



## ANNEX 3: DILEMMAS



# 1

## The cutting of emissions and the right to development

### Roles:

- Leonardo di Caprio: US citizen who argues that developing countries need to increase energy only by the use of **renewable energy**.
- Sunita Narain: Indian activists that stresses the right of Indian people to have access to energy.

### Discussion:

- Should the Indian government give energy access to its poorest citizens if it is through the use of coal?
- If you were Leonardo Di Caprio, what would you have said to Sunita Narain (the Indian academic in the clip)?
- What might be the strongest way to stop the big powers of the world, like the USA and the EU, from using up the carbon budget of everyone else?
- Is there a **right to development** in the context of climate crisis? Should 'western' or 'developed' nations be dictating what others in the globe can/cannot do because of the environment?
- In whose interest is it to change to renewable energy? Who will do or decide this? The UN, governments, ...?

*Teachers should note that, even though the narrator claims that India is the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest emitter, this is really not correct in any just measurement of emissions with per capita and consumption considered. This fact is pointed out by Sunita Narain later on in the scene, when showing how consumption by one American at home is equivalent to 34 citizens of India (at that time). This should alert the students to how deeply embedded that is this way of looking at the crisis is (as the reaction of Leonardo di Caprio struggling to handle the critique of Sanita shows). Even a film that is really trying to expose the problems can't quite drag itself away from an American centric view. This also shows how the general media does not have a clear view of the data.*





Transcription of part of the conversation in the video:

*Can less developed countries with rapidly growing populations make transition (to renewable energies) rapidly? India is the world's third largest emitter yet the country is struggling with massive power shortages and rolling blackouts. India is consistently saying that the biggest priority is development and bringing people out from poverty (radio).*

*S: We care about climate change. But the fact is we are a country where energy access is as much a challenge as climate change. We need to make sure that every Indian has access to energy.*

*L: I understood there are 300 million people without power, without light here. That's equivalent to the entire population of the United States.*

*S: Today in Indian villages you will find people take cow dung and they make what is known cow dung cakes and they burn those. And that's their only source of cooking energy.*

*About 30% of households in India are yet to have access to energy. If you want to provide energy to everybody, we have to ensure that our electricity is affordable. India has a vast reservoir of coal; we are probably the third or fourth largest reservoir of coal in the world. (Ashok Lavasa, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, forest, and climate change).*

*S: Coal is cheap, whether you like and I it or not. You have to think about it from this point of view: if you created the problem in the past, we will create it in the future. We have 700 million households who cook using biomass. If those households move to coal, you have that much more of use of fossil fuel. Then the entire world is fried. If anyone gives you this very cute stuff and tells you "All the world's poor should move to solar, why they have to make the mistakes that we have made", I hear this all the time from American NGOs. I think "wow, if it was that easy, I would really like the US to move towards solar". But you haven't. Let's put our money where our mouth is.*

*L: We have to practice what we preach absolutely.*





S: I am sorry to say this I know you are an American and please don't take it amiss but your consumption is really going to make a hole in the planet. And I think that is the conversation we need to have. I will show you charts from this perspective. The electricity consumed by one American at home is equivalent to 1,5 citizen of France, 2,2 citizen of Japan, 10 citizen of China, 34 of India and 61 of Nigeria. Why? Because you're building bigger, you're building more, and using much more than before. The fact is we need to put the issue of **lifestyle** and **consumption** at the centre of **climate negotiations**.

L: Look, there is no way I don't agree with you. How can I argue that: you're absolutely correct. Yes, it's a very difficult argument to present to Americans that we need to change our lifestyle and I would argue that is probably not going to happen so we are depending if we want to solve the climate crisis, on the fact that hopefully **renewable** like solar and **wind** will become cheaper and cheaper and the more money we funnel into them, the more we invest into them and ultimately it will solve that problem. But I see you're shaking your head...

