

Forced to Move

Reducing the impact of climate
change on migration



ONWARD➤

About Onward

Onward is a modernising think tank whose mission is to develop bold and practical ideas to boost economic opportunity and strengthen communities in all parts of the United Kingdom.

We are not affiliated to any party but believe in a mainstream conservatism. We recognise the value of markets and support the good that government can do, and believe that a strong society is the foundation of both. We want to seize the opportunities of the future while preserving the accumulated knowledge of the past. We believe that most people are hard-working, aspirational and decent, but that many do not have the opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Our goal is to address the needs of the whole country: young as well as old; urban as well as rural; in all parts of the UK – particularly places that feel neglected or ignored in Westminster – by working with ordinary people directly and developing practical policies that work.

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Summary of Argument





In the coming decades, millions of people in climate-vulnerable countries could be forced to move. A perfect storm of climate change, conflict, and demographic growth will place enormous pressures on already vulnerable populations and environments. As the Government seek to secure the UK's borders, it should also help vulnerable countries to adapt to these pressures.

The Illegal Migration Bill has been brought to the House of Commons to tackle the small boats crisis in the English Channel. It introduces new powers for the Home Secretary to detain and remove anyone who arrives in the UK illegally, either to their country of origin or a safe third country.

When introducing the Bill, Suella Braverman told the House of Commons: "in the coming years, developed countries will face unprecedented pressures from ever greater numbers of people leaving the developing world for places like the UK. Unless we act today, the problem will be worse tomorrow. And the problem is already unsustainable."

One of the 'push' factors which is likely to increase in severity is environmental pressures, especially climate change. On current trajectories, climate change will have major impacts on our planet. We are on track for 2.7 degrees celsius above pre-industrial temperatures by 2100. In a warming world, there will be higher sea levels, longer droughts and an increase in wildfires. This means destruction to property and scarcer resources, particularly in the developing world.

Estimates are subject to great uncertainty, but some studies suggest that hundreds of millions of people could be forced to migrate over the course of this century. More frequent and extreme weather events and increased land and resource scarcity will forcibly displace people from their homes. While most of the movement will likely be within countries or regions, some could seek entry to the UK, including by illegal means.

This risk is widely recognised, including by the Government in the refresh of the Integrated Review. Onward's polling found that by a ratio of two to one more people agree than disagree that "climate change will lead to more refugees wanting to come and live in the UK". As with the Channel crossings, voters will expect the Government to take preventative action alongside a firm approach to enforcement.

Global decarbonisation is theoretically the best way to limit climate change and its consequences, including for migration. In practice, however, some climate change is already locked in and global decarbonisation cannot be achieved through UK national policy alone.

This will mean increased movement of people is likely. The precise number of people who will be forcibly displaced is highly uncertain, but it is sensible to assume in general that greater environmental pressure will lead to greater levels of migration, including potentially to the UK. The Government must therefore develop a response to protect the integrity of the UK border while also building resilience abroad in countries that are most vulnerable to climate change.

We recommend the government approach the issue of climate migration with the following three principles:

1. The British public have demonstrated time and again that they are willing to help those in the most danger. But they also expect and deserve a robust immigration system and a properly enforced border that controls who comes into the country.
2. Climate change is here and its impacts are already being felt. Sudden natural disasters and slow onset climate change will likely place greater pressure on the developing world as populated areas become less habitable.
3. It is therefore wise to invest in building resilience abroad and help people to stay where they are. Enforcement and deterrence is the right policy for our border, but relying on that alone could prove more expensive for the British taxpayer, and misses diplomatic opportunities.

We are not seeking to offer solutions or policies for domestic border enforcement for now or in the future. We are providing policies for how the Government should approach the issue of climate change and migration. Most movement will be abroad, but could have severe implications for our own border security. The UK cannot solve this problem alone, but neither can we ignore it.

Guided by the three principles, we recommend the following policies:

1. Work with international development organisations to increase climate adaptation-related infrastructure in vulnerable countries.
2. Focus UK International Climate Finance (ICF) on adaptation and prioritise five key areas.
3. Establish two new legal and controllable routes to the UK:
 - a. An Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme for skilled workers with mutually recognised qualifications in sectors undergoing sustainability transitions.
 - b. A Natural Disaster Visa Scheme to help people rebuild following climate change-related extreme weather events and avoid humanitarian disasters caused by climate change.

Summary of Recommendations

Catalysing private investment for adaptation schemes

Large amounts of private capital will need to be mobilised for climate adaptation, particularly in developing countries. However, these countries are experiencing a “climate investment trap”, due to the high cost of capital.

1. Work with international development organisations to increase climate adaptation-related infrastructure in vulnerable countries. The UK should do this by pooling concessional governmental capital with our partners to create grants that take the first loss for adaptation-related infrastructure in climate-vulnerable countries.
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UK International Climate Finance spending on adaptation

The UK has pledged to spend £11.6 billion on International Climate Finance (ICF) between 2021/22 and 2025/26, to help poorer countries “reduce poverty and respond to the causes and impacts of climate change”. To reduce climate-related displacement funding should focus on those climate impacts which act most strongly as migratory drivers.

2. Focus UK International Climate Finance (ICF) on adaptation and prioritise five key areas. These are: food security; water security; preparation for environmental disasters; investment in green skills; and ‘managed retreat’ resettlement schemes.
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Establishing legitimate, safe, and controlled routes to the UK

A robust immigration system and an enforced border to lower the level of illegal migration into the country is key to maintaining public confidence. However, new controllable visa schemes for those displaced by climate change to come to the UK would enable the Government to help those most in need while protecting the integrity of the immigration system. They could also help the UK with labour shortages that are threatening its energy security and decarbonisation targets.

3. Establish two new legal and controllable routes to the UK:
 - a. An Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme for skilled workers with recognised qualifications in green skills to more easily move to the UK. This could help to resolve the UK’s green skills gap.
 - b. A Natural Disaster Visa Scheme to help people rebuild following climate change-related extreme weather events and avoid humanitarian disasters caused by climate change. This could offer short-term, seasonal visas to help people rebuild their lives following natural disasters, before returning home once safe to do so. However, it could also offer long-term or permanent visas to enable people to resettle in the UK if they have no home to return to.
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The link between climate change and migration





In recent years, the world has woken up to the possibility of ‘great migrations’ caused by climate change. In the British media, this has often been presented as a picture of a looming crisis in which hundreds of millions of people migrate from South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa to the shores of Europe and Britain.¹

This media response has been triggered by alarmist reports providing estimates of hundreds of millions of so-called ‘climate migrants’ in the near future. Some reports have even suggested 1.2 billion on the move by 2050.²

In policy terms, however, climate migration has typically been framed as a security threat which risks high levels of undocumented migration, economic and social harm and the outbreak of conflict.^{3 4} The Center for Climate and Security, for example, recently published a briefing on preventing the weaponization of climate migration.⁵

Estimates of future levels of climate-induced migration in academia are generally lower and subject to significant uncertainties resulting from a lack of data, variations in climate model assumptions and outputs, and uncertainty on future policy decisions.⁶

Some academics warn against the term ‘climate migrant’ due to the complexity behind a decision to move meaning it is rarely down to one factor.⁷ But, for the sake of simplicity and discussion, we will use the term ‘climate migrant’ to refer to those who are forced to move primarily due to environmental pressures caused by extreme weather events and destruction to property (e.g. flooding or heat waves) and slow onset events (e.g. sea level rises or desertification).⁸

Despite uncertainty over numbers and disagreement over definitions, we do know that climate migration will be a problem for which policy will be required at national and international levels. This paper calls for a nuanced approach that de-emphasises numerical predictions and instead focuses on developing policies that are beneficial to the UK and help to build resilience to climate change abroad. This will help people to remain where they are, reducing instability abroad and the potential for pressure on European and ultimately British borders.

Environmental disasters are already displacing millions of people each year

The world is not on track to meet the Paris Agreement’s target to keep global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees celsius (°C) above pre-industrial levels. Instead, based on current policies, warming is likely to reach 2.7°C by 2100.⁹ This would be devastating for many parts of the world, bringing more frequent and severe environmental disasters, sea-level rises, threats to food and water security, new vector-borne diseases, extreme temperatures and the destruction of ecosystems.¹⁰

Millions of people are already displaced as a consequence of environmental disasters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that an average of 21.5 million people were forcibly displaced each year by sudden onset extreme weather events between 2008 and 2016.¹¹ Again, apportioning displacement directly to climate change is difficult, as knock-on factors such as livelihood opportunities and external factors such as population growth affect decisions to migrate. However, climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of such events and so the implications for greater levels of forced displacement are clear to see.

Climate change is likely to displace people in climate-vulnerable countries

The International Organization for Migration defines migration as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State”.¹² Where migrants choose to move to is dependent on contextual drivers of that migration, which are well established in academic literature and fall into two categories:¹³

1. ‘Push’ factors, which drive people to leave their current place of residence. These can include political instability, food and water insecurities, poor economic opportunity, environmental disasters and conflict.
2. ‘Pull’ factors, which attract migrants to their destinations. These can include economic factors, such as job prospects, higher wages and resource security. They also include political factors such as suitable emigration/immigration policies, political stability and higher levels of safety. Finally, some migrants will also be attracted to particular destinations due to familial ties and diasporic networks, language and transport links.

Some migratory decisions are voluntary, such as people choosing to move for the prospect of greater economic opportunities. Others are involuntary, where migrants are “displaced”, meaning they are “forced or obligated to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence”.¹⁴ This is often due to push factors such as conflict, violence, and natural or human-made disasters.

Climate change will have exacerbate the drivers of displacement, especially in those countries which are most climate-vulnerable (see page 17). Some consequences of climate change will directly result in displacement, such as increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters. Others will have a more indirect influence on driving migration, including loss of livelihood and better economic opportunities abroad (such as the creation of new arable land in Siberia).

Climate change vulnerabilities typically relate to food and water security

A country's "climate vulnerability" represents the degree to which that country is "susceptible to, and unable to cope with, the adverse effects of climate change".¹⁵ Climate vulnerabilities can be grouped into two main categories: food-related and water-related vulnerabilities.

Food-related vulnerabilities

Climate change could have severe implications for food security and agricultural livelihoods in many places. Firstly, it is likely to decrease crop yields. The IPCC estimates that it is "more likely than not" that crop yields will decrease by more than 5% after 2050 based on a 3°C warming scenario.¹⁶

Africa is the region most vulnerable to decline in agricultural productivity due to increased temperatures and reduced precipitation, in the form of both crop failure and a reduction in available arable land.^{17 18} This would devastate African countries, particularly in rural areas where reliance on subsistence agriculture is particularly high. In Niger, where 80% of the population rely on farming to meet their daily food requirements, available arable land is shrinking by up to 200,000 hectares per year.¹⁹ This situation could evolve into a major food security crisis. Vulnerability will also be exacerbated as food shortages trigger price increases.²⁰

Coastal regions are also particularly at risk due to their dietary and financial reliance on fishing. According to the OECD, nearly half of the world's population - around 3.1 billion people - depend on fish for at least a fifth of their daily protein intake.²¹ Climate change is likely to alter fish stocks and migratory patterns, mostly in the tropics, which are estimated to experience a decline in catches of up to 40%.²²

Food insecurity is a significant push factor for migration, just as food security is a pull factor.²³ Parts of China and the UK are already experiencing warming to the benefit of agricultural productivity.²⁴ In the future, other regions will also benefit. For example, Tchebakova et al. (2011) predict that between 50% to 85% of central Siberia will be climatically suitable for agriculture by the end of the century as a result of warming - up from 32% at the time of the study.²⁵

Adaptive measures can mitigate food security vulnerabilities, such as diversifying crop types, adjusting planting dates, and using new fertilisers. The IPCC suggests that "the benefits of adaptation vary with crops and across regions and temperature changes; however, on average, they provide approximately a 10% yield benefit compared to when no adaptation is used".²⁶ There are also numerous potential adaptive measures to protect fishing stocks, such as better management and monitoring of environmental impacts or changing target species.

