

Refugee Week: Climate Refugees

Climate change is threatening the lives of millions of people as they are forced to leave their homes because of environmental changes.



Such changes could include extreme weather events, droughts or rising sea levels.

Have a read about some of these environmental changes, which are threatening the lives of many people today.

Did you know that **every 1.3 seconds someone is forced to leave their community due to the climate crisis!**

*Flooding is happening more frequently and more severely in lots of parts of the world due to climate change.
Image credit: Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash*

Climate change isn't a problem created or experienced equally by all. Climate change is mostly caused by two things: environmental degradation such as deforestation which means the earth can't absorb carbon dioxide; and also the production and consumption of fossil fuels which release huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the air.

Richer countries like the UK produce much more CO₂ than a lot of poorer ones. Our habits and the things we buy and eat lead to much more environmental degradation in other countries than we would allow in the UK. Often the harmful practices in poorer countries are done for industries that export their goods, like clothing, electronics, or food. So locals aren't even using the products they make.



*Deforestation of a peat forest in Indonesia to make way for palm oil plantation.
Image credit: Aidenvironment via Wikimedia Commons*

The impacts of climate change are forcing people to move away from their homes.



Real world example: Pakistan



*Pakistan shown in green
Image credit: Atin Bhattacharya*

Pakistan is located in South Asia, and shares an Eastern border with India and a North-Eastern border with China. But it has also been very exposed to the impacts of climate change. There has been a rise in monsoon rains, which are a severe cause of a warming climate. This can cause flooding and landslides.

What do you think a monsoon rain is? Here's a tip: The word monsoon comes from the Arabic word 'mausim' which means season. A monsoon is a seasonal wind which lasts for several months.

In July 2010, Pakistan was heavily affected by monsoon rains. This led to lots of flooding and the displacement of more than 10 million people from their homes. As you can see from this photo, there was a lot of flooding and in fact 20% of the country was under water.

Read this quote from a survivor of the 2010 floods:

"The water came at night and we didn't have time to save our belongings; we had to choose whether to save our children and ourselves or our property and assets, so we chose to save our kids. We left everything and ran to save our lives."

In English we think of a monsoon as really heavy rainfall, and this is because the change in wind direction usually brings in rain from over oceans or seas.



*Flooding in Pakistan in 2010
Image credit: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Via Creative Commons*

The heating of the Earth as a result of climate change has been linked to more extreme monsoon events, such as the 2010 floods.



Real world example: The Arctic

The Arctic is located in the northernmost part of our Earth.

It consists of the Arctic Ocean, parts of Alaska, Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

Indigenous people have inhabited the Arctic for thousands of years; there are over 40 different ethnic groups living there.

There is great variation of cultural, historical and economical backgrounds among the different groups.

However, one thing they all face, is the threat of climate change.



The arctic (green) as it would appear if looking down at Earth from directly above the North Pole
Image credit: Heraldry via Wikimedia Commons

Look at this image which shows how much Arctic ice has been lost between 1985 and 2018

