



ecojudaism

OUR FAITH IN THE PLANET

Climate and migration

By World Jewish Relief



Q: How do changes in the climate cause migration?

A: There are many different reasons why people may migrate due to the changing climate:

- Loss of livelihoods
- Reducing availability of food and water
- Climate-related disasters becoming more intense or more regular
- Environment becoming uninhabitable (e.g. sea level rise threatening existence of Pacific islands, temperatures or air pollution becoming high for humans to survive in certain cities)
- The changing climate can also create opportunities, which may attract people to move

Q: What patterns of migration are we seeing due to the climate crisis?

A: The media often reports that the climate crisis will drive a new 'mass migration', where huge numbers of people will move from countries with high levels of poverty, conflict, and climate-related disasters, to wealthier countries. But in reality, climate-migration is much more complex.

- Temporary, short distance movements during a climate-related disaster, or permanent movements to seek better economic opportunities and safer environments
- Internal migration within the same country, or international migration
- Voluntary migration where people take a proactive decision to move towards opportunities, or involuntary migration where people are forced to move for their own safety (also called 'displacement')

- ‘Trapped populations’ – people who are unable to migrate because of: financial barriers, social barriers (gender, age), legal barriers, conflict, lack of alternative opportunities, or lack of information about where and how to move.
- It is important to think critically about how the media and politicians report on this very complex issue – particularly when the idea of a ‘mass migration’ is linked to debates around illegality and national security

Q: How many people are migrating because of the climate crisis?

A: The number is difficult to measure. People typically migrate for multiple reasons so it is difficult to quantify how often climate concerns are the main reason, plus data is often lacking on people that have moved internally, particularly during emergencies or conflict situations. However, we do know that:

- Over the past decade (2010–2019), climate-related disasters triggered approximately 23.1 million displacements of people on average each year. (This is twice as much as triggered by conflict and violence)
- The overwhelming majority of climate migration happens internally, within countries in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. When people do cross international borders, they mostly move to neighbouring countries. Only a small proportion of people move to wealthier nations.
- Projections for how climate migration will evolve over time are even more controversial. Commonly cited estimates for climate migration vary significantly, from 50 million to 150 million people by 2050

Q: What risks are faced by people migrating due to the climate crisis?

- Physical dangers during the journey, or when they arrive in a new area/country. These may include exposure to further climate-related disasters or violence and lack of access to basic needs such as food, water and healthcare.
- Climate migrants often struggle to receive protection of their human rights. While the term ‘climate refugees’ is often used to describe people who are involuntary displaced due to the climate crisis, it is not officially recognised in international law.
- This means that climate migrants may struggle to access citizenship, residency, economic opportunities, healthcare and so on.
- Climate migrants may also face losses of community, culture, and heritage.

If you would like to read more:

- Landmark report on the complex links between climate and migration: https://www.carefrance.org/ressources/themas/1/2755,WTRF_report_lowres.pdf
- Leading UN database on migration with data and publications: <https://gmdac.iom.int/>

- Research and advocacy on climate-migration policy issues: <https://climatemigration.org.uk/>
- UN agency for refugees: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/065d18218b654c798ae9f360a626d903>