



CLIMATE CHANGE  
LOCAL ADAPTATION  
PATHWAYS

# SHIFTING GROUNDS

Telling the Climate Migration Story in India



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## **Shifting Grounds: Telling the Climate Migration Story in India**

July 2025

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# Endorsements



This is a must-read for anyone reporting on climate and migration in India (and beyond). It uses clear explanations, useful definitions, and a wealth of additional resources to show how evidence-based storytelling can move us towards more inclusive and responsible reporting on climate and migration.

**Saffron O'Neill**

Co-Director, Centre for Climate  
Communication and Data Science (C3DS)  
University of Exeter

Climate uncertainties fuelling migration are seemingly simple but complex stories to tell with cross-cutting themes of caste, gender, policy among others. Unpacking these with the right terminology is important for these stories to speak to policy, invoke sharper interventions. Towards that end, this guide is a crucial tool.

**Roli Srivastava**

Founder  
The Migration Story





There is a new set of stories waiting to be told on climate change and migration. And they need to be told urgently. This report provides detailed evidence on current narratives and how we can reframe those future stories. They need to be based on evidence and need to be inclusive of diverse voices and experiences: this report shows the way.

**Neil Adger**

Professor of Human Geography  
University of Exeter

Climate change is impacting every aspect of peoples' lives and livelihoods. This guide provides practical and evidence-based ideas on how we can develop powerful stories to capture this. This is a key step in aligning bottom up experiences with policy priorities on climate change adaptation. This is also an important step in layering up complex processes and assessing its implications.

**Amir Bazaz**

Head – Infrastructure and Climate  
Indian Institute for Human Settlements



# 1. Introduction

Climate change is increasingly reshaping migration across South Asia, a region highly vulnerable to both sudden-onset disasters such as floods, cyclones, wildfires, and slow-onset changes like rising sea levels, desertification, and coastal erosion. Extreme weather is already displacing people in India.

In 2024, 5.4 million people were displaced in the country, mostly due to floods and cyclones.<sup>1</sup>



Migration is not just a response to climate change-related extreme events and disasters. It is often a strategy for survival, managing risk, and adapting.<sup>2</sup> People move for many interconnected reasons—climate pressures, economic hardships, employment opportunities, social networks, and government policies. Some relocate permanently, while others migrate temporarily or seasonally, often in search of work. Increasingly, people are migrating to cities and towns, to supplement incomes. However, urban destinations are not always prepared<sup>3</sup> to receive large numbers of migrants, leading to challenges in housing, employment, and social services.<sup>4</sup>

**Climate migration is complex and underreported in India.** For journalists, it presents both opportunities and challenges. Many stories oversimplify climate migration, reducing migrants to either helpless victims or threats. But most people move by choice and contribute to both origin and destination communities.

**Responsible, evidence-based reporting can challenge stereotypes, highlight systemic drivers, and add depth to public and policy debates.**

Journalists and communications professionals, often struggle to access reliable data, research, and resources to support their reporting. Understanding climate science, migration patterns, and attributing movement to climate factors remains difficult. Further, most existing guides and frameworks focus on cross-border movement and not internal mobility that is dominant in India.



Wayanad saw severe landslides in 2018 that damaged infrastructure and affected livelihoods. People relocated from landslide-affected regions take longer to recover since identification of new land that suits both the government, and the people takes more time than anticipated. Additionally, people who have been relocated often face new vulnerabilities such as the lack of economic opportunity and loss of community.  
Image by Yashodara Udupa



This guide aims to address these challenges. It encourages narratives to move beyond reactive coverage and place migration within broader structural and policy contexts, helping audiences understand who moves, why, and what solutions exist.

Drawing on IIHS research from the Climate Adaptation Local Adaptation Pathways or [CLAPs](#)<sup>5</sup> project, this guide seeks to build connections between media, communications professionals, and researchers to strengthen public understanding, inform policy, and counter misinformation on climate migration.

The CLAPs project examines climate change adaptation in India to understand current challenges and limits that climate change poses on development. The project is generating evidence from Odisha, Karnataka, and Kerala on changing livelihoods and migration choices, to inform inclusive and climate-resilient policies and interventions.



Between 2020 and 2022, Ramayapatnam lost three lanes of houses to coastal erosion.

Yet members of the Noliya fishing community continue to live along the shore. An elderly woman sun-drying her fish said, “The sea is equivalent to our gods, and it is impossible to survive away from the coast.”

Image by S J Hemant Kumar

## Why Reporting on Climate Change and Migration Matters

**Climate migration is not a future crisis; it is unfolding now.**

Yet, the media often underrepresents this growing reality. The issue is not just about numbers; it is about people. Every statistic reflects a lived story— a displaced farmer, an uprooted family, or a worker seeking a new livelihood. Journalism plays a vital role in making these stories visible, challenging misconceptions and influencing policy.

## Good reporting can

- Explain how climate events make regions uninhabitable and livelihoods more precarious.
- Track progress on effective and inclusive climate adaptation strategies and migration policies.
- Bring migrant voices into the public and policy discussions with empathy, presenting them as individuals, not just as statistics or stereotypes.
- Counter misinformation by addressing myths about migrants by showing the structural drivers of their movement and drawing attention to their contributions to destination areas.
- Highlight the need for cooperation across states on climate and migration.
- Mobilise support for humanitarian action and sustainable choices by connecting audiences emotionally and factually to the issue.