Water-related vulnerabilities

Water-related vulnerabilities are already proving problematic. The IPCC estimates that today “roughly half of the world's ~8 billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least some part of the year due to climatic and non-climatic factors”.²⁷ More than 700 million people live in regions that have experienced increased maximum one-day precipitation since 1950. Climate change is expected to make these existing vulnerabilities worse.²⁸ One UN report describes climate change as “primarily a water crisis”.²⁹

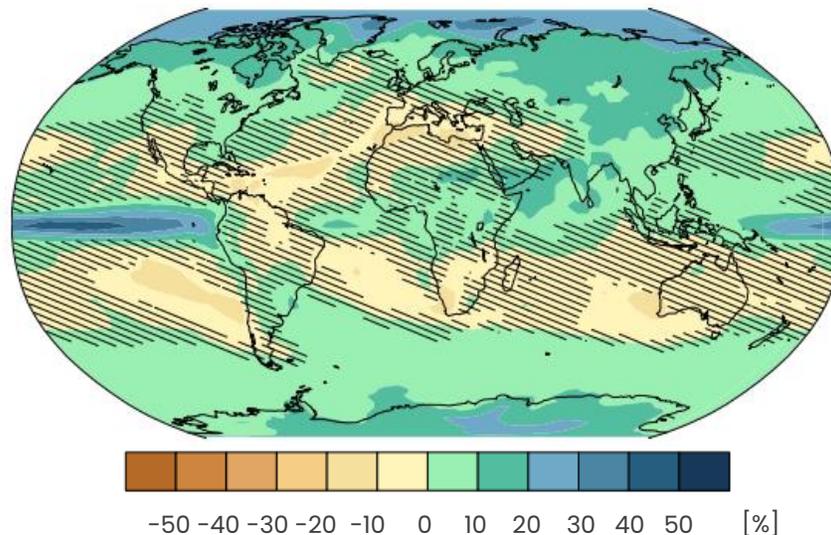
Figure 1 shows the predicted changes to global precipitation by the end of the century under a Representative Concentration Pathway 4.5 scenario (RCP4.5), which is likely to lead to between 2°C and 3°C of warming by 2100. Uncertainty around predictions remains in many regions (shown by the hatching), however in general there is likely to be more rainfall in the subtropics and less across much of the tropics.³⁰

In short, the extremes are becoming more extreme and will continue to do so. Water-related disasters such as floods and droughts will become more frequent, last longer, and will be more intense.

Figure 1: Percentage changes to precipitation by the end of the century, relative to historical levels (1986 – 2005)

Source: KNMI Climate Atlas using AR5 CMIP5 models, RCP 4.5 scenario

Note: Hatching represents areas of uncertainty, where the signal from the models is smaller than one standard deviation of natural variability.



Floods are already having devastating consequences for many people: more than 44% of all environmental disasters since the 1970s have been flood-related. Over the same period, droughts accounted for a further 7% of all environmental disasters and yet were responsible for more than a third (34%) of environmental disaster-related deaths, the majority of which were in Africa.³¹

In addition to floods and droughts, which are single events, long-term intensification of “water scarcity” presents a major risk to many countries. Water scarcity is a relative measure of demand versus supply, and when demand exceeds supply, countries are said to be “water-stressed”.³² Water stress levels are typically highest in Middle Eastern and African nations, and so these places are likely to be very vulnerable to water scarcity in future. They will therefore be more reliant on foreign water resources to meet their needs.^{33 34}

However, water security can be enhanced and preserved through adaptation. For example, major infrastructure projects for water storage (e.g. new dams and reservoirs) could help to combat rising water scarcity. Flood defences and improved drainage systems provide protection against sea-level rise and flooding, while desalination of sea water for human consumption can boost water security. Installing new and improved irrigation systems can also help rural areas become more resilient to droughts in future.

Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia are particularly vulnerable to climate change

Quantitative estimates of countries' relative vulnerability to climate change typically use the IPCC's definition of vulnerability as a framework, alongside the results of climate models. The European Commission's INFORM Climate Change Risk Index (INFORM CC) uses climate modelling results alongside socioeconomic projections to measure the future risk of humanitarian crises that could require international assistance, including floods, droughts, and damage to infrastructure.

Africa and Asia - in particular South Asia - are the two most vulnerable regions to climate change under the Inform CC index (Figure 2 & Table 1). Of all of the countries in the top quartile for climate vulnerability, most are located in these two regions along with a small number in Central America and the Caribbean.

Figure 2: Relative vulnerability to climate change, by country

Source: European Commission INFORM Climate Change Risk Index³⁵

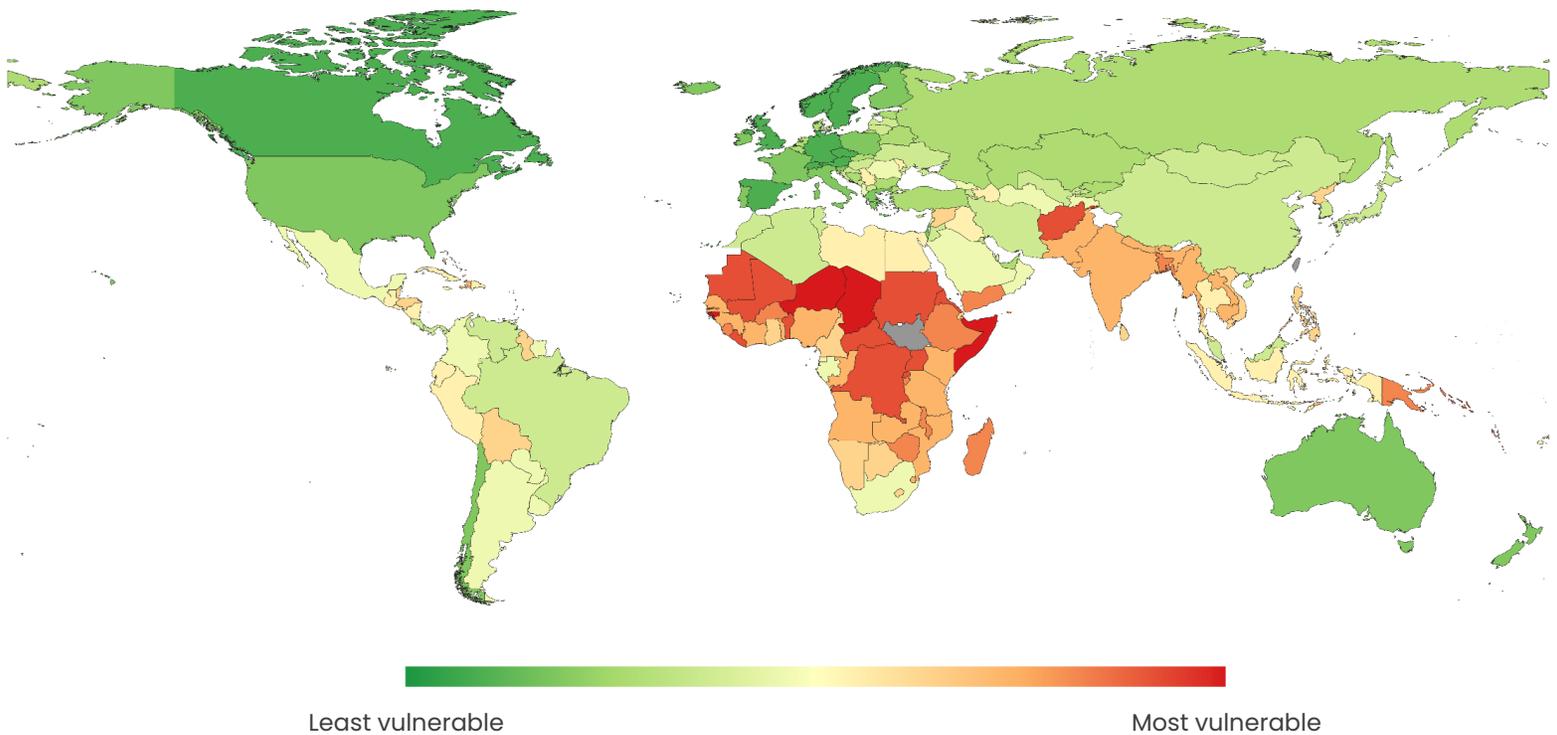


Table 1: Top 20 most vulnerable countries to climate change

Source: European Commission INFORM Climate Change Risk Index

Rank	Country	INFORM CC Risk Score (1 = very low vulnerability, 10 = very high vulnerability)
1	Somalia	8.8
2	South Sudan	8.5
3	Yemen	8.1
4	Afghanistan	8.0
5	Chad	7.8
6	Central African Republic	7.7
7	Congo DR	7.6
8	Niger	7.3
9	Mozambique	7.2
10	Syria	7.0
11	Mali	6.9
12	Ethiopia	6.8
13	Iraq	6.6
14	Nigeria	6.6
15	Burkina Faso	6.4
16	Sudan	6.4
17	Cameroon	6.2
18	Libya	6.2
19	Myanmar	6.2
20	Uganda	6.2

Mechanisms through which climate change will drive displacement

Some consequences of climate change will have a greater impact on displacement than others. The four most significant direct climate-related drivers of international migration are droughts, loss of agricultural productivity and land degradation, flooding and other environmental disasters, and sea-level rise.³⁶ These four key drivers are explored below.

1. Droughts

Droughts will become more frequent - particularly in much of sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of South Asia, which could also force people to move from their homes. Adaawen *et al.* forecast that drought-induced migration will increase by 200 per cent by 2100.³⁷ There is also evidence that changes to rainfall patterns in sub-Saharan Africa are already driving rural to urban migration.³⁸ Worsening water scarcity could also directly or indirectly drive conflict.³⁹

Droughts are a major driver of food insecurity as they cause crop failure or greatly reduced crop yields. Food insecurity will drive rural to urban migration, particularly in parts of Africa. Rademacher-Schulz *et al.* found that 85% of households in Northern Ghana who had emigrated had experienced food shortages in the past five to ten years, and 73% of them named seasonal migration as the main strategy to deal with this crisis.⁴⁰ Climate-induced food insecurity has also been shown to be the most significant driver of out-migration from the Indian Sundarbans.⁴¹

2. Loss of agricultural productivity and land degradation

The desertification of agricultural land and soil degradation linked to droughts will negatively affect productivity in many rural areas. This will have knock-on effects on displacement. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2.5 billion people around the world generate income by managing small farms of less than two hectares each, which total 500 million in number.⁴²

The degradation of farmland will result in the loss of agricultural incomes, driving rural-to-urban migration from affected areas. In addition, the resulting pressures placed on urban wages by an influx of people to urban areas is expected to trigger further international migration.⁴³ In some places, this effect has already been detected, such as in sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh.^{44 45 46}

This will also damage the economies of developing countries. For example, the UN Environment Programme estimates that if no action is taken to prevent the desertification of arable lands in Africa, then it could cost African countries an average of 12.4% of their annual GDP.⁴⁷ Rural communities will bear the brunt of these losses.

