The background of the cover is an aerial photograph of a coastline. The top half shows a bright orange sky, which transitions into a hazy, brownish-orange landscape of rolling hills and fields. The bottom half of the image is dominated by dark blue, turbulent ocean waves crashing against a rocky shore, with white foam visible. The text is overlaid on this background.

EXODUS EQUATOR

ONE BILLION ON THE MOVE BY 2050

Jonathon Porritt • Robin Maynard • Colin Hines



Global warming could prompt mass migrations, involving up to three hundred million ‘eco-refugees’ during the next century.



Sir Crispin Tickell

British Ambassador to the UN,
June 1989



By 2070, almost 20% of the Earth’s land area could be ‘outside the climate niche’ of temperatures tolerable to life, spreading around the Equatorial belt from Australia, Africa, India, the Pacific, to Central and Latin America.



Future of the human climate niche

Chi Xu, Kohler, Lenton, and Scheffer

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The principal objective of this paper remains as when we published the first version less than six months ago: To raise awareness of the global humanitarian and ecological crises that will be caused by the forced displacement of up to 1 billion people by 2050 – as a direct consequence of accelerating climate change.

We still have time to address those converging crises - even though the scale and imminence of that threat remains almost totally unrecognised outside a small cohort of climate scientists and development experts – but in the last few months the underpinning science and political context have become considerably more challenging.

And despite, as has been demonstrated in both the recent European Parliament and UK elections, with the Far Right successfully “weaponising” immigration, leaving Progressives and the Left struggling to find a coherent, compassionate narrative.

MIGRATION TODAY

Over the last decade or more, what might be described as the “mainstream consensus on migration” (that, broadly speaking, it’s been a “net benefit”, both for receiving and “exporting” countries) has been challenged more and more aggressively by the Far Right.

Anti-immigration sentiment was the single most influential factor in the Brexit referendum back in 2016, constantly whipped up by the UK’s predominantly right-wing media. Elsewhere, the “centre of gravity” in European politics has shifted markedly to the Right since then, with explicitly anti-immigration parties gaining a greater share of the vote in most European countries.

The Far Right consolidated its position in the European Parliament elections of June 2024 securing just over a fifth of all seats, with a higher share of the overall vote - notably in Austria, France and Italy. This is creating massive pressure within EU institutions, with Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign policy chief, acknowledging that migration is becoming “a dissolving force for the European Union.”

For the UK, notwithstanding Labour’s victory and the election of four Green MPs, Nigel Farage’s nationalist, anti-immigration, Reform UK party gained 14% of the public vote, securing five seats in Parliament for the first time. Immigration remains an incendiary issue exploited by the Far Right, with the UK experiencing in August the worst public disorder riots for decades following false

claims about the religion and origins of the murderer of three young children in Southport.¹

Such violent attacks on hostels and hotels housing asylum seekers are despicable, racially motivated, and fuelled by misinformation from Far Right influencers. But concern about immigration is not restricted to the Far Right, a much greater, diverse body of the general public across Britain and Europe are worried about the scale and impact of recent immigration. An Ipsos poll of March 2024 for British Future, which identifies itself as a ‘*thought leader on identity, race, immigration and integration*’, found that 52% of British people want to see immigration reduced and that whilst 40% still felt that overall immigration had a positive impact on the country, that proportion had decreased over recent years, with 35% now believing immigration has had a negative impact.²

CLIMATE CHANGE

In February, the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service³ announced that the average global temperature for the previous year had exceeded pre-industrial levels by 1.52°C – causing barely a ripple in the media despite governments around the world having committed back in 2015 to “pursue efforts” to avoid ever breaching that 1.5°C threshold.

Six months on, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) states that there is now an 80% likelihood of the average global temperature exceeding 1.5°C for at least one of the next five years, and a 47% chance that it will breach that critical threshold across the whole five-year period running up to 2028.⁴ Commenting on those latest findings, WMO Deputy Secretary-General Ko Barrett said,

“Behind these statistics lies the bleak reality that we are way off track to meet the goals set in the Paris Agreement. We must urgently do more to cut greenhouse gas emissions, or we will pay an increasingly heavy price in terms of trillions of dollars in economic costs, millions of lives affected by more extreme weather and extensive damage to the environment and biodiversity.”

With the annual Conference of the Parties (CoP) process in disarray (now definitively “captured” by the fossil fuel industries, after 30 years of utterly ineffectual climate diplomacy), there is no reason to suppose that the median projection from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of an average 2.7°C temperature increase by the end of the century is in any way unrealistic.



up to **ONE BILLION PEOPLE** may be forced to migrate by 2050 due to climate change

Unless the politics of addressing the Climate Emergency are transformed in the next few years, that catastrophic prospect of a 2.7°C rise could well be the very best we might hope for. And certainly not the worst case, as confirmed by the IPCC.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION

The consequences of this for billions of people, all around the world, are stark, with growing numbers finding themselves in countries or regions facing insupportable increases in average temperatures and devastated by increasingly frequent climate-induced disasters.

A consensus is growing among climate scientists around the estimate of up to 1 billion people who could be forcibly displaced by climate-induced factors by 2050.

This constitutes an unparalleled humanitarian catastrophe. The scale of it (measured not just in millions but in billions of devastated lives) seems incomprehensible – impossible to grasp. Most are numbed by such numbers.

This refusal to engage represents a further betrayal of future generations. And the Left is inevitably implicated in that collective betrayal.

Beyond the critically important work the Left does in countering today’s cruel “hostile environment” around migration, as promoted by the Right, it has little to say about the near inevitability of this looming catastrophe. Its rhetoric (advocating unrealistically for “migration to be recognised as a positive tool for climate adaptation”, and “for the right to stay and for the right to move when staying is no longer possible”) seems light years away from today’s geopolitical and demographic realities.

The Climate Emergency and the looming catastrophe of up to 1 billion forcibly displaced people are inextricably linked – and demand a very different kind of response.

WAYS FORWARD

This paper argues for an integrated, radically different approach, based on four pillars.

1. Climate Finance.

In 2009, rich world countries committed to providing \$100 billion a year to help the poor world transition their economies away from fossil fuels and adapt to the worsening impacts of climate change. Shamefully, that target was not met until 2023, and still with far too high a percentage of loans rather than grants, further increasing already onerous debt burdens.

Fifteen years on, the latest estimates from the Grantham Institute demonstrate the true scale of the support now needed: closer to \$2.5 trillion a year rather than \$100 billion.

International NGOs should be getting behind the new proposal from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for a New Collective Quantified Goal – to determine a new consensus on climate finance, and secure a commitment of at least \$1 trillion a year from 2030 onwards.

2. A Global Stability Fund.

At CoP26 in Glasgow in 2021, the Prime Minister of Barbados (Mia Mottley) launched the Bridgetown Initiative, which we see as the most realistic proposal for scaled investments in those parts of the world likely to be most devastated by accelerating climate change, home to hundreds of millions of the poorest and most vulnerable people on Earth being forced to move.

Her ideas are gaining ground, and should now be consolidated in a UN-backed Global Stability Fund, including the possible use of the kind of Quantitative Easing that played such a critical part in addressing the recent banking and Covid crises, with Central Banks creating trillions of dollars to avoid massive social dislocation.

3. A New Global Protocol Under the 1951 Convention on Refugees.

Climate refugees (already numbered in their tens of millions) have no status under the 1951 Geneva Convention, where those seeking asylum must be able to demonstrate “a well-founded fear of persecution”. This lack of recognition is deeply unjust.

We support calls for a new Protocol, covering both immediate, disaster-based displacement and more gradual ecological degradation that makes it impossible for people to stay in their homes and communities.

This means providing a formal legal status for climate refugees – imposing an obligation on rich world countries to provide adequate funding to mitigate this crisis, but without extending the same asylum rights as are guaranteed to refugees under the Geneva Convention. The latter, we believe, is a totally forlorn aspiration.

4. Stabilising and Reducing Human Numbers.

Our global population has grown by between 70 and 80 million people every year for the past two decades, and continues to do so. Whilst the Total Fertility Rate continues to decline in more and more countries (providing some hope for human numbers starting to come down towards end of the century), much of that growth

today is in poorer countries, with wholly inadequate health and family planning services. Particularly in Africa.

Those 4 international pillars need to be reinforced by national policies and action:

- Reinstating the UK’s commitment to allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income to overseas development aid.
- Creating a new Department for International Development and Global Stability.
- Prioritising skills training and fair pay for UK citizens and workers.