## Why this Guide?

As climate change reshapes lives, migration is increasingly a strategy to diversify livelihoods and incomes. Reporting on climate-induced migration requires understanding climate science and how climate impacts shape how people live, earn, cope and prosper. Ethical reporting must also ensure dignity and consent of migrants and avoid stereotypes and biases. While international migration has received attention and institutional focus, internal migration linked to climate change remains under-researched and underreported.<sup>6</sup>

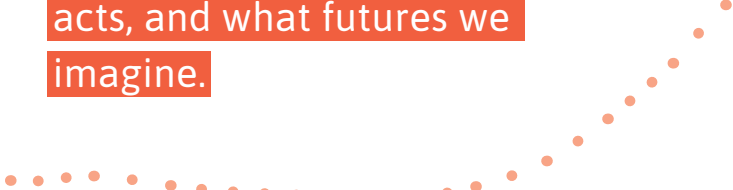
This guide on climate change and internal migration supports journalists, communicators, and photojournalists in India to navigate reporting challenges, and produce accurate and well-researched stories.

It includes:

- Quick reference on climate change and internal migration— key concepts, common myths, and misconceptions
- Global and national trends in climate migration reporting
- Review of climate migration coverage in India and insights from senior editors and journalists
- Tools for fact-checking and data verification
- Guidance for ethical, human-centred storytelling
- Resources to frame climate migration within structural, social, and policy contexts

The way we tell stories matters.

It decides who listens, who acts, and what futures we imagine.



# 2. Understanding Climate Migration



# What is Climate Change?

Climate change is a complex, rapidly evolving subject with its own terms and frameworks.

To report it accurately, climate literacy is essential.

## Physical system

Meteorology covers short-term weather. Climate science tracks long-term changes seen in heatwaves, floods, cyclones, and droughts. These changes and events are one part of the story.

## Risks and Impacts

Risks posed by climate change and its impacts on human, social, and ecological systems are a big part of the story. While extreme events often dominate headlines, strong reporting looks beyond frequency and intensity (e.g., a heat wave lasted for 5 days and touched 48°C) to examine *who* is exposed and *how* underlying vulnerabilities shape overall risk.

## Action

Climate change is also about action, mitigation (how we reduce greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (how we reduce harm from climate change). These subfields within climate change are crucial when designing stories about it.

**1**

## FIRST PRINCIPLE

Examine and report climate change as a system of interacting components – the physical system of extreme events (hazard, risk); the story of vulnerability and reducing harm (i.e., adaptation to risk); and the urgency of mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions).



### Using the right terms

Climate change has its own vocabulary. Accurate reporting depends on using the correct terms. For example, risk and impact are often used interchangeably but have distinct meanings in climate science. Similarly, it is important to distinguish:

- climate change (multi-decadal change typically over 30 years)
- climate variability (more short-term changes from year to year)
- weather (daily, weekly changes in weather variables)

### Attribution

When covering extreme events, ask whether the causes are due to human-induced climate change (anthropogenic), or non-climatic factors like poor planning or weak infrastructure. Many events involve both, and a nuanced approach reflects this complexity.

For more guidance: [World Weather Attribution Guide](#).<sup>7</sup>

## 2

## SECOND PRINCIPLE

Accurate climate reporting depends on understanding and using the correct climate change terms and taking a transparent approach towards climate attribution.



### Reporting beyond immediate events

News focuses on the here and now, with disasters and extreme events dominating headlines. But climate reporting must also track long-term, systemic changes. For example, while reporting on the links between climate change and migration, reporting must go beyond flood-related displacement to also explore slow-onset changes like desertification or groundwater depletion that drive migration over time. Good stories further connects these to broader policy, governance, and planning issues, asking not just *what happened*, but *why*, *under what conditions*, and *what needs to change*.

**Diversifying expert voices:** Effective climate change stories need diverse expertise, depending on the nature of the stories. When developing a narrative ask whether your story focuses on the problem, the solution, or both—and consult experts accordingly:

- Affected communities (rarely considered as experts) on the frontlines of climate change, who hold experiential knowledge.
- Local leaders, trade unions, community organisations, local representatives who speak for broader populations, and point to impacts and solutions that meet a specific group's needs.
- Meteorologists and climate scientists (commonly sourced and quoted) who work on climate modelling, hazards, and extreme events.
- Adaptation and mitigation experts who work in the solutions space across sectors such as agriculture, water, transport, and forestry, and disciplines like economics, political science, geography, development studies, urban studies, and gender studies.

Always consider: Whose voices are included? Whose expertise is missing?

## 3 THIRD PRINCIPLE

Tell evidence-based, persuasive stories. Strong stories combine data, diverse voices, and nuanced representations of loss and damage. They centre dignity, expose injustices, and bring complex realities to life.

Not every story needs a personal lead, but compelling narratives help audiences engage.

# What is Migration?

Migration is often framed as a crisis or a choice—but the reality is more complex.

Understanding migration means recognising the multiple drivers and systems that influence who moves, how, and under what conditions.

Migration can be seasonal or permanent, internal or cross-border. In India, internal migration dominates, with nearly a third of the population<sup>8</sup> moving within or across states for reasons including economic stress, work, environmental degradation, and social factors. Often, these drivers overlap. Movements in India are mostly rural–rural and rural–urban, though urban–urban and urban–rural flows also exist. Marriage drives much female migration, while labour migration is largely male, with men moving from rural areas to cities in search of work. In this guide, we focus on labour migration.

According to Ajeevika Bureau<sup>9</sup>, around 140 million rural poor migrate seasonally to cities, industries, and farms, often taking up informal work in construction, manufacturing, services, and agriculture. Much of this movement occurs from poorer states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand to more affluent states such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Maharashtra. Climate-related migration sits within this larger web of mobility.

