



# Climate Migration

**For Prelims:** [Climate change](#), [National Action Plan on Climate Change \(NAPCC\)](#), [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDC\)](#), National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change (NAFCC), [State Action Plan on Climate Change \(SAPCC\)](#)

**For Mains:** [Issue of Climate Migration](#) and potential remedies

**Source:** DTE

## Why in News?

Recently, the issue of [climate migration](#) has garnered significant attention, yet the world still **lacks a comprehensive legal framework** to protect individuals forced to flee their homes due to increasingly [severe weather disasters](#).

- This critical gap leaves a vulnerable population without adequate safeguards in a time of growing displacement.

## Who are Climate Refugees?

- **About:**
  - According to the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#), "climate migration" refers to the movement of a person or groups of **people who are predominantly forced to leave their homes due to sudden or gradual environmental changes caused by climate change**.
    - This movement can be temporary or permanent and can occur within a country or across borders.
    - This definition highlights that climate migrants are primarily those who have **little choice** but to leave their homes due to the impacts of climate change.
- **Causes of Climate Migration:**
  - **Sudden-Onset Disasters and Displacement:**
    - **Internal Displacement:** Reports by the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) highlight that sudden-onset disasters like [floods](#), [hurricanes](#), and [earthquakes](#) often cause significant internal displacement.
      - People flee to safer grounds within their countries, but returning home can be difficult due to **destroyed infrastructure** and livelihoods.
    - **Disasters and Vulnerability:** The [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#) emphasises how disasters often disproportionately affect **vulnerable populations**.
      - These populations, lacking resources or living in high-risk areas, are more likely to be displaced and struggle to recover.
  - **Slow-Onset Disasters and Migration:**
    - **Environmental Degradation and Livelihoods:** The [IOM](#) reports that slow-onset disasters like **droughts, desertification, and salinisation** degrade land and water resources.

- This makes it difficult for people to sustain their livelihoods, pushing them to migrate in search of better opportunities.
- **Sea Level Rise and Coastal Communities:** Reports by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) warn of **rising sea levels** threatening coastal communities. This can lead to permanent displacement as homes and farmland become submerged.
- **The Complexities of Climate Migration:**
  - **Mixed Drivers:** The [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UNDESA\)](#) acknowledges that migration due to climate change is rarely caused by a single factor.
    - **Poverty, political instability, and lack of social safety nets** often combine with disasters to force migration.
  - **Data Gaps and Policy Challenges:** [World Bank](#) highlights the challenges in accurately quantifying climate migration.
    - This makes it difficult to develop effective policies to support displaced people and build resilience in vulnerable communities.

## Chronological Overview of International Efforts Regarding Climate Refugees

- **1951:** Geneva Convention gives a legal definition of refugees. It does not include climate disasters as a ground for seeking asylum.
  - However, the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees**, in 2019, says the Geneva Convention could be applied to persons affected by climate change.
- **1985:** UN Environment Programme for the first time broadly defines environmental refugees as people who are forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, due to "environmental disruption"
- **2011:** Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement in Norway formulates 10 principles on climate change and cross-border displacement
- **2013:** European Commission downplays climate-induced migration into Europe
- **2015:** The Paris Agreement calls for a taskforce to recommend approaches to avert, minimise and address climate change-related displacement
- **2018:** The UN Global Compact on Refugees has a reference of climate refugees, but lacks actionable commitments from countries
- **2022:** Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change allows people affected by weather events to move safely across the borders in the Horn and East of Africa regions
- **2023:** Pacific island countries agree on a framework to allow cross-border movement of people due to climate change.

## What are the Challenges Faced by the Climate Migrants?

- **Precarious Livelihoods:**
  - **Loss of Skills and Assets:** The [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) warn that climate migrants often **lose their skills** and assets due to displacement.
    - This makes it difficult for them to find new jobs and rebuild their livelihoods in unfamiliar environments.
  - **Informal Work and Exploitation:** The [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#) reports that climate migrants often end up in informal work sectors with low wages and poor working conditions.
    - They may also be more vulnerable to exploitation due to their precarious situation.
- **Integration and Social Challenges:**
  - **Lack of Access to Services:** [World Bank](#) highlight that climate migrants often struggle to access basic services like healthcare, education, and housing in their new locations.
    - This can lead to social exclusion and marginalisation.
  - **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:** The IOM emphasises the difficulties climate migrants face **adapting to new cultures and languages**.

- This can hinder their ability to integrate into new communities.

- **Legal Status and Protection:**

- **Limited Legal Framework:** Reports by the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) point out that there's no clear legal framework to protect climate migrants.
  - They don't qualify for refugee status under current international law.
- **Increased Risk of Statelessness:** The Journal of Environmental Law claims that climate change-induced displacement can lead to **statelessness**, particularly for those who move across borders.
  - In 2021, the **World Bank, in its Groundswell report**, estimated that by 2050, some **216 million people** worldwide would be **internally displaced** due to the impacts of climate change.