S: It's Indian style which means no. Who will invest? Let's be real about this. Who will invest and how will you invest. We are doing more investment in solar today, China is doing much more investment in solar today than the US is. What is the US doing that the rest of the world can learn from? You are a fossil addicted country, but if you are seriously disengaging it's something from us to learn from. And it will be leadership that we can all hold up to our government can listen: if the US can do it and the US is doing it in spite of all their pressures, we can do it as well.

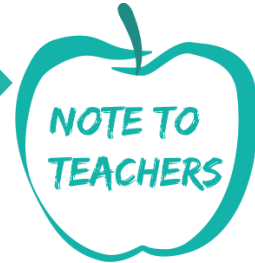
**From "Before the flood", in**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&t=2009&v=zbEnOYtsXHA&feature=youtu.be>

There has not been an **energy transition** yet. It is a myth that it has happened. All the solar panels and wind turbines that we might see have just taken up a bit of the extra demand that we have created through extra consumption and population. Since 1800, **fossil fuel** consumption has only ever increased, because it is so easy to mine and the companies and



states that have made huge profits out of that extraction do not want to give up the market to alternative technologies (see also the second dilemma on **extractivism**). The good news is that the costs of **renewable energies** have plummeted in recent years, and with the right political signals a **just transition** could happen.



## 2

## Energy Transition, Extractivism and Sacrifice Zones

The students will be divided into 2 roles:

- Indigenous leader in favor of the implementation of a lithium extraction company, who has expectations of access to jobs and argues that various needs are covered through the companies (such as the construction of schools and community halls). The leader may also argue that lithium is necessary for the global green transition.
- Indigenous leader against the extraction of lithium in their community who argues that lithium extraction destroys their environment and that extraction companies and the state do not respect human and indigenous rights.

### Discussion:

Let's imagine that for once the right to **prior consultation of indigenous communities** in the Atacama salt flat (Chile) is respected. The leaders will discuss what to vote in a consultation about opening a lithium extraction plant near their communities.

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Here is some information to prepare the points of view:

Lithium has become a “wonder” mineral, since it has qualities that allow it to store energy very efficiently. The light metal is an essential ingredient for making the batteries in our telephones and computers, as well as the electric vehicles (EVs) that are often seen as essential for a green energy transition.

By allowing the storage of energy derived from renewable energies, whose main disadvantage is that they cannot be stored for a long time, the use of



lithium for the manufacture of batteries can lead to a considerable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to this, once the infrastructure is sufficiently developed for lithium vehicle batteries to be recharged with renewable energies, and not with fossil energies as is currently the case, the use of these batteries will generate additional value in the reduction of emissions. In this way, the use of lithium is presented as an alternative to the climate crisis.

Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile have more than 60 percent of the total reserves of lithium, and their high-altitude salt flats have 51% of the lithium resources currently available worldwide. The salt flats are fragile ecosystems: they constitute closed basins with little access to water throughout the year. They are also wetlands that harbor valuable biodiversity and depend on delicate balances between freshwater systems (low salinity) and brackish water (with a large proportion of salts, also called "brines"). Lithium mining, however, puts at risk the delicate natural balance between freshwater and brackish water masses, creating, as already mentioned, a threat to the availability of water for ecosystems and the human populations that inhabit it.

**Adapted extract from “*Litio: los costos sociales y ambientales de la transición energética global*”** <https://co.boell.org/es/2020/05/08/litio-los-costos-sociales-y-ambientales-de-la-transicion-energetica-global>

There is a reason why Chile has been dubbed “the Saudi Arabia of lithium”. For the past 20 years, the country has accounted for almost 40 percent of the global supply of the silvery-white metal that is essential for making the rechargeable batteries used in computers, smartphones and electric cars.

Lithium is viewed as a crucial building block in the “green energy transition” to low-carbon technology. But the increasing extraction of lithium is fueling conflicts over water scarcity among the indigenous peoples of Chile’s Atacama Desert, where some of the world’s largest lithium deposits lie.

Averaging only 15 millimeters of rain each year, the desert of Atacama is considered the driest place on the globe. Extracting Atacama’s lithium requires massive amounts of the scarce water resources that indigenous peoples and animals have relied on to survive for thousands of years in this harsh





environment. And according to researchers, it is already causing lasting damage to this fragile ecosystem.