Labour migrants from Tamil Nadu to Kochi, Kerala. Incomes from rainfed agriculture in dryland ecosystems are becoming more uncertain. Rainfall is becoming more variable, drought is a recurring hazard. This is driving outmigration to cities like Kochi where some migrants have spent an entire lifetime, working as daily wage workers. Image by Chandni Singh





## Reporting on this subject requires climate migration literacy.

To be climate migration literate, it is essential to understand certain key aspects, unpacked below:

### 1 FIRST PRINCIPLE

Climate migration is a process, not a one-time event.

- Climate migration involves multiple pressures. Reporting should explore who moves and why, whether the move is temporary or permanent, and who is left behind due to poverty or lack of support.
- Social identity shapes migration experiences. Caste, gender, and class affect who moves, how they move, and what risks they face. For example, men often migrate alone, leaving women with increased responsibilities in climate-stressed areas. But men of certain castes are locked into certain types of work, intensifying their precarity and lack of choice.
- Just as with climate change, migration has a specific vocabulary. Using correct terms is important: displacement (forced movement, often disaster-linked), migration (voluntary or seasonal moves), and trapped populations (unable to move despite rising risks).
- Avoid framing climate migration solely as a failure or tragedy. Climate migration is often a practical, adaptive strategy—it helps people manage risk and seek out livelihoods—though often shaped by deep inequality. Some decisions to move or stay are voluntary, sometimes, they are forced.

### 2 SECOND PRINCIPLE

Migration is a lens into both vulnerability and resilience.

- Migration shows people's vulnerability (their inability to cope with environmental change) and resilience (efforts to find better opportunities). Strong reporting explores both these dimensions and looks beyond crisis events to long-term shifts.
- Consider how climate hazards interact with existing vulnerabilities. For example, ask what drives mobility — Are cyclical droughts pushing farmers to cities? Is coastal erosion displacing communities? Are landlessness and debt worsened by droughts?
- Migration experts include academics and demographers across various fields like human geography, sociology, labour and development studies, and climate change and disaster research. Expertise also comes from trade union leaders, NGO staff, and local officials. Migrants themselves are key experts as their lived experiences offer essential insights into how people navigate risk and make decisions on the ground.
- Stories on climate-linked migration combines official data (Census, NSSO) with fieldwork, NGO reports and migrant testimonies. Recognise gaps in official data on seasonal or short-term movement. Examine how policies include or exclude migrants—many seasonal migrants in India remain outside urban housing and welfare systems.

### 3 THIRD PRINCIPLE

Migration is a development and justice issue.

- Migration intersects with development, rights, and justice. Ask: who benefits, who is excluded, and whether policy responses reflect migrant needs. Are migrants included in climate change policies and projects? Are remittances supporting resilience at home and in what ways?
- Intersecting identities—caste, class, gender—shape both decisions to migrate and conditions after migration. For further data and context, see the work of organisations like Aajeevika Bureau, India Migration Now, and the Gram Vikas, Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, and Jan Sahas. These resources can help ground reporting in lived realities, and guide journalists toward underreported geographies and populations.



# Words Matter

## Using the Right Terms in Climate Migration Stories

Reporters often encounter confusion around key terms related to climate migration.

This section clarifies core terms and concepts in climate change and migration.

### 1 RISK AND IMPACT

**Risk** refers to the potential for adverse consequences from the interaction of climate-related or geophysical hazards with vulnerable human or ecological systems. It is forward-looking and uncertain, based on likelihood and severity.  
 Example: There is a 50% risk of a once-in-100-years flood affecting 20% area of Mumbai.

**Impact** refers to the observed and experienced consequences of a hazardous event — observed effects that may be positive or negative, direct or indirect.  
 Example: In 2015, inland flooding caused damages of 300 billion rupees.

The key difference is in temporality, i.e., risk is about what could happen, it is a probability; impact is about what has happened.

### 2 HAZARD AND DISASTER

A **hazard** is a process or event — such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, or human activities like war or industrial accidents — that may cause harm including loss of life, damage to property, environmental degradation.

Example: Extreme heat, that is high temperatures over a prolonged period, is a growing hazard across India.

A **disaster** occurs when a hazard strikes vulnerable communities that are unable to cope or recover. Disasters are not purely natural; they reflect social, political, economic, and environmental conditions that shape vulnerability and exposure.

Example: Heatwaves turn into disasters once they have an impact on human mortality (deaths) and morbidity (stress).

Framing disasters as ‘natural’ masks the role of human decisions, governance failures, and structural inequalities in creating risk. Replacing it with ‘disaster caused by natural hazards’ makes clear that disasters are socially generated and unequally experienced. Also see the [#NoNaturalDisasters campaign by UNDRR](#).<sup>10</sup>

## 3

## CLIMATE CHANGE, CLIMATE VARIABILITY AND WEATHER

These three terms differ in timescales across which the changes are tracked.

**Weather** refers to short-term atmospheric conditions — temperature, humidity, wind, precipitation, and pressure — that can change within minutes, hours, or days.

**Climate** describes long-term patterns of these conditions, typically averaged over 30 years (as per the World Meteorological Organization). It includes interactions across the atmosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere, and is influenced by geographic factors like location, altitude, land use, and proximity to water. The Köppen climate classification system<sup>11</sup> is a common method for classifying climate types based on temperature and rainfall.

**Climate variability** describes natural variations in climate conditions beyond individual events, over weeks to decades.

**Climate change** refers to long-term shifts in climate patterns beyond natural variability. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as caused by both natural processes and by human activity, while the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change defines climate change as alterations to global atmospheric composition caused directly or indirectly by human activity, in addition to natural variability.