- **Psychological and Health Impacts:**

- **Trauma and Mental Health Issues:** [WHO](#) highlight the **psychological distress and trauma** climate migrants experience due to displacement and loss.
  - Access to mental health services is often limited, further exacerbating their struggles.
- **Increased Vulnerability to Health Risks:** Climate migrants may be exposed to **new health risks** in their new locations, such as infectious diseases or extreme weather events. This is especially concerning for [children and the elderly](#).

## What are the Limitations of Policies Taken to Address the Issue of Climate Migration?

- **Global Compact for Migration:** It acknowledges climate change as a factor for human mobility, its silence on climate refugees reflects the **difficulty in reaching consensus** on this issue at the international level.
- **Regional Treaties and Declarations:** Regional agreements, like the [Kampala Declaration](#), often lack explicit recognition of climate refugees, highlighting the need for more comprehensive legal frameworks.
- **Identification of Climate Refugees:** One of the key challenges is **identifying and categorising individuals** or communities affected by climate change as refugees, given the complex nature of climate-induced displacement.
- **Collective Displacement:** Climate change often affects entire communities or nations, requiring collective responses and highlighting the **limitations of individual-based refugee status**.

## What are the Steps Taken to Address the Issue of Climate Migration?

- Countries like **Bangladesh** are investing in **coastal embankments and flood-resistant infrastructure** to protect communities from rising sea levels and storm surges.
- Island nations like **Fiji** are exploring **innovative solutions** like raising landmasses to adapt to rising sea levels.
  - **Kiribati** are exploring options for planned relocation of their populations due to rising sea levels.
    - This involves careful considerations of **land acquisition, cultural preservation, and livelihood opportunities** in the new settlements.
- **Early warning systems** for floods, cyclones, and other extreme weather events have been implemented in countries like **India and Vietnam**.
  - These systems allow communities to evacuate vulnerable areas and minimise casualties and displacement.
- The **Kampala Declaration on Protracted Displacement** is a regional framework adopted by African countries to address the needs of people displaced by conflict, natural disasters, and climate change.
  - It provides a model for regional cooperation on climate migration.
- Countries like **Ethiopia** are investing in **drought-resistant crops** and irrigation technologies to help farmers adapt to changing weather patterns and ensure food security.
  - This reduces the risk of displacement due to food scarcity.
- **Other Examples of Adaptation Measures:**

- **Pacific Island Climate Mobility Framework:** This framework facilitates legal movement between Pacific island countries for populations affected by climate change, providing a model for regional cooperation and adaptation.
- **Tuvalu-Australia Pact:** The pact between **Tuvalu and Australia, granting residency to Tuvaluans** facing climate-related dangers, demonstrates a bilateral approach to addressing climate migration challenges.

## What are India's Climate Change Mitigation Initiatives?

- [National Action Plan on Climate Change \(NAPCC\)](#)
- [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDC\)](#)
- [National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change \(NAFCC\)](#)
- [State Action Plan on Climate Change \(SAPCC\)](#)

## Way Forward

- **Tackling Climate Change:**
  - IPCC emphasises the importance of **aggressive mitigation strategies** to reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** and slow climate change.
  - The [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) promotes adaptation strategies to help communities become more resilient to climate impacts and reduce displacement risks.
- **Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction:**
  - The [UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction \(UNDRR\)](#) emphasises the importance of **disaster preparedness plans**, early warning systems, and risk reduction measures to minimise displacement caused by sudden-onset disasters.
- **Legal Frameworks and Protection Mechanisms:**
  - The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the IOM advocate for developing legal frameworks to protect climate migrants.
  - This could involve **extending refugee status** or creating a new protection category for those displaced due to climate change.
- **Planned Relocation and Resettlement:**
  - The [World Bank's Groundswell Report](#) acknowledges that some communities will become permanently uninhabitable due to climate change.
    - **Planned relocation and resettlement programs** may be necessary in these extreme cases.
- **Investment in Sustainable Development and Climate-Smart Agriculture:**
  - The [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UNDESA\)](#) emphasises the importance of **investing in sustainable development** and climate-smart agriculture.
    - This can create opportunities for people to adapt to climate change and reduce the need for migration.
- **Labour Migration Schemes:**
  - Encouraging **labour migration among countries as an adaptation measure** for climate-displaced populations can help mitigate the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Q. Discuss the challenges and policy implications of climate migration in India. How can the government ensure the protection and welfare of climate migrants while addressing the environmental concerns that drive migration?

**Mains:**

**Q.** Refugees should not be turned back to the country where they would face persecution or human right violation". Examine the statement with reference to ethical dimension being violated by the nation claiming to be democratic with open society. **(2021)**

**Q.** Rehabilitation of human settlements is one of the important environmental impacts which always attracts controversy while planning major projects. Discuss the measures suggested for mitigation of this impact while proposing major developmental projects. **(2016)**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/climate-migration>

