



INSIGHTS

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION CRISIS

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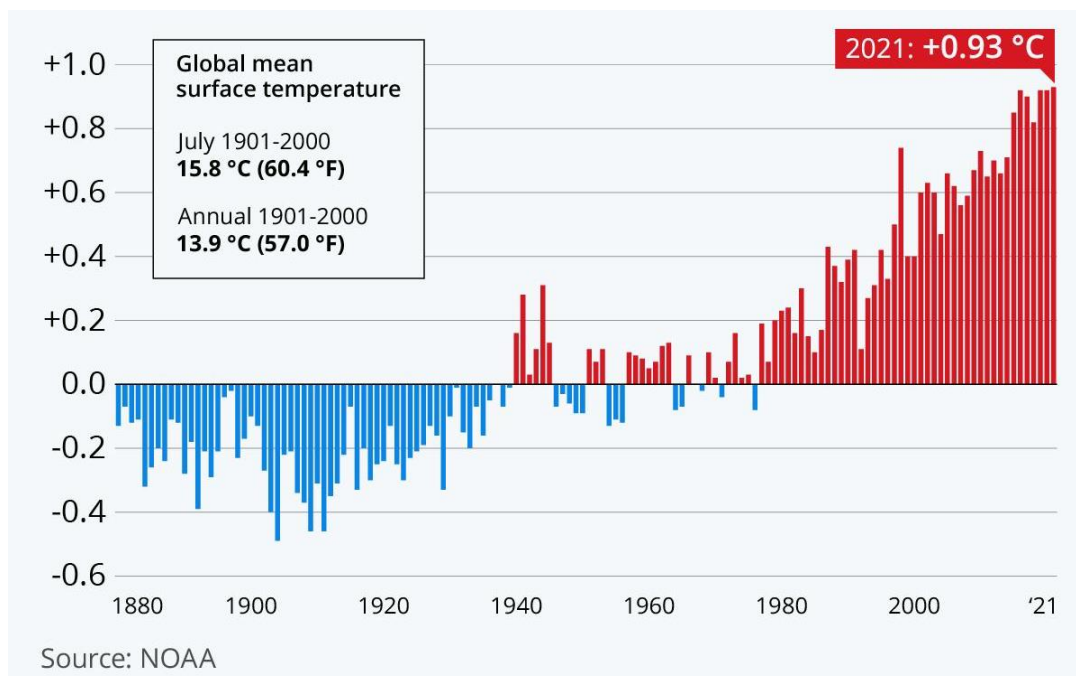
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INTRODUCTION

As the world attempts to recuperate and readjust to a system crashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a more pertinent crisis awaits us, met with a lot more if not equal scepticism and denial. Climate change is not a new phenomenon. It has lurked for decades, even centuries within the planet's core but has now reached a point where immediate redressal is required. If our climate collapses, so does everything else and that is enough cause to make this a central debate, globally.