This has to be addressed as the humanitarian crisis it really is – a crisis that will be further exacerbated by worsening climate change. The refusal of many NGOs to recognise population growth as a major driver of climate change, and to get behind tried and tested, non-coercive family planning programmes, becomes increasingly problematic.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge such measures would represent a **massive and entirely unprecedented shift** in international efforts to address today’s converging climate and migration crises.

But the reality of rapidly worsening climate-induced disasters, pointing to the horrific prospect of up to 1 billion forcibly displaced people by the middle of the century, demands nothing less.

We have to confront this reality now – whilst we still have a chance of substantively mitigating what will otherwise be the worst humanitarian disaster in the history of humankind.



@Gerhard-Jören/Flickr

A. THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

1. THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Climate change is the defining context for and driver of the accelerating humanitarian and ecological crises – exacerbated by global economic inequalities and ongoing population growth.

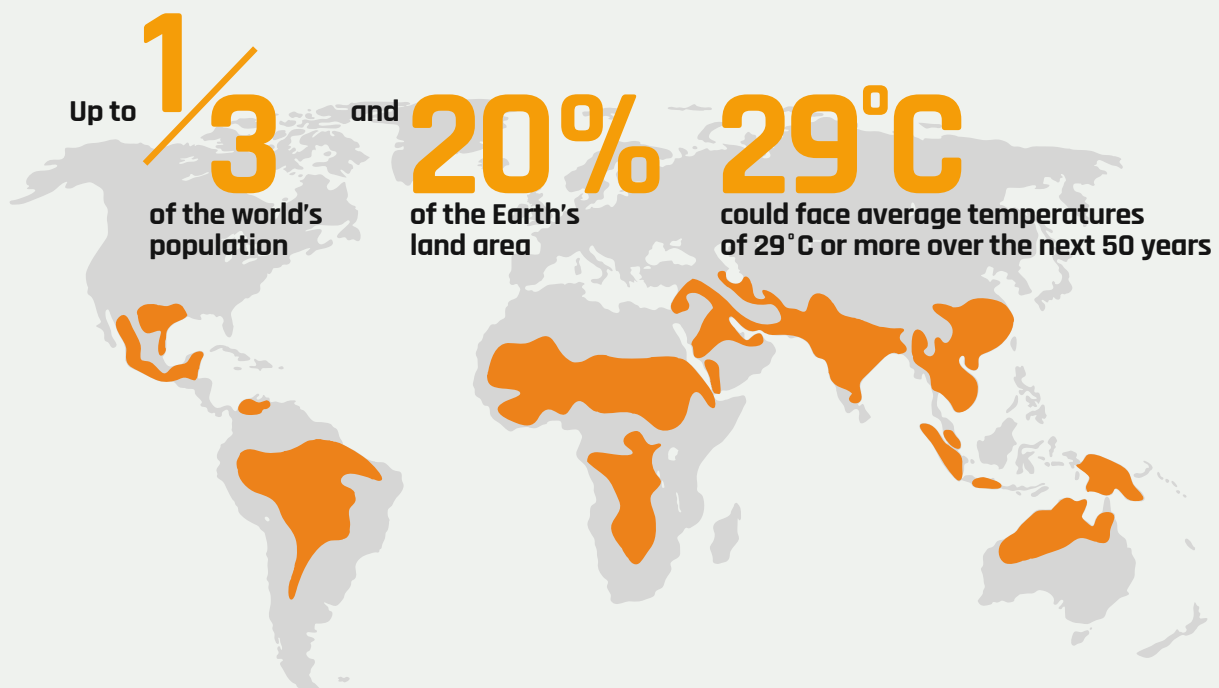
The dominant narrative since the Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Paris in 2015 has been “the imperative” of keeping the average global temperature increase between now and the end of the century to no more than 2°C, with countries exhorted to do everything they can to restrict that increase to 1.5°C.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, countries have actually done as little as they could get away with. Emissions of greenhouse gases have increased every year since then. Between 2015 and 2022, oil and gas companies invested an astonishing \$4.8 trillion in new assets, with significant direct and indirect support from governments. “Globally, fossil fuel subsidies were \$5.9 trillion (or 6.8% of global GDP) in 2020, and are expected to increase to 7.4% GDP in 2025”, according to the International Monetary Fund.⁵ **That’s roughly \$11 million every minute of every day.** Whilst production and consumption of coal is finally falling, both oil and gas volumes are still booming.

In February this year, it was confirmed by the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service that the average temperature over the previous year exceeded pre-industrial levels by 1.5°C. Scientists reminded us that **this doesn’t necessarily mean the much vaunted 1.5°C threshold has gone for good. But an increase of 1.5°C, for an entire year, tells us everything we need to know about the direction of travel.**

The most recent report from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) confirms that, warning that there is now an 80% likelihood of the average global temperature exceeding 1.5°C for at least one of the next five years, with a 47% chance that it will breach that critical threshold across the whole five-year period running up to 2028.⁶

The complete failure of governments properly to respond to the Climate Emergency was devastatingly confirmed at CoP28 in Dubai at the end of 2023. The final “Consensus” was almost entirely without substance. The heavily spun headline (“historic breakthrough”) quickly dribbled away into the sands of Dubai, with this “breakthrough” amounting to nothing more than the acknowledgment that it’s the burning of fossil fuels that is the primary cause of today’s climate breakdown. Unbelievably, this was the first time such an acknowledgment had been made in 30 years of futile climate diplomacy.





Despite increased pledges and targets to tackle climate change, current policies still leave the world on course for around 2.7 °C above pre-industrial temperatures.

There is now literally no combination of emergency interventions, at this stage, which will keep the average global temperature increase below 1.5°C by the end of the century. As a target, 1.5°C is no longer on life-support: it is definitively dead. And even a 2°C threshold looks increasingly at risk.

The latest data don't automatically point to an irreversible slide from 1.5°C on to 2°C and beyond. But if we're not completely honest about why we have failed so comprehensively to protect that 1.5°C target, then all future efforts to protect 2°C will fail just as comprehensively, for exactly the same reasons.

The kind of “stubborn optimism” that denies this undeniable, science-based “realpolitik” has now become a massive barrier to forcing today’s politicians into doing what they need to do to narrow that science-policy gap.

The best thing to come out of CoP28 in Dubai was the agreement to set up a new Loss and Damage Fund to compensate poorer countries for the economic damage already done by climate-induced disasters – and for the even worse damage still to come. However, the initial commitments made by those richer countries which are almost exclusively responsible for the build-up of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere were (at \$770 million) insultingly insufficient. But at least the mechanism has now been established. We return to this theme in Section D.

2. CLIMATE PROJECTIONS FOR 2050 AND BEYOND

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) median global warming projection for the end of the century is between 2.2°C to 3.5°C⁷, with a rise of 2.7°C regarded as most likely (if still optimistic) by many scientists: *“Despite increased pledges and targets to tackle climate change, current policies still leave the world on course for around 2.7°C end-of-century global warming*

above pre-industrial levels—far from the ambitious aim of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C.^{8,9}

That projected rise of 2.7°C by the end of the century still sounds reassuring to some commentators. But this is an average rise in global warming across the whole of the Earth’s land surface; temperatures in particular parts of the world will vary greatly. Research by Professors Chi Xu, Timothy Kohler, Tim Lenton, and Martin Scheffer shows how human beings throughout history have lived and thrived in a ‘*surprisingly narrow subset*’ of the Earth’s available climates or regions – within a ‘*climate niche*’ with a temperature range of between 11 to 15°C on average annually.¹⁰

Based on the IPCC’s global average rise of 2.7°C, scientists have concluded that up to a third of the world’s population could face average annual temperatures of 29°C or above over the next 50 years – putting them ‘*outside the climate niche*’.¹¹ Less than 1% of the Earth’s surface currently experiences such temperatures, mostly in the Sahara Desert and The Sahel.

By 2070, almost 20% of the Earth’s land area could be affected, spreading around the Equatorial belt from Australia, Africa, India, the Pacific, to Central and Latin America, and collectively home to over 3 billion people. Leading to what the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) describes in its latest Ecological Threats Report as:

*“catastrophic ecological threats” ... driven by “a nexus of interrelated challenges [which are] ... likely to see larger refugee flows from forced migration, impacting both source and recipient countries.”*¹²

IEP’s 2022 and 2023 Reports identify 27 ‘hotspot countries’ facing catastrophic ecological threats and further challenged by having extremely low societal resilience or the capacity to mitigate or adapt to those threats. Seven out of its eight worst-ranked countries are in sub-Saharan Africa and The Sahel: Burundi, the Central

African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. (The eighth is Yemen).

