

REFUGEE LAW AND COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE  
TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR COURSE MATERIALS

Unit 16: Refugees and Climate Change

How Climate Change has affected the Current Global Refugee Crisis.....	1
143 Million People Could Soon be Displaced Because of Climate Change, World Bank Say.....	3
Climate Change will Displace Millions in Coming Decades. Nations Should Prepare Now to Help them.....	5
New Zealand might create visa for climate change refugees.....	9

# How climate change has affected the current global refugee crisis

Me gusta 0

Twitter

G+

Share

Save

Compartir



(<http://www.vidasostenible.org/wp-content/uploads/climaterefugeescuadrado.jpg>)

The most common image of a current refugee is a Syrian citizen fleeing from war and persecution with little money and no place to go. Another image is a middle eastern citizen fleeing from extremism, possibly already influenced by extremism and spreading it to the west. However, this image could not be more wrong.

In 2006 Syria and other parts of the middle east experienced the worst recorded drought in history. Most of the Syrian population were originally farmers who made a decent wealth and lifestyle. Others were water farmers and drillers, who would harvest ground water. Before the drought farmers would drill as little as 100-200 meters below the surface in order to find water, however by the end of the drought in 2011 farmers were drilling up to 700 meters. This was due to the sinking of the water table in the winter of 2006-2007, an issue that is continuing across the world.

Due to the drought 1.5 million farmers and others from rural areas migrated into cities. Syria's city's had already experienced an influx of migrants after the US invasion of Iraq. This led to further overcrowding of water and food supplies creating social turmoil which could be argued contributed to the 2011 protests.

However, it is possible to argue that this crisis was partially of Syria's governments making. The Assad government controlled Syria militantly, however, some what stable for around 40 years.

However, during the water shortage, the government stopped farmers creating new wells and made them drill in wells that had already been dug. This caused more strain on the water table. This situation led to further government and official corruption as for a vast payment farmers were able to drill new wells. Many farmers were arrested and imprisoned for drilling new wells without permits.

Uso de cookies

Este sitio web utiliza cookies para que usted tenga la mejor experiencia de usuario. Si continúa navegando está dando su consentimiento para la aceptación de las mencionadas cookies y la aceptación de nuestra política de cookies (<http://www.vidasostenible.org/privacidad/>), pinche el enlace para mayor información.

Due to these conditions, social turmoil grew as more people migrated from to urban areas. Eventfully in 2011 protests broke out creating a nasty war which still continues to this current day. The question is, however, is how much is climate change to blame for this? Is it possible that climate change which veritably caused the drought in Syria was responsible for the protests which eventually led to the refugee crisis today? It is clear the crisis was not solely created by the drought as the Assad regime is one of a strict authoritarian rule and the rise of ISIS in the region made life worse. However, it is clear that climate change and the drought was an influencing factor.

More research has opened up in recent years into climate change and migration. It is expected that soon many countries will see an increase in migration from the Pacific islands due to rising sea levels These migrants could be classed as climate change refugees. However, under the Geneva convention and international refugee law, the definition of a refugee is only someone fleeing their home from the risk of persecution. This, therefore, means there is no definition for those fleeing their homes due to issues such as droughts and rising sea levels.

The term climate change refugee could also become a dangerous term for refugees who also fall into those fleeing persecution.

Research now suggests that if current gas emissions continue we will see more migration from areas such as the middle east and Sub-Sahara Africa. Before the current crisis, most fleeing from natural disasters and climate change effects stayed in their own countries, however, due to the rising political tensions most now choose to move to other states and nations. John Kerry had previously painted a post-apocalyptic vision of climate change with the middle east, primarily Syria as a vision for the rest of southern Europe and the meditation. Other figures such as Prince Charles have put the pin for the current crisis on climate change, stating that the signs for political issues were there during the drought.