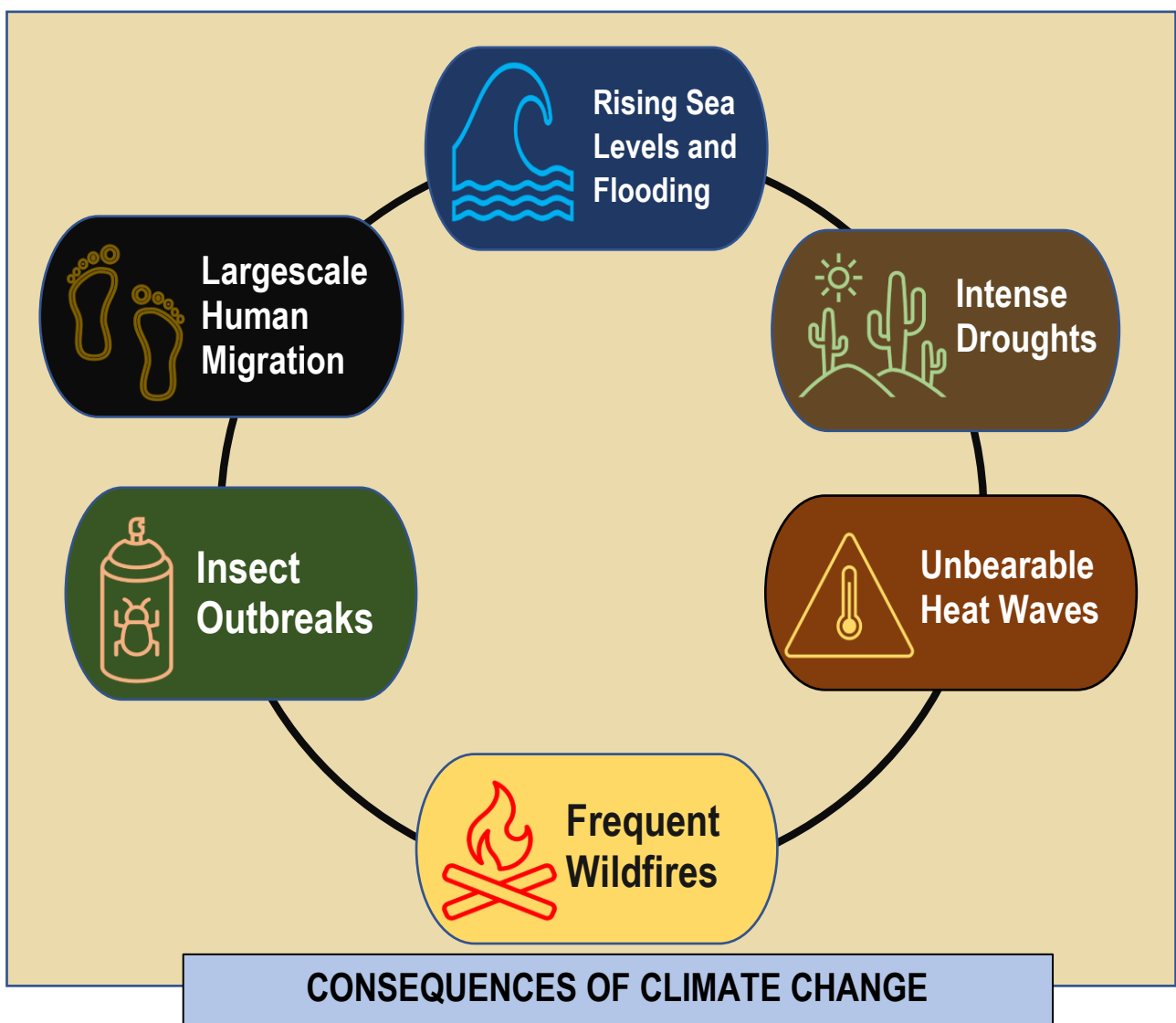
Jul 2021 was recorded as the hottest month ever on the planet, in a study conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with their initial records including data from 1880. The global land and ocean surface temperature was 0.93 degrees Celsius (1.67 °F), much above the 20th century average this Jul, making it the hottest Jul ever recorded.

The following chart studies the trend in Jul temperatures and the various anomalies in them over the last century, with the last decade showing the hottest Jul temperatures ever recorded. These take into account both land and ocean surface temperatures across the globe. Thus, the climate emergency becomes clear here. The effect of global warming in the form of extreme heat waves resulting in unexpected and large-scale wildfires, severe droughts across all terrains, along with other impacts on global weather patterns is a matter of great concern.



In Aug 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Sixth Assessment Report¹ presenting its latest findings and understanding of climate systems and climate change through an in-depth study of paleoclimate, observations, process understanding, and global and regional climate simulations. UN Secretary-General António Guterres termed it "**a code red for humanity**".

According to the report, the world will probably reach or exceed 1.5 degrees C (of warming within a very short period of just 20 odd years). It also sheds light on the status quo and looks into the monumental rise in the concentration of greenhouse gases, the fervent yet steady changes in the global water cycle and the simultaneous burning up and freezing of the earth's surface crust.



¹ IPCC Report- <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

Given above are some of the short-term consequences of climate change, most of which are being witnessed already. The long-term consequence of course, is the gradual but sure collapse of human civilisation due to lack of resources and destruction of favourable living conditions.