## 4

## DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

**Displacement** is a forced movement from usual residence, within or across borders, due to sudden or progressive changes in environment or living conditions, including conflicts, disasters, or climate-related impacts. It is characterised by lack of choice and greater vulnerability.

**Example:** In Assam, floods displace people every year, and in 2024, these displacements were estimated at 2.5 million people.

**Migration** is a movement away from usual place of residence, within or across borders, for any reason ranging from economic opportunities to conflict and with varying degrees of choice.

**Example:** Assam also has a large population of migrants — 4.59 lakhs within the state and 6.59 lakhs migrating to other states — according to the 2011 Census.

The main difference lies in agency: migration involves some degree of decision-making; displacement involves compulsion.



## 5

## CLIMATE MIGRANTS, CLIMATE REFUGEES AND TRAFFICKING

**Climate migrants** are people who move, temporarily or permanently, due to climate-related factors such as rising sea levels, extreme heat, floods, or droughts. Such movement is rarely caused by climate change alone, but by a complex mix of environmental stress, livelihood loss, and governance gaps. Most climate migrants move within their own country or region rather than across borders.

The term ‘**climate refugees**’ has no legal standing under international or Indian laws. While widely used in media, it inaccurately suggests that those displaced by climate impacts are entitled to protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which applies only to persecution based on specific grounds. India’s legal framework does not recognise cross-border arrivals due to environmental factors as grounds for refugee status.

**Trafficking** involves recruiting, transporting, transferring, or harbouring people by coercion, deception or abuse of vulnerability, for purposes of exploitation. Climate-related disasters in India, such as floods in Bihar or cyclones in West Bengal, have increased risks of trafficking displaced communities, which have lost homes, income, and support systems.

## 6

## DISTRESS, LABOUR AND ASPIRATIONAL MIGRATION

**Distress migration** happens when people are forced to move due to hardship — such as crop failure, debt, disasters, or violence — often as a survival response. The IPCC notes that climate impacts can intensify distress migration, especially in vulnerable rural areas with limited options. In India, seasonal distress migration is common from drought-prone Bundelkhand or flood-affected Bihar, where families take up insecure, low-wage work mostly out of compulsion.

**Labour migration** involves people moving for employment to improve livelihoods, often seasonally or long-term. It can be voluntary and often follows known patterns, such as rural-to-urban or inter-state migration within India’s informal economy. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (1979) offers some protections, but enforcement remains uneven, and many migrants fall outside formal labour laws.

**Aspirational migration** is driven by the pursuit of education, career growth, or better living standards, reflecting greater agency and future planning. It is more common among young people with some access to resources and networks.

While distress, labour, and aspirational migration often overlap in practice, they differ in the degree of choice, vulnerability, and opportunity involved. A household may experience all three over time—shifting from distress to labour and eventually aspirational movement as circumstances change.



## 7

## TRAPPED, STAYING BEHIND/IMMOBILE, LEFT BEHIND POPULATION

Migration research has long focussed on those who move. But not everyone moves—some choose to stay back, others are forced to. This act of staying back has led to growing attention on *immobility*.

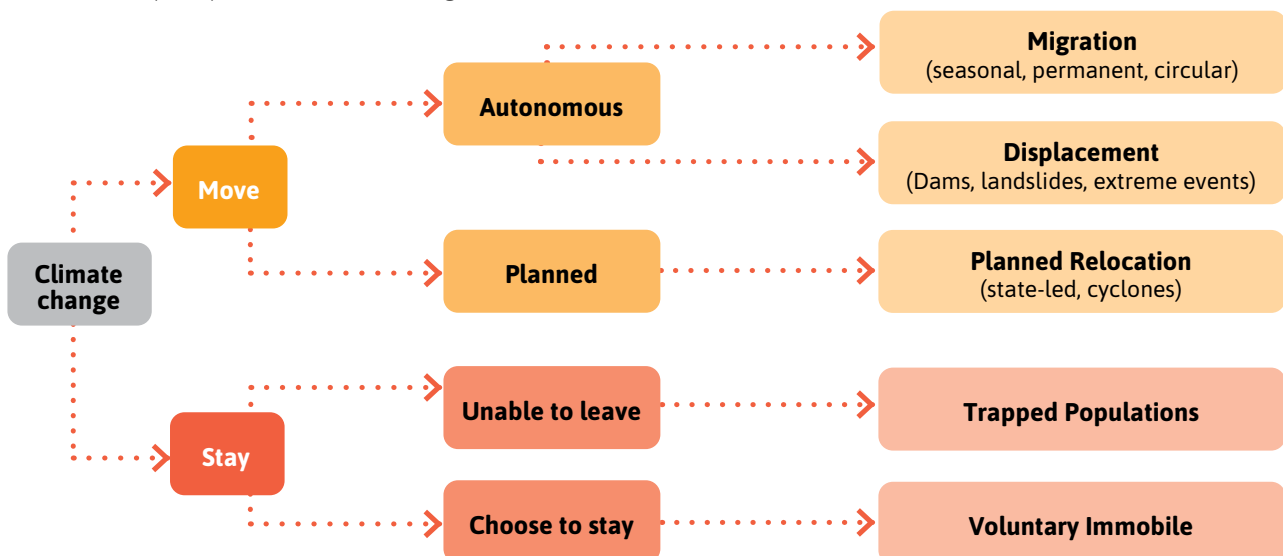
**Trapped populations** are those unable to move despite living in high-risk areas, making them more vulnerable to environmental shocks and poverty. International Organisation on Migration (IOM) defines trapped populations as those who “do not migrate yet are situated in areas under threat...”. In India, much of the existing research on trapped populations comes from the Sundarbans, though more evidence is needed from other climate hotspots.