Overall it is clear that climate change is not the sole reason for the current refugee crisis. However, there is a small percentage of refugee's ad migrants who are immigrating solely due to climate change. Others are migrating due to political factors and persecution, despite a clear and distinct link with climate change. It is possible over the next few decades that the situation could worsen due to harsher environmental conditions across the middle east. It is also possible that the environmental situation in Syria could spread across the middle east and Europe.

**Versión en español (<http://www.vidasostenible.org/informes/el-cambio-climatico-esta-afectando-a-la-actual-crisis-de-refugiados/>)**

**Caroline Hibbs ([@carolinehibbs](https://www.linkedin.com/in/caroline-hibbs-b85873b1?trk=nav_responsive_tab_profile))**  
**@cazalineee (<https://twitter.com/cazalineee>)**

## **Deja un comentario**

Tu dirección de correo electrónico no será publicada. Los campos necesarios están marcados \*

Nombre \*

Correo electrónico \*

Web

[Uso de cookies](#) [Comentario](#)

Este sitio web utiliza cookies para que usted tenga la mejor experiencia de usuario. Si continúa navegando está dando su consentimiento para la aceptación de las mencionadas cookies y la aceptación de nuestra política de cookies (<http://www.vidasostenible.org/politica-de-cookies/>), pinche el enlace para mayor información.



TIME

# 143 Million People Could Soon Be Displaced Because of Climate Change, World Bank Says

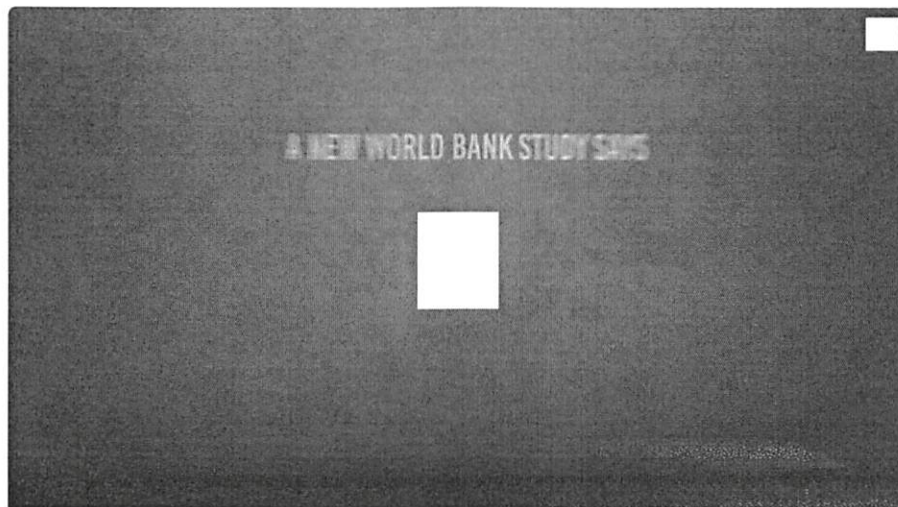
By LAIGNEE BARRON March 20, 2018

Climate change, already a growing driver of migration, forcing families to flee water scarcity, crop failure and rising sea levels, may cause as many as 143 million people to be displaced by 2050, the World Bank has concluded in a new report.

This scenario covers just three regions — Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America — that are major climate “hot spots” and account for 55% of the developing world’s population.

The report, *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, examines the impacts of internal, or in-country migration as people increasingly look for more viable places to live in the face of slow onset climate change impacts.

The shift will likely involve the poorest people from the poorest countries moving in large numbers from rural regions to increasingly overburdened urban areas. Without prior planning, such dramatic swells of migration could lead to major disruption and instability, the report says.



World Bank  
@WorldBank

3

#Groundswell report out now! By 2050 #ClimateChange could force more than 140 million people in three densely populated regions of the world to move within their countries. #Learn more→[wrlt.bg/jXXF30j2jTv](http://wrlt.bg/jXXF30j2jTv)

2:09 PM - Mar 19, 2018

930 380 people are talking about this

The World Bank urged cities to prepare infrastructure, social services and employment opportunities ahead of the predicted influx, warning that “adaptation in place” strategies to make rural areas more resilient have limitations.