3. Floods and other environmental disasters

Water-related climate vulnerabilities are a key driver of displacement. The IPCC states that “extreme storms and floods are the two most significant weather-related drivers of population displacements globally”.⁴⁸ The report finds that more than 20 million people are already displaced on average by these events each year.

Many expanding cities are built near rivers or on low-elevation land that will be prone to flooding as rains become heavier and more frequent and meltwater increases, as is likely to be the case in South Asia.⁴⁹ Urban areas with inadequate drainage systems and informal housing will be more vulnerable to flooding and have less capacity to retain displaced populations, as is the case for the 600,000 people displaced by flooding in Pakistan this year - many of whom are still residing in relief camps.⁵⁰

4. Rising sea levels

Rising sea levels present an additional risk to many low-lying coastal areas and small-island nations. Millions of people who live in these areas will be affected in future. Under an RCP 4.5 scenario (2-3 degrees warming by 2100), global sea-levels are expected to rise by at least 1 metre by 2100. Under this scenario, Hooijer and Vernimmen estimate that 410 million people will live on land vulnerable to sea-level rise by the end of the century - even with zero population growth.⁵¹ Other studies estimate that without preventative and adaptive measures, tens-to-hundreds of millions will be at risk of displacement from sea-level rise over this time period.⁵²

Aggravating factors affecting climate-related displacement

There are two key aggravating factors which could amplify the effects of climate change on displacement in some regions:

1. Some climate-vulnerable regions are likely to undergo significant population growth over the next few decades.
2. Climate change has the potential to indirectly lead to armed conflict, by driving resource insecurity and instability.

Climate change will act as a multiplier on the increases to migration flows and displacement that these two factors will result in. This means that the effects of climate change in combination with these factors will lead to larger levels of displacement than would otherwise be seen. In this section, we explore the effects of each of these aggravating factors in further detail.

Factor 1: Population Growth

Between 1990 and 2020 the population of the world grew by nearly half (46%).⁵³ Between 2020 and 2050, the world's population is projected to grow by a further quarter (25%). While population growth is slowing, this still amounts to an extra two billion people by 2100.

Population growth will be concentrated in certain regions. Europe's population is expected to decline slightly from 446 million today to 441 million by 2050, with a greater fall-off in the latter half of the century to around 365 million by 2100.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Africa's population is set to double, from 1.2 billion in 2016 to 2.5 billion in 2050.⁵⁵

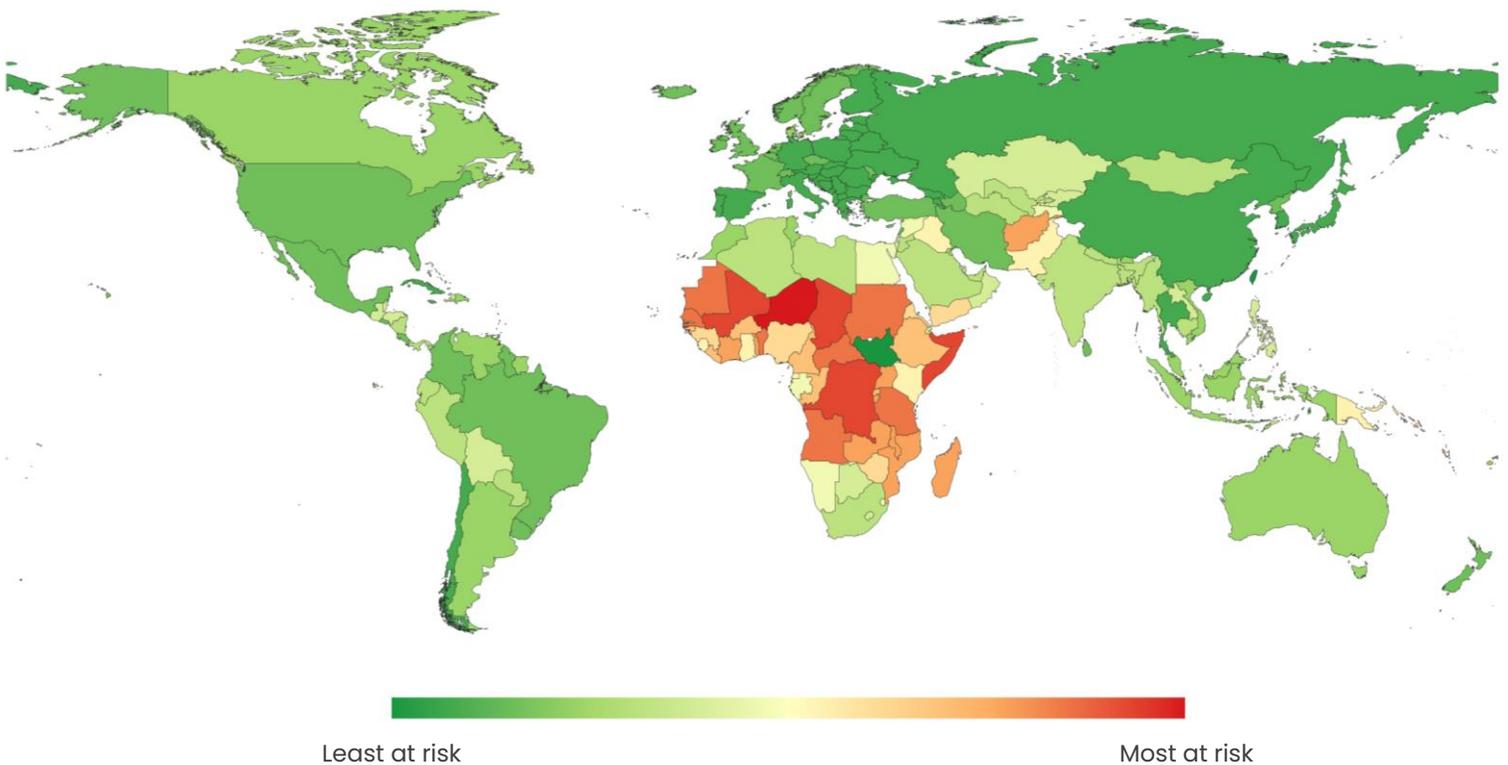
Evidence suggests that as countries develop economically, a greater proportion of their population migrate internationally. This trend has been detected in Africa, where the share of people born in sub-Saharan Africa who move away from their country of birth has risen from 2 percent in 1990 to 2.5 percent today.⁵⁶ Combined with the rapid population growth sub-Saharan Africa is set to experience, this will lead to increased levels of economic migration from the region to the rest of the world.

Climate change will act as a further multiplier to this trend. To identify countries that are both vulnerable to climate change and likely to experience population growth, Onward created a composite index that combines a country's vulnerability to climate change with its expected population growth (Figure 3). The worst-affected nations on the composite index are clustered around the equator in Africa, including Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

Figure 3: Composite index of vulnerability to climate change and population growth¹

Sources: UN World Population Prospects 2022 (Medium variant),⁵⁷ INFORM CC Risk Index

Note: To create the composite index, we calculated the ratio of 2100 population (projected) to 2021 population (actual) for each country, using the UN's Medium scenario for future population changes for each country. We then multiplied this ratio by each country's score on the INFORM CC Risk Index.



¹ An important caveat of this index is that it does not highlight places that are vulnerable to climate change but expected to have low (or negative) population growth. Instead, it only highlights areas in which population growth is likely to exacerbate the number of climate-displaced people there would otherwise be. South Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh do not have high composite index scores, because their populations are not projected to grow significantly. However, they remain extremely climate-vulnerable, and so there will still likely be millions of climate-displaced people from these countries (who are either displaced internally or externally)

Table 2: Composite index of vulnerability to climate change and population growth

Source: European Commission INFORM Climate Change Risk Index

Rank	Country	Composite index score
1	Niger	4.46
2	Democratic Republic of Congo	2.64
3	Somalia	2.62
4	Chad	2.50
5	Mali	2.38
6	Benin	2.05
7	Central African Republic	2.04
8	Tanzania	2.00
9	Senegal	1.95
10	Angola	1.95

Factor 2: Conflict

Conflict is one of the key drivers of migration. In 2021, environmental disasters triggered 62% of the 38.1 million displacements recorded, with around 14.4 million prompted by conflict and violence.⁵⁸

Climate change may exacerbate conflicts, and thus indirectly migration, by acting as a “threat multiplier” through its knock-on effects on the availability of water, food and arable land.⁵⁹ There is already a strong correlation between climate-vulnerable countries and regions, and those places that are fragile or experiencing conflict (see Case Study 1 below).⁶⁰ However, experts caution against arguments of direct causation, as governance, development and social dynamics must also be considered.

The five countries with the highest number of new internal displacements in 2021 due to conflict and violence were Ethiopia (5.1 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (2.7 million), Afghanistan (723,000), Burkina Faso (682,000) and Somalia (549,000).⁶¹ All of these countries are within the top 15% in Onward’s composite index of vulnerability and population growth.

Case Study 1: Darfur, Western Sudan

Darfur's ongoing war has been termed "the first modern climate change conflict" by Jeffrey Mazo of the Institute of Strategic Studies, and the "climate culprit" by former-UN secretary Ban Ki-Moon.^{62, 63, 64} The region has seen rainfall decrease by up to 40% since the 1980s, with the desert advancing by more than a mile per year.⁶⁵

The western, northern and central regions are most affected, prompting significant levels of migration southwards. Influxes of nomadic pastoralists onto land occupied by sedentary agriculturalists has led to clashes over resources (pasture, water, crops), exacerbated by inter-ethnic tensions, government corruption and divide and rule, the militia group Janjaweed, and population growth.⁶⁶ The lack of opportunities for young people also means they are vulnerable to being radicalised.

It is impossible to determine the exact role climate change has played in the conflict. The UN Environment Programme found environmental degradation to be one of the major causes of the conflict. As explained above, environmental changes have interacted with social and political instability.⁶⁷

Some four million people are already internally displaced and around 350,000 refugees have crossed borders, mostly into neighbouring Chad and Ethiopia and some beyond.^{68, 69} Libya is a popular transit country and stepped migration is one of the ways that migrants from Darfur make their way to Europe. Sudanese people were the fifth, sixth and seventh most populous refugee group arriving in Italy in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively.

As of 2020, the ONS estimated that there were 20,000 people of Sudanese origin residing in the UK, double the number recorded in the 2001 census.⁷⁰ The UK could be a popular destination for Sudanese migrants due to common English language and diasporic ties.

