



In the future, climate change will force more and more people to leave their homes, but the term "climate refugees" is not an internationally recognized term. National legislation in most countries does not take climate factors into account when granting asylum.

Last week the asylum bid of Ioane Teitiota, a 37-year-old man from the small island state Kiribati, was rejected in New Zealand. Teitiota said he was trying to escape rising seas and environmental risks caused by global warming in his home country.

New Zealand's High Court ruled that his claim fell short of the legal criteria for asylum, such as fear of persecution or threats to his life.

The [United Nations refugee convention](#) does not provide long-term legal protection to refugees due to environmental change.

The [International Organization for Migration](#) [defines](#) environmental migrants as “persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”

The Nordic countries are somewhat an exception in dealing with climate refugees. Finland and Sweden are the only countries in the world that include environmental migrants as “persons otherwise in need of protection” in their official state immigration and asylum policy. Denmark does not refer to environmental migrants in its official asylum policy, but it has adopted a pragmatic approach. For example 31 refugees from Afghanistan fleeing drought were granted asylum in 2001.

Despite the legislation, the number of climate refugees in Nordic countries has so far remained marginal. Finland has acknowledged environmental factors when granting asylum to some African refugees, but not granted asylum solely for environmental reasons, said Esko Repo, Asylum Director of The Finnish Migration Service in an interview with [Helsingin Sanomat](#).

Environmental factors have long had an impact on global migration flows, as people have historically left places with harsh or deteriorating conditions.

However, the scale of migration flows, both internal and cross-border, is expected to rise as a result of accelerated climate change. The rising amount of migrants can have unprecedented impacts on lives and livelihoods.

Future forecasts vary from 25 million to 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050. The most widely cited estimate is around 200 million. This figure equals the current estimate of international migrants worldwide.