The report, the first to look at such possible population distributions within countries, estimates up to 86 million people could be displaced in Sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia, and as many as 17 million in Latin America. While these numbers reflect outcomes if current trends are sustained, all the World Bank’s models, even those taking into account optimistic “climate-friendly” intervention, show climate change will increase displacements.

“Internal climate migrants are rapidly becoming the human face of climate change,” the report says.

This migration is expected to intensify over the next few decades before further accelerating beyond 2050.

In a best-case scenario, the study estimates that if urgent steps are taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and authorities engage in climate change preparations, the number of people displaced could drop from 143 million to 40 million.

“We have a small window now, before the effects of climate change deepen, to prepare the ground for this new reality,” Kristalina Georgieva, World Bank’s Chief Executive Officer, wrote in a statement. “Steps cities take to cope with the upward trend of arrivals from rural areas and to improve opportunities for education, training and jobs will pay long-term dividends.”



### TIME “Science of” Collection

The medicine of movement & how to be happy!

4

## THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

# Climate change will displace millions in coming decades. Nations should prepare now to help them

December 18, 2017 8.41pm EST

Pakistani commuters travel on a flooded street following a heavy rainfall in Karachi, Aug. 31, 2017. AP Photo/Shakil Adil

# Climate change will displace millions in coming decades. Nations should prepare now to help them

December 18, 2017 8.41pm EST

Wildfires tearing across Southern California have forced thousands of residents to evacuate from their homes. Even more people fled ahead of the hurricanes that slammed into Texas and Florida earlier this year, jamming highways and filling hotels. A viral social media post showed a flight-radar picture of people trying to escape Florida and posed a provocative question: What if the adjoining states were countries and didn't grant escaping migrants refuge?

By the middle of this century, experts estimate that climate change is likely to displace between 150 and 300 million people. If this group formed a country, it would be the fourth-largest in the world, with a population nearly as large as that of the United States.

Yet neither individual countries nor the global community are completely prepared to support a whole new class of "climate migrants." As a physician and public health researcher in India, I learned the value of surveillance and early warning systems for managing infectious disease outbreaks. Based on my current research on health impacts of heat waves in developing countries, I believe much needs to be done at the national, regional and global level to deal with climate migrants.

### Author



**Gulrez Shah Azhar**

Ph.D. Candidate, Pardee RAND Graduate School

### America's First Official Climate Change Refugees



The U.S. government is spending US\$48 million to relocate residents of Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana, because their land is sinking.

## Millions displaced yearly

Climate migration is already happening. Every year **desertification** in Mexico's drylands forces 700,000 people to relocate. Cyclones have displaced thousands from **Tuvalu** in the South Pacific and **Puerto Rico** in the Caribbean. Experts agree that a prolonged drought may have **catalyzed** Syria's civil war and resulting migration.

Between 2008 and 2015, an average of **26.4 million people per year** were displaced by climate- or weather-related disasters, according to the United Nations. And the science of climate change indicates that these trends are likely to get worse. With each one-degree increase in temperature, the air's moisture-carrying capacity increases by 7 percent, fueling increasingly severe storms. Sea levels may rise by as much as **three feet** by the year 2100, submerging coastal areas and inhabited islands.

The Pacific islands are extremely vulnerable, as are more than 410 U.S. cities and others around the globe, including Amsterdam, Hamburg, Lisbon and Mumbai. Rising temperatures could make parts of west Asia **inhospitable to human life**. On the same day that Hurricane Irma roared over Florida in September, heavy rains on the other side of the world **submerged one-third of Bangladesh** and eastern parts of India, killing thousands.

Climate change will affect most everyone on the planet to some degree, but **poor people in developing nations** will be affected most severely. Extreme weather events and tropical diseases wreak the heaviest damage in these regions. Undernourished people who have few resources and inadequate housing are especially at risk and likely to be displaced.