The Chilean salt flats are located in the ancestral territory of indigenous peoples such as the Aymara, Quechua, Atacameño or Lickanantay and Colla. In the case of these peoples, their waters, meadows and bofedales are essential for the reproduction of culture, traditional ways of life and subsistence.

In Chile's Atacama Desert, where lithium extraction has been under way for long, communities are experiencing water shortages affecting their home lives and agriculture. Atacama's indigenous communities have sounded the alarm about water scarcity for years. Rivers, lagoons and meadows have all dwindled over the past decade according to the Atacama People's Council, which represents 18 indigenous communities.

But Chilean authorities have largely relied on environmental impact studies conducted by the mining companies. And these studies have generally not identified significant effects on water levels or the surrounding nature.

In January 2018, CORFO (Chilean State Development Agency which owns the mining concessions at the Atacama salt flat and leases them to the lithium-mining companies) signed a contract with SQM (mining company) that enabled the company to triple its lithium extraction over the coming years and extended its mining access to the Atacama until 2030.

Chile has ratified the International Labour Organisation ILO's Convention No. 169, which obliges governments to consult indigenous peoples when major projects intervene in their environment and ancestral territory.

However, "You have to be very clear that the indigenous peoples of Chile have never been properly consulted in relation to lithium extraction", says Marcel Didier Von Der Hundt, a lawyer and legal advisor at the Observatorio Ciudadano, a Chilean NGO focused on the promotion of human rights.

Nevertheless, mining companies have made agreements with communities, which include financial benefits, jobs, and other contributions, such as building or repairing schools and providing scholarships. While some residents are happy with these agreements, others question what will happen after the







boom, especially since many of these provisions replace what used to be state services. According to the mining company Albemarle, as much as three percent of sales are used on community development and shared with the Atacama People's Council.

The deal has sparked conflicts among the local communities: some actors and organizations oppose taking money from the mining companies, while others claim the money is helping the poorest communities. Moreover, the promising demand for lithium and its role in the global green transition is likely to contribute to the economic development of Chile and to guarantee employment for workers of this industry.

A new Amnesty International campaign, launched on 21 March, challenges car companies to create the world's first ethical battery in the next five years. It also calls on companies to strengthen their human rights practices and engage with both suppliers and governments in lithium-producing countries. Amnesty's Secretary General, Kumi Naidoo, said: "We need to change course now, or those least responsible for climate change – indigenous communities and children – will pay the price for the shift away from fossil fuels."

Solar, wind and renewable energy companies that need lithium for energy storage also have an opportunity to meet this challenge. Energy companies must put indigenous communities and workers at the heart of their operations to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon economy is not only fast, but fair.

**From Our demand for electric cars and smartphones is drying up the most arid place in the world - Danwatch** in

<https://danwatch.dk/en/undersoegelse/our-demand-for-electric-cars-and-smartphones-is-drying-up-the-most-arid-place-in-the-world>

**From “*Dos caminos hacia la destrucción medioambiental: extractivismo verde en los salares de la Argentina y Chile*”** in

<https://observatoriosalares.wordpress.com/2021/06/16/dos-caminos-hacia-la-destruccion-medioambiental-extractivismo-verde-en-los-salares-de-la-argentina-y-chile/>

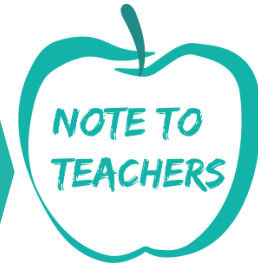




It is important to pose the question of **how this kind of situations could generate displacement**: is it possible that the destruction of habitats, loss of access to water, etc. From the company will lead to displacement? If students do not pose these questions by themselves, teachers should point it out.

Also, it is interesting to **highlight the contradictions that underlie discourses and initiatives that, at a national and global level, promote the decarbonization of industrial societies —mainly responsible for climate change— at the cost of dispossession and environmental sacrifice of indigenous and rural territories** such as Andean salt flats and wetlands. In order to protect and preserve these ecosystems, it is important to consider the voices and perspectives of indigenous peoples, environmental activists and researchers, usually marginalized, are considered in the global struggles for **climate justice**.