Nowhere is that collision with the ‘real world’ more acute than in sub-Saharan Africa and its northern region of The Sahel. Increases in temperature from climate change, competition and conflict over depleted natural resources of grazing and water, exacerbated by high population growth, place sub-Saharan Africa at the top of the world’s regions most at risk from climate change and linked threats to the region’s stability and its people’s wellbeing. Across The Sahel, temperatures are rising one and a half times faster than the global average, with countries in the region already experiencing life-threatening temperatures of over 35°C for more than 300 days per year¹³, a figure projected to become almost all-year-round by the end of the century.¹⁴

IEP’s uncomfortable analysis that most of the world’s population growth is occurring in the least stable and peaceful countries, where climate change is set to hit hardest, cannot be ignored: “The total population of the 40 least peaceful countries is projected to increase by 1.3 billion by 2050...these countries also face the worse ecological threats, with the sub-Saharan population expected to increase by 95 per cent by 2050.”¹⁵

Impacts on Biodiversity will be equally shocking. The two most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, tropical rainforests and coral reefs, are located mainly within

the equatorial belt – together these are home to a greater diversity of life than anywhere else on Earth. It has been estimated that half of all terrestrial species found on Earth live in the rainforest, and coral reefs are the “rainforests of the sea” – making up just 1% of the world’s marine area but providing a home for 25% of all known marine species.

Where it can, wildlife is migrating to escape climate change: “*land-based species are moving polewards by an average of 17km per decade and marine species by 72km per decade*”, Professor Gretta Pedl of the University of Tasmania told The Guardian in 2017.

But not all wildlife, whether on land or in the sea, is able to migrate or find new habitats. For species that compete with humans, are invasive, viewed as pests, or may spread disease, it is open to question whether, like human climate refugees, they will be welcome. More and more human-wildlife conflicts exacerbated by climate change are occurring all around the world.

Accelerating climate change is not the only “risk multiplier” for both humans and other species (water shortages, soil erosion, continuing deforestation all loom large), but it is by far the most significant.



B. MIGRATION TODAY

1. A GLIMPSE AT THE NUMBERS.

To date, the total number of people migrating from one country to another has been relatively modest. As of July 2020, an estimated 281 million people were living in a country other than that of their birth.¹⁷ As a percentage of the global population, this has increased from 2.3% to 3.6% since 1970. But that small percentage rise is significant, given a much greater total human population – increasing from 3.7 billion in 1970 to over 8 billion today. Absolute numbers of international migrants have therefore more than trebled over the same period from 84.4 million to 281 million.¹⁸

Many commentators continue to dismiss international migration as a major concern. As noted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the majority of recent migrations have been within people's country of birth: *"...the majority of people do not migrate across borders; much larger numbers migrate within countries... The vast majority of people continue to live in the countries in which they were born – only 1 in 30 are migrants"*.¹⁹

While it is true that a greater number of people, around 740 million currently, migrate within the countries of their birth²⁰ to find work or by personal choice, growing numbers of people are being forced to move both within and beyond their own countries due to conflict, violence, political or economic instability and increasingly by climate change and other natural disasters. According to the IOM's latest estimates, there are 120 million such 'forcibly displaced' people worldwide today, half of that total made-up of internally displaced people – **both being the highest numbers ever recorded**.^{21,22}

One hundred and twenty million people with personal tragedies, in need of safe refuge, and deserving of their basic human rights and dignity - yet a tiny number compared to what is projected, as presaged by recent events. In 2022, Pakistan suffered climate change related floods submerging one-third of the country, affecting 33 million people and displacing over 8 million with massive economic, health and social consequences.²³ As a low middle income country (LMIC), Pakistan has limited resources to contend with the challenges and scale of such a disaster.

It is the world's poorer, least developed, least resilient countries already experiencing increasing internal

displacement of their citizens, which are also receiving the greatest proportion of external climate and conflict refugees (75% of refugees globally):

- Pakistan was host to 1.7 million refugees before the floods.
- Bangladesh took in over 950,000 refugees in 2022, while seeking to manage over 1.5 million of its own people displaced by natural disasters.²⁴
- Most tellingly, countries across sub-Saharan Africa, took in millions of people from their neighbours fleeing conflicts and disasters – **a staggering 20% of all refugees globally**.²⁵

The growing numbers of people on the move are causing tensions. Migrants from sub-Saharan African countries moving to North Africa for work or in the hope of making the perilous journey to Europe have been subject to xenophobic and racist attacks that echo the political rhetoric and nationalist discourse which has flared up across Europe and the UK recently.²⁶ This prompted the United Nations to put out a statement demanding Tunisia, *"combat all forms of racial discrimination and racist violence against black Africans, especially migrants from the south of the Sahara and black Tunisian citizens."*²⁷ At the other end of the continent in South Africa, a paramilitary-style anti-migrant group 'Operation Dudula' (Dudula translates as 'to force out') has scapegoated migrants from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and other African countries, blaming them for the country's rising illegal drug use, and in a bizarre take on US White Supremacists' 'Great Replacement Theory',²⁸ of seeking to overwhelm South Africa's 'native' population.²⁹

2. THE SITUATION IN THE UK

The scale of inward migration has been a key issue in many countries for many years. Here in the UK, that became abundantly clear in the 2016 Referendum vote to leave Europe, with inward migration cited as the key reason by 77% of those who voted for Brexit – to 'Take Back Control'.³⁰ Over the period 2004 to 2016, around one million migrants came to the UK, mainly from Eastern European countries, most of whom would return eventually to their countries of birth. But this was sufficient to cause significant ill-ease in the general public, and intense hostility in the media.

In 2018, net migration (the difference between people coming into the UK and those leaving) was just over 250,000 people, declining to 184,000 in 2019. The 2022 figures are stark, surging to an all-time high of 764,000 in December 2022 according to revised figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), falling back slightly to 685,000 as of June 2023.³¹ ONS forecasts that net migration will decline to an average level of 315,000 from mid-2028.³²

The media and politicians have focused on the number of people arriving via illegal and irregular immigration routes across the English Channel in ‘small boats’. Yet those are a tiny proportion of the migrants coming to the UK, with 29,000 arriving via that route in 2023³³ (just 2% of the total 1.2 million migrants coming into the country legally in the same year).³⁴ This vastly greater number was driven by the then government’s policy of using overseas workers as ‘cheap labour’ to take up hard-to-fill, poorly paid jobs³⁵ in the National Health Service, care system, and hospitality sector - as well as by the over-reliance of some universities on international students to shore-up questionable business models.³⁶ This policy was in direct contradiction to its public rhetoric,³⁷ leading The Guardian’s Business Editor, Larry Elliott, to observe in an article in February that the UK faces a clear choice: embrace high levels of migration or “fundamentally rethink the economy.”³⁸

For the UK, the benefits of current levels of migration significantly outweigh the disbenefits, even if that is not necessarily the case for those countries losing so many talented (and often well-trained) young people when they move to the UK. The UK would not be the country it is without migration: 35% of doctors and 27% of nurses are not UK nationals.³⁹ The UK is not being “swamped” by migrants: according to the Migration Observatory at Oxford University⁴⁰, we have a foreign-born population of around 14%, similar to that of the USA, Spain and France – and below that of Germany, Canada and Australia. And the UK’s rate of immigration, averaged over 10 years, is proportionate to a country with a GDP like ours – not “abnormal”, as so many on the Right continue to claim.

Which makes the lack of “safe routes” for those seeking asylum in the UK and many other countries all the more reprehensible. With a non-stop barrage of hateful anti-immigration rhetoric from the right-wing press and media, the deeply disturbing loss of lives amongst those seeking to reach Europe is being “steadily normalised”. The IOM calculates that 28,000 have lost their lives since 2014; 3,789 deaths were recorded on migration routes from North Africa and the Middle East in 2022, the highest total since the war in Syria in 2017.⁴¹

We should not underestimate the difficulty of managing existing levels of migration to the UK more intelligently and compassionately.

...we’re one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, our natural resources are already seriously depleted.