While most of the damage is very large and hard to repair, it is not irreversible. **To mend this damage, the crucial first step is to accept and acknowledge the mammoth of an emergency that is climate change.**



Catriona McKinnon, Professor, University of Exeter: *Climate denial has increased the risk of catastrophic global change. **Should international criminal law be used against those who promote this dangerous trend?** Economic and political leaders can no longer pretend it is business as usual. Whether they actively induce environmental harm or just ignore the existential threat against the survival of the human species, states and corporations must be held accountable for their actions or inaction regarding climate change.*

McKinnon has been an important contributor to liberal climate conservation discourse. Her book *Climate Change and Future Justice: Precaution, Compensation and Triage* touches upon intergenerational injustice caused by climate change and the resultant displacement.

Climate deniability is dangerous, it is what caused the climate emergency in the first place. The climate emergency, however, is also an act of crime. It is important that we look at it as a crime so justice can be restored effectively and accordingly. Limitless consumption and constantly regenerating consumerism have led to the possibility of profit overriding the need to protect natural life that enables survival. This disregard for planet and human life has triggered the onset of forced climate related migration that will only increase in the foreseeable future.

In this report, we look into the different causes of climate change and also shed light on the phenomenon of climate induced migration.

CAUSES OF CLIMATE CHANGE:

Big industries and governments from developed nations have, through the years, enabled a system that causes massive environmental damage and unequal distribution of resources resulting in what is known as climate apartheid. Wealthy countries have built entire economies from scratch through uninhibited and unmonitored use of fossil fuels and burning of carbon products. This, combined with the usurpation of land, labour, and resources from the developing nations, has caused massive harm.

Average global temperatures have been predicted to rise by 3.3 degrees, causing low-lying mainland coastal cities to completely submerge under water. South and Southeast Asia is particularly susceptible to this damage. Hastily



rising sea levels in Vietnam, Indonesia and Maldives have sounded a global alarm, concerning the rate at which the impact is being felt. The developed nations must reduce their global emissions to at least 7.6% between 2020 and 2030 for the developing nations to even have a fighting chance. This fighting chance to bring down global temperatures by 1.5 C will be a gargantuan effort by the developed nations, the biggest one in 150 years.

There are climate drivers of change and non-climate drivers, both of which affect the climate in different ways. Climate drivers could be the changes in Sun's energy output, Earth's orbital cycle, and large volcanic eruptions that put light-reflecting particles into the upper atmosphere.

Non-climate drivers could include extensive land use causing degradation, urbanisation, pollution and are essentially man-made causes.

NON-CLIMATE DRIVERS		
ENTITY	ACTION	EFFECT
<u>Fossil Fuel Industry</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constant production and burning of fossil fuels. Misinforming the public about the effect of burning fossil fuels on climate change. 	Magnanimous rise of greenhouse gas concentration in the ozone layer leading to more heat trapping and thus greater and more rapid global warming.
<u>Governments Of Developed Nations</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis point of Big Industries that give rise to waste mismanagement and excessive trash production Carbon trading in the global market. 	Overwhelming plastic pollution has been a major impediment in fish farming, water availability and rise in general carbon footprint, that is only furthered by callous carbon trade.
<u>International Financiers</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The European Central Bank, Volkswagen and various hedge fund financiers have been active investors in pro-fracking and other fossil fuel collection. Lack of implementation of a universal climate policy to restore justice. 	Investing in pro-fracking and climate change denying organisations has given companies further impetus to continue production and thus increase fossil fuel use. In an attempt to make profits, these organisations often act irresponsibly and enable climate damage.



<u>Largescale</u> <u>War-Waging Nations</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reckless use of petroleum, oil and other energy sources causing carbon emissions.● Targeting and overusing oil infrastructure in oil rich countries such as Iraq and Syria.● Massive deforestation during and post war.	Unaccounted carbon emission and future carbon sequestration due to deforestation. Deforestation also adds to major human and natural life displacement, making it harder and longer for ecosystems to recover.
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Dr Peter Gleick, Scientist and President, Pacific Institute:

We are seeing the emergence of “two classes of refugees: those with the freedom and financial resources to try, for a while at least, to flee from growing threats in advance, and those who will be left behind to suffer the consequences in the form of illness, death and destruction.

Developed nations are more than equipped to facilitate and finance the change they need to make but the same cannot be said for the developing nations. Most nations within the global South are developing nations, still finding their footing in the global system and will need assistance to implement systemic change. This assistance could be both financial and technical, to not only develop newer mechanisms of carbon-free, self-sustaining economies but also to help contain the damage that has been caused already. Developed nations should be obliged to facilitate this.

