

Climate changed-driven migration is a focus of a new international report

February 28 2022, by Michelle Klampe



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An Oregon State University (OSU) researcher is a lead author of an international report released today that explores the impact of climate change-driven human migration.

David Wrathall, an expert on environmental change and human migration, played a key role in writing several sections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest Working Group II report, which looks at the human dimensions of climate change.

"Human-induced climate change is a powerful influence that is already affecting the natural world the lives and livelihoods of billions of people around the globe, and the risks from climate change are expected to increase substantially over the next 20 years and beyond," Wrathall said.

"One of the key questions about climate change is where people will no longer be able to live because it is too dangerous," he said. "Climate change is rendering places uninhabitable. It is a complex problem and it is already happening in many areas. Wildfires in 2020 displaced more than 4,000 people in Oregon. Many of those people are migrating right now as they look to rebuild their lives."

The IPCC is the United Nations body for assessing science related to climate change; these assessments occur every five to seven years and include a review of knowledge on climate change, its causes, potential impacts and response options. The panel is currently working on the Sixth Assessment Report.

Each assessment includes reports from three working groups. Oregon State's Alan Mix, an oceanographer and climatologist, is a lead author for Working Group I, which focuses on the physical science basis of climate change. That working group report was released last fall.

The Working Group II report, "Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability," is a major update of the human dimension of climate change. The report is authored by several hundred scientists from around the world; each of the 18 chapters has a team of up to 15 coordinating and lead authors.

Wrathall, who works in OSU's College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences, is a lead author on the report's chapter on Poverty, Livelihoods and Sustainable Development. He also has a role in coordinating the science on human [migration](#) throughout the report.

The latest report builds on scientists' increasingly clear understanding of the risks from climate change, from physical changes to impacts on the economies, societies, food systems and ecosystems that humans depend on. But the latest report also has a new emphasis on actionable, feasible [solutions](#), Wrathall said.

"There are small, easy, no-regrets actions that vulnerable communities can take, such as ecosystem restoration efforts that can buffer communities against weather extremes," he said. "At the same time, in the face of overwhelming changes such as sea level rise and desertification, communities will require massive, multi-decade transformative strategies to build more resilient systems."

The report includes an emphasis on the highly vulnerable—the poorest and most vulnerable developing countries and the most vulnerable people in wealthy, industrialized societies—and addresses the root causes of people's [vulnerability](#), which almost always include inequality, poverty and existence on the political and economic margins of society, without a voice, Wrathall said.

"To understand vulnerability, we need to spend a lot more time looking at issues of governance, equity and justice. In order to address vulnerability, it will be necessary to make our societies, communities and economies more inclusive and equitable," he said. "We'll have to make a seat at the decision-making table for the people who have historically been left out."

The report also addresses the "adaptation gap," which is the idea that

many communities are totally unprepared to address and manage the risk associated with climate change. For example, people being forced from the homes and communities need places to go and the ability to get there. They also need jobs, housing, health care and schools for their children, Wrathall said.

"We are capable of so much compassion, generosity and courage, and also we're capable of fear, suspicion and exclusion. Can we be there to help people off the lifeboats? Can we prepare our [communities](#) to welcome people who need our help? Or will we close the door?"

To avoid widespread and destabilizing impacts of [climate change](#), the report concludes it will be necessary to radically reduce emissions in the coming decades.

"There are a range of options to reduce the escalating climate risks, but they decrease as warming increases," Wrathall said. "Even temporarily exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming will result in severe and often irreversible impacts, especially in nature. The close connections between people, nature and climate come into even sharper focus when we look beyond 2040 and what the world might look like if we don't take steps to slow the warming and adapt to the changing planet."

More information: Please click on the link to read ["Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability."](#)

Provided by Oregon State University

Citation: Climate changed-driven migration is a focus of a new international report (2022, February 28) retrieved 11 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-climate-changed-driven-migration-focus-international.html>

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