Some argue that trapped populations also face loss and damage by climate change, but this is not uniformly acknowledged in climate policy such as the 2013 Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage.

**Staying behind** or **Immobile** refers to people who choose to stay in their place of residence over a significant period of time. Like migration, immobility involves deliberate decisions to stay, not simply lack of option to move.

The **left behind** are individuals within a household or people within a community, who do not move despite wanting to. In India, researchers and reporters use this term in reference to women, whose male family members move for work. However, some criticise this framing as erasing agency and overlooking calculated decisions taken to stay behind. In many cases, women (and men) stay to care for children or elders, manage farms, preserve community ties, or maintain livelihoods.

When reporting on those who stay, language matters. If staying is a choice, terms like staying or immobile are more accurate and respectful than trapped or left behind.



## 8

## CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION: MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

Climate action includes two broad approaches: mitigation and adaptation.

**Mitigation** refers to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through measures such as transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and implementing carbon capture technologies. In India, various mitigation measures are being implemented such as subsidies for electric vehicles, tree planting to sequester (store) carbon, or setting up solar and wind farms.

**Adaptation** refers to reducing risks from climate change through adjustments in human and natural systems. In India, common adaptation measures include infrastructural solutions like building seawalls to minimise risk from sea-level rise, nature-based solutions like tree planting for shade during heatwaves, informational solutions like early warning systems for extreme weather, and agrometeorological advisories to help farmers plan crops. Adaptation is forward-looking and long-term unlike coping, which is more reactive and short-term.

## 9

## WOMEN MIGRANTS

Women form a large share of internal migrants in India, but much of their mobility is recorded as marriage migration, which hides their economic roles. Women's labour migration is seen largely in informal/semi-formal, undervalued sectors like domestic work, construction, and textiles, where they face low wages, poor conditions, and limited legal protection.

At the same time, growing numbers of single women (unmarried, divorced, widowed) are migrating independently, seeking work, dignity, and survival. Many women also head households while men migrate, however, still face barriers to land rights, credit, access and institutional support.

Women left behind are not passive. While taking on care and agricultural work, they also assume greater decision-making roles within their households and communities.

Climate change can both deepen gender inequalities, especially where mobility is restricted, and catalyse shifts, opening up new opportunities for women to take up income-earning or leadership roles. Women's experiences — as workers, decision-makers, and survivors — must be central to understanding migration.



## 10 REMITTANCES

**Remittances** are financial or in-kind transfers that migrants send home to support family expenses, education, healthcare, or small investments. In India, internal migrants send significant amounts annually and several studies show that these remittances are quite large. For example, labour migrants remit INR 35 crore annually to Daringbadi block<sup>12</sup>.

Beyond money, researchers are now also highlighting **cultural remittances**, which include ideas, behaviours, and practices that migrants bring home — such as changes in house designs, clothing styles, or food habits. For instance, South Asian migrants returning from the Middle East have influenced clothing norms, Odia migrants bring back construction styles from South India. Remittances are often used as indicators of

migration's impact. But analyses should consider both financial and cultural remittances and examine who benefits and how these resources are used.

Women working at construction sites are rarely provided with essential protective equipment such as safety belts, helmets, and shoes, putting their safety at serious risk. The lack of on-site toilet facilities forces them to refrain from eating or drinking adequate amounts of water so that they can resist the urge to use the toilet. Prolonged exposure to heat, dust, and cement further increases their vulnerability to health hazards.

Image by Sumit Sute



## Correcting Common Misconceptions on Climate Migration

### MYTH 1

### Climate migrants will flood wealthier countries

**FACT:** Most climate and labour migration happens within countries or nearby regions. Proximity, cost, cultural ties, and economic links shape migration patterns. Poor and marginalised groups, often the most vulnerable to climate impacts, rarely have the resources to move far. The framing of climate migration as a security threat lacks evidence.

EXAMPLE: After Cyclone Aila in 2009, many people from India's Sundarbans region moved temporarily or seasonally to Kerala, Mumbai, Gujarat and Odisha.

### MYTH 2

### Climate migrants are economic opportunists

**FACT:** While some migrants seek better jobs, climate migration is often an adaptation strategy driven by environmental stressors like drought, salinisation or land degradation that leave no viable alternatives.

EXAMPLE: In drought-hit Maharashtra (India), farmers migrate seasonally to Mumbai or Pune for construction work.

**MYTH 3****Climate migrants are only victims**

**FACT:** Climate migrants face significant hardships, both at source and destination, but they also demonstrate resilience. Many adapt by acquiring new skills, building alternative livelihoods, and engaging in collective action.

EXAMPLE: In Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand, two remote villages, Khati and Wachham, are thriving through eco-tourism, farming, and herb-collection, despite changing climate and economic conditions in mountains.

**MYTH 4****Only people in poor rural areas are affected by climate migration**

**FACT:** While rural communities are often on the frontlines of climate impacts, cities also face growing risks. Migrants in low-income urban settlements are highly exposed to heat and floods, and are more vulnerable due to limited access to urban infrastructure and social services.

EXAMPLE: In Mumbai, rising sea levels have pushed families from coastal areas to resource-poor inland settlements.

**MYTH 5****The obvious choice under climate stress is to migrate**

**FACT:** Migration decisions are shaped by social, financial, cultural, and emotional factors. Some cannot afford to move; others stay because of strong ties to land and community. Gender roles and caste norms also shape who moves and who stays.