People displaced by drought in Somalia queue to register at a refugee camp in neighboring Ethiopia, July 26, 2011. UK-DFID, CC BY

6



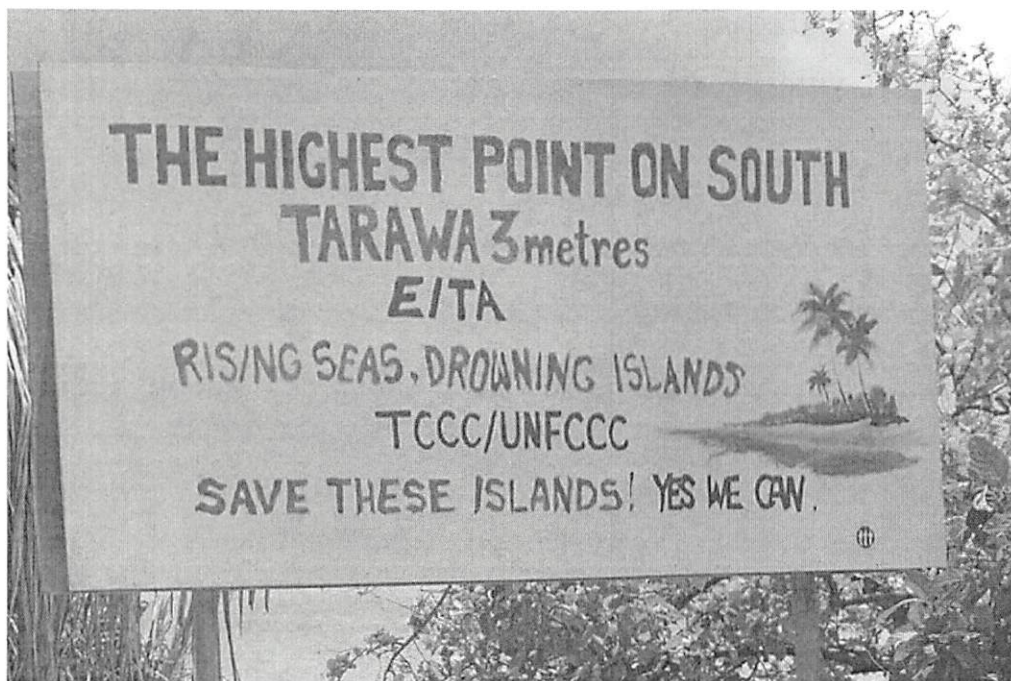
## Recognize and plan for climate migrants now

Today the global community has not universally acknowledged the existence of climate migrants, much less agreed on how to define them. According to international refugee law, climate migrants are **not legally considered refugees**. Therefore, they have none of the protections officially accorded to refugees, who are technically defined as people fleeing persecution. No global agreements exist to help millions of people who are displaced by natural disasters every year.

Refugees' rights, and nations' legal obligation to defend them, were first defined under the **1951 Refugee Convention**, which was **expanded in 1967**. This work took place well before it was apparent that climate change would become a major force driving migrations and creating refugee crises.

Under the convention, a refugee is defined as someone "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." The convention legally binds nations to provide access to courts, identity papers and travel documents, and to offer possible naturalization. It also bars discriminating against refugees, penalizing them, expelling them or forcibly returning them to their countries of origin. Refugees are entitled to practice their religions, attain education and access public assistance.

In my view, governments and organizations such as the United Nations should consider modifying international law to provide legal status to environmental refugees and establish protections and rights for them. Reforms could factor in the concept of "climate justice," the notion that climate change is an ethical and social concern. After all, richer countries have contributed the most to cause warming, while poor countries will bear the most disastrous consequences.



The low-lying Pacific island nation of Kiribati is extremely vulnerable to climate-driven sea level rise and storm surges.  
DFAT, CC BY

Some observers have suggested that countries that bear major responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions **should take in more refugees**. Alternatively, the world's largest carbon polluters could contribute to a **fund** that would pay for refugee care and resettlement for those temporarily and permanently displaced.

