Moreover, Muslims were prevented from openly practicing their faith (al-Mubarakfuri, n.d.). These relentless oppressions led Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia and later to Medina. These migrations were not solely acts of self-preservation, but a means of upholding the banner of Islam. As a result, Islam expanded not only in terms of followers and territory but also influenced all aspects of civilization, including politics, economy, education, law, customs, and culture. Migration, therefore, became one of the driving forces behind the development of Islamic civilization, and in turn, contributed significantly to the advancement of human sustainability.

Freedom of Migration as a Fundamental Human Right

The freedom to migrate is a right inherent to every human being. This right is explicitly enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) of 1948, Article 13, which affirms the freedom of every individual to move and to reside within any state. This right is also safeguarded within Islam, as reflected in the *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* (1990). According to Article 12 of the declaration, every person has the right, within the framework of the *Shari'ah*, to move freely and to choose his or her place of residence, whether within or outside one's own country; furthermore, if subjected to persecution, one has the right to seek political asylum in another state. Based on these provisions, it is evident that restricting this right would hinder the progress of civilization and obstruct the realization of human sustainability.

The Legal Rulings on Migration from the Perspective of Islam

Human migration is a global phenomenon. It is a process of civilization that continues and will never cease. When examining the history of Islamic civilization, contemporary migration patterns are clearly different from the *hijrah* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The *hijrah* was undertaken for the purpose of upholding Islam and its symbols, not merely to fulfill worldly needs. Although this event occurred more than 1,400 years ago, it is not merely a historical record. Rather, there are legal rulings concerning migration that remain relevant and applicable until today. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "*Migration will not end until repentance ends, and repentance will not end until the sun rises in the west*" (narrated by Abu Dawud, *Kitab al-Jihad*, Bab *fi al-Hijrah hal Inqata'at*). Based on this hadith, scholars such as al-Albani (al-Tibi, 1994), al-Bughawi (1984), Ibn Qudamah (1984), Ibn al-'Arabi (2002), al-Nawawi (1991), and al-Asqalani (2000) have affirmed that the rulings on migration will remain in effect until the Day of Judgment.

In the present context, migration occurs for various reasons, including seeking employment, pursuing education, avoiding natural disasters, political crises, wars, epidemics, obtaining medical treatment, joining one's spouse, and many others.

While the freedom to migrate is recognized as a fundamental human right, in Islam such movements must be aligned with religious guidelines. Migration should not only fulfill worldly

needs but also adhere to spiritual obligations. Accordingly, the legal rulings on migration in Islam can be classified as follows:

Mandatory Migration

The Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Maliki schools of thought stipulate that Muslims living in non-Muslim countries where they are unable to practice and openly observe their religious duties, while at the same time possessing the ability to migrate, are obligated to relocate to an Islamic country (which is preferable) or to any land that offers safety and freedom to practice Islam (al-Nawawi, 1996; Ibn Qudamah, 1984; Zuhayli, 1991). If they choose to remain in such a country without a valid *shar'i* excuse, they are deemed sinful (Abu Basir, n.d.). This ruling is grounded in the Qur'anic verse:

"Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves - [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" For those, their refuge is Hell - and evil it is as a destination." (Qur'an, al-Nisa' 4:97)

This verse refers to Muslims who failed to migrate to Medina without legitimate reasons. They were unwilling to abandon their wealth or endure the hardships of migration, choosing instead to remain in Mecca while concealing their faith. As a result, they were compelled to join the Quraysh in battle against the Muslims at Badr, where they were eventually killed. According to Ibn Qudamah (1984), this verse serves as strong evidence obligating Muslims in such circumstances to migrate.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said: *"I disassociate myself from every Muslim who resides among the polytheists"* (Abi Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud, Kitab al-Jihad, Bab al-nahy 'an qatli man i'tasama bi al-sujud*). This hadith clearly prohibits Muslims from remaining among non-Muslims in a manner that increases their numbers or strengthens them in ways that may bring harm to Islam.

In a broader context, Ibn al-'Arabi (n.d.) elaborated that Muslims are also obligated to migrate under the following circumstances:

1. **Migration from a land of bid'ah.** Ibn al-Qasim narrated: *"I heard Imam Malik say: It is not permissible for anyone to live in a land condemned by the salaf."* Ibn al-'Arabi (n.d.) affirmed that migration is obligatory if such heretical practices cannot be changed. This is supported by the Qur'anic verse (al-An'am 6:68): *"And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversation. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people.."*
2. **Migration from lands dominated by prohibited practices.** This includes places where usury, gambling, alcohol trade, fornication, and other major sins prevail without control or the possibility of reform. As it is obligatory for Muslims to seek what is lawful, migration becomes necessary.
3. **Migration to escape physical danger.** This applies to situations involving threats of violence, imprisonment, or death. The case of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), who fled from his people after they attempted to burn him alive, is illustrative. Following divine deliverance, he was commanded to migrate, as stated in Qur'an (al-'Ankabut 29:26):

“Indeed, I will emigrate to my Lord.” Similarly, the Qur’an records in al-Saffat 37:99: *“Indeed, I will go to [where I am ordered by] my Lord; He will guide me.”* The story of Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) also reflects this principle, when he left Egypt in fear of being killed, praying: *“My Lord, save me from the wrongdoing people”* (al-Qasas 28:21).