The UK Home Office was criticised in 2007 for returning Darfuri asylum seekers to Sudanese refugee camps.⁷¹ The oppressive conditions and lack of resources for economic survival were cited by the Court of Appeal as reasons why their expulsion from the UK was "unduly harsh", and some were allowed to remain.⁷²

Internal vs international displacement

As described above, climate change is likely to increase the number of people who are displaced in future. However, there remains uncertainty as to where these people will move. Evidence of existing climate-related migration finds that most people move internally, within their home countries.⁷³ In cases where migrants do move internationally, most examples suggest that they settle regionally, in neighbouring countries. Internal migration is what the often-cited Groundswell report from the World Bank focused on.⁷⁴

However, a small proportion of climate migrants do make long-distance international moves. For example, one macro-economic analysis detected a correlation between migrant flows from low- to high-income countries and adverse climate impacts in the countries of origin.⁷⁵ Most of the literature suggests that this relationship is likely to hold as the number of people displaced by climate change grows significantly in the future.

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) rapid evidence assessment on the impacts of climate change on migration patterns found that climate-related shocks can contribute to increases and decreases in migration. It also stated there is no evidence yet of an upward trend in weather-related shock migration.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, while there is insufficient evidence gathered so far, it is still likely that greater levels of climate change will mean greater environmental pressure on people to move within and out of climate-vulnerable areas and countries. Combined with other pressures like population growth and conflict, we could see major displacement crises occurring in this century.

The potential for major displacement

As this chapter has set out, there are a number of direct and indirect ways in which climate change will increase the number of people living in dangerous or uninhabitable conditions in the years to come. There are a number of projections which have been put forward to try and quantify this potential crisis (Table 3).

It should be noted that none of these studies are perfect and indeed often have methodological flaws. The FCDO's rapid evidence assessment found that "there are no rigorous global estimates of the number of people displaced by or migrating in response to weather shocks or climate change, and high-end projections of future climate-related migration are not considered credible".⁷⁷ They should also be placed in a wider context: the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, for example, found that 40.5 million people were displaced internally in 2020 alone.⁷⁸

Table 3: Estimates of climate-displaced people in future years

Estimate of climate-displaced people	Date	Source
200 million “environmental refugees”	2050	Myers and Kent (1995) ⁷⁹ ; Myers (1997, 2002) ⁸⁰
216 million (internally)	2050	Groundswell Report (2021) ⁸¹
More than 200 million people at risk of becoming “climate refugees” (82 million from Africa, 141 million from Asia)	2050	Biermann and Boas (2010) ⁸²
187 million at risk of forced displacement from sea level rise and flooding	2100	Nicholls <i>et al.</i> (2017) ⁸³
125 million at risk of being displaced because of desertification, with 60 million expected to move from sub-Saharan Africa to Northern Africa or Europe.	2030	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification report (2010) ⁸⁴

In addition, migratory decisions are personal choices that individuals make and can be influenced by any number of factors. For some, sudden, destructive events like flooding or wildfires will primarily drive decisions to migrate, while for others climate change will indirectly induce mobility (such as by reducing the economic opportunities in their local area or decreasing availability of resources). However, it is rare that climate change will be the sole driving factor in a decision to migrate.

In fact, the harmful consequences of extreme weather events, resource insecurity, and slow onset climate change may mean that some people cannot afford to migrate long distances. If a person or group of people are too impoverished to safely move elsewhere, the headline rate of migration would be lower. This is why there is such significant variation in the range of estimations of future climate migrants.

Nevertheless, climate migration is more likely than not to occur on a scale involving tens or hundreds of millions of people globally over the century as the planet gets warmer and environmental pressure grows. Some impacts are already being seen. One study demonstrated that hotter-than-normal temperatures across 103 countries, including many in Africa, have increased asylum applications to the European Union.⁸⁵ The same study found that asylum applications to the EU are projected to increase 28% by the end of the century (relative to 2000–2014) under an RCP 4.5 scenario.

Implications for the UK





It is hard to predict where climate migrants will want to move to if they do migrate beyond their region. However, there are good reasons to think that a significant number will want to move to the UK and could therefore attempt to illegally enter. This chapter explores the potential consequences of climate migration for the UK.

Climate migrants may want to move to the UK

As with other developed countries, the UK has a number of ‘pull factors’ for potential migrants. It has a strong economy with high wages compared to much of the world, and strong cultural ties such as a shared language with many climate-vulnerable countries in Africa and South Asia.

Migrants have come to the UK from all corners of the globe over the past few decades, retaining strong familial and social networks with other countries. The presence of these networks is particularly important for climate migration because people from climate-vulnerable regions are disproportionately represented in the UK. Around a third (32%) of foreign-born people living in the UK have come from countries in the top quartile of climate vulnerability, totalling 3.06 million people. In the last twenty years alone, around 1.6 million people have arrived in the UK from countries in the top quartile of climate vulnerability.

Most of the largest existing migration flows from climate-vulnerable countries are from South Asia and Africa, including India, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Uganda (Table 4). Of the ten countries listed in Table 4, four rank in the top ten countries with the largest English-speaking populations, and all bar Somalia rank in the top quartile.

Migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa to the UK will be particularly relevant in future due to rapid population growth and the increasing propensity of people to migrate away from the region. Between 1990 and 2013, levels of economic migration from the region to the rest of the world have increased by more than sixfold to more than 6 million people.⁸⁶

The UK currently hosts around 16% of the total sub-Saharan African diaspora, second only to the USA, which hosts around 18%. The number of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in OECD countries is predicted to increase by a further 28 million by 2050. If the UK continues to host around 16% of these, this would equate to an additional 4.5 million people moving to the UK in the next thirty years.

Table 4: Countries of origin in the UK population

Source: Onward analysis of ONS statistics and European Commission INFORM Climate Change Risk Index

Rank	Country of birth	People living in UK	Climate vulnerability rank (out of 192 countries)	English speaking population (millions)	English speakers as a proportion of total population
1	India	896,000	24th	129	9.2%
2	Pakistan	456,000	20th	115	49.7%
3	Nigeria	312,000	13th	103	48.3%
4	Bangladesh	223,000	22nd	20	11.8%
5	Philippines	158,000	29th	64	56.2%
6	Kenya	144,000	44th	8.1	15.3%
7	Brazil	119,000	34th	10.5	4.9%
8	Turkey	82,000	38th	12	14.2%
9	Somalia	82,000	39th	No data	No data
10	Uganda	54,000	19th	39.8	86.8%

Stepped migration is one way in which people displaced by climate change may eventually come to the UK

Stepped migration is a long-standing theory of how migration flows exist, first proposed by Ravenstein in 1885. The theory states that there is often no one big move, from say a rural village to a cosmopolitan capital city; rather, migrants tend to move short distances hierarchically, firstly from rural to mid-size settlements and then later to suburbs to cities. These steps occur over extended periods of time before the migrants settle, and they may not have a planned final destination.⁸⁷ Carlos and Sato describe stepped migration as a pathway in which migrants move via “stepping stone” transit countries with the ultimate goal of reaching a “preferred destination”.⁸⁸ An example of this happening in the case of Bangladesh is explored in Case Study 2 below.

However, the extent of future stepped migration flows will be difficult to quantify. They will depend on the level of climate change we see and how the world adapts to it, economic growth in different countries, and demographic changes in future years.

Reducing the need for people to migrate through stepped migration

If environmental pressures forcibly displace people in these regions and countries, it is likely that the above pull factors will tempt some to attempt to undertake stepped migration to enter the UK – including by illegal means. Regardless of pull factors, the UK border should be secure and illegal entry should not be legitimised by climate change or other environmental pressures. The scope for undermining confidence in the British immigration system is simply too great.

However, given it is likely that climate change will lead to more displacement, which in turn increases the likelihood of more conflict and instability, the Government should consider offering safe, legal, but controllable, routes to safety for those most in need.

Britain has a very strong track record of doing so: it has special nationality-specific schemes for Hongkongers fleeing from the Chinese Communist Party, Afghan interpreters from the Taliban, and Ukrainians from the Russian invasion. It also has special schemes such as the Family Reunion policy and the UK Resettlement Scheme.

To reduce the potential financial and resource burden on the UK Border Force, it would be prudent to try to mitigate the environmental push factors that force or make it more likely for someone to decide to try to come to the UK. This means making the regions vulnerable to displacement more liveable and helping them to adapt climate change, and cope with environmental pressures in general. We explore the establishment of legal routes and adaptation in the recommendations section.

Case Study 2: Environmental migration in Bangladesh

Ranking 5th in the Global Climate Risk Index, Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to climate-related disasters. Over 80% of its land is low-lying floodplain, hosting 35 million people.⁸⁹ The frequency and intensity of climate-induced disasters has increased significantly in recent decades, with cyclones and storm surges triggering floods, erosion and salinisation, accompanied by slow-onset sea level rise.⁹⁰

Environmental and related economic issues are increasingly driving rural to urban migration in Bangladesh.⁹¹ Ahsan et al. 2014 estimate that 300,000 to 400,000 migrants move to the capital Dhaka each year to “improve their economic prospects” - taking the “urban advantage” path.⁹² Swiss development organisation Helvetas surveyed 70 coastal villages, finding 82% of households to have at least one family member who migrated “for a better livelihood” within Bangladesh between 2000 and 2017.⁹³ The IOM estimated that 70% of migrants in Dhaka had experienced environmental shock.⁹⁴

Slum dwellers already comprise 40% of Dhaka’s population, and the city has a very high population density of 1,502 people per square kilometre. Poor sanitation conditions, inadequate housing, social inequalities and few job opportunities may prompt those with economic and social capital to seek more favourable conditions overseas (Hatton & Williamson, 2003; Massey et al. 1993). These people are classed as international economic migrants, but they have been indirectly propelled by climate change. Currently 4% of internally displaced people within Bangladesh leave the country immediately. But land conflicts, disease, rapid urbanisation and population growth will intensify the situation in Dhaka, and could trigger humanitarian crises which displace large numbers of people abroad.

