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The Economist INTELLIGENCE UNIT

Climate and conflict

Climate change has resulted in

slow-onset changes – notably gradual temperature increases, rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, land and forest degradation, and salinisation. The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are also increasing, including floods, droughts, wildfires and extreme heatwaves.

Climate change is already affecting conflict dynamics and posing a significant obstacle to peace.

In 2017, global warming reached 1°C above pre-industrial levels. Without urgent action, this figure is on track to be 3°C by 2100, with catastrophic consequences (IPCC, 2019).

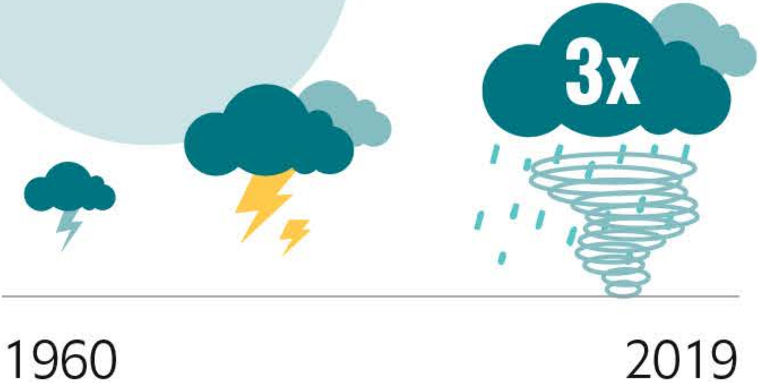
The latest data suggests that 2020 is tied with 2016 as the hottest year on record (Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2021).

2016

and

2020

The number of weather-related natural disasters has tripled since 1960, with the highest number recorded in 2019 (WHO, 2018; EM-DAT, 2019).



The resulting social, economic and political fragility contributes to a vicious cycle, as stifled crop production, increased poverty, and displacement undermine attempts to implement the necessary policy reforms (International Security and Development Center, 2016).

The relationship between climate change, peace and security has implications for all Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2: Zero Hunger; SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities (Migration and Displacement); SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

2 ZERO HUNGER

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

The UN has identified **climate change** as a leading cause of global hunger. It affects food security as changing temperatures, rainfall variability, and more frequent and intense extreme weather events are straining water supplies and reducing crop yields, and causing food prices to rise and be more volatile (FAO, 2020).

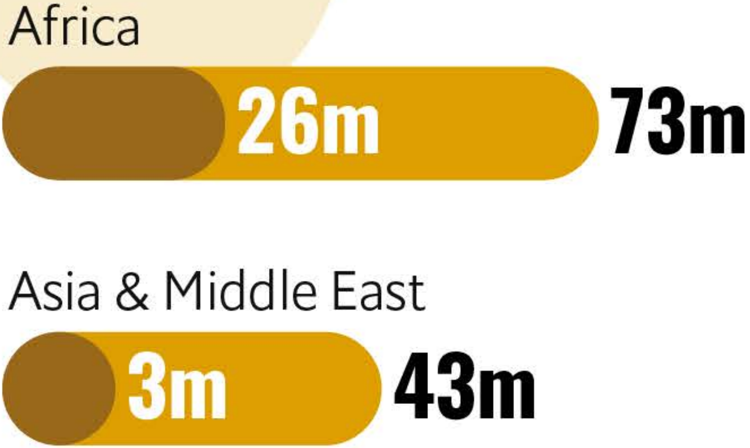
22.4%

25.9%

In 2019, up to 25.9% of the world's population faced moderate or severe levels of food insecurity, up from 22.4% in 2014. This number is **projected to increase**, particularly in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (FAO, 2020).

Of the 73m people pushed into food crises in Africa in 2020, 26m were affected by

weather-related events; in Asia and the Middle East, this figure was 3m of the 43m; and in Latin America, 4.4m of the 18.4m (FSIN, 2020). More than half of all food-insecure people around the world are located in fragile contexts or countries affected by conflict (World Food Programme, 2020).



Latin America

4.4m **18.4m**

- ● Food crises
- ● Weather related

Food insecurity, due in part to higher and volatile food prices, increases competition for resources, aggravates economic grievances, and changes the opportunity costs associated with engaging in conflict (International Security and Development Center, 2016).