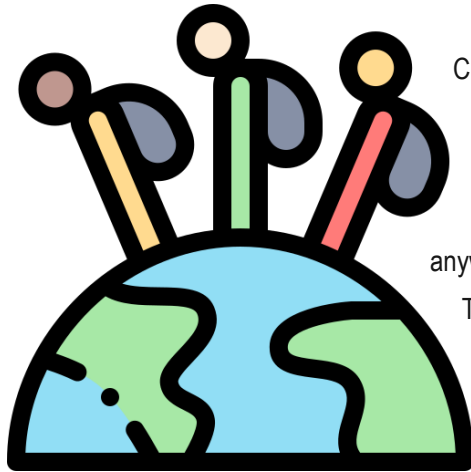
However, developed nations in the Global North tend to disagree with this proposition. This is also one of the reasons that the USA refused to be part of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The Kyoto Protocol was a landmark agreement that gave birth to a system through which developed, carbon-intensive countries in the Global North were required to necessarily make emissions cuts.

According to the latest Paris Agreement that advocates for a bottom-up approach instead, each country was required to come by with ‘Intended Nationally Determined Contributions’ or INDCs that clearly outlined their Standard of Protocol for pro-climate actions post 2020. All countries that signed the Agreement are necessitated to present these INDCs and make an increment in these pledges every five years in a collective sphere known as the Global Stocktake. Many developing nations have argued that since they are ill-equipped, they are at an unfair advantage and will need ensured assistance in financial and technological domains to combat climate change.



THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Migration is not a rigid phenomenon. It is a vast expansive one, with multiple reasons for its occurrence. People may migrate in search of better living conditions, better opportunities, unprecedented circumstances or in some cases due to climate change.



Climate migration is a deeply pertinent, relevant issue of our present times. The notion and traditional factors that have driven migration are increasingly bound up in the environmental crisis. The International Organization for Migration recently predicted that there could be anywhere from 25 million to 1 billion climate refugees in the world by 2050. The World Bank in a study has also predicted that about 17 million people could be internally displaced in Latin America alone, in the same amount of time, all as a result of the climate crisis.

The latest findings from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre stated that climate related disasters have already forced a cumulative of 7 million people from across the world to be displaced and migrate to other parts of the world, just in the beginning of 2019.

When a climate related calamity strikes, the first response of the victims is to migrate within their domestic borders. Post its failure, migration to other countries or continents takes place. However, climate migration, internal or external, is still not recognised under international law. There is grave need for the same to help formulate better climate laws in order to provide proper refuge to those displaced by the calamity.

The concept of a refugee in itself is one that is contentious. While it is true that a refugee is anyone who moves to another land to escape dire political conditions in their native home, it also implies that said refugee has a chance to return to their homeland once the crisis subsides. However, this is impossible in the case of climate refugees and so it is better to acknowledge them as climate migrants.



However, it goes without saying that expanding the definition of a refugee from someone escaping political circumstances to include people that have no choice but to relocate due to climate conditions will be difficult. Nations that have stringent border policies might not recognise the legitimacy of this claim until the gravity of the climate crisis is acknowledged immediately.

It is also important to acknowledge that migration is a privilege not everyone can afford. Migration requires serious planning, monetary resources, networks in the destination country and the ability to uproot one's entire existence without much repercussion. A lot of people in developing nations cannot afford this privilege. Therefore, most migrants tend to relocate to areas closer to home, to maintain some semblance to their earlier life.



It is important to note that there are no regulated asylum/refugee conventions for climate migrants. The below table provides few examples of the beginning of what could turn out to be a mass exodus across the globe, and hence one must think about what can be done to make this transition a relatively painless one.