Chain migration to the UK is common, with people following friends and family already in the UK.⁹⁵ Bangladeshis represent one of the largest immigrant groups in the UK of around 223,000 people.⁹⁶

Public opinion on climate migration



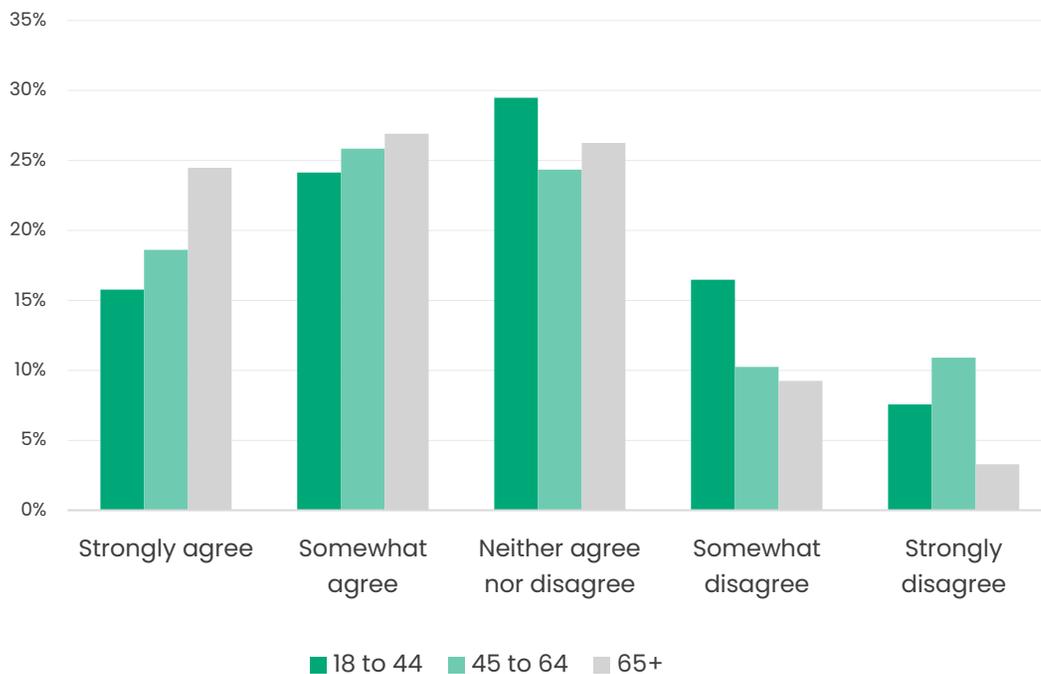
To understand the extent to which the public recognise climate migration as a potential issue for the UK and their views on how the UK should respond, Onward commissioned Stack Data Strategy to conduct a poll on 18th November 2022. The sample size was 1,513 people and results were weighted to be nationally representative.

Public views on climate change and migration

The polling demonstrates that people clearly make the link between climate change and migration. By a ratio of two to one, more people agree than disagree that “climate change will lead to more refugees wanting to come and live in the UK” (44% agree, 20% disagree).

Figure 4: Agreement with the statement “Climate change will lead to more refugees wanting to come and live in the UK”, by age group

Source: Stack Data Strategy, Onward analysis



In general, older people are more aware of the potential impacts of climate change on migration. Half (51%) of 65+ year olds agreed with the statement “climate change will increase the number of refugees wanting to come and live in the UK”, while only 13% disagreed. This compares to 40% agree, 24% disagree for 18-44 year olds.

What do voters think the UK's response should be?

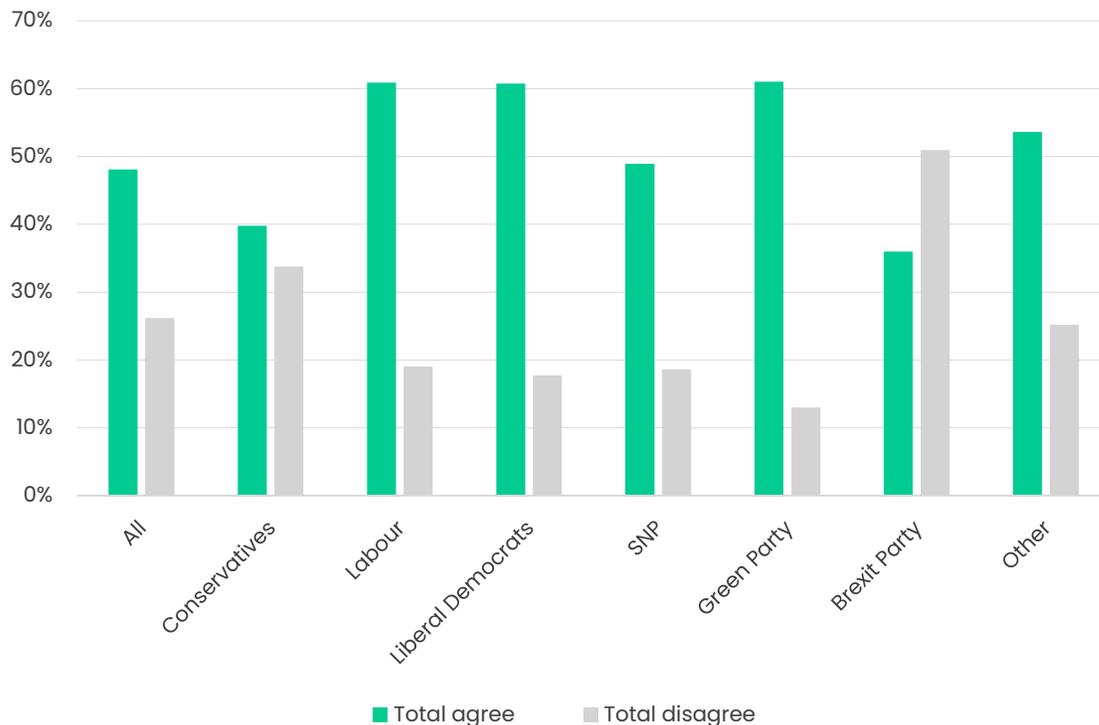
Adaptation spending

People are largely enthusiastic about the UK funding climate adaptation abroad. Nearly half (46%) of voters agree that the UK should fund climate adaptation abroad and just a quarter (28%) disagree. And 2019 voters for every major party except the Brexit party are in agreement that the UK should fund climate adaptation abroad. This view is held more strongly by Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, with net agreement among voters for these parties at 42% and 43% respectively.

2019 Conservative voters are more split, with 40% in agreement and 34% disagreeing. However, when looking ahead to the next election, agreement increases among those who intend to vote Conservative. For this group of people, net agreement rises to 14% with just 29% disagreeing that the UK should fund climate adaptation projects abroad. These results suggest that adaptation spending is something that Conservative voters generally support and that it does not go against the principles of the Party's core voter base.

Figure 5: Agreement with the statement "The UK and other richer nations should fund poorer countries to adapt to more frequent flooding and drought as a result of climate change", by 2019 vote

Source: Stack Data Strategy, Onward analysis



Voters also believe that climate adaptation should be a priority area for use of the UK's aid budget. When asked to rank five potential priorities, climate adaptation was ranked as the second biggest priority behind only health. Nearly a quarter of people (23%) selected it as the most important priority for the UK's aid spend, well above spending on improving education systems (15%) and helping countries to develop strong institutions (13%).

Once again, this view was universal across 2019 voters from all parties. Conservative, Labour and Brexit Party voters all ranked spending on climate adaptation as their second biggest priority area for the UK's aid budget behind health, while it was the main priority for Liberal Democrats. This suggests support for aid spending on climate adaptation is not simply a view held by the Left.

Hosting climate migrants

Many voters question whether the UK has a duty to host climate-displaced people. Overall, only 29% of people think the UK has an obligation to host people forced to move by climate change, versus 41% of people who do not. There are also significant splits along party lines here. For example among 2019 Conservative voters, 21% agree the UK has such a duty while 55% disagree. However, other voters are much more likely to agree that the UK has such a duty. For example, among those who voted Labour in 2019, 42% agree while 30% disagree.

A key finding from our polling is that voters agree - by a slim majority of 42% to 36% - that spending on overseas climate adaptation would reduce the UK's obligation to host people displaced by climate change. Crucially, it is Conservative voters who take this view most strongly. Net agreement among 2019 Conservative voters with this principle is 26%, and this rises to 28% among those who intend to vote Conservative at the next general election. This view is also held by Liberal Democrat and Green voters.

Overall, the polling demonstrates clear public support for the UK to invest in early-stage interventions which help vulnerable countries adapt to climate change. And the public view this as a true area of priority for the UK's aid spend, over and above other traditional avenues for aid spending such as education and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, there is agreement among voters - particularly Conservatives - that this spending would reduce the UK's duty to take in people forced to move by climate change in the future.

How the UK should approach climate migration





Climate change could lead to the displacement of hundreds of millions of people under current trajectories. Most of these people will initially move internally within their current countries, but some will move across borders into neighbouring countries. This in turn could lead to greater levels of stepped migration, including to Europe and potentially across the English Channel.

What are the key issues when considering policies for climate change and migration?

Climate Refugees

Before continuing, it is worth discussing the term “climate refugee”. This term is used in the growing debate around climate change and migration in the media, by governmental bodies, and in official reports on the subject.

There are currently 21.3 million people defined and protected as refugees under international law, through the UNHCR’s (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) 1951 Refugee Convention.⁹⁷ Under this convention, a refugee is defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁹⁸

However, this definition makes no mention of people who are displaced by environmental factors or climate change. Even today, there are already more people - 21.5 million - who are forced to flee their homes due to weather hazards each year than the total number of refugees. The majority of these people currently do not have refugee status and therefore do not enjoy the same rights. These people are instead often referred to as “environmental migrants”.⁹⁹

There have been calls to revise the UNHCR’s Refugee Convention to designate climate-displaced people as refugees in future.¹⁰⁰ But in practice, there are numerous problems with this approach that renders it impractical. The incredibly complicated nature of migration means that no singular definition of a “climate refugee” can capture the plurality of reasons behind people’s decisions to leave their homes.¹⁰¹

In addition, all countries are likely to be impacted by climate change to some degree. Any update to the UNHCR Refugee Convention would therefore need to include a threshold for a minimum level of disruption under which someone would be classed as a climate refugee. This would also require a reliable mechanism to assess whether this threshold had been met. In practice, linking all “climate-displaced people” back to a climate-related event to grant them asylum would be extremely difficult. Due to the nascency of attribution science it would be hard to evidence and make it difficult to assess which claims were truly genuine.

Finally, updating the UNHCR Refugee Convention would require the 140 parties to the convention to agree on an amended text. Given the potential number of climate migrants in future, it is likely to be extremely difficult to achieve the necessary level of international collaboration to make this happen. Some parties have also expressed concern that formally recognising “climate refugees” could weaken the convention and undermine the protections of existing refugees.¹⁰²

Therefore, any legislation and government policy in this area should be wary of using the term “climate refugee”. While it might be acceptable in some places to use this term as a layman’s phrase for people forcibly displaced by sudden or slow onset climate change-related events, wider use by the government could open up the British immigration system to abuse.

Border enforcement

Firm enforcement of the UK’s borders will help the Government to balance humanitarian obligations with domestic capacity. Controlled immigration and effective border control are particularly important for Conservative voters and, crucially, many swing voters.

Effective border enforcement is therefore the policy of both main political parties. While maintaining a secure border is necessary, however, the financial and resource burden of enforcement could become overly strenuous on taxpayer resources. For example, the current cost of processing an asylum claim is £12,000 per person. Processing and deporting people to safe countries is also expensive; the average cost per person of deportation flights was more than £13,300 as of the end of 2020.¹⁰³ In addition, there will be further costs to the taxpayer associated with legal and court proceedings, administrative procedures and jail sentences.

If the number of people trying to come to the UK increases significantly because of climate change, the costs associated with enforcing the UK’s border policies will grow. This could present a significant burden on the taxpayer. A firm approach to the enforcement of the UK’s border policies can reduce future levels of illegal entry to the UK, but reducing the need for enforcement in the first place should also be part of any policy approach.