This is a stain on all wealthy European countries, including the UK. As Gaia Vince asked in an article in the Guardian in August 2023:

*“What’s an acceptable number of dead people in European waters? What about dead children? How many should we write off as justifiable collateral damage in our war against...what, exactly? There is no war except with ourselves: it’s a culture war.”*⁴²

That, of course, represents an unacceptably “woke” view as far as the Far Right is concerned, with their growing support amongst voters causing increasingly impactful consequences for the whole of Europe (see pp. 7 & 8).

But that does not mean to say we should underestimate the difficulty of managing existing levels of migration to the UK more intelligently and more compassionately. Precisely because we’re one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, our natural resources are already seriously depleted, making us one of the most “nature depleted” countries in the world. And we’re facing significant challenges on water availability (particularly in the South East), water pollution, inadequate infrastructure investment, and so on.

Those problems are not caused by immigration as such, but they are certainly going to get a lot worse. Net migration made up 60% of population growth from 2001 to 2020.⁴³ The latest (January 2024) projections from the Office for National Statistics indicated that the UK population will increase by a further 9.9% over the next 15 years, from 67 million today to 73.7 million in the mid-2030s, to 76.6 million in the mid-2040s.⁴⁴ The inconvenient, but indisputable, fact is that with an average Total Fertility Rate of just 1.49 here in the UK, that growth is almost wholly due to immigration.



3. THE INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS ON MIGRATION

There’s certainly no “one size fits all” when thinking about future levels of migration. The World Bank’s core proposal is for a ‘*Match and Motive Matrix*’, whereby migrants’ skills are matched to the recipient country’s needs, their motives for migrating understood, and obligations as regards human rights respected. The ‘donor countries’ that are effectively exporting their people and skills should be receiving reciprocal benefits.

This liberal proposal is grounded in classic economic and labour theories, leavened by genuine humanitarian aims, and follows the conventional economic prescription that countries with low fertility rates and declining populations need “imports” of younger people to sustain economic growth. Canada’s leaders are following exactly that prescription with their controversial plan to take in an additional 1.5 million immigrants between 2022 and 2025 to offset the country’s ageing population and fill labour shortages.⁴⁵

With today’s relatively modest numbers, it’s still possible to frame migration in terms of benefits to both recipient and donor countries as per the World Bank’s ‘*Match and Motive Matrix*’, enabling recipient countries to rejuvenate their economies with an influx of young people with needed skills, whilst donor countries benefit from the remittances sent home (over \$669 billion in 2023, exceeding the entire global aid budget) and the eventual return of their more experienced citizens.⁴⁶

As regards refugees and asylum seekers the UNHCR is the primary international body ‘*dedicated to protecting people forced to flee. We lead international action to protect refugees, deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home where they can build a better future*’.⁴⁷ Set up in 1950 in the aftermath of the Second World War, when millions of people in Europe had been displaced, or were otherwise in need of refuge following persecution and incarceration, the UNHCR has championed the rights of refugees and asylum seekers under the 1951 Convention on Refugees and the 1967 amendments which made the Convention global in its reach.

Following the resurgence in migrant flows from 2015 onwards, driven by conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and with an increased number of economic migrants seeking better life opportunities, the UN has been working to forge a new ‘*Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration*.’ The IOM (UNHCR’s sister body) is leading on this initiative, which alludes to the future greater numbers of people that climate change will displace. Its ‘*International Strategy on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change 2021-2030*’ aspires to set out ‘*a comprehensive, evidence and rights-based approach to migration in the context of environmental degradation, climate change and disasters, for the benefit of migrants and societies*’.⁴⁸

However, as we’ll explore, this paper *massively* underestimates the scale of the problem, and the degree to which accelerating climate change requires a total rethink regarding future numbers.

4. CONSENSUS UNDER GROWING PRESSURE

This international consensus still commands high level political support. However, a powerful backlash has been growing steadily over the last decade. Across the world, particularly in Europe and the US, both public opinion and many politicians are not following the UN, IMO and World Bank script. As the BBC's Europe Correspondent, Katya Adler, observed in June 2023:

*“Look around Europe right now – north, south, east and west – and you see Far Right parties of different flavours – nostalgic nationalist, populist nationalist, ultra-conservatives with neo-fascist roots, and more – enjoying a notable resurgence.”*⁴⁹

Germany provides an interesting case study. Under Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany took in over 800,000 refugees in 2015, rising to one million by 2016 through its ‘Open Door Policy’.⁵⁰ Merkel’s admirably humanitarian decision was not rewarded by the electorate – despite the increased economic growth linked to those refugees absorbing any additional costs. The nationalist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) more than doubled its share of votes cast in 2013 to secure 12.6% in 2017, becoming the first overtly Far Right party to have seats in the Bundestag for 60 years. Across Germany, public support for AfD, running on an aggressively anti-immigration ticket, averages at over 17% in the polls. And much higher in some regions: with the AfD’s Björn Höcke taking nearly a third of the vote (32.8%) in the recent state parliament election for Thuringia of September 2024 – ahead of all the three parties (Social Democrats, Greens and the liberal Free Democratic Party) making up Olaf Scholz’s coalition government.⁵¹

Europe’s political scene has been transformed since 2016. Astonishingly, almost one third of Europeans now vote for populist Far Right or Far Left parties;

effectively, “anti-establishment politics” has become the new establishment. Research by Matthijs Rooduijn at the University of Amsterdam found that in elections in 2022 a record 32% cast their ballots for anti-establishment parties, compared with 20% in 2000 and just 12% in 1990.⁵² Far Right populist (or “nativist”) parties have shifted European politics significantly to the right, and many erstwhile centre-right parties (including the Conservative Party in the UK) can now be classified as borderline Far Right. Tolerance of the Far Right amongst elites and ordinary voters has also grown significantly. The longing for “stability and order” increasingly takes precedence over democracy and diversity.

Whipped-up fears about immigration are at the heart of this wholesale reconfiguration of European politics, with Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign policy chief, giving voice to deep fears inside the Commission that migration is becoming a “dissolving force for the European Union”.⁵³ Spain’s Prime Minister, Sancho Pedrez, warns that “the very soul of Europe is at stake”.

It is not just the rhetoric that is hardening around Europe. Over the last two decades more than 2,000 kilometres of razor-wire and hard boundaries have been erected across the EU to prevent migrant flows.⁵⁴

The influence of the Far Right cuts even deeper than that, with some of its populist policies being adopted not just by conservative, centre-right politicians, but also by those on the Left.⁵⁵ As noted by Saaranish Mishra of the Observer Research Foundation, “*With even Europe’s left turning right on immigration, and Far Right ideologies gradually getting entrenched in the mainstream, the anti-immigration sentiment is here to stay.*”⁵⁶

More and more politicians on the Far Right are deliberately ‘weaponising’ concerns about migration for political gain when the actual numbers of people on the move are still relatively low. However, those numbers are indeed likely to accelerate dramatically over the next decade.

Over the last two decades more than 2,000 kilometres of razor-wire and hard boundaries have been erected across the EU to prevent migrant flows.





THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT ACROSS EUROPE

- President Macron's gamble of calling a snap election in July 2024 after Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally won 31.5% in the initial vote, galvanised the Left and Progressives into collaborating as the 'New Popular Front,' securing the most seats and preventing a Far-Right French government. Yet National Rally (in alliance with far-right fellow travellers Reconquête⁵⁷) attracted 37% of the country's vote to win 143 seats, its best ever result, up from 89 in 2022.
- Georgia Meloni's 'Brothers of Italy' party, despite deep fascist roots, is supported by 29% of Italian voters, retaining her as head of the country's most right-wing government since World War Two.
- Austria's Freedom Party held on to its 25% share of the public vote in June 2024 putting it in first position just ahead of the conservative Austrian People's Party with 24.6%.
- The shift to the right in the Netherlands was sustained with Geert Wilders' anti-Islam, anti-immigration 'Freedom Party' (PVV) becoming the strongest partner in the newly formed Dutch coalition government and securing six MEPs (from zero in 2019) in the 2024 European Parliament.
- In the UK's General Election, Reform UK gained five seats in Westminster for the first time. Nigel Farage's populist, nationalist party took 14% of the overall vote, 2% more than the Liberal Democrats, and double that of the Greens. Under proportional representation Reform UK would have secured over 90 seats.⁵⁸
- In the 2019 European Election, 112 MEPs were elected from the radical-right.⁵⁹ In 2024, 156 right-wing, far-right, and populist national MEPs secured seats, potentially forming a 'Far Right Super Group' to outnumber the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats group by 20 seats.⁶⁰
- Across Europe, the Greens lost 18 of their 2019 tally of 71 seats in the European Parliament elections in 2024. With their share of the vote plummeting to just over 5% in France from 14% in 2019; in Germany falling from 21% in 2019 to 12% in 2024. The Greens fared better in the UK, winning 4 seats with 7% of the vote⁶¹, up from one MP and 2.7% of the vote in 2019.⁶²
- **NB.** The Far Right is exploiting a rising, wider concern amongst ordinary people across the political spectrum: 53% of voters in Germany ahead of the European elections said they were "very worried" about too many foreigners coming into their country.⁶³ Far Left politicians are tapping into this 'zeitgeist' too, with the former head of Die Linke (The Left), Sara Wagenknecht who now leads the avowedly anti-immigration BSW party recently stating, "Germany is overwhelmed, Germany has no more room."⁶⁴

C. FUTURE REALITIES

1. IMPLICATIONS OF EXTREME CLIMATE CHANGE FOR MIGRATION

If the numbers of people on the move were to remain at 3.6% of the global population, with the majority of those migrating by choice, and a smaller proportion displaced by relatively short-term conflicts, then achieving ‘safe, orderly and humane migration’ might still be a reasonable and achievable aspiration.