Conflict and fragility are in turn among the key drivers of food insecurity, creating a **vicious cycle** and a food insecurity and conflict trap (EIU Food Security Index, 2019).

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

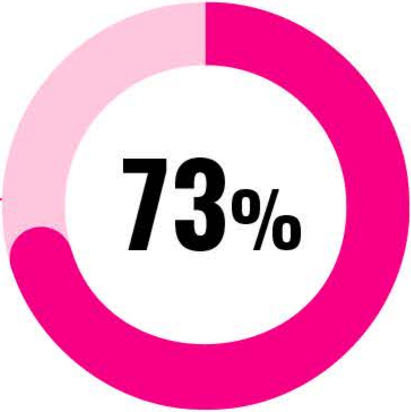
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities (Migration and Displacement)

The effects of **climate change** on food and water availability and crop yields are linked to increases in migration and displacement, as communities – particularly agricultural communities –

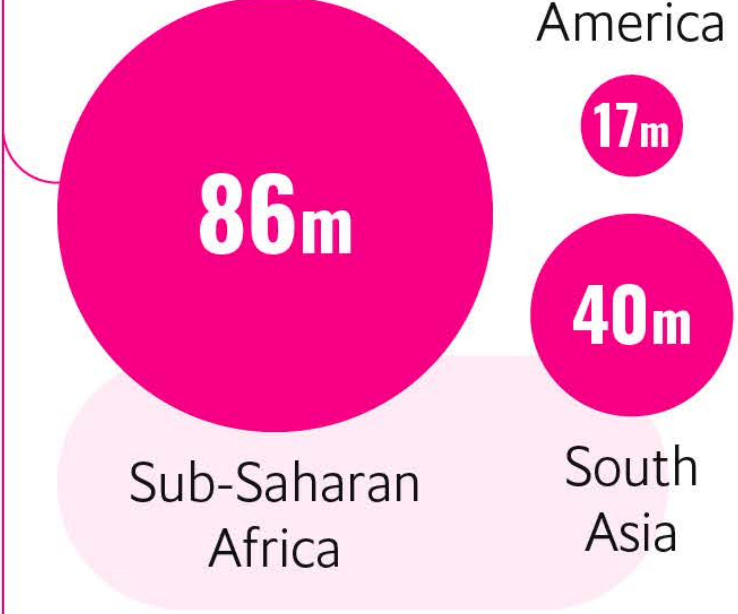
migrate as an "adaptation strategy" (IEP, 2020).

Migration occurs within countries or across borders into neighbouring countries or regions.

Though not all disasters are a product of climate change, in 2019, 73% of new displacements were attributed to climate- or **weather-related disasters** (IOM, 2020).



Latin



By 2050, climate change is estimated to create up to 86m internal migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa, 40m in South Asia, and 17m in Latin America (World Bank, 2018) (ODI, 2017).

Increases in migration and displaced communities can contribute to **conflict** by fuelling competition for resources and undermining the social balances that exist within and between the communities.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities

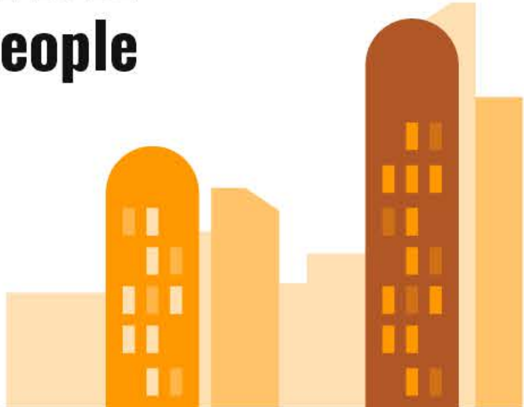
Worsening climate conditions lower rates of agricultural productivity and push rural communities to **migrate to cities** (ADB, 2017).

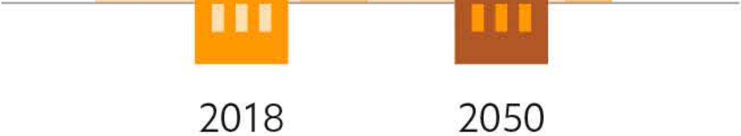
Currently, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, but estimates suggest that 2050 will see additional **2.5 - 3bn**

urban dwellers – almost double the size of China's population (C40, 2018). Of this growth, 90% is expected to take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (UNFCCC, 2017).

