

Climate Change and Human Migration

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Chris Brunet lived his whole life in Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana. He belongs to the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw nation, who have lived there for over 200 years. Last year, in the summer of 2022 he made the hard decision to leave his home. "I feel like I was being separated from where I belong." This is because 98 percent of the island has sunk into the sea. His home, and many others were deemed no longer safe to live in. The United States government awarded a \$48 million dollar grant in January of 2016 to help relocate this community. When he left his ancestral home, Chris left behind a yellow sign. "Isle de Jean Charles is not dead. Climate change sucks."

Nobody wants to move. Moving communities is politically unpopular. In Isle de Jean Charles, it cost nearly \$50 million to move about 100 people. How will voters react when entire cities or countries need to be relocated? The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that an average of 21.5 million people were forcibly displaced each year by sudden onset weather-related hazards between 2008 and 2016. There are 5 island nations that will be submerged by the end of this century, in less than 80 years, leading to the displacement and migration of up to 2 million people. Where will they go? Many of those most impacted live in low-income countries who have low rates of industrialization and contribute very little to climate change. They are suffering due to the industrialization of high-income countries.



High-income countries are currently focused on reducing carbon emissions and adaptive actions like sea walls and flood defenses to hold back the ocean. Venice has surrounded itself with a dam to keep the Mediterranean out, and London has the Thames Barrier which protects it from tidal surges.



However, very little is being prepared for the people of Tuvalu who will be the first to lose their country to the sea. In November of 2022, Tuvalu began the process of uploading a virtual version of itself online in an effort to preserve its history and culture.

At the moment, most people displaced by changing climate, whether it's increasing sea levels or droughts, are staying within their own countries. In the United States, most climate displacement is due to sea levels rising, permafrost thaw, drought, and wildfires. Cross-border movements are on the rise, especially where climate change intersects with violent conflicts. Often, the individuals most at risk are the least able to relocate.

On February 9, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14013, “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration” which directed the National Security Adviser to create a report on climate change and its impact on migration. This is the first time the United States is officially reporting on the link between climate change and human migration.

As we recognize Earth Day on April 22, 2023, consider how climate change is impacting human migration around the world. What can we do as individuals, communities and nations to best care for those being displaced due to global climate change?