COUNTRY	CRISIS
<p><u>Guatemala</u></p> 	<p>The ocean Guatemala shares with its nations is being choked with plastic and other trash, with most of it resurfacing on Guatemalan land. Since Guatemala lacks enough equipment, technological infrastructure, and resources to segregate and properly dispose of this waste, most of the trash has choked its water bodies.</p> <p>The river water is toxic, and the widespread contamination has put a major block on fishing, agricultural activities, and access to clean drinking water. This has led to major water scarcity, causing an increase in migration across the border to the US.</p>
<p><u>China</u></p> 	<p>In Jul 2021, the Henan province in China experienced major flash floods. All river embankments had overflowed due to unprecedented heavy rainfall. 25 people died, more were injured and around 2,00,000 residents were displaced and evacuated from their homes over a period of three days. More than 10 million people were struck by a cumulative of an entire year's rainfall in just three days. The rainfall caused massive destruction and was the heaviest that the country has experienced in 60 years.</p>
<p><u>Pacific Islands</u></p> 	<p>The sea level is rising at a rate of 12mm per year in the western Pacific and has already submerged eight islands. The islands, although uninhabited by humans, scaled over 2.5-12.4 acres of land, all of which were lost to the ocean due to its continuously rising levels.</p> <p>Six other islands in the same archipelagos of the Solomon Island territory saw large portions of land get submerged, of which two had a beaming human population. Entire villages witnessed destruction, resulting in forced migration of its inhabitants.</p>

<div>New Zealand</div> 	<p>In 2015, a family from the island nation of Kiribati applied and fought a court case to be accepted as refugees into New Zealand on account of the complete destruction and submersion of their native island due to rising sea levels. Mr. Teitiota, the petitioner, claimed that he was entitled to be recognized as a refugee, based on the changes to his environment in Kiribati caused by sea-level-rise associated with climate change.</p> <p>However, the request was denied. The case is important in order to further greater conversation regarding climate refugees and the need for better policy formulation.</p>
<div>Mozambique</div> 	<p>Tropical Cyclone Idai hit the southeast coast of Mozambique on 14 Mar 2019. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees launched an investigation into it and found that over 1.85 million people needed help with rehabilitation and replacement of resources. 146,000 people were internally displaced, and they were temporarily shifted into a collective of 150 home sites set up by the central government. The cyclone and subsequent flooding damaged 100,000 homes, destroyed 1 million acres of crops, and demolished \$1 billion worth of infrastructure.</p>



EFFECTS OF CLIMATE INDUCED MIGRATION



Largescale human migration means an explosion in local population, which means faster consumption of fossil fuels and at a larger scale.



Concerns for human trafficking have also been raised as there is a history of disaster related migration resulting in widespread trafficking rings.



Political destabilisation, increased scope for war, radical and sectarian policies and rise in biased sentiments are also legitimate possibilities of climate migration.



Large populations also mean a larger poverty gap. This is particularly possible in the case of climate migration where most migrants are likely to reside in outer-city/detached slum areas, unable to find equal opportunities.



The first group to feel the effects of change negatively will, undeniably, be women and children. Displacement will give rise to violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking.



Women migrants will also be tasked with more responsibility in a different land where power dynamics are already unfavourable.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE 26TH UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE (COP26) ON CLIMATE MIGRATION

All countries should prioritise community-led climate interventions that address the health of migrants and the reasons for their migration.

Increased role of human mobility in national climate change action plans, strengthening services and systems for migrants, as well as taking measures to keep essential services running after disasters, and prioritising access to sustainable and predictable financial resources for vulnerable countries.

Development of prevention, preparedness and the response capacity of health systems -- including infrastructure, supplies and workforce -- as they are key aspects in mitigating the potential health risks of climate change-induced displacement and global public health.

It is clear that without countermeasures, millions more people displaced by climate change will be subjected to various forms of modern slavery in the coming decades. Therefore, it is important to put the nexus of "climate change, migration, modern slavery" on the agenda of international development, climate and migration policies.

CONCLUSION

The climate crisis is a central global emergency. It has the ability to trigger a major shift in the world order and the lives of the generations after us. It is beyond the point of deniability and gradual acclimatization. We must take action now to ensure our own survival. We must work towards making climate positive policies, implementing bans on fracking, plastic use, overfishing and reckless burning of fossil fuels.

International organisations and nations across the world must come together to collectively create more committees, and diverse developmental agencies to work out structures in international law and policy, that address the challenges of climate change and how to deal with them.

A multi-pronged, multilateral strategy on a global scale to tackle global warming, water scarcity, agricultural degradation and carbon emission must be worked out to stop the current damage in its tracks. Here, the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' must be upheld and the developed nations must pull its weight to manage climate emergency. Additionally, it is imperative to work towards less stringent, more flexible border policies and frameworks to facilitate rehabilitation of those displaced by climate change and ensure justice.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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