4. **Migration for health protection.** Ibn al-‘Arabi (n.d.) argued that Muslims must migrate from places afflicted by dangerous diseases, epidemics, or pandemics. This ruling is illustrated by the Prophet’s permission to shepherds in Medina to leave temporarily until the city recovered from illness. However, if one is already infected with a contagious disease, it is *makruh* (discouraged) for them to leave, to prevent spreading harm elsewhere. This is in line with the Prophet’s command concerning plague: *“If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; but if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place”* (Muslim, *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Salam, Bab al-ta’un wa al-tirah wa al-kahanah wa nahwaha*).

In a modern context, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this principle. Declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, the disease spread rapidly to 185 countries by March 22, 2020, infecting 267,013 people and causing 11,201 deaths. This alarming situation compelled many states to impose lockdowns and emergency regulations. Hence, it became obligatory for citizens in affected countries to remain in place to prevent the spread of infection to other regions, while others were required to avoid traveling to identified high-risk areas.

5. **Migration due to threats against property and family.** As established by Islamic scholars, a Muslim’s property is inviolable, just as shedding a Muslim’s blood is prohibited without right. When one’s wealth or family members are unlawfully attacked and cannot be protected, migration becomes obligatory.

Recommended Migration

Ibn Qudamah (1984) and al-Nawawi (1996) explain that if a non-Muslim country grants Muslims the freedom to openly practice and fulfill their religious obligations, migration is not obligatory but recommended (*sunnah*). Examples include Muslim communities who live freely and safely in countries such as Canada, Taiwan, and parts of Europe. Through migration, Muslims may strengthen the numbers of the ummah, contribute to the struggle (*jihad*) of establishing Islamic governance, and safeguard themselves from witnessing acts of immorality that are prevalent in non-Muslim lands.

This situation can be compared to that of the Prophet’s uncle, al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, who remained in Mecca while still maintaining his faith. It is also narrated that Nu‘aym al-Nuhham, when preparing to migrate, was approached by his tribe, Banu ‘Adi. They said to him: *“Remain with us and hold firmly to your faith. We will protect you from those who fight you, and we will provide for your needs as we provide for our own.”* Nu‘aym was responsible for orphans and widows of Banu ‘Adi, and although he initially did not join the early waves of migration, he eventually migrated. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said to him: *“Your people treated you better than my people treated me. My people pursued me and sought to kill me, while your people cared for and protected you.”* Nu‘aym then replied: *“O Messenger of Allah, indeed your people drove you away from obeying Allah and from striving against His enemies, whereas my people prevented me from migrating and from fulfilling obedience to Allah.”* (Ibn Qudamah, 1984)

However, there are exceptions that alter the ruling from being merely recommended. Al-Nawawi (1996) adds that if a Muslim is capable of fighting against non-Muslims or is able to engage in da'wah (religious propagation) to the extent that Islam could potentially be established, then it is preferable for him to remain in the non-Muslim country. In fact, remaining there becomes obligatory if his migration would weaken the Muslim presence and lead to the loss of the land to non-Muslims. In such cases, the responsibility of upholding Islam in that land falls upon them.

Permissible Migration

The Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Maliki schools of thought state that Muslims who are ill, unfamiliar with the route, coerced to remain, lack the means to avoid harm, or are among the vulnerable—such as the elderly, women, and children—are exempt from the obligation of migration. If they migrate, their act is not considered *recommended*, since the condition of capability is not fulfilled (al-Nawawi, 1996; Ibn Qudamah, 1984; al-Zuhayli, 1991). However, according to al-Asqalani (2000), they are still rewarded for their intention and effort. This ruling is based on the Qur'anic verse (al-Nisa' 4:98):

“Except for the oppressed among men, women and children who cannot devise a plan nor are they directed to a way.”

In a broader sense, any Muslim who seeks better livelihood to support themselves and their family is permitted to migrate. This also applies to other pursuits such as furthering education, conducting business, seeking medical treatment, traveling, or visiting. However, the destination must meet specific conditions: it must allow Muslims the freedom to openly practice their religious obligations, and the migration must not be with the intention of increasing the strength of non-Muslims or aiding them in ways that could harm Islam (al-Jaza'iri, 1995).

Prohibited Migration

In general, Muslims are prohibited from migrating to non-Muslim lands if such migration exposes them to prohibited acts and immoral practices, whether in trade, culture, customs, entertainment, or other aspects of life. They may also face oppression and injustice that prevent them from fulfilling their religious obligations, while lacking the ability to reform such conditions. The prohibition, therefore, functions as a precautionary measure to safeguard Muslims from potential harm.