“Our ticket to **green growth** is digging deep into the environment”- says [Olivia Lazard in her TED talk](#). This material could be useful to illustrate and have a deeper understanding on the dilemma.



### **3** Migrate or not migrate when a culture is at risk of disappearing

#### **Roles:**

- **Laisa:** A climate change-related planning and policymaking technician from the Government of Fiji. She is organizing the relocation of Ratu ´s community.
- **Ratu:** a fisherman who does not want to leave his living place in old Korolevu. He claims that he does not want to leave the land his ancestors have lived on for generations, and the sea, especially for a location far from sea.

#### **Discussion:**

Ratu ´s community has been identified as a location at risk. **Relocation** is visualized as the solution. Laisa discusses the situation with the community,



and Ratu is the leader of those who are determined not to leave their current village.

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### **1. Balancing climate, culture, and community: Fiyi's relocation challenge**

Korolevu's choice is one facing many communities across the Pacific, and around the world. There could be as many as 143 million people internally displaced by climate change by 2050 if more is not done to address global greenhouse gas emissions, according to a report from the [World Bank](#).

Rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and extreme weather events are some of the risk factors that people face. But while for much of the world climate-induced displacement is still a future concern, in the Pacific, low-lying coastal communities are already dealing with the very difficult challenge of how, when, and where entire communities may have to relocate.

In practice, true community-led relocation remains an aspiration. There are few successful examples yet numerous challenges in balancing the measurable economic impact of climate change with the intangible cultural value that indigenous Fiyians have with the land their ancestors have lived on for generations, and the sea on which many depend for their livelihoods.

Fiyi —[the first country to ratify the 2015 Paris Agreement](#)— officially released its [relocation guidelines](#) in late 2019. Described as a "living" document, the guidelines state that relocation will only be undertaken as a last resort, when other adaptation options such as seawall construction and wetlands rehabilitation are exhausted or not feasible.

The guidelines emphasize the importance of community leadership and household participation and decision-making around relocation. To further enable effective relocation funding, in 2020 Fiyi also established the [Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples Trust Fund for Communities and Infrastructure](#), the world's first relocation fund for people displaced by climate change.





“So far the experience of relocating communities is still pretty limited,” said Andreas Neef, a professor of development studies at the University of Auckland, who has done extensive fieldwork in Fiji.

“Even in a country like Fiji, where you have a relatively large landmass, it doesn’t mean that if villages are moved away from the coast that these villages are necessarily safer,” Neef said.

According to Sabira Coelho, migration environment and climate change officer at the [International Organization for Migration](#)'s regional office in Fiji, one area that deserves more attention are the local cultural factors and understanding the importance of land to indigenous people in the region.

*“You have to have recognition and acknowledgment of the spiritual and cultural links Pacific people have to the land to even understand what the implications are of climate relocation.”— Says Sabira Coelho, migration and climate change officer, the International Organization for Migration's regional office in Fiji*

Fiji’s guidelines do acknowledge this and make it clear that relocation is to be a community-led process. But in practice, balancing the potential risks and the difficult-to-quantify value of cultural heritage is challenging, and specific to each location.

“To a certain extent, cultural values are considered by the government, but often it does not include issues around risk values and perceptions of risk,” Neef said. Some villages, he noted, see the known risks of sea-level rise and stronger storms as lesser than the risk of moving away from their ancestral land and losing intergenerational cultural value.

Another of Neef’s concerns is in defining exactly who are the active and passive participants in any community, and ensuring that marginalized voices within communities, such as women or youth, are properly heard.

“There is often this tension within the community between those who want to leave and those who feel like their ties to land are strong, and they are not able to move,” Neef said.



**Co-funded by  
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One thing Neef's team noticed during their field research in the villages of Votua and Nawaqarua in the lower Ba River Catchment in northwestern Viti Levu was a gender gap. "Many of the women we talked to, they were actually willing to relocate, while often the [mostly male] community leaders were saying 'this is our ancestral land, we should not move,'" Neef said.

