

# The Climate Crisis on Migration

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# Who is a refugee & what rights do they have?

U.N. definition (1951 Convention):

A refugee is a person who “owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

Refugees are granted “protection from refoulement, protection against unlawful expulsion or detention, the right to employment and education, access to the courts, and freedom of movement.”





# Who is a climate/environment migrant?

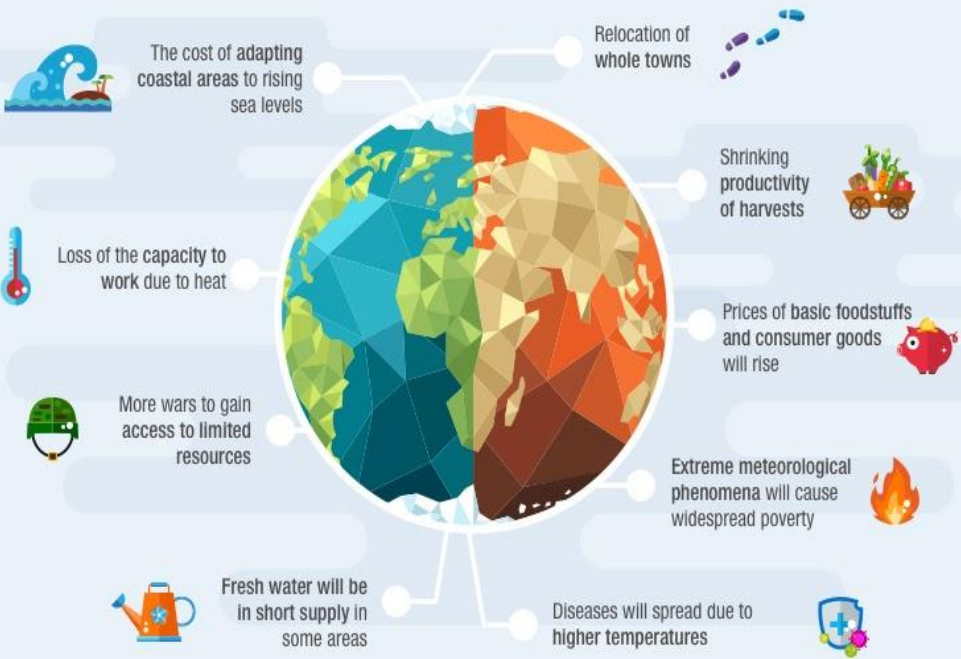
Climate migrants are those who are forced, or chose to leave their homes on the basis of climate related factors such as changing rainfall, extreme flooding, sea level rise, etc.

A climate migrant can range from someone living in the Pacific Island states such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, whose lands and homes have been completely lost due to sea level rise, or farmers in West Africa who cannot cultivate crops or raise livestock due to intense periods of droughts and flooding.





## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE



## Impact of Climate Change on Human Health



## Alarming statistics

- » Today, there are almost **20.4 million officially designated refugees** under the protection of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
- » However, there is an additional group of **21.5 million people** who flee their homes as a result of sudden onset **weather hazards** every year, yet “climate migrants” have **not been officially granted refugee status**, therefore legal protections afforded to refugees do not extend to them.
- » In 2018, the World Bank estimated that Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia will generate **143 million more climate migrants by 2050**.
- » In 2017, **68.5 million** people were forcibly displaced, this is more than at any point in human history. Approximately **one-third** of these were forced to move by “**sudden onset**” **weather events** including but not limited to, flooding, forest fires after droughts, and intensified storms.





# Impacts on the Pacific Islands

- To date, there are only a few cases where climate change is the **sole** factor prompting migration.
- Dramatic sea level rise at the rate of 12 millimeters per year in the western Pacific has resulted in **eight** submerged islands, with **two more** are on the brink of disappearing.
- In 2015, a family fleeing the island nation of Kiribati applied for refugee status in New Zealand
  - Their case was the **first** official request for refuge **explicitly attributed climate change**.
  - The case made it to the High Court of New Zealand but was ultimately dismissed.



One argument against redefining refugee status to include climate migrants is based upon the assumption that most climate migrants would only be migrating within their own country, and do not need to cross international borders. What about those whose home countries have, or are expected to completely disappear?



- According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “the term “climate refugee” is **not** endorsed by UNHCR, and it is more accurate to refer to “persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.” ”
- The UNHCR affirms that valid arguments could be made when applying for refugee status if climate change is a factor, or **interacts** with conflict/violence, however it is not seen as a **primary** reason.
- As of now, neither a multilateral strategy nor a legal framework exist to account for climate change as a driver of migration.
- Current Action:
  - 2015 Paris Climate Agreement
  - The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration
- What about Temporary Protection Status in the U.S?
  - Discretionary, not always reliable





## Sources

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