Impact of climate migration on domestic politics

In 2022, more than 45,000 people arrived in the UK through small boat crossings.¹⁰⁴ But these crossings are very unpopular with voters.¹⁰⁵ Recent polls have shown that immigration is now a top-three issue for voters and that the failure to deal with the rise in small boat arrivals is the single largest reason why voters may switch away from the Conservative Party at the next election.^{106 107} Any increase to the number of small boat crossings in future as a result of climate migration is likely to receive a negative reaction from voters, no matter which party is in power.

As increasing numbers of people are displaced, the number of people who attempt to come to the UK through illegal channels, including by small boat crossings, may also increase. The UK's toughening stance on illegal arrivals through the new Illegal Migration Bill and greater enforcement may act as a deterrent. However, as noted previously, the costs of enforcement are large and the number of people who attempt to enter the UK illegally may grow significantly.

Improving relations with climate-vulnerable countries

As explained in the first chapter of this report, the most climate-vulnerable countries can be found in Central Africa and South Asia. These countries are often developing and therefore have little resource or capacity to prepare for the consequences of climate change. Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable. They will be seeking help from developed economies to become more resilient to climate change and other environmental pressures, as demonstrated by the campaign for a Loss and Damage Fund at the United Nations.

In December, the Foreign Secretary announced a foreign policy strategy of 'patient diplomacy':

"Now, we have to recognise that the UK's future influence will depend on persuading and winning over a far broader array of countries, countries in the Commonwealth, in the African Union, in ASEAN and elsewhere. Many are old friends; others we know less well. They often describe themselves as "non-aligned" and they are wary of committing themselves in any direction just because other countries want them to, and that is exactly as it should be.

"Our job is to make our case and earn their support, investing in relationships based on patient diplomacy, on respect, on solidarity, and a willingness to listen. Because this isn't about dictating or telling others what they should do: we want a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship, based on shared interests and common principles.

"And that means learning from our competitors and always thinking 10, 15, 20 or more years ahead. Because in the past I think perhaps we have been too transactional and too impatient. Now we must have strategic endurance, a willingness to commit to relationships for decades to come."

Rt Hon James Cleverly, December 2022¹⁰⁸

In January 2023, the FCDO also launched its UK Small Island Developing States strategy, which prioritised climate change and natural disasters as an area of focus. The refresh of the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy also makes it clear that mass migration and climate change will be among the “shaping forces” this century.¹⁰⁹ Investment in helping climate vulnerable countries to adapt and become more resilient to climate change could help to build relations with countries of special diplomatic interest to the UK.¹¹⁰

Long-term time frames

Climate-induced displacement is a problem that will exist beyond the end of this century and is likely to only grow larger year-on-year. Unless action is taken, many more people could try to come to the UK in future. This will result in future governments needing to make decisions later down the line which are likely to prove highly controversial and potentially very costly to the taxpayer.

Action can be taken now to support climate vulnerable countries and reduce the need for people to leave their homes. This will help more people to stay where they are. As our polling demonstrates, this is also the option likely to resonate with voters, who believe we should fund adaptation measures abroad to reduce our obligation to host climate-displaced people. It would also reduce the cost of enforcement by lowering attempts to cross the Channel. And it would provide a chance to improve diplomatic relations with climate-vulnerable countries. In the following section, we will set out the steps the UK can take to do this.

Principles for responding to climate migration

With the issues discussed above in mind, we propose three high level principles that the Government should keep in mind when making policy in this area.

1. The British public have demonstrated time and again that they are willing to help those in the most danger. But they also expect and deserve a robust immigration system and a properly enforced border that controls who comes into the country.
2. Climate change is here and its impacts are already being felt. Sudden natural disasters and slow onset climate change will likely place greater pressure on the developing world as populated areas become less habitable.
3. It is therefore wise to invest in building resilience abroad and help people to stay where they are. Enforcement and deterrence is the right policy for our border, but relying on that alone could prove more expensive for the British taxpayer, and misses diplomatic opportunities.

Environmental push factors can be mitigated by ensuring people are able to maintain an acceptable livelihood in their existing places of residence.¹¹¹ In practice, for many people in climate-vulnerable places this means ensuring they have reliable access to food and water, safety from extreme weather events and incomes protected from risk. This can be achieved by reducing the exposure of vulnerable places to climate impacts and helping them adapt to these impacts where they do occur.

Reducing exposure to climate impacts requires mitigating climate change, which can only be done by reducing net greenhouse gas emissions across the globe. However, the pace at which this is occurring is not fast enough to avoid significant impacts. Global emissions have not yet peaked, and the world is on track to warm by around 2.7 degrees by 2100, according to Climate Action Tracker.¹¹² Meeting the Paris Agreement 1.5 degree target, which would “significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change”, would require the world “to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases (net zero) in the second half of this century”.¹¹³ However, the prospects of doing so are remote.

Mitigation of climate change should still be a global priority. However, global decarbonisation will not occur through UK policy alone. Efforts must therefore also be directed at reducing countries’ sensitivity to climate effects and helping them to adapt and become more resilient. Doing so will reduce the effect of climate impacts as migratory drivers and lessen the need for people to move in response to climate change. This can be done using a combination of both preventative measures, such as long term adaptation initiatives, and responsive measures following environmental disasters.

The most significant environmental drivers of migration include drought, land degradation, flooding, access to farmland, sea-level rise, natural disasters, and agricultural productivity.¹¹⁴ It is therefore these impacts which should be the focus of any efforts aimed at levels reducing climate-related migration.

Recommendations





Our recommendations are set across three areas:

1. Catalysing private investment for adaptation schemes
2. UK International Climate Finance spending on adaptation
3. Establishing legitimate, safe, and controlled routes to the UK

Catalysing private investment for adaptation schemes

One long term strategic aim for high-income countries like the UK should be to support private sector investors to build resilience in climate-vulnerable countries. This would reduce the exposure of taxpayers, as well as the long-term impact of climate migration, and improve the economies and lives of the people living in those targeted regions. It would also be more cost effective overall than financing increasingly severe and frequent disaster response.¹¹⁵

Large amounts of private capital will need to be mobilised for climate adaptation. The UN estimates that between \$280 billion and \$500 billion per annum will be needed by 2050, particularly in developing countries.¹¹⁶

As the analysis in the first chapter of this report shows, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia are the three most vulnerable countries to climate change and demographic growth. The World bank puts the cost of adaptation for sub-saharan Africa at \$15 billion (0.93% percent of regional GDP), which could rise to \$201 billion (12% of GDP) by 2050 if there isn't action.¹¹⁷

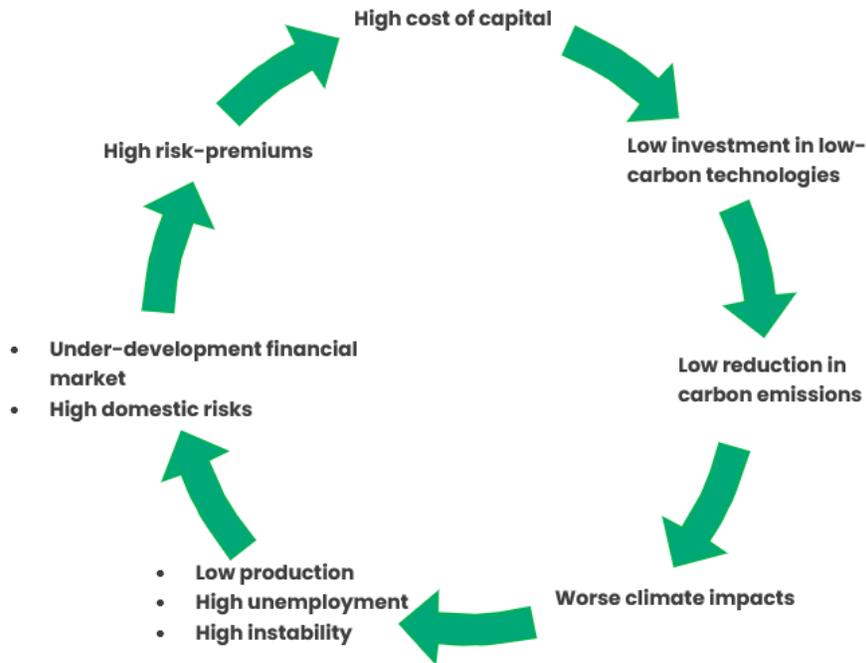
This problem is exacerbated by what is known as a “climate investment trap” in many of these economies. Capital markets are immature and lack capital stock, making it difficult to access finance. This is particularly difficult for climate adaptation related projects such as energy efficiency, water management and cooling systems due to their high capital expenditure costs.

This is largely because the current cost of capital is very high. One study found that the weighted average cost of capital (WACC) for wind and solar in Africa is 12% for the whole continent, compared to 4% in the UK and an average of 6% across the EU.¹¹⁸ A different study found that WACC values could go as high as 32% in some African countries.¹¹⁹ This high cost of capital is due to a number of factors such as political risk, lack of strong and independent institutions, and poor property rights.

This creates a climate investment trap (Figure 6). High-risk perceptions mean high premiums, increasing the cost of capital, delaying the climate transition and the resilience management necessary to limit the negative impacts of climate change. To fix this market failure, investors need to be able to reduce the risk they are exposed to when investing in these projects.

Figure 6: The climate investment trap

Source: Ameli et al, "Higher cost of finance exacerbates a climate investment trap in developing economies"¹²³



Recommendation 1: Work with international development organisations to increase climate adaptation-related infrastructure in vulnerable countries.

Concessional finance targets high-impact projects tackling globally significant challenges, such as climate change, education, poverty and vaccines, which did not previously have the right market conditions to go ahead without the targeted support. The most common forms of concessional finance come in the form of loans, grants and equity investments.

Development Finance Institutions are specialised development banks set up to support private sector investment in developing countries. They are often owned by national governments and source public capital to crowd in private sector investment. The UK's DFI is called British International Investment (BII), formerly known as the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

DFIs pooling concessional capital for targeted global issues is nothing new. One example is in Kazakhstan, where the installed capacity of renewable energy increased six times in just five years between 2015 and 2020. This shift was triggered by the \$8 billion (£6.6 billion) Climate Investment Funds which pooled capital from development funds from the UK, US, Japan, Germany, Canada, France, Spain, Sweden and Australia, making it one of the largest climate investment funds

in the world. In total, the fund invested approximately £46 million of concessional finance into Kazakhstan's clean energy sector. As a direct result of this funding, approximately £166 million of further MDB funding was secured, together with another £342 million in follow up financing - making an attractive leverage ratio of approximately 11:1.¹²⁰

The Kazakhstan example shows that concessional finance is an efficient and highly targeted way of catalysing private-sector capital for climate-related infrastructure projects.

The Government could work with partners to pool concessional governmental capital to create grants that take the first loss for adaptation-related infrastructure in climate-vulnerable countries. In practice, this would involve British International Investment, the UK's DFI, setting up a fund with other DFIs and Development banks such as the KfW in Germany and OPIC in the United States. This capital could then be pooled in a multilateral investment fund ringfenced for adaptation-related infrastructure in climate vulnerable regions.

This solution would attract investment in the countries which receive the funding, which will - over time - mean investors become comfortable with the economies and markets they work within. In the long-run these grants could be gradually phased out as investors build experience and teams on the ground.