**EXAMPLE:** In Kerala, many coastal families stay back despite erosion and flooding to continue traditional livelihoods like fishing.

**MYTH 6****Men and women are equally affected by climate migration**

**FACT:** Climate migration has gendered impacts. Men often move for work, leaving women to manage households, care work, and farming. Women face increased risks of violence, exploitation, and economic marginalisation during displacement. At the same time, men too face adverse impacts when they enter low-paying precarious jobs, or live in unsafe climate-vulnerable housing.

**EXAMPLE:** In the Sundarbans, women manage household (reproductive care work) and livelihood duties (productive wage earning) after male migration, bearing a double and sometimes triple burden with added climate stress.

**MYTH 7****Climate migration affects all social groups equally**

**FACT:** Climate impacts and choices to move are deeply unequal. Historically marginalised communities, particularly Dalits and Adivasis in South Asia, are more likely to live in environmentally vulnerable areas, have fewer resources, and face discrimination in relief and recovery efforts. Caste, gender, age, and livelihoods influence who can move or migrate to reduce climate risk, and who is unable to adapt through migration.

EXAMPLE: In Odisha's Kendrapara district, Dalit families were last to receive cyclone relief after Cyclone Fani. In Tamil Nadu, post-tsunami aid often excluded Dalit coastal fishers. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana's brick kilns, Dalit migrants face lower wages than their counterparts and face social segregation in living arrangements.

**MYTH 8****Climate migration is always a crisis**

**FACT:** Sudden disasters can trigger crisis-driven displacement, but many forms of climate migration are strategic, proactive decisions to reduce risk, secure better income, or access better housing and education. Migration, especially when undertaken voluntarily, can serve as an adaptation strategy.

EXAMPLE: Across semi-arid India (from Rajasthan to Tamil Nadu, Gujarat to Andhra Pradesh), drought and water scarcity limits cropping seasons and agricultural yields. To counter this, many families take up seasonal work in large cities to maintain household income and stability. This allows households to 'spread' risk across different locations, rotating between job opportunities in source and destination.

**MYTH 9****All climate migrants are displaced by sudden disasters**

**FACT:** Many climate migrants move due to slow-onset changes such as drought, soil degradation, and changing rainfall patterns. These environmental stressors often build gradually, prompting families to move before a crisis point is reached.

EXAMPLE: In Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa district, erratic rainfall and extended dry periods have led to seasonal migration. Even without major floods or extreme events, many are migrating to nearby towns for work when their crops fail.

**MYTH 10****Relocation always reduces risks and improves lives**

**FACT:** Vulnerable groups — such as informal settlers, landless labourers, and marginalised communities — are often excluded from relocation schemes due to lack of documentation or legal land titles. Even when relocated, communities often face social tensions with host populations due to competition over resources, cultural differences, or unequal access to services. Integration into new environments is often difficult, especially for displaced groups facing discrimination and limited support.

EXAMPLE: In Odisha, coastal fishing families were relocated inland to escape rising seas but struggled to find alternative work. In Assam, some relocated families were resettled in flood-prone areas again due to poor site selection.

**MYTH 11****Relocation is accessible to all and leads to easy social integration**

**FACT:** Vulnerable groups — such as informal settlers, landless labourers, and marginalised communities — are often excluded from relocation schemes due to lack of documentation or legal land titles. Even when relocated, communities often face social tensions with host populations due to competition over resources, cultural differences, or unequal access to services. Integration into new environments is often difficult, especially for displaced groups facing discrimination and limited support.

**EXAMPLE:** In Bihar, informal settlers living on riverbanks were excluded from flood relocation programmes because they lacked legal land titles. In Maharashtra, drought-affected families relocated to peri-urban areas faced discrimination and struggled to integrate into new neighbourhoods.

# 3. Climate Migration Reporting in Media



The media plays a critical role in shaping public understanding, influencing opinion, setting agendas, and informing policy.

In the case of climate migration—a complex and evolving issue—how stories are framed shapes public narratives, influencing both perception and political response.

Framing refers to how media structures information: what is emphasised, what is left out, and how stories are told. Narratives are the recurring themes that emerge from this framing. Together, they shape how climate migration is understood, with real consequences for policy, governance, and the lives of migrants.

## Global Trends in Media Coverage of Climate Change and Migration

Research shows that global media coverage<sup>13</sup> of migration is often more negative than positive. More important than the tone is the framing. In many high-income countries, media often presents migration as a security or law-and-order issue, with migrants linked to illegality or crime. **Another dominant frame casts migrants as economic and cultural burdens, fuelling an “us vs. them” mindset<sup>14</sup> that portrays them as threats to identity, jobs, and safety in host countries.**

**Language used in narratives that come from such frames is often dehumanising, with migrants described as ‘floods’, ‘swarms’, and ‘waves’, signalling overwhelming forces of disruption.** Migrant voices and their contributions are largely absent in these stories.

Similarly, climate-induced migration tends to be framed through a **lens of crisis**, portraying it as a looming disaster that threatens societal stability. Media narratives focus on projected migration

numbers, prioritising scale over context. In these stories, migrants are often homogenised, lacking political, social or geographic nuance, reinforcing the image of climate migrants<sup>15</sup> as passive victims or potential threats.

Humanitarian frames offer a counter-point, portraying migrants as **victims of disaster or poverty**. While these stories evoke empathy, they often strip migrants of agency, reducing them to passive figures. Recent reportage has also introduced a resilience frame, positioning migration as an adaptation strategy. However, this too is limited—resilience is often linked to economic productivity, with migrants seen as successful only if they integrate into labour markets.