But the numbers forced to move by climate change, by disruption to and depletion of natural resources, and by linked conflicts, are an order of magnitude greater. Even the very cautious IOM estimates between “25 million and 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050...with 200 million being the most widely cited estimate”.⁶⁵ A consensus is growing amongst some climate scientists around the estimate of up to 1 billion people who could be forcibly displaced globally by climate-induced disasters by 2050⁶⁶, including food insecurity and water scarcity⁶⁷, with up to three times that number by the end of the century.

The early signs of this unfolding tragedy are already with us, with 600 million people already tolerating temperatures and conditions outside the ‘human climate niche’⁶⁸. Indeed, there is a growing body of published, peer-reviewed research warning of far greater numbers of people forced to move far greater distances due to climate change and accompanying natural disasters (drought, fires, flooding, sea level rise and so on) over the coming decades.⁶⁹

This was summarised by Dr Christopher Wolf of Oregon State University speaking to The Guardian in October 2023: “By 2100, as many as 3 billion to 6 billion people may find themselves outside the Earth’s liveable regions, meaning they will be encountering severe heat, limited food availability and elevated mortality rates.”⁷⁰

Migration on such a scale and pace has nothing to do with the World Bank’s “Match and Motive Matrix” It is about survival for billions of already very hard-pressed and very poor people.

2. POLITICAL RESPONSES

Such a scale of disruption is almost unthinkable, which is why so many (across the entire political spectrum) continue to avert their eyes from these harsh (yet increasingly inevitable) realities. Given the scale of human suffering involved, this refusal to engage cannot possibly be put down to indifference, but rather to a latent sense of dread as to the implications for the whole of humankind.

Faced by the regressive reactions of politicians and the public across Europe and the USA to today’s relatively modest flows of migrants, the projected huge numbers of forcibly displaced people pose an infinitely harder challenge. It’s difficult to imagine that the consequent migrations north and south of the increasingly uninhabitable equatorial belt will be ‘safe, orderly and humane’. However, there are those who believe such a managed and benign outcome is both possible and even desirable, including the science writer, Gaia Vince, author of *‘Nomad Century – How to Survive the Climate Upheaval’*.⁷¹

The analysis and figures that Vince sets out in her opening chapters square with our own – we draw on the same academic sources. There is no turning away from the impact of what she calls “the Four Horsemen of the Anthropocene”. But she then jumps to a spectacularly Utopian perspective on the resulting forced mass migration: “...the solution is so obvious, it hardly needs spelling out, and yet it is rarely discussed as a serious policy: help people move for everyone’s benefit.” The bulk of the book eloquently extols the benefits of migration throughout human history and how the coming, involuntary displacement of billions of people can be turned to humanity’s benefit: “Mass migration will be an upheaval, but it doesn’t have to be catastrophic – it could actually be good.”

A new generation of Orbans and Bannons – and worse – would easily encourage and exploit anti-migrant fears. Pogroms would proliferate.



Vince envisages a new UN Migration Organisation with powers to compel governments to accept refugees, including all European countries, Russia, America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. As John McNeil, Professor of Environmental History at Georgetown University points out: *“Vince’s vision requires that every high-latitude country accepts refugees in numbers that would swamp the native-born. A new generation of Orbans and Bannons – and worse – would easily encourage and exploit anti-migrant fears. Pogroms would proliferate.”*⁷²

The existing “weaponization” of today’s relatively low levels of migration has already had significant geopolitical consequences. A 2021 White House report on the impact of climate change on migration noted Putin’s strategic interventions in the destabilised regions of North Africa and Syria, and his opportunistic use of consequent migrant flows as *“weapons of war...Russia also sees some benefits in the destabilizing effects of large-scale migration to the EU, particularly as it relates to the rise of xenophobia and political parties sceptical of the European project and the broader liberal order.”*⁷³

This is particularly true with regard to those southern European countries receiving large numbers of migrants crossing from North Africa – like Italy, Greece and Turkey – with existing anti-EU movements and increasingly influential Far Right political parties.⁷⁴ (See p.8).

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS, PROGRESSIVES AND THE LEFT

It is undeniably true that a new generation of profoundly illiberal, xenophobic politicians have had considerable success in sowing the seeds of deep concern about migration amongst citizens. But those seeds have often fallen on worryingly fertile ground. More and more people are giving voice to those concerns, and it’s the Right that appears to do all the listening.

Progressives and the Left, not so much. As of now, it would appear that the Left remains reluctant to acknowledge these profound shifts in European (and global) politics. Its sights are set on articulating humanitarian responses to the crisis as it exists today. A wider understanding of what’s coming down the track at us is severely limited. For instance, an article by Nick Cullen in Red Pepper (13/01/24)⁷⁵, highlights the growing convergence between climate and migration organisations coming together to campaign around two key principles:

“The right to stay – to defend communities from the impacts of climate breakdown – and the right to move safely and with dignity when staying isn’t possible. The ability to move ensures that people are able to adapt to the changing environment around them. Migration must be part of the solution to the climate crisis.”

This is where it gets difficult. We are in agreement with much of what the International NGOs were calling for in their “Open Letter to Governments” at CoP28, particularly the need for steadfast solidarity to resist the politics of former Home Secretary Suella Braverman’s “hostile environment” both nationally and locally, protecting all migrants from the rapid escalation of de-humanising rhetoric and policies. But it seems to us completely unworldly to see climate-induced migration as “a positive tool for climate adaptation”:

“Migration must not only be recognised as a positive tool for climate adaptation – with mechanisms for safe pathways made into International Law – but also welcomed by countries, particularly in the Global North”.⁷⁶

There is more than a note of desperation in such a sentiment. Short of advocating for more authoritarian governments, with powers to make people feel good about significant increases in numbers of migrants, there’s little to be gained by such vacuous generalisations. Urging support for an open-ended right to move, as the climate crisis deepens, brings little relief to those who most need clear-headed, highly-focused campaigning around practical, deliverable policy options.

Not least (as powerfully pointed out by Nick Cullen himself in his Red Pepper article)⁷⁷ in terms of the UK’s callous response to the Climate Emergency. Between 2013 and 2018, the UK spent approximately £2.2 billion per annum on border militarisation, and just £780 million on climate finance – figures more or less in line with the Transnational Institute’s estimate that the world’s biggest emitters of greenhouse gases are spending on average 2.3 times as much on arming their borders as they are on climate finance.⁷⁸

The hypocrisy gets worse. In 2022, the UK spent around £3.7 billion on housing the backlog of unprocessed refugees, compared with a total of £1.1 billion in bilateral aid for the whole of Africa – which in itself represents a huge reduction in the 2020 figure of £2.3 billion.⁷⁹

Addressing this kind of cruel disregard for some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people has to be our campaigning priority. Especially as we contemplate the inevitability of things getting a great deal worse. We have to focus, right now on the very strong likelihood that up to 1 billion people will be forcibly displaced as a consequence of worsening climate disasters over the 25 years between now and 2050 – unless things can be dramatically turned around.

That provides a 25-year window to do what needs to be done to reduce the impact (as far as is possible) of this unparalleled humanitarian disaster. Progressives and the Left absolutely have to get behind this realpolitik, and urgently fashion a compelling case for scaled humanitarian interventions at a level never seen before. Without that, restricting the Far Right to the margins of contemporary politics become ever harder.