Such a move would help end the "climate investment trap" that currently exists in many of these most vulnerable regions. It would enable more investment in the renewables sector, but also in infrastructure which would increase national resilience to climate change such as irrigation, cooling and energy efficiency.

UK International Climate Finance spending on adaptation

At the COP15 conference in Copenhagen in 2009, developed countries pledged to mobilise \$100 billion (£83 billion) per year by 2020 in climate finance to support developing countries. This target was not met, but is now expected to be achieved this year (2023).¹²¹ The UK has pledged to spend £11.6 billion on International Climate Finance (ICF) between 2021/22 and 2025/26 as part of its contribution to this target, equivalent to £2.3 billion per year.¹²²

ICF is developmental funding provided by the UK to poorer countries to help them "reduce poverty and respond to the causes and impacts of climate change".

The International Development Strategy committed to an even split between mitigation and adaptation finance. At least £3 billion of ICF is for development solutions that protect and restore nature. At COP27, the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak recommitted to the target of £11.6 billion. This is a welcome pledge and one

the UK must meet over the remainder of this parliament. However, to maximise the effectiveness of the UK's ICF on reducing the need for people to leave their homes, funding should be prioritised for long-term adaptive measures which build resilience in vulnerable areas.

For example, this should include expanding the proportion of existing funding used for adaptive measures such as constructing irrigation systems and flood defences and introducing adaptable crops.¹²³ In addition, ICF should also be used for disaster preparedness and to contribute to the funding of internal resettlement schemes.

Recommendation 2: Focus UK International Climate Finance on adaptation and prioritise five key areas.

In the Integrated Review refresh, the Government has recognised that the UK cannot be resilient to environmental changes without enhancing global resilience. It will protect infrastructure, homes and health, the natural environment and businesses from the effects of climate change.

The newly re-committed UK ICF needs to be deployed in areas where it will have the highest effect in reducing climate-related displacement. To do so, it should focus on those climate impacts which act most strongly as migratory drivers. These include drought, land degradation, flooding, access to farmland, sea-level rise, environmental disasters, and agricultural productivity.¹²⁴ With these impacts in mind, adaptation funding should focus on five main areas:

1. Food security
2. Water security
3. Preparation for environmental disasters
4. Investment in green skills
5. 'Managed retreat' resettlement schemes

Food security

ICF should be used to fund projects aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and resilience in climate-vulnerable areas. This will help to ensure and maintain food security in these places, which Parr (2022) argues is the most effective use of funds to prevent international climate migration.¹²⁵ These projects should span multiple forms. In some of the most vulnerable areas, direct investment in improving irrigation systems and new equipment for farms would be most effective. This would help farmers in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa - where irrigation systems are particularly lagging - adapt to lower rainfall, higher temperatures and increased droughts.

Alongside direct investment, other projects could be set up to educate and support farmers with new and more productive farming techniques. These projects could also provide financial support and safety nets for farmers willing to trial new methods and techniques designed to improve both the yield and resilience of their crops. For example, farmers in drought-prone areas could be supported to trial techniques such as no-till farming, fallow rotation, or methods such as the System of Rice Intensification.¹²⁶ In addition, these projects could provide funding for small-scale irrigation systems, which can prove better value for money than large-scale projects.¹²⁷ These projects could also provide data and monitoring to help farmers better understand their crops and protect against land degradation.

One example of a successful scheme is the “climate-smart villages” project pioneered by the CGIAR Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security.¹²⁸ The programme provides farmers with text advice and weather forecasts to help them plan harvests and planting; teaches smallholder farmers practical steps they can take to improve the resilience of their crops; and provides options for farmers to buy insurance against extreme weather. Through projects such as these, farms in climate-vulnerable places can adapt to climate change and prevent their agricultural productivity from declining. This will guarantee the livelihoods of farmers in rural areas and the food security of those that depend on their output, reducing the need for people to move.

Water security

Through the FCDO, the UK has provided £23 million in funding to the REACH programme, which aims to improve water security in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya.¹²⁹ The programme aims to improve water security for between 2.5 and 5 million people between 2013 and 2024 and is currently exceeding targets. The Government should increase the funding for REACH using ICF funding, and expand the programme to include other climate-vulnerable countries at particular risk of water insecurity. In addition to REACH, ICF should be used to invest in other projects which would improve water resilience. For example, these could include nature-based solutions such as wetland restoration and mangrove conservation.

Disaster preparedness

To help prepare for environmental disasters, ICF should focus on measures which can help vulnerable places to better prepare for environmental disasters and more disruptive weather. These include early-warning systems for storms, floods, heatwaves and wildfires, which allow people to take steps to protect their homes and possessions. Evidence shows that providing a 24-hour warning of an incoming storm or heatwave can cut ensuing damage by 30%.¹³⁰

These systems often provide exceptional value for money. For example, it is estimated that spending \$800 million (£646 million) on early-warning systems in developing countries would avoid losses of \$3-16 billion (£2.4-12.9 billion) per year - a staggering return on investment.

In a May 2021 speech, former UK International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency, Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, emphasised that: “only 1% of humanitarian finance is pre-arranged.”¹³¹ Most UK humanitarian aid is spent dealing with the aftermath of a disaster. And yet, between 1970 and 2019, 79% of environmental disasters involved weather, climate or water-related hazards, so forecasting these hazards should be a priority.¹³² This will require more funding as the meteorological models of the past might not have the capacity to predict the extent, intensity and frequency of events in the future.¹³³

In addition, ICF could also be used to fund projects aimed at making key infrastructure in developing countries more climate-resilient. It is estimated that doing so at the point of construction typically adds around 3% to the total upfront cost but has a benefit-to-cost ratio of 4:1. There will be a projected £49.8 billion worth of infrastructure projects built globally this decade, and so there are significant benefits to early-adaptation by making any projects in vulnerable areas climate-resilient.

Since 2018, between 10%-14% of the UK's spending on International Development has been on humanitarian aid, which is usually the sector that receives the most spending alongside health. In 2020, UK spending on humanitarian aid totalled more than £1.5 billion. A majority of spending on humanitarian aid goes towards emergency responses to disasters (94% in 2016), while less than 5% is spent on disaster prevention and preparedness.¹³⁴ Investing in early-warning systems in climate-vulnerable places using ICF funding will help to limit the amount of the UK's spending on disaster-relief in future, while providing significant benefit to many at-risk places.

All of the above initiatives should be evaluated and considered in any distribution of the ICF funding going forward. If the funding is spent in an efficient and targeted way it can have a significant impact building resilience in climate vulnerable regions and reducing the push factors of migration.

But when disasters do strike, the UK needs to be prepared to distribute funds quickly and effectively. The UK funds anticipatory action for the long-term, for example, at COP26 the UK pledged £55 million in partnership with Pakistan to fight climate change and unlock climate investment.¹³⁵ But they could do more to enable the quick release of funds in the short-term when disasters strike. They could do this by frontloading emergency funds, so that eligibility is predetermined and paperwork is pre-arranged before an emergency, so that funds can be activated instantly in the event by those on the frontline. The UK's Rapid Response Facility is currently seeking applications from UK-based organisations for this.¹³⁶

Funding could be streamlined through channels such as the decentralised Start Network, through which multilateral mechanisms distribute funds to local NGOs on the ground. For example, Senegal is set to receive £330,000 from Start Network ahead of drought predictions.¹³⁷

Investment in green skills

There is a global shortage of the necessary skills for both climate mitigation and adaptation.¹³⁸ Millions more workers are needed to transition to clean energy and sustainable agricultural practices to lower emissions, build resilience and adapt to climate change.

Normally, this skills gap would be filled over time as people train or retrain to fill the positions in the labour market. However, with the pressing need to limit anthropogenic emissions and restore nature, intergovernmental cooperation to develop a pipeline of skilled workers would be beneficial. This would be especially true for countries that need to become more resilient to environmental pressures.

The UK Government should include investment in “green skills” in its International Climate Finance. “Green skills” is a necessarily nebulous term as the speed in which green sectors are growing and changing makes it difficult to accurately forecast which exact skills will be needed in the near future.

However, there are certain options which are no-brainers, such as training people in climate-vulnerable countries in new agricultural practices to enhance food security and sustainable production. They could also be trained in clean energy, construction, and disaster preparedness.

This would help countries develop their economies in a more environmentally sustainable way and make them more resilient to environmental pressure. It could even make it easier to leap-frog the fossil fuel stage of development that developed countries have experienced, lowering anthropogenic emissions without suppressing standards of living.

If the UK works with climate-vulnerable countries to align accreditation systems, a mutually beneficial and controllable circular migration system could be established for skilled workers. This could take the form of a new Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme, as is discussed further below. This could enhance cooperation with climate-vulnerable countries, including those the UK is currently trying to forge closer ties with such as India and Nigeria.

“Managed retreat” resettlement schemes

Investing in helping communities in climate vulnerable states to become more resilient to climate change is critical to lowering potential migration overall. However, migration can still be a legitimate adaptation measure.

Resettlement schemes can be both responsive and preventative. They can be established to assist those forcibly displaced by environmental disasters and to move people to areas that are less at risk of disasters. In most cases it is significantly cheaper to implement as a preventative measure rather than an urgent response to a natural disaster.

As discussed in greater detail in the first chapter of this report, the majority of those who must relocate due to the effects of climate change will seek to resettle within their home country or a neighbouring one. Policy interventions will therefore need to derive from those countries.¹³⁹ But the UK could support these countries with the costs of internally resettling those at risk of forced climate-related displacement through its international adaptation funding.

In response to the 2007 Zambezi delta floods in Mozambique, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC) and international donors including MEDAIR and the International Organisation for Migration considered that costs from recurrent floods would eventually outweigh the cost of resettlement.^{140 141 142} People were given the opportunity to relocate with incentives including building materials, seed vouchers, health centres and humanitarian aid prompting movement.¹⁴³ This scheme resulted in 56,000 households relocating away from a flood-prone area (although 20% to 30% of relocatees chose to return to the lowlands).¹⁴⁴

Early-intervention and voluntary resettlement schemes can benefit the affected population. Involuntary resettlement (or displacement) can bring harm to those moving, while voluntary resettlement empowers people who have relocated and allows them to negotiate the benefits they will receive from relocation.¹⁴⁵ ‘Managed retreat’ from high-risk areas, although dependent on the permission of those moving, is far more safe and preferable to displacement.

One study shows that the implementation of relocation programmes takes between one and 20 years on average.¹⁴⁶ Given the expected growth in environmental pressure from climate change expected in the coming years, greater investment and support for these schemes could help to speed them up.

In all cases of adaptation, it will be important for policymakers to consider the potential impact of adaptation schemes themselves on migration. For example, a World Bank-backed mega dam project in Mozambique will improve the country’s water security, but an estimated 1,400 families could be forcibly displaced, with consequences for up to 200,000 people downstream.¹⁴⁷

The FCDO's rapid evidence assessment actually found that poorly implemented adaptation schemes contribute to displacement. This is called 'maladaptation'. Sometimes, as with the mega dam project in Mozambique, schemes might be considered necessary to make an area more resilient to climate change overall by enhancing water security, for example. But any resettlement must be done sensitively, with all possible measures undertaken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those who must move.