**Extracts from "Balancing climate, culture, and community: Fiji's relocation challenge"** <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/balancing-climate-culture-and-community-fijis-relocation-challenge/index.html>

## 2. Voluntary immobility: indigenous voices in the Pacific

The Government of Fiji is pioneering relocation processes in the Pacific, working closely with Fijian communities in vulnerable coastal areas and offering an emerging example of voluntary immobility good practice. Fiji's draft relocation guidelines include a procedure to follow when physical relocation is deemed necessary, but a community decides not to move. This procedure involves: respecting voluntary immobility first and foremost; investigating the reasons for voluntary immobility; holding discussions with the community about adaptation options and land tenure; including climate change issues in secondary and primary education curricula; and ensuring psychological and emotional preparedness for climate impacts.

However, the guidelines also state that relocation might be enforced in a worst-case scenario, that is, to guard against loss of life. If, hypothetically, a set of guidelines were to stipulate that relocation would **not** be enforced in the worst-case scenario, there would also need to be strong ethical and legal support for the voluntarily immobile to ensure that human rights and human dignity are maintained. This would include legally acceptable evidence that all local adaptation options have been exhausted, that detailed dialogue about the consequences of immobility have been held, and that the choice to be immobile is entirely voluntary. Binding legal rules would need to be developed to ensure that human rights and human dignity are the highest priority in such situations.



**Extract from Forced Migration “Voluntary immobility: indigenous voices in the Pacific” in <https://www.fmreview.org/syria2018/farbotko>**

*This is a very particular type of displacement, based on an ‘option’ of relocation. It is important to note that things do not always pan out like this for societies like, for example, Ethiopia or Somalia, where shocks are more quick or less predictable (for example famine) and where the governments are not necessarily in a position to relocate people.*



## 4

### A livelihood at risk

#### Roles:

- **Amina:** a fish processor of fish caught through traditional fishing. In two months, she has not been able to process fish because there was none. Three of her sons have tried to reach the Canary Islands in small fishing boats and only one has succeeded: one died in the sea, and the other is missing. (Reading 1)
- **Antón,** the captain of a Spanish ship that has paid the fees Senegal requested but has not been given permission to be able to fish in Senegal. (Reading 1 and 2)

#### Discussion:

- Who are responsible for the lack of fish? Why?
- Whose fish should it be?
- Is there a relationship between the lack of fish and the emigration of young Senegalese to Europe? Why?
- There is a fishing pact. Should there be migratory pacts?
- Should Western countries fish overseas to feed their domestic overconsumption?
- Do such countries (like Spain here) have an obligation to fix the damage they cause? for example by welcoming displaced Senegalese people here?



- How do we protect the environment in less wealthy countries from exploitation by Western or other actors when there is a power/wealth imbalance (e.g.: Senegal needing to trade with Europe)

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### 1. Europe wants Senegal's fish but rejects its migrants

*There are nearly 500 dead, and thousands of survivors on the high seas are young Senegalese who, at the risk of their lives, have been trying to reach Europe in recent months. A human tragedy continues to unfold. And as the tragedy makes news headlines, the fishing sector in Senegal is going through an unprecedented crisis – the Senegalese authorities have just renewed their fishing agreement with the European Union (EU).*

*Since the world's leading fishing powers have emptied their own waters, the problem of industrial overfishing is being exported to distant seas. The European Union made its first bilateral fishing agreement in Africa with Senegal in 1979, and soon afterwards Chinese trawlers and other Asian vessels entered West African waters, many of them operating illegally. Many of the vessels involved in illegal activities in West Africa are operating under flags of convenience. According to the Environmental Justice Foundation, a significant number of these vessels are originally owned by European companies.*

*As the EU begins to repatriate Senegalese migrants back to their land, it continues to exploit the country's fishery resources, the scarcity of which is partly the cause of the despair of thousands of young Senegalese.*