~4bn
people

6.5-7bn
people



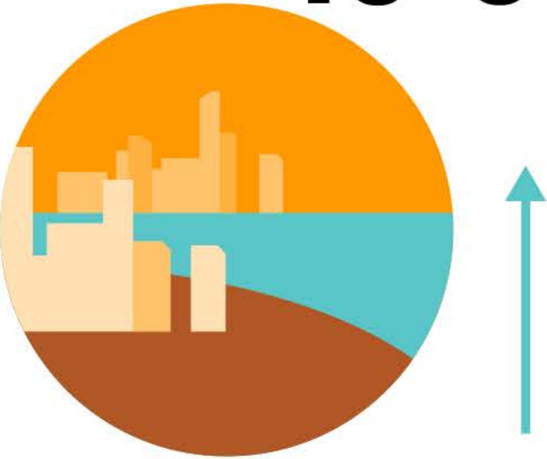


Growing urban centres usher in the potential for conflict. Sharp increases in the number of people puts **pressure on public**

goods and services, especially in secondary cities that lack the investment and infrastructure needed to sustainably cope with a growing population (EIU Safe Cities Index, 2019).

Cities are also vulnerable to climate change. The IPCC predicts that **sea level rise** will range from 43 cm to 84 cm by 2100, with a projected 800m urban inhabitants at risk from the impacts of rising seas and storm surges by 2050 (IPCC, 2019; C40, 2018).

43-84cm



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

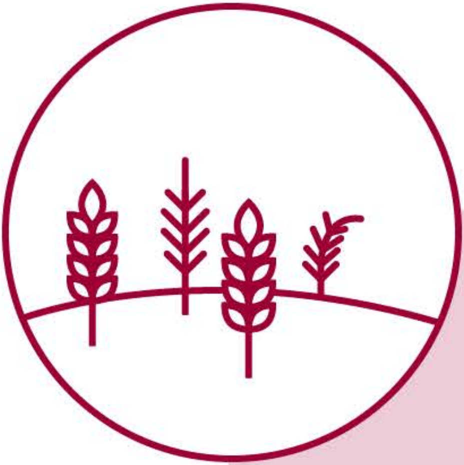
SDG 8: Economic growth and decent jobs

132m

As many as 132m additional people are expected to be living in poverty by 2030 on account of the multiple impacts of climate change; many of these people will be in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2020).

Climate change undermines inclusive economic growth.

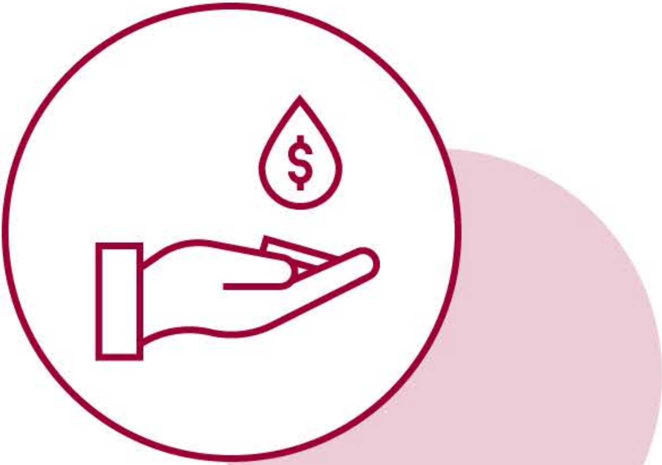
It disproportionately affects developing economies and, in particular, poorer communities within these economies (EIU Climate Change Resilience, 2019). This is because poorer-quality infrastructure and housing makes these countries less climate-resilient.



Additionally, developing economies tend to depend heavily on agriculture, a sector which feels the climatic effects of slow-onset changes and extreme weather events particularly acutely (EIU Climate Change Resilience, 2019).

20%
of GDP

Research shows that if current warming rates continue, lower-income countries could lose up to 20% of their country incomes by the late 21st century (Hsiang, et al., 2017).



Climate change thereby worsens conditions of poverty, particularly in countries where poverty is already prevalent, further exacerbating their fragility.

Conclusion

Climate change disrupts where people live, what they can eat, and how they earn a living. Limiting the warming of the planet also means limiting the number of lives affected by climate-generated fragility and conflict. Effective climate adaptation and building resilience are therefore closely tied to effective peace-building and our progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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