

# Climate Change Displacement: Mapping the BC Context



This project aims to lay the groundwork for helping British Columbia (BC) prepare for the movement of people to and within the province due to a changing climate.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

A Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) Opportunity Project, Dec 2019-Aug 2020

This short-term scoping project marks the beginning of a partnership between PICS, the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria, and the Climate Migrants and Refugees Project (an NGO in Vancouver, BC). Collectively, these partners will establish a network of relevant partners from governments and society to identify knowledge gaps and develop a research agenda on policy options for climate displacement in BC.

## PROJECT GOALS

1. Establish a network of key partners and interested parties
2. Identify knowledge and information gaps
3. Develop a research agenda related to climate displacement in British Columbia

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Conduct partner analysis - identify relevant partners and their needs, interests, and capacity
2. Create initiative inventory - create list of key climate displacement initiatives
3. Host workshop - convene key partners to discuss information gaps, knowledge needs and policy questions, and develop future research agenda

## PROJECT TEAM



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# **Climate Change & Human Mobility - Background Information**

## **What is the issue?**

Climate change is altering our world. Between 2010 and 2018, more than 23 million people per year were displaced<sup>1</sup> by climate-related sudden-onset events such as wildfires, floods, and storms; and by slow-onset events such as sea-level rise and desertification. These types of events threaten homes, livelihoods, social and cultural resources and health, and may force people to move, either temporarily or permanently, to get out of harm's way.<sup>2</sup> With more frequent climate-driven disruptions forthcoming, now is the time for governments to plan for climate change displacement.

## **Complex connections between climate change and human mobility**

The connections between climate change and human movement are highly complex and context specific.<sup>3</sup> The kind of mobility that we can expect in the context of a changing climate fall along multiple continuums from: temporary to permanent, forced to voluntary, local to international, proactive to responsive, restricted to facilitated.<sup>4</sup> While we can expect an increase in the displacement of people, it is simplistic to assume that climate change will drive mass migration from the Global South to the Global North.<sup>5</sup> We need research that advances knowledge of how climate change will affect the movement of people in and to specific locations.<sup>6</sup> Understanding this diversity of movement is essential to build adaptive capacity.

## **Why does it matter for British Columbia?**

### ***Mobility within BC***

British Columbians face the threat of displacement in the context of a changing climate. The greatest risks to BC are severe wildfire season, seasonal water shortage, heat waves, ocean acidification, glacier loss, and long-term water shortage.<sup>7</sup> But BC is already affected; in 2017, over 65,000 British Columbians were displaced by wildfires, and many more by floods.<sup>8</sup> The province's *Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment for British Columbia* discusses temporary and long-term displacement / migration resulting from risk events and the subsequent impacts on mental health, education, employment, livelihoods, and culture—especially in Indigenous communities.<sup>9</sup> There are therefore direct and indirect impacts on British Columbians who are being displaced or needing to relocate in the short- or long-term because of climate events in BC.

### ***Mobility to BC***

BC is a destination for immigrants from around the world. Although BC is experiencing climate impacts of its own, the province may be relatively well off compared to harder hit and less resilient regions. BC already receives many immigrants from countries which are highly vulnerable to climate change.<sup>10</sup> Research shows that migrants tend to follow existing migration routes.<sup>11</sup> This may result in increased migration from vulnerable areas with already large diasporas in BC. While much of the research to date has been conducted in climate-sensitive sending areas in the Global South,<sup>12</sup> destination areas, such as BC, must start preparing for new forms of human mobility, including within and to the province.

## **What should we do?**

If addressed proactively, there are significant benefits of forward-looking policies and programs compared to ad hoc responses to changing flows of migrants or to extreme weather events. Through this PICS project, *Climate Change Displacement: Mapping the BC Context*, the Centre for Global Studies and the Climate Change Migrants and Refugees Project will develop a research agenda on solutions to the climate displacement challenge. Towards this goal, we will examine areas of practice in BC and comparable jurisdictions. We will identify and mobilize key partners, building a network that can think through BC's pressing needs and knowledge gaps. This will lay the groundwork for the future development of policy options addressing the displacement consequences of climate change both within and to British Columbia.

[1] [IDMC 2019](#)

[2] [IPCC 1990, 2014, 2018](#)

[3] [Klepp 2017](#), [Foresight 2011](#), [McLeman 2014](#)

[4] [Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, Gemenne 2017](#)

[5] [Boas et al. 2019](#)

[6] [Boas et al. 2019](#)

[7] [BC Govt 2019](#)

[8] [BC Govt 2018](#)

[9] [BC Govt 2019](#)

[10] [Statistics Canada, 2017](#)

[11] [De Haas 2010](#), [Krissman 2005](#), [Massey et al. 1993](#), [McLeman 2014](#)

[12] [Boas et al. 2019](#)