*Greenpeace Africa calls on the EU and Senegalese authorities to address the real causes of this phenomenon in order to find a sustainable solution rather than allowing the situation to worsen by signing this agreement.*

*According to the communiqué of the European Union delegation in Dakar, the new fishing agreement will allow 45 European vessels to fish at least 10,000 tons of tuna and 1,750 tons of black hake per year for financial compensation of 15 million Euros (10 billion FCFA) over five years.*

*It is evident today that the poor management of the fishing resources in Senegal, the agreements signed, and the fishing licenses granted to vessels of foreign origin are largely the cause of these resources' scarcity.*

*"Except for today, in two months we have not been able to process any type of fish. We are very tired," she says. "If it were up to us, we would seek help*





*against these boats. We would seek help to stop their activity and to do everything possible so that we could get fish. There are no fish left. We even sent some of our children on boats to Europe. Some went to Spain, others made it and others didn't," adds Amina, traditional fish processor (..)*

Europe wants Senegal's fish but rejects its migrants - Greenpeace Africa

## **2. Galician boats cannot fish in Senegal despite having paid the license due to the Government's veto**

*In July 2019, Senegal signed a five-year fishing agreement with the E.U. in return for EUR 1.7 million (USD 1.8 million). The payment includes EUR 800,000 (USD 857,000) in cash, with the remaining amount provided to programs that support the country's fisheries management policy.*

*The Spanish Fisheries Confederation (CEPESCA) has accused Senegal of violating an existing five-year fishing protocol it signed with the European Union in July 2019.*

*CEPESCA said the West African country has refused to issue permits to the country's pole-and-line fleet, which has remained moored in the Senegalese port of Dakar since the beginning of 2022. The moored fleet, CEPESCA said, is continuing to accrue operational expenses as the companies pay salaries for sailors and mechanics, port expenses, and licensing fees, despite being unable to earn any income.*

*The confederation called the situation inexplicable, and has urged the European Commission "to unblock the situation urgently and to defend the interests of European fishermen against third countries that, as in this case, and inexplicably, unilaterally breach a fishing agreement with the E.U."*

*The Basque pole-and-line fleet in Senegalese waters, which is represented by Dakartuna, catches skipjack, yellowfin, and bigeye tuna. However, it has not been able to fish regularly for 21 months because the fleet has been prevented "from entering Han Bay and obtaining live bait to fish," CEPESCA said.*

*Senegal Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Economy Alioun Ndoy said the country's 1 January 2022, decision to not issue new licenses to European vessels remained in place. The decision to lock out European vessels from accessing*





Senegalese fishing permits was reaffirmed on 25 March at a meeting of the Joint Commission between Senegal and the E.U. according to CEPESCA.

From [CEPESCA accuses Senegal of denying fishing permits to EU fleet | SeafoodSource](#)

On both sides we have put **profiles of workers, in professions that are increasingly threatened**, although in Senegal the situation is much more precarious than in Galicia. In some ways the **Senegalese fisher folk are a lot more vulnerable than Spanish fishers**, because they depend more directly on their environments and traditional fishers might not have the same level of industrial/technological resources to extract fish, and also because the assistance they can get in the countries they live in are not comparable. It may be worth considering whether western countries should be fishing abroad to feed their over-consumption. And in general, whether **over consuming** countries should have an obligation to redress the damage they cause, for example by welcoming Senegalese people displaced here. There might be migration due to the loss of livelihoods. Is it fair that European people can fish in Senegal and Senegalese people affected by it cannot migrate to Europe? Why are there pacts to fish and not to migrate?

However, it is important to note that there are actors beyond the people who make a living from fishing: large-scale institutional actors, such as the European Union or the Government of Senegal, with **international treaties** on fishing. And another actor is also mentioned, such as China. In this context, questions like the following could be posed: how should we divide up 'control' of oceans? Does the Senegalese government have the right to grant/refuse access to fisheries? And if so, how can we protect the environment in less wealthy countries from exploitation by 'Western' or other actors, when there is a power/wealth imbalance as with Europe/Senegal?



