

Key Findings

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change expects climate change to increase displacement, and this is already a reality for many people around the world. Between 2008 and 2020, droughts and extreme temperatures caused more than 3.5 million new displacements, and planned relocations of entire communities due to slow-onset degradation are already taking place in over 60 countries and territories.
- It is difficult to quantify how many people have already migrated due to climate change, as a combination of factors shape decisions. Climate change may exacerbate conflict because of competition for resources, lead to poorer employment opportunities, or reduce access to resources, and these may be the primary motivating factors.
- While dramatic weather events make headlines and highlight the immediate impact of climate change on people's lives, the slow onset of climate change is more likely to impact migration. These slow onset events include extremely high temperatures and drying conditions as well as sea-level rise, which give people time to plan and gather the resources to migrate.
- Patterns of migration related to climate are often different to migration with other motivations. Migration linked to climate change is usually internal and less likely over international borders, and it can be seasonal as people seek work elsewhere during periods of drought at home, then return when weather conditions improve.
- There have been some dramatic projections at the potential scale of climate change migration, and while it is important to impress the urgency upon policymakers, these projections must be treated with caution as they can trigger fearmongering that could negatively influence public perceptions and policymaking choices.
- Environmental science provides insights into the future conditions facing the world. Rising temperatures are a growing concern as exposure to high heat threatens habitability and can lead to loss of labour productivity. Recent estimates indicate that a 1.5°C global temperature rise would result in 30 to 60 million people living in hot areas where the average heat in the hottest month is likely to be too high for a human body to function well. A warmer world will also put millions of people under threat of sea-level rise.

- Migration is a legitimate form of adaptation to climate change, and facilitating regular migration when slow-onset climate events make habitation untenable is a necessary policy response. But developing new safe and legal migration pathways to cope will be an immense challenge and is likely to prompt difficult political discussions.
- Planning for climate migration is key, as when ad hoc migrations take place, people often leave rural areas for large cities, which are also vulnerable to slow onset events. People can be encouraged to move to more climate-resilient secondary cities instead, while regional free-movement policies can also provide other avenues for mobility.
- Migrants can play a key role in adapting to climate change. International remittances have the potential in some contexts to constitute an alternative source of climate finance in developing countries, for example allowing family members back home to build climate-resilient houses or invest in climate-proof community infrastructure.

Takeaway for Policy

The best way to prepare for migration linked to slow-onset climate change is to continue to work on a global effort to tackle climate change and mitigate its effects as soon as possible. But much of the damage has already been done, so finding ways to respond in a planned manner to the specific needs of people forced to leave their homes is key, as there is a window of opportunity to ensure that the worst human migration and displacement predictions do not come to pass.



The full chapter is available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022-chapter-9>.



The WMR interactive platform can be accessed at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>.

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