Awareness is growing all the time. We know that it’s the rich world that is predominantly responsible for the worsening climate crisis and must therefore bear the principal responsibility for proactively managing its consequences – including that threat of 1 billion forcibly displaced people by 2050. More and more politicians in moderate, centre-left and green parties realise they cannot just cede this territory to the racist and “nativist” parties on the Far Right. They simply have to develop a new and compelling narrative.

We have to focus, right now on the very strong likelihood that up to 1 billion people will be forcibly displaced as a consequence of worsening climate disasters over the 25 years between now and 2050 – unless things can be dramatically turned around.

D. SO WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?

We believe that narrative should be based on four pillars at the international level as detailed over the following pages:

- **Climate finance** – Climate Change recognises no borders; its impacts fall first and foremost on those countries least responsible for causing it, and least able to adapt.
- **A Global Stability Fund** – Climate Change and its consequences represent the gravest risk to the whole of humanity’s long-term security.
- **A new protocol to the Convention on Refugees** – one fit for the context and challenges of the 21st Century.
- **Achieving a sustainable human population** - through a framework prioritising rights, choice and equality.

Those 4 international pillars should be reinforced by national policies and action demonstrating the Government’s commitment to our international responsibilities, respecting global humanitarian and environmental treaties, whilst addressing lack of opportunity and inequalities domestically by:

- **Reinstating the UK’s commitment to the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income to overseas development aid** - critical to restoring the UK’s reputation and respect as an international partner. As well as morally right, it is in our long-term interests (not least in reducing illegal, unsafe, migration) to support the sustainable development of poorer countries.
- **Creating a new, stronger Department for International Development and Global Stability** - signalling the centrality of those issues to the long-term security and wellbeing of the UK and its citizens. With responsibility for oversight of the UK’s political response and financial contributions to the proposed Global Stability Fund.

- **Confirming the UK’s support for a revised UN Convention on Refugees** - reversing the perverse policies of the past which vilified the comparatively small numbers of refugees and asylum seekers (29,000 in 2023) making their way to the UK by unofficial, unsafe routes, while encouraging vast numbers of migrant workers (1.2 million in 2023 in 2023 according to ONS⁸⁰) to fill low-paid jobs and cover for lack of investment in education and training for UK citizens. Recent polls show that the majority of the British public can hold nuanced, seemingly contradictory, but wholly logical views: with 52% of Britons concerned about the rise in overall immigration,⁸¹ whilst still having amongst the most positive attitudes in the world to refugees and asylum seekers.⁸²
- **Prioritising training, opportunities, and fair pay for UK citizens and workers** – to tackle regional and national skills shortages. A key objective being to reverse the current distorted and exploitative immigration ratios, reducing the need for pulling in ‘cheap labour’ from and the ‘brain drain’ of poorer countries, whilst enhancing our capacity and welcome for refugees and asylum seekers. This dovetails with restoring the UK’s aid budget to support development and life opportunities in poorer countries and is in tune with the new Government’s **Skills England Bill** and the Prime Minister’s declared vision for ‘*a decade of national renewal*’.

1. CLIMATE FINANCE

The abysmal failure of CoP28 in Dubai, bringing to an end a year of dramatic disruption caused by climate-induced disasters in countries all around the world, confirmed, beyond a shadow of doubt, that there are two inextricably linked aspects of the accelerating Climate Emergency.

The first is the growing risk of today's increased warming bringing us ever closer to tipping points in key eco-systems – particularly in the Arctic and Antarctic. The dramatic increase in the average temperature in 2023 (at 1.52°C above pre-industrial levels)⁸³ confirmed the warnings that scientists have been trying to alert politicians to for years: the climate may not change in predictable, gradual increments, but could easily change in a radically discontinuous way.

The second is that the processes we currently rely on to drive forward international climate agreements are clearly broken:

- **the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is not able to advise politicians on the true state of climate science today;**
- **the CoP process has been comprehensively corrupted by the combined power of petrostates and the big oil and gas companies;**
- **leaving things to individual governments to move forward at their own pace (through their Nationally Determined Contributions) has brought us to the very edge of climate breakdown.**

This is not the place to explore what needs to happen to those processes now in the light of the Dubai fiasco – and with the next CoP taking place in the equally corrupt and oil-dependent country of Azerbaijan. But from where we sit, today's international NGOs appear to have slipped into a fatalistic state of resignation, stumbling from one CoP to the next, with no real expectation that anything much is going to change.⁸⁴

That has to change before CoP30 in Brazil. President Lula (as this year's president of the G20 Summit) has started to lay out what could be a transformative new approach to climate negotiations at CoP30, including proposals for a global wealth tax and a whole host of new ideas on climate finance. This would appear to offer the last chance of getting the world on track with a true emergency response to the climate crisis.

In the meantime, there is much that has to be done in terms of the whole adaptation agenda. In its *Adaptation Gap Report 2022: Too Little, Too Slow – Climate Adaptation*

Failure Puts World at Risk, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights the gap between rhetorical promises of financial support and actual delivery. International aid reaching developing countries is 5-10 times below that estimated to be necessary, and the gap is widening: annual climate change adaptation costs for the world's poorer countries are estimated to be \$160-\$340 billion a year by 2030 and \$315-\$565 billion by 2050.⁸⁵

In a coruscating critique, Oxfam picks apart the widely publicised \$100 billion annual funding goal agreed by rich nations back in 2009 to help poorer countries adapt to climate change. Aside from the fact that an average of no more than \$80 billion had been provided up until last year, Oxfam's analysis is that only about one-third of that figure (\$24.5 billion) can be defined as genuine climate assistance.⁸⁶ Oxfam's findings are endorsed by the UN which found that the majority of the funding went to middle income countries, with the poorest receiving only 8%, and that rather than providing genuine bona fide grants, 60% of the funding was in the form of loans that will have to be repaid.⁸⁷

There is universal consensus that the rich world countries remain in a state of deep denial about the scale of the climate finance challenge. A recent report from the Grantham Institute⁸⁸ estimated that:

“There will need to be \$2.4 trillion per year investment in emerging market and developing countries by 2030. The central challenge is to accelerate and implement the fostering and financing of this investment from a range of sources.”

That overall figure is broken down as follows:

- The energy transformation, concentrating on the rapid expansion in renewables, could entail total financing needs of \$1.3-\$1.7 trillion a year.
- Estimates for future Loss and Damage suggests they could be as high as \$150-\$300 billion a year by 2030.
- Investment needed for adaptation could amount to \$200-\$250 billion a year.
- Natural capital expenditure (encompassing sustainable agriculture, the protection and restoration of forest, other habitats and marine ecosystems, as well as the conservation of biodiversity) could amount to \$275-\$400 billion a year.
- Methane abatement requires relatively modest amounts of investment, ranging from \$40-\$60 billion a year by 2030.

India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has recently raised the ambition level here, demanding that CoP29 in Azerbaijan at the end of the year should agree to \$1 trillion a year for climate finance (from 2025 onwards) as part of any final agreement.

Progress on debt relief will also feature large at CoP29, following up on the letter from more than 500 economists at CoP28 calling for a huge programme of debt cancellation. The UNDP's call for a "debt-poverty pause" (allowing governments to divert debt repayments into social, environmental and infrastructure projects) does not go far enough. Many low-income countries are spending far more in debt repayments than on healthcare and other social programmes, let alone on addressing the climate crisis. Without substantive debt relief, many poorer countries will continue to go backwards, further reducing resilience and undermining national security.

2. A GLOBAL STABILITY FUND

The most realistic proposal for investing in Climate Change adaptation and building resilience in the poorest, hardest-hit countries, is the Bridgetown Initiative,⁸⁹ launched by the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley.

This is based on four main elements: unlocking \$1 trillion to enhance climate resilience in developing countries, mobilised through the World Bank, the IMF and other Development Banks; setting up a 'Global Climate Mitigation Trust', leveraging up to \$500 billion a year using the IMF's Special Drawing Rights for climate and development; mobilising more than \$1.5 trillion per year of private sector investment in the green economy; and ramping up contributions to the newly established Loss and Damage Fund to speed recovery after major climate disasters.⁹⁰ (Many developing countries already cite chapter and verse in terms of the scale of that damage as a growing percentage of their GDP).