7



The Paris climate agreement does not mention climate refugees. However, there have been some consultations and initiatives by various organizations and governments. They include efforts to create a climate change displacement coordination facility and a U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change.

It is tough to define a climate refugee or migrant. This could be one of the biggest challenges in developing policies.

As history has shown, destination countries respond to waves of migration in various ways, ranging from welcoming immigrants to placing them in detention camps or denying them assistance. Some countries may be selective in whom they allow in, favoring only the young and productive while leaving children, the elderly and infirm behind. A guiding global policy could help prevent confusion and outline some minimum standards.

### Short-term actions

Negotiating international agreements on these issues could take many years. For now, major G20 powers such as the United States, the European Union, China, Russia, India, Canada, Australia and Brazil should consider intermediate steps. The United States could offer temporary protected status to climate migrants who are already on its soil. Government aid programs and nongovernment organizations should ramp up support to refugee relief organizations and ensure that aid reaches refugees from climate disasters.

In addition, all countries that have not signed the United Nations refugee conventions could consider joining them. This includes many developing countries in South Asia and the Middle East that are highly vulnerable to climate change and that already have large refugee populations. Since most of the affected people in these countries will likely move to neighboring nations, it is crucial that all countries in these regions abide by a common set of policies for handling and assisting refugees.

The scale of this challenge is unlike anything humanity has ever faced. By midcentury, climate change is likely to uproot far more people than World War II, which displaced some 60 million across Europe, or the Partition of India, which affected approximately 15 million. The migration crisis that has gripped Europe since 2015 has involved something over one million refugees and migrants. It is daunting to envision much larger flows of people, but that is why the global community should start doing so now.



Climate change   Floods   Hurricanes   Climate migration   human displacement   Climate refugees   Refugee relocation   Droughts  
Global Perspectives

LIVING

# New Zealand might create visa for climate change refugees

By Lauren Tousignant

October 31, 2017 | 4:22pm | Updated



A village on the island of Kiribati, in the South Pacific, is flooded by the rising sea. Each year, the sea level rises by about half an inch.

LightRocket via Getty Images

New Zealand could become the first country to offer a visa to people displaced by climate change.

"There might be a new, an experimental humanitarian visa category for people from the Pacific who are displaced by rising seas stemming from climate change," James Shaw, New Zealand's climate change minister, told Radio New Zealand "and it is a piece of work that we intend to do in partnership with the Pacific Islands."

Shaw's comment follows New Zealand's rejection of two families from Tuvalu who applied for refugee status due to the impact of climate change on their island.

The families listed rising sea levels, a high unemployment rate and lack of access to clean and sanitary drinking water as their reasons for seeking asylum.

9

New Zealand rejected the families based on the 1951 refugee convention, which defines a refugee as someone at risk of persecution due to their nationality, race, religion or political affiliation. The convention does not cover victims of climate change.

Tuvalu rests about six and a half feet above sea level and is considered one of the most vulnerable areas for rising sea levels. Around 10,500 people live on the small collection of islands located in the South Pacific.

New Zealand's Green Party – who became the leading party with the recent election of Jacinda Ardern as Prime Minister – promised the new visa in the run-up to the country's September election. They also said they would raise New Zealand's refugee quota from 1,000 to 5,000 a year, over the next six years.

**SEE ALSO**

"The lives and livelihoods of many of our Pacific neighbors are already being threatened and we need to start preparing for the inevitable influx of climate refugees," Vivien Maidaborn, New Zealand's UNICEF director, recently wrote in an op-ed for stuff.co.nz.

On Monday, the United Nations released a report stating that atmospheric carbon dioxide increased at a record rate in 2016, reaching a level not seen for 800,000 years. This level could add 3 degrees to temperatures and trigger a 65-foot rise in sea levels.

**Carbon dioxide levels  
reach 1 million-year record**

FILED UNDER CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT, JACINDA ARDERN, NEW ZEALAND, PACIFIC OCEAN, REFUGEES, SOUTH PACIFIC

Recommended by

|

10