Establishing legitimate, safe, and controlled routes to the UK

The Government has introduced the Illegal Migration Bill to Parliament in a bid to restore public faith in the British immigration system and the security of the UK border. However, the Government has also stressed that while it is cracking down on illegal migration to the UK, particularly through the English Channel, the UK remains a compassionate and welcoming country to those in need.

There has nevertheless been controversy over the availability of safe and legal routes to the UK for those in need. A salient example of this debate was in a Home Affairs Committee oral evidence session on 23rd November 2022. Tim Loughton, a Conservative MP, asked the Home Secretary about the shortage of safe and legal routes to the United Kingdom for those in danger.¹⁴⁸ The Permanent Secretary replied the route would be via engaging with the UNHCR, but accepted that there are countries where that would not be possible.

Government ministers have pointed to the various schemes available to people to find refuge in the UK, such as the Family Reunion policy and the UK Resettlement Scheme. There are also nationality specific schemes such as the British National (Overseas) visa, the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), and the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

As the Home Secretary said in the Home Affairs Committee evidence session, the UK has offered 390,000 places to people seeking safety from various countries around the world. It also has a higher acceptance rate of asylum applications than Germany and France, although a lower overall number of asylum applications.¹⁴⁹

As with all migration, 'climate migration' should be through legal routes. Illegally entering the UK is unacceptable. It places strain on taxpayer resources that could be spent elsewhere, puts cash in the hands of organised crime, undermines public trust in the wider immigration system, and often places economic migrants ahead of those genuinely in need of safety.

When the UK left the European Union, it regained control of its immigration system as it no longer had to abide by the free movement of workers. There is no reason that climate change should have any impact on the UK's sovereignty over its own borders, whether or not the world meets its Paris Agreement objectives.

However, like many other countries around the world, the UK has severe skills shortages in key sectors, including food and energy, which could undermine both our economic growth and our decarbonisation targets. While the Government should work with the educational sector and industry to fill those gaps through training or retraining domestically, some controlled immigration could help to meet demand. Creating a system which improves the climate resilience of other countries at the same time would only bring further benefits.

The UK also has a proven track record of climate leadership. It takes responsibility as a developed economy in investing in decarbonisation not just because it has become the competitive thing to do, but because climate change is a common threat to all that requires leadership to tackle.

Should people be forcibly displaced by slow onset climate change or sudden natural disasters, the UK, with its proud record in humanitarianism, may decide to help. In which case, having legal routes set up to assist so-called "climate refugees" would be the best way to control this kind of migration, not just for the safety of those being moved but for the integrity of the British immigration system.

We therefore recommend that the Government considers establishing two new legal and controllable routes to the UK: an Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme and a Natural Disaster Visa Scheme. The first could help the UK to meet its energy security and decarbonisation targets, grow its economy, and produce food while helping climate-vulnerable countries to become more resilient. The second would ideally never need to be used, but should be established so that the UK has a legitimate mechanism to help avoid humanitarian disaster.

Recommendation 4: Establish two new legal and controllable routes to the UK: an Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme and a Natural Disaster Visa Scheme.

Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme

As mentioned above, the world is short of the skills required to decarbonise the global economy and adapt to climate change. The UK is no different. Recruitment and retention was cited as the primary challenge to growth in the first Offshore Wind Supply Chain Confidence Survey carried out by the UK government-backed Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Catapult.¹⁵⁰ PwC have also identified the need for a fresh pipeline of approximately 200,000 people to fill the UK's green skills gap.¹⁵¹

The priority for the UK Government should be to fill the skills gap domestically by training or retraining British workers. The potential for net zero to contribute to levelling up, which has job creation at its very core, is huge. Onward has discussed this at length in previous reports, including most recently *Green Jobs, Red Wall*.¹⁵² It has likewise made numerous policy suggestions to fill the skills gap in *Qualifying the Race to Net Zero* and *Course Correction*.¹⁵³

However, as the British Energy Security Strategy concluded, the transition to clean energy has been made all the more urgent due to the weaponisation of gas supplies by Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. Transitioning away from fossil fuels is now a national security and economic imperative as well as a sustainability necessity. This makes the demand for green skills even more acute.

Germany faces the same problem. Part of its solution has been to strike a deal with India to allow solar power workers to go and work in Germany.¹⁵⁴ The UK, which is currently reaching out to countries across the world to enhance partnerships after regaining sovereignty over its trade policy, could do the same. An Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme could be offered to allow workers with recognised qualifications with green skills to move to the UK more easily.

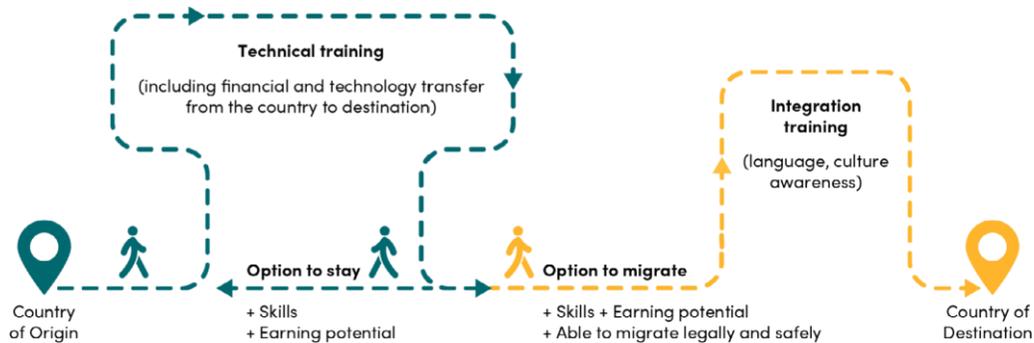
As mentioned above, the alignment of accreditation systems could establish a mutually beneficial, controllable, and circular 'skill partnership' for green-skilled workers. A 'global skill partnership' has been proposed by Helen Dempster and Samuel Huckstep at the Center for Global Development, which would create a pool of mobile labour that could fill green skills gaps in labour markets across the world.¹⁵⁵ Despite being called a 'global skill partnership', the model is bilateral in nature; between a country of origin and a country of destination.

A worker in a country of origin - one receiving adaptation finance for green skills programmes through UK ICF - would be trained in relevant skills for sustainability transitions in sectors such as energy, agriculture, forestry and construction. At the end of training, the person would be granted the opportunity to stay in the country of origin, or move to the UK for a limited period of time (depending on the shortage of skills in the UK) after receiving additional training in language and culture awareness.¹⁵⁶

Should they choose to stay, the visa holder would have the necessary skills to help the country of origin develop sustainably or adapt to climate change, and could increase their standard of living through skilled work. Should they choose to move to the UK, they would help to boost the UK's economy and increase its energy security (or food security, if spaces were made available to fill current agricultural shortages). They would also help the UK to reach the Government's targets of achieving net zero by 2050 and halting the decline of nature by 2030.

Figure 7: The Global Skills Partnership Model

Source: Dempster et al (2022)¹⁵⁷



To limit brain drain, which is often a concern of developing countries, the number of visas could be limited to a number below those receiving mutually recognised qualifications. Likewise, to ensure there is not a surplus of skilled workers in the UK labour market for a given sector, visas could be prioritised for sectors facing shortages which cannot be met in the short-term without some level of immigration. As with the Natural Disaster Visa Scheme, visas could also be prioritised for those who suffer from sudden natural disasters and need to urgently rebuild their financial capital.

Paired with skills programmes supported by UK ICF, or through UK Government approved skills programmes delivered by third parties, the Environmental Resilience Visa Scheme would represent a legitimate route for those in climate-vulnerable countries to gain skills to help make their countries more resilient to climate change. It would also expand the pool of skilled workers available to help overcome the global green skills gap, which will mitigate environmental pressures in the future. Both would have downward pressure on migration flows.

Natural Disaster Visa Scheme

Due to the slow pace of global decarbonisation and the fact that some degree of climate change is already locked in, it is likely that many countries, will be severely impacted by climate change. Among these are likely to be countries with historic ties to the UK. A Natural Disaster Visa Scheme would be specifically targeted at

those who have been forcibly displaced by natural disasters, but do not necessarily have the skills to benefit from the Environmental Resilience Scheme.

This would be narrower than a Humanitarian Visa Scheme (which has been tried with varying degrees of success by New Zealand, Argentina, and Brazil);¹⁵⁸ focused entirely on those who suffer natural disasters related to climate change. The UK clearly does not have the capacity to help all who might be forcibly displaced by climate change over the course of the coming century. But, as mentioned throughout this report, the UK has demonstrated time and again that it is willing to play its part to help those most in need.

These visas would be prioritised for those who suffer climate-related natural disasters such as flooding and wildfires, or slow onset disasters like sea level rises which put entire Small Island Developing States at risk of imminent destruction. The Met Office is becoming increasingly able to determine whether a given extreme weather event or natural disaster can be attributed to climate change. These reports could be considered as part of a decision-making process as to whether to make the visa available.¹⁵⁹

The scheme could also be flexed depending on the severity of the situation. For example, there is a difference between someone who suffers from an extreme weather event but ultimately still has a country to go back to, and another whose country has become entirely uninhabitable.

For the former, the Natural Disaster Visa Scheme could follow the model of the Haiti-US Temporary Work Visas for Development following the Haitian earthquake of 2010. This saw a limited number of Haitians offered limited seasonal visas for agricultural jobs. Each worker admitted would typically raise the income of a Haitian family by \$19,000 per year, with 30% - 40% of the income being sent back to Haiti where it was needed.¹⁶⁰ The transformational impact was in the income those employees gained, which was then invested in the country of origin.

For the latter, longer-term visas could be provided to help the individual or family resettle safely in the UK, similar to the nationality-specific visa schemes for Afghans, Ukrainians, and Hongkongers. Importantly, a Natural Disaster Visa Scheme would allow the Government to set the criteria for visa eligibility, and to put a cap on the number of visas it would give.

As the Government often sends UK Aid to disaster zones, those most in need could be helped by British aid workers or disaster relief organisations like the British Red Cross. Given the control the Government would have over this scheme, it is entirely in keeping with the Government's current policy to protect our borders while also playing a leadership role in the fight against climate change.

Annex: Polling questions

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know):

- Climate change will lead to more refugees wanting to come and live in the UK
 - The UK has an obligation to host people forced to move by climate change
 - The UK and other richer nations should fund poorer countries to adapt to more frequent flooding and droughts as a result of climate change
-

2. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- If the UK funds measures to help poorer countries adapt to climate change, this reduces our obligation to accept climate refugees
 - If the UK funds measures to help poorer countries adapt to climate change, this does not reduce our obligation to accept climate refugees
-

3. When the UK spends money to help foreign countries, what should the UK spend its budget on? Please rank these five things, where your top option is where you'd most like to see this budget go. (Rank from 1 to 5)

- Humanitarian aid (like emergency response to wars, natural disasters, etc.)
 - Health (like disease control and prevention, improving healthcare services in poorer countries, etc.)
 - Developing strong institutions (like funding improvements in the legal or justice system, anti-corruption measures, supporting independent media, etc.)
 - Improving education systems
 - Adapting to climate change (like funding renewable energy projects, strengthening flood protection, etc.)
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Endnotes



Endnotes

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