LOSS OF VERY OLD ICE OVER TIME

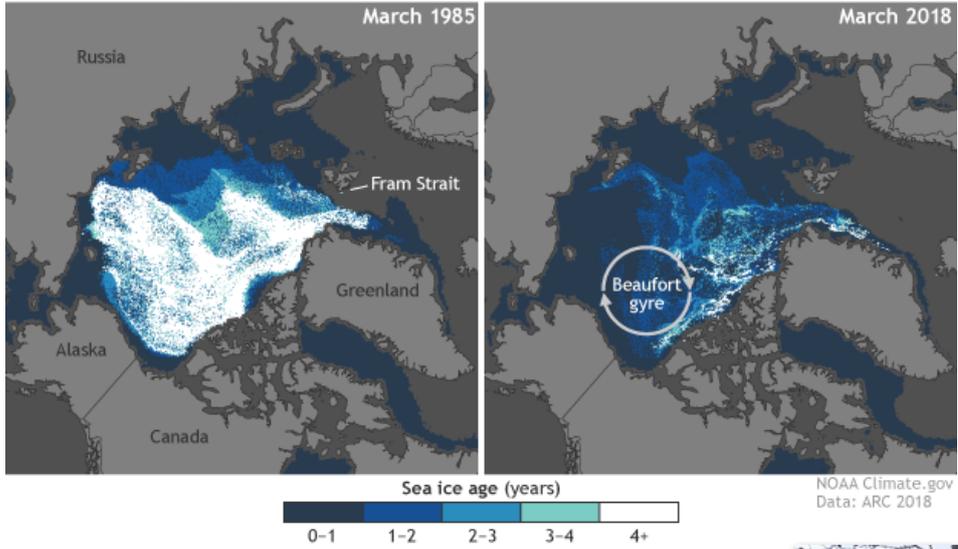


Image credit: NOAA

A warming climate means that more ice melts, on average, each year. This has meant that traditional hunting practices, such as the use of frozen lakes, become more dangerous as the ice disappears.

Native peoples who rely on these hunting techniques for survival will be more impacted by the changing climate.

The changing weather also affects many species, like polar bears, seals, whales and some fish. Lots of the species are forced to move to hunt, which then means the communities are forced to move with them too.

Watch [this video](#) and listen to how climate change is affecting the lives of indigenous arctic peoples.



A ski hunter from the Sami people setting a trap to hunt for a wild animal.
Image credit: Nenets Via Shutterstock



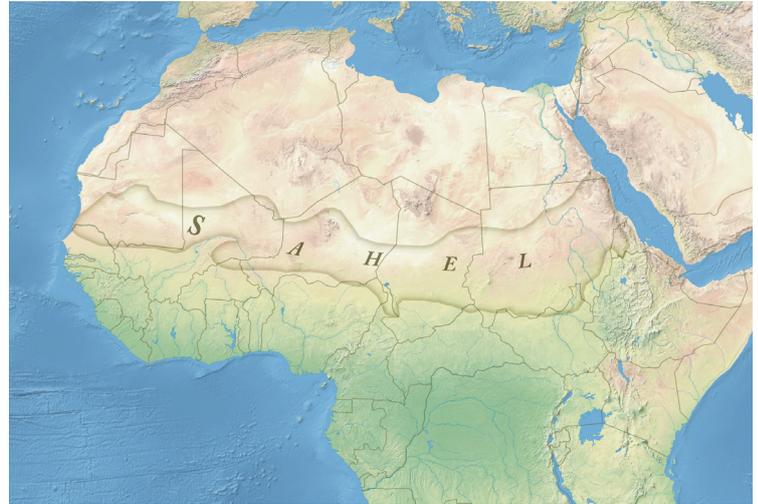
Real world example: The Sahel Region

The Sahel is a semi-arid region located on the Southern edges of the Sahara Desert. It undergoes vast seasonal changes every year, from wet to dry. These changes are becoming more severe.

The Sahel already suffers from droughts and with temperatures are predicted to rise by 3-4 °C by the year 2100 these droughts are likely to get more severe.

A drought is a prolonged period of no rainfall.

What are some negative impacts of a drought?



The Sahel region spans the entire width of North Africa
Image credit: Munion - Natural Earth Data via Wikimedia Commons



Image Credit: TREEAID Via Creative Commons



Image credit: YODA Adaman on Unsplash

As more greenhouse gas emissions are released into the air, air temperatures increase, which means more moisture evaporates from land, lakes, rivers and other bodies of water. There is also less rainfall. Warmer temperatures increase evaporation from soils, which will have a big impact on plant life.

The Sahel Region is highly dependent on agriculture. When there is no rainfall farmers' crops fail and livestock dies. This means lots of people are forced to move in order to find work and food.

From these examples we can see that lots of people can become refugees when their homes, communities and livelihoods are put at risk by the changing climate.

One thing we can do to help is to welcome people who may be seeking sanctuary in our local areas.