“The Central Banks of the wealthiest countries engaged in \$25 trillion of Quantitative Easing in the last 13 years. Of that, \$9 trillion was spent in the last 18 months to fight the pandemic. Had we used an equivalent \$25 trillion to finance the energy transition, we would now be reaching the 1.5°C limit that is so vital to us.”

Mia Mottley
Prime Minister
of Barbados
(CoP26, Glasgow,
2021)



To recognise both the gravity and urgency of these crises, consideration should be given to setting up an overarching Global Stability Fund directly accountable to the UN Security Council, recognising that the threats highlighted in this paper constitute the gravest of risks to the long-term security of humankind.

By far the biggest contributors to that Fund should be the Development Banks. The total assets held by the world's 520 Development Banks and development finance institutions amount to \$22.5 trillion, of which \$20.2 trillion is held by National Development Banks and \$2.3 trillion by Multilateral Development Banks. (As an example, the IMF issued \$650 billion in Special Drawing Rights in August 2021 for some of the world's poorest countries. This measure proved to be by far the most important action to support the economies of developing countries in the face of combined global health, debt, economic and climate crises.)

The proposed total of \$2 trillion a year sounds off the scale. But it's important to remember that the global financial system and the rich, developed world have delivered even bigger sums in the recent past.

Few involved in social, environmental or development issues have any understanding of the way in which the Central Banks of the rich countries have used a process called Quantitative Easing (QE) to electronically create billions of dollars, pounds, yen, euros and other currencies to finance the cost of tackling both the banking crisis of 2008 and the Covid pandemic. This ability of Central Banks to create such huge sums of money could now be used to fund tackling the even bigger climate change crisis. This is how Mia Mottley put it at CoP26 in Glasgow:

“Low-income countries do not have enough financial firepower to meet this challenge. I say to you now that there is a sword that can cut through this Gordian Knot. And it has already been used. The Central Banks of the wealthiest countries engaged in \$25 trillion of Quantitative Easing in the last 13 years. Of that, \$9 trillion was spent in the last 18 months to fight the pandemic. Had we used an equivalent \$25 trillion to finance the energy transition, we would now be reaching the 1.5°C limit that is so vital to us.”⁹¹

3. A NEW PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON REFUGEES

Shortly after the formation of the United Nations, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees confirmed the view at that time that people in danger of persecution in their own country had the right to seek refuge in another country. It was essentially focused on protecting refugees across Europe, but in 1967, the Protocol to the Convention confirmed that all citizens in the 148 signatory countries were entitled to similar protection against persecution.

We're living in a very different world today. **Global population has risen by nearly 5.5 billion since the original Convention was signed (from 2.5 billion to today's 8 billion).** The criteria for asylum can be interpreted very broadly. Trafficking has become a huge and profitable industry. These factors have caused many critics on the Right to call for a new (and much more restrictive) Convention.

That controversy will run and run. But it's clear that the current situation is wholly inadequate when considering the status of climate refugees – defined by the Environmental Justice Foundation as:

“Persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive climate-related change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”⁹²

Under the 1951 Convention, a prospective refugee must have “a well-founded fear of persecution”. Climate-related impacts cannot be described as a form of persecution, and climate-displaced people do not therefore qualify for refugee status.

Some human rights campaigners now argue that a new legal framework, encoded in a new Protocol, is necessary. This would cover both immediate, disaster-based displacement and more gradual ecological degradation that makes it impossible for people to stay in their homes and communities. We concur with that view – as a necessary first step in ensuring climate refugees are officially recognised as such, under international refugee law. And it is essential that politicians should act on this before the effects of accelerating climate change really take hold.

Without some kind of official legal status, acknowledging that the vast majority of climate refugees will come from countries which bear little (if any) responsibility for the increasingly devastating impacts of the climate emergency, those rich countries that do bear that responsibility may well seek to ignore their moral and legal obligations to provide appropriate financial support for climate refugees – both for those who are able to remain within their own countries (for instance, moving inland to escape sea level rise and flooding), or who are forced to move to other countries.

There is of course no guarantee that rich world countries would “honour” such obligations. But it would certainly give some legal redress to those organisations representing climate refugees.

We have to remember the current reality here: UNHCR figures for 2023⁹³ show that 83% of refugees worldwide are already hosted by low-and-middle income countries (not by rich countries), and 72% by countries neighbouring conflict zones. Funding for those recipient countries is all but non-existent, and this situation will just go on getting worse and worse. It’s critical that their massive humanitarian commitments are properly recognised and recompensed.

In effect, this proposal entails providing a formal legal status for climate refugees (imposing an obligation on rich world countries to provide adequate funding to mitigate the crisis), but without extending to them the same asylum rights as are guaranteed to refugees under the Geneva Convention and Protocol. That, we believe, is a totally forlorn aspiration. The danger is that if campaigners persevere with that unrealistic demand, we will lose the chance to take a huge (if more pragmatic) step forward in terms of climate finance and climate justice.

We know such a compromise will be unacceptable to those who continue to advocate for “the rights of climate-impacted people both to stay (where possible) and to move (when that is no longer possible)”.

But it’s clear to us that there is literally no way rich world governments will sign up to such an open-ended “right to move” as a way of coping with the worst impacts of climate change. They wouldn’t be in government very long if that was what they asked their citizens to support. Compromise is therefore inevitable – one way or another. For us, that means putting as much emphasis as possible on “the right not to have to move”. And that requires massive amounts of new funding

4. STABILISING AND REDUCING HUMAN NUMBERS

Human population growth is one of the two major drivers of climate change identified unequivocally by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: ‘*Globally, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade*’.⁹⁴

Our global population passed 8 billion in November 2022. The UN’s “World Population Prospects 2022” gave a range of projections under low, medium, and high variants, ranging from just under 9 billion of us on Earth by the end of the century to over 12 billion. Its most likely medium scenario offered: “*a probability of 95% that the size of the global population will lie between 9.4 and 10 billion in 2050*”, whilst acknowledging that this scenario “*... embodies an optimistic vision of development*”. In particular, it assumes that “*continued progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment will mean that as time progresses, individuals will be better able to realize their childbearing intentions. Assuming that such progress continues into the future, women have even more social and economic opportunities and a better ability to realize their family goals*”

Achieving ‘*progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment*’ and enabling girls and women worldwide to achieve ‘*even more social and economic opportunities*’, should be a primary objective of all aid programmes, through increasing access to education and safe, modern family planning. According to UNICEF, 129 million girls are not attending school globally,⁹⁵ and over 270 million women worldwide have ‘*an unmet need*’ for contraception – denied choice and control of their own fertility. That number has risen from 230 million in 1990, due to population growth and insufficient funding for family planning.⁹⁶

Therefore, addressing that ‘unmet need’ for contraception, enabling choice and bodily autonomy for those 270 million women is critical. Whilst primarily about the rights of girls and women, it brings the significant, secondary ‘benefit’ of helping to curb climate change. Project Drawdown, the global research network which analyses and ranks the best solutions to climate change, has consistently placed family planning and education in its Top Five solutions (out of 93) for reducing greenhouse gas emissions globally. “*Slower population growth, a cascading outcome of increased family planning and rising education levels, contributes to reduced greenhouse*

“When girls are educated and when they stay in schools, they get married later in their lives, then they have less children and that helps us to reduce the impacts of climate change that the population increase brings.”

Malala Yousafzai

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



@Simon Dawis/DFID

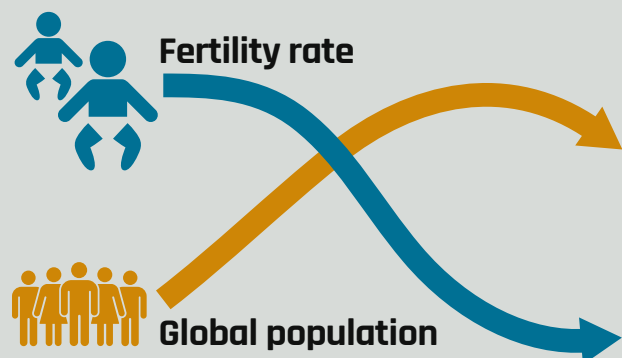
gas emissions.” Drawdown’s 2022 report ranked those linked solutions as the **third most effective solution** for limiting global warming to no more than 2°C by the year 2100, cutting more carbon than from other solutions like onshore and offshore wind power.⁹⁷

The United Nations Population Division report, ‘World Population Prospects 2024’, revises its 2022 projections slightly estimating that while our global population will continue to grow for another 50 or 60 years, it is likely to peak at around 10.3 billion people in the mid-2080s.⁹⁸ Thereafter, gradually falling to 10.2 billion people by the end of the century. That is still an additional two billion people on our planet.