These narratives are reinforced by the episodic nature of news cycles—coverage spikes during disasters but fades quickly, limiting sustained reporting on the underlying drivers, policy gaps, and everyday realities of climate migration.

In contrast, climate change coverage has become more consistent in recent years. It is influenced by science, global agreements, environmental events and lived experiences. Common frames include climate science, ecological impacts, politics, economics, energy transitions and social effects. Global events like Conference of the Parties summits and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report releases temporarily align media

narratives, though regional differences persist. A [2021 study](#)<sup>16</sup> analysing news content from 10 countries, between 2006 and 2018 found that developed countries cover climate change more frequently, with a stronger focus on science and policy. In contrast, media in developing countries, including India, tend to emphasise human impacts and vulnerabilities, often with less attention to scientific causes or long-term solutions.

## Reporting on Climate Change and Migration in India

Despite the scale of internal migration in India, media coverage remains [limited](#)<sup>17</sup> across English and vernacular media outlets. This gap is partly due to the lack of real-time, granular data, but also reflects a broader neglect of rural and labour reporting in mainstream media. As with global trends, climate migration in Indian media is often framed as crisis-driven, with people depicted as fleeing disasters. Migrants are often rendered invisible or reduce to tropes: faceless victims of extreme events and natural disasters, accidents, or as burdens on cities in political rhetoric. Their contribution to economies, infrastructure, and services is rarely acknowledged.





Stranded people rushing to the railway station to catch their train during the fourth phase of the lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic in Delhi.

Image by Sumita Roy Dutta shared under CC-BY-SA-4.0

## COVID-19: A rare moment of focus

The pandemic briefly shifted this pattern of media coverage. The 2020 nationwide lockdown triggered a mass exodus of migrant workers walking back to their home states<sup>18</sup>. This unprecedented reverse migration dominated headlines across mainstream and independent media. Combined with public pressure and legal interventions, the coverage prompted immediate state and national responses—special transport services, food relief, temporary shelters, and later, long-term measures such as rental housing schemes, social security portability, and rural employment programmes.

This moment demonstrated the media's potential to spotlight injustice, amplify marginalised voices, and catalyse policy action. Yet the momentum was short-lived. Once the immediate crisis subsided, migration coverage declined sharply, slipping back to the margins of national attention.

# Climate and Migration: The Missing Link

While coverage of climate change has expanded—covering policy, energy transition, extreme weather, and global negotiations—the links to migration remain weak.

Several challenges contribute to this gap:

- **Lack of tracking systems:** There is no dedicated mechanism to monitor or record climate-linked mobility.
- **Attribution complexity:** Climate drivers are deeply entangled with poverty, land loss, and economic stress, making it difficult to isolate causality—particularly for slow-onset events like drought or salinisation.
- **Incomplete storytelling:** Researchers and reporters tend to capture migration and its links to climate change at source or destination but not both, telling incomplete stories.
- **Event-driven reporting:** As with broader migration stories, coverage is event-led and episodic, favouring dramatic visuals and crisis narratives over deeper structural analysis.

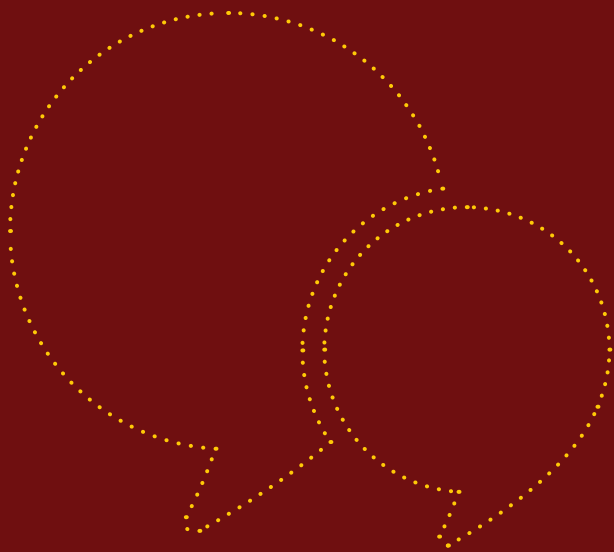
## A content analysis of 76 English language articles (2000–2023) by IHS found persistent issues:

- Homogenised depictions of migrants
- Absence of gender or intersectional perspectives
- Alarmist framings of climate mobility

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 12 senior editors from print and digital media echoed these concerns. Editors pointed to the need for more robust evidence, contextual framing, evidence-based and grounded coverage reporting on climate migration in India.

“I think the mainstream media is obsessed with big names. When a celebrity or politician has something to say about climate change 100%, it will get front page coverage. But, very rarely does one see a story, which connects even what is being said in COP 25 with something on the ground, linking it to ordinary people's lives and their livelihoods and how that's being altered forever due to climate change.”

**Priti David**  
Executive Editor PARI



“Our understanding of rural-to-urban migration is improving. While the primary motivation is job opportunities, factors such as failing agriculture and frequent flooding and droughts —issues that may not yet be explicitly labelled as climate crises—also influence the decision to move to cities.

I think only recently experts have started to emphatically link climate change to many of the extreme events we are witnessing on a regular basis. Climate-induced migration needs more extensive research and better data analysis by experts, which can complement the field reporting done by journalists.”

**Shivani Singh**  
National Urban Affairs Editor  
Hindustan Times

“There is a clear need to improve climate literacy. The challenge isn't just understanding climate terminology—it's making sense of it in context. Digging a pond might be adaptation, but what does it mean for your region and your people?”