If migration results in only a minor benefit while abandoning a greater benefit that could be preserved by remaining in a non-Muslim country, then it becomes obligatory to remain there (Abu Basir, n.d.). For example, if Muslims live in peace and are free to practice their religion, capable of engaging in da'wah, and their departure would weaken or abandon an existing Muslim community, thereby diminishing the presence of Islam, then it becomes prohibited for them to migrate (al-Nawawi, 1996).

This principle of balancing interests (*maslahah*) is illustrated in the case of the Negus (al-Najashi) of Abyssinia, whom the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed not to migrate to Medina. His presence in Abyssinia was of greater benefit, as his authority allowed him to protect the Muslims who had migrated from Mecca. Thus, the Muslim community

there grew stronger, while Medina was not in desperate need of his presence (Abu Basir, n.d.).

Within the context of Islamic states, Muslims possessing essential expertise or religious authority—such as scholars and intellectuals—are prohibited from migrating if their absence would leave the community or the religion vulnerable, or if their knowledge and skills would be exploited by non-Muslim states in opposition to Islam. This ruling is consistent with the Qur’anic prohibition against forming alliances with non-believers that may bring harm to Islam:

“Let not believers take disbelievers as allies rather than believers. And whoever [of you] does that has nothing with Allah, except when taking precaution against them in prudence. And Allah warns you of Himself, and to Allah is the [final] destination.” (Qur’an, Al ‘Imran 3:28)

Prohibited migration also includes cases where Muslims relocate to non-Muslim lands with the intention of adopting lifestyles contrary to Islamic teachings. This may involve engaging in unlawful businesses such as the sale of alcohol, studying practices of sorcery or superstition, acting in films that promote indecency, neglecting proper gender boundaries, or participating in immoral industries such as pornography. The general prohibition is clear in the Qur’an:

“Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatever he forbids you from, leave it. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is severe in punishment.” (Qur’an, al-Hashr 59:7)

Al-Shawkani (1994) explains that this verse carries a comprehensive meaning, encompassing everything transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whether in the form of commands, prohibitions, speech, or actions. Thus, it is evident that all practices contradicting the teachings of Islam must be strictly avoided.

Migration as an Act of Worship

Migration is considered among the matters prescribed by the *Shari’ah*. Any action mandated by the *Shari’ah* falls within the category of worship (*‘ibadah*). As with all acts of worship, migration must be carried out with sincerity solely for the sake of Allah SWT, not for the pursuit of worldly gain or personal reward. The importance of sincerity in migration, just as in other forms of worship, was emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who said:

“Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended. Whoever migrates with an intention for Allah and His messenger, the migration will be for the sake of Allah and his Messenger. And whoever migrates for worldly gain or to marry a woman, then his migration will be for the sake of whatever he migrated for” (al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Iman, Bab Bada’i al-Wahy*)

Ibn Rajab (2008) explains that the migration referred to in this hadith is that which is undertaken for the sake of Allah SWT and His Messenger. Those who migrate for worldly benefits or to marry a woman will indeed attain their objectives; however, such migration does not fall within the scope of worship. Rather, it is deemed futile, for it departs from the realm of sincere devotion and does not yield divine reward. Thus, intention plays a decisive

role in determining whether an act qualifies as prescribed worship, and whether it is accepted or rejected by Allah SWT.

Conclusion

Migration is not merely the physical relocation of people across borders; within the framework of Islamic civilization, it is a phenomenon that encompasses spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions of human life. Historically, the *hijrah* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) demonstrates that migration can serve as a transformative process that strengthens faith, preserves the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), and lays the foundation for a sustainable civilization. From an Islamic legal perspective, migration may be classified as mandatory, recommended, permissible, or prohibited, depending on circumstances, intentions, and outcomes.

Importantly, migration contributes directly to the sustainability of human life by safeguarding religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, while also ensuring socio-economic stability and communal resilience. At the same time, when undertaken with sincere intention for the sake of Allah SWT, migration transcends the worldly sphere and becomes an act of worship. This dual function reflects Islam's holistic vision in which worldly necessities and spiritual aspirations are integrated. Thus, migration is not only a response to political, economic, and social realities but also a means of fostering sustainability, preserving human dignity, and advancing civilization in accordance with divine guidance.

This study contributes theoretically by integrating the concept of *hijrah* within the framework of human sustainability, highlighting how migration in Islam is not merely a socio-political or economic phenomenon but also a spiritual and civilizational process rooted in the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. This offers a distinct lens that expands migration studies beyond secular interpretations, bridging classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary sustainability discourses. Contextually, the research is significant as it situates migration within the lived realities of Muslim communities, especially in regions experiencing displacement, socio-economic challenges, and cultural transformation. By demonstrating how migration safeguards religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, the paper underscores its relevance in shaping policies and community responses to modern migration issues. Thus, this work not only enriches existing scholarship but also plays a practical role in guiding societies and institutions to approach migration as both a human right and an act of worship that fosters resilience, dignity, and civilizational progress.

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