

Refugees: the human face of the climate crisis



Sudan, November 2024

Disastrous climate change is already forcing people from their homes, their communities and their countries. Recent flooding in South Sudan is one of the latest examples – affecting 1.4 million and displacing 271,000.

Internationally, over the last 15 years, an average of over 20 million people have already been displaced each year by extreme weather events. This does not even include slow-onset threats such as desertification or rising sea levels.

A 2021 World Bank report estimated that, by 2050, the climate crisis could drive more than 200 million people to move. Global heating, interacting with other political and economic conflicts, could make the figure much higher – as many as one billion according to some estimates.

In our region, low-lying Pacific islands are particularly vulnerable – 350,000 people in the region are threatened by sea level rise.

This is the human face of the climate crisis.

How will we treat climate refugees?

There are currently no legal obligations on countries to support those fleeing the climate crisis.

Indeed, much of the world is turning its back, even on those who have fled persecution and have been long considered to be refugees. The proportion of people resettled safely is falling. Instead, more barriers have been created in Europe and North America.

Politicians in many countries – Trump's America, Victor Orban's Hungary and, of course, Australia – have manufactured fear of refugees to score political points.

Australia's policies have led backwards

Australia has some of the most cruel refugee policies in the world. We have mandatory detention of those who arrive by boat. Detention can be indefinite – entirely at the discretion of the Minister responsible. We have boat turn-backs on the high seas. We have "offshore" detention – meaning that Australia has paid PNG and, still, Nauru to imprison those seeking asylum from us.

Some countries are, unfortunately, following Australia's terrible lead. In imitation of us, the UK tried to send refugees to Rwanda. So is Denmark. Italy, and possibly Germany, are looking to use Albania for the same purpose.

If we treat people fleeing the combined effects of climate change, war and political persecution as Australia currently deals with refugees, it will be a global humanitarian disaster.

We need much better and more serious policies on climate and we need them now. And we need much better and more humane policies for dealing with the refugees who are already the victims of our climate failures. **Join us!**

Refugee Action Campaign

mail@refugeeaction.org

<https://refugeeaction.org>