## 4

### Climate Refugees, what does that mean?

The students will be divided into 2 **roles**:

- Advocate for legal recognition of the status of climate refugee in international law and for New Zealand to grant climate refugee visas to those displaced by climate change in the Pacific
- New Zealand government against granting climate refugee visas to Pacific islanders.

#### 1. Who are climate refugees?

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates that between 2008-2020, 283 million people have been displaced by weather-related “disasters” worldwide. More and more, such displacements are being attributed to climate change.

After World War II, the United Nations (UN) was created and established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1951, the UN adopted a Refugee Convention, and a follow-up Protocol in 1967, rooted in the declaration of human rights. The refugee convention established the basis for how “refugee” is defined in international law today: a person who has a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. It is worth noting that the evolution of the legal definition of ‘refugee’ is rooted in history: in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and before, ‘refugees’ who sought asylum in foreign countries were few in number and were often wealthy, high-class elites, fleeing persecution in their own states. They were most frequently political opponents or dissidents, intellectuals, or members of religious minorities. As such, the early definitions of ‘refugee’ did not usually refer to the majority of lower ranking, ‘normal’ people who are displaced by war, disaster, or other events, and most of these people did not have the resources to leave their countries after they were forced from their homes. This is part of the reason why the legal definition of ‘refugee’ is limited to those suffering particular persecution – because it was initially designed in a specific context, for elite people fleeing their countries. In this sense, the legal definition of refugee could be said to be obsolete – but is has evolved since then to protect more people, especially after World War II. However, it still does not cover those fleeing famine, poverty, or environmental



change – and we could argue that this is partly because the original, wealthy ‘refugees’ would not have worried about these issues.

People displaced by economic factors (such as poverty) or environmental disasters do not fall under this definition. However, political circumstances (such as histories of colonialism, war, and oppressive governments) are often inter-related with economic and environmental conditions.

Climate change could have an impact on drought and then on farming. This may mean that people move as the income from their farming declines, and they need to find other work. Are they climate refugees? It could well be that if they had access to other non-farming work nearby that they wouldn’t move. So, is it climate change that has caused them to move? Or is it the fact that their local economy lacks alternative employment?

The Refugee Convention also defines a refugee as someone outside of their country of origin. But a majority of people displaced by climate change-related events are displaced, at least at first, within their own countries.

The concept of climate refugee is difficult to define because the wide-ranging impacts of climate change are hard to measure and predict. Although the UN recognizes the reality of climate change-related displacement, there are currently no protections for climate refugees under international law. Unlike traditional refugees, climate refugees may be sent back to their devastated homeland or forced into a refugee camps.

Climate activists have been demanding that people displaced by the impacts of climate change be called refugees, but the term is highly politicised. Governments around the world fear that by attaching a legally coded label to the problem, they will be held responsible for this new humanitarian crisis.

To make matters more complicated, not everyone likes the term climate refugee. Those who like this term argue that it expands the current definition of refugee to demand rights for more people, and that it is more inclusive of all the factors that cause people to leave their homes—political, economic, and environmental—and how those factors often work together.

Those who dislike this term say that it makes people seem to be powerless victims of climate change, that it is a label often applied by outsiders, and that it assumes an adaptation response to climate change—meaning, an acceptance that relocating people is a solution rather than people obtaining justice on lands that are their home and that they do not want to leave.





The Critical Refugee Studies Collective argues for a more expansive definition of the term “refugee” as follows:

Refugees are human beings forcibly displaced within or outside of their land of origin as a result of persecution, conflict, war, conquest, settler/colonialism, militarism, occupation, empire, and environmental and climate-related disasters, regardless of their legal status. Refugees can be self-identified and are often unrecognized within the limited definitions proffered by international and state laws, hence may be subsumed, in those instances, under other labels.