Yet the proven, low-cost technology of modern contraception is routinely ignored – despite being desperately wanted by hundreds of millions of women, and simultaneously providing a return on investment of \$120 in economic, social, and health gains for every \$1 invested.⁹⁹ The United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA) has estimated that total funding of \$264 billion over 10 years would not only address that unmet need for contraception, but also help in delivering on other “transformative goals” of ending the connected human rights abuses of child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation . Regrettably, only one-sixth of that sum has been pledged to date.¹⁰⁰

DEMOGRAPHIC MOMENTUM

Whilst the annual percentage growth rate of the global population has significantly declined, that is, in effect, a lower percentage of a greater overall number of people on our planet. Global population has grown by between 70 and 80 million every year over the last two decades, and continues to do so, driving population growth to an additional billion people on our planet every 10-12 years.¹⁰¹ Even when fertility rates have fallen to or below replacement rate, if a country has a large proportion of young adults of child-bearing age, then its population will keep on growing for many decades – this is known as ‘demographic momentum’.¹⁰² In India, for example, where despite the average number of births per woman



reducing from 5.9 in 1950 just over 2 today, the population is still growing by over 10 million each year, overtaking China three years ago to become the world’s most populous country.¹⁰³

Yet most environment and development NGOs remain aloof, detached from the fate of millions of women and children in oppressive, male-dominated societies. Policymakers and funders in rich, developed countries have avoided addressing and funding these vital areas, often due to ill-informed and outdated perceptions about family planning and population, tainted by China's abhorrent one-child policy from the 1980s,¹⁰⁴ and the forced sterilisation programmes in India a decade earlier.¹⁰⁵ There are many more examples of practical, positive, rights and choice-based family planning programmes across the world, from Bangladesh, Costa Rica, and Thailand¹⁰⁶ including, within India itself, that of

the southern state of Kerala (see box below). But these are rarely promoted as a "minimum norm" that would inspire governments and international institutions to address huge numbers of unplanned pregnancies, illegal abortions, forced child marriages, and the chronic unmet need for contraception.

Addressing population through these girl and women-focused rights-based solutions is key to achieving Oxfam's aspiration for a "safe and just space for [all] humanity."¹⁰⁷ And it's absolutely critical to mitigating the misery and destitution that will be caused through massive climate-induced migration.

EMPOWERING WOMEN, ENABLING CHOICE IN KERALA

In the 1950s, Kerala's population was growing faster than that of any other Indian state. By 1987, however, it had become the first state to reach a replacement level fertility rate. That rapid decline in birth-rate was achieved through investing in women's empowerment, healthcare, and non-coercive family planning, removing multiple, persistent barriers to women having access to a choice of contraception. Education of girls and women was highly relevant to this: by 1961, Kerala had the highest female literacy rate in India - 45.6% compared to 15.3% countrywide.¹⁰⁸ Today, more than three quarters of women in Kerala have completed at least 10 years of education. A natural consequence is that women tend to marry later than in most other parts of



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India. Addressing its earlier runaway population growth has also enabled significant economic development. Per capita income rose from below the Indian average in the late 1970s to standing 20% above it currently, as educated girls and women enter the workplace and add their entrepreneurial energy to the economy.¹⁰⁹

E. CONCLUSION

In writing this Report, we know all too well that we will be accused by some of extreme “unscientific doomism”, or even fatalistic despair.

We hope many more will see it differently – quite simply because the world’s “direction of travel” cannot be ignored any longer:

- Climate change is accelerating; crucial climate tipping points now loom large; and the warnings from scientists from the climate frontline become more and more desperate.
- Politicians have failed to respond to that gathering scientific reality, not least because so many are in thrall to today’s massively powerful fossil fuel incumbency.
- There’s a clear and deeply disturbing move to the Far Right in Europe, the UK and the USA. Every single one of the parties that are driving that shift deny the basic science of climate change, let alone its worsening impacts on millions of people.

As we’ve set out to explain, that points ineluctably to the horrific prospect of hundreds of millions of people uprooted from their homes and communities by new climate extremes. As many as one billion by the middle of the century.

The political reality is that few of these climate migrants will be allowed to settle in the world’s richer countries. The campaigning priority must therefore be a massive financial transfer to mitigate the worst impacts of this all-but unavoidable disaster.

We have to confront this reality now – whilst we still have a chance of substantively mitigating what will otherwise be the worst humanitarian disaster in the history of humankind.

Our warmest thanks to **Alice Page, Barbara Panvel, Neale Powell-Cooke and Penelope and James Tickell** for their support with this project

AUTHORS

Jonathon Porritt

Jonathon Porritt has been involved in green politics and the environment for the last 50 years. He was formerly Co-chair of the Green Party, of which he is still a member, director of Friends of the Earth and a trustee of WWF UK. He stood down as Chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission in 2009, after nine years providing high level advice to government ministers.

In 1996, he co-founded Forum For The Future, a leading international sustainable development charity, working with business and civil society to accelerate the shift towards a sustainable future.

Right now, he is particularly focused on intergenerational justice, supporting young people in their activities around today's Climate and Nature emergencies.

But it's as President of Population Matters that he has undertaken this project. The critical importance of addressing unsustainable population growth (alongside unsustainable consumption growth, particularly in the rich world) has been part of his advocacy since joining the Green Party in 1974.

Overpopulation and overconsumption are two sides of the same coin. Many of those countries with the highest fertility rates will be the hardest hit by accelerating climate change – through absolutely no fault of their own. Ensuring that girls stay in school for as long as possible, and that women have access to improved reproductive healthcare and to a choice of contraception, is the surest way of building greater justice for women and girls, and climate resilience.

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Robin Maynard

Robin Maynard has worked for over 30 years in the environment movement – starting as a volunteer at Friends of the Earth just before the Chernobyl disaster. That grim event led to his first job tracking fall-out across the UK, finding more contamination than officially admitted, so securing greater compensation for farmers. He has held senior posts at FOE, The Soil Association, FARM, and the Wildlife Trusts.

A producer and presenter on BBC Radio 4's Farming Today in the 1990s, he also provided pieces for BBC Radio 4's Costing the Earth and The Ecologist magazine marking the tenth anniversary of the Bhopal pesticide leak, visiting Chernobyl, and indigenous communities in Sarawak threatened by palm oil plantations and logging. He has worked in the commercial sector for communications company, Forster.

From 2009 – 10, he was Director of Communications for the Forestry Commission, resigning at the proposed sell-off the public forest estate in England. With Jonathon Porritt, he set-up Our Forests forcing the first policy U-turn of the Coalition Government. During 2012 – 13, he and Jonathon sought to persuade environment and conservation groups to acknowledge human population as an issue alongside consumption.

From 2016 – 2023, he headed up Population Matters, significantly reinforcing the organisation's impact and credibility. Since then he has been a freelance campaigner, writer and consultant, whilst also undertaking a practical sustainability course.

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Colin Hines

Colin Hines has worked in the environment movement since the early 70s on the issues of population, food, new technology and unemployment, nuclear proliferation and on the adverse environmental and social effects of international trade and the need to solve these problems by replacing globalisation with localization. He is the author of the book 'Localization- A Global Manifesto' (Earthscan). In 1985 he joined Greenpeace to work on proliferation issues and was then made the Co-ordinator of Greenpeace International's Economics Unit and worked for the organisation for 10 years.

In 2007, he coined the term 'Green New Deal' and brought together a group of finance, tax, energy and environmental experts to form the Green New Deal group that has published numerous reports on the need and funding of a Green New Deal <https://greennewdealgroup.org/>.

In December 2010, he co-authored with Green New Deal group member and tax expert Richard Murphy 'Green Quantitative Easing: Paying for the Economy We Need'. Since then they have set up 'Finance for the Future' to answer the 'How do you pay for it' question. Their answer is what they term QuEST- a mixture of Quantitative Easing, savings and tax, depending on the issue involved <https://www.financeforthefuture.com/>.

Working in a personal capacity, he co-authored with Jonathon Porritt in 2017 'The Progressive Case for Taking Control of EU Immigration – and Avoiding Brexit in the Process'.

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The Authors are all writing in a personal capacity.

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