- What do you think? Could climate refugees be:
- People displaced by immediate environmental factors, such as a hurricane event. Or by slower-moving trends, such as recurring droughts and poor crop returns, or rising sea levels?
- People displaced outside of, or within their own countries, regions, or even towns.
- People who have been colonized or historically left out of the wealth of the developing world, but who face some of climate change’s heaviest impacts?
- Indigenous peoples and communities who have lost their land or who are fighting to protect their land from the interests of oil, mining, tourism, and other extractive industries?
- Migrants who face harsh environmental conditions and environmental racism on their journeys or after resettlement?
- Anyone who identifies themselves as such?

[Who are Climate Refugees? \(climaterefugeestories.com\)](http://climaterefugeestories.com)

## 2. Climate visas for climate refugees – The case of New Zealand

In 2017, New Zealand announced a new humanitarian visa for those displaced by climate change in the Pacific. Then in 2018, it changed tack, abandoning the visa and instead following the priorities of Pacific Island peoples, Nina Hall writes.

In October 2017, the New Zealand Climate Minister, James Shaw, announced a world first: a humanitarian visa for 100 people from the Pacific affected by climate change. The ‘pilot’ visa would enable Pacific islanders who face rising sea levels, salt-water intrusion, and other adverse effects of climate change, to move to New Zealand.

Shaw, also the co-leader of the Green Party, made this announcement in the run-up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change





summit in Bonn to send a clear message to the world: New Zealand will be a leader in tackling the climate crisis and helping those in its region worst affected by climate change.

Since then, media and politicians across the world have taken note of this pioneering policy. It was a breakthrough as no other government has pledged so concretely to assist those displaced directly by climate change.

Moreover, there are no provisions within the 1951 Refugee Convention for those who are forced to flee their homes due to natural disasters, even if the disasters were caused by anthropogenic climate change. This is because the Convention was written in the early days of the Cold War, to assist those fleeing persecution in Europe.

However, fewer commentators took notice when the New Zealand Government announced it would not go ahead with this humanitarian visa.

In August 2018, the Minister for Immigration, Ian Lees-Galloway, announced that the government had no current plans for implementing the experimental visa, but that it would consider its approach to the impacts of climate change in the Pacific in future conversations around immigration policies.

The Green Party immigration spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman explained that a humanitarian visa was not likely to work in the Pacific context. Pacific islanders have regularly expressed their desire for self-determination and a collective solution rather than an individualised visa approach.

In short, the New Zealand government changed its approach to align with Pacific Island countries' desires instead of an outsider perception of what would suit them best.

So, what are the Pacific islands' priorities?

Firstly, Pacific Island countries want to see a drastic cut in greenhouse gas emissions. They have long urged the international community to limit global average temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

It was thanks to their advocacy, working with other developing small island states, that the Paris Agreement even set an aspirational goal of 1.5 degree – although states are officially aiming for 2 degrees Celsius.

More recently, Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama urged Prime Minister Scott Morrison to shift Australia away from fossil fuels. Bainimarama noted that no industry should take priority over the welfare of Pacific peoples and others





affected by climate change. The livelihoods of Fijian farmers, he explained, are already being threatened due to the effects of rising sea levels.

Secondly, many Pacific islanders want to stay in their homes. In 2008, Pacific Island leaders came together to sign the Niue Declaration on climate change. The declaration recognises the importance of preserving Pacific society and culture, as well as peoples' wish to live in their home countries.

The declaration also encourages signatory nations to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Pacific leaders have regularly called on their development partners and regional agencies to channel aid to adaptation efforts in the Pacific and have also pushed for greater funding internationally.

Thirdly, even in the worst-case scenario, Pacific islanders are likely to want 'migration with dignity' and not be forced to flee as refugees. Former President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, has regularly called for countries to open up pathways for migration so that people can choose when they move instead of being treated as refugees.

So, what should other countries do to support Pacific Island countries? Governments and individuals must drastically cut their own carbon emissions.

Governments should also offer adaptation assistance to nations vulnerable to climate change and open up legal pathways for Pacific islanders to migrate.

New Zealand is taking a step in the right direction with its Zero Carbon Bill and an increase in adaptation assistance for the Pacific, but there's much more to do both there and abroad. We can start by carefully listening to and collaborating with those who are most immediately affected by climate change.

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