**Ayswarya Murthy**  
Assistant Editor, 101Reporters

# Climate Migration in Indian News

We reviewed 76 English-language articles from Indian media, spanning both legacy and digital platforms. Articles were selected for their explicit focus on climate change and migration.

Each was analysed across key dimensions:

**Who** is depicted as migrating

**How** climate change and migration are framed

**Why** are people moving?

**What forms** of evidence are used, and

**What outcomes** of mobility are discussed

## Who are climate migrants?

Our review showed that media often presents climate migrants as a homogenous group.

**Nearly 46 per cent of reviewed articles mentioned migration and migrant population without specifying who was moving — omitting age, gender, caste, region or class markers.**

This lack of detail obscures unequal impacts of climate change, and limits understanding of migration as a complex, socially embedded process. Even when social differentiation was acknowledged, references were cursory and unsupported by evidence.

Among news articles that specified who is migrating:

**48%** focused on men.

**10%** mentioned both men and women.

**33%** referred to families.

This reinforces the framing of migration as primarily a male phenomenon.

Women migrant perspectives were underrepresented:

- Only 3 articles centered women's experiences.
- Two of these discussed their vulnerability to trafficking, and one profiled their struggles and lived realities in a Women's Day feature.

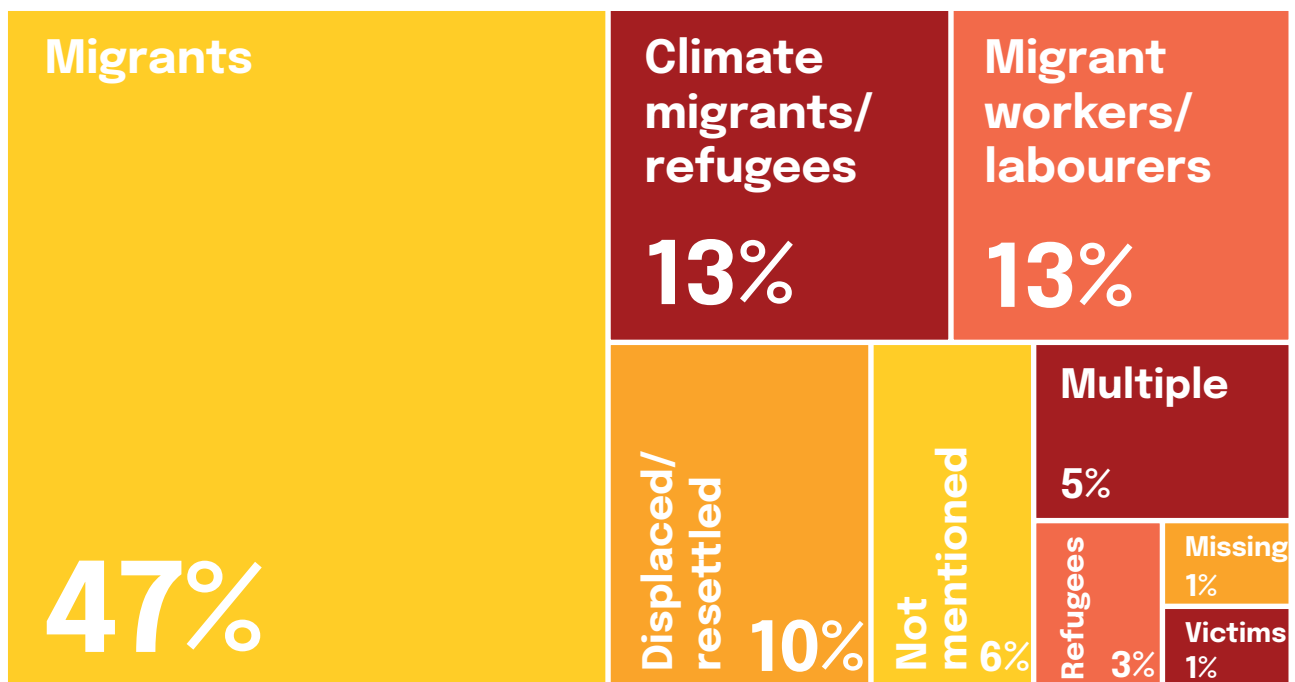
## How are people on the move depicted in the media?

Articles used a range of terms to describe migrants, often inconsistently. Labels were based on the cause of movement (e.g. “climate migrants”, “climate refugees”), the degree of agency (e.g. “displaced”, “resettled”, “victims”), or the type of work (e.g. “migrant labour”, “migrant workers”). These descriptors also shifted/expanded based on the topic covered.

For example, migrants were described as ‘victims’ in the context of trafficking and ‘bonded labour migrants’ to denote exploitative nature of labour. The Guardian used the term ‘drought migrants’ in

reports on drought-driven migration in Maharashtra, while Scroll coined the term ‘energy migrants’ for those displaced by coal sector job losses during India’s energy transition. Multiple articles used various terms in the same piece to describe migrants, often interchangeably, leading to confusion about how climate migrants are described and depicted.

Migrants are often represented as helpless. The trope of the helpless migrant presents natural hazards as inevitable and climate change somewhat impossible to adapt to.



## Reasons for moving

Nearly 67 per cent of the articles framed climate change as a key driver of migration, with rapid-onset hazards like floods (42 mentions) and cyclones (28) receiving the most attention. Slower-onset risks such as heatwaves and erosion were underrepresented due to their diffuse and less visible impacts.

The preference for sudden, visible disasters likely stems from the ease with which these can be linked to migration, as opposed to slower, more diffuse processes like heat stress or land degradation, whose impacts on mobility are harder to trace.

The focus on rapid-onset hazards is also reflected in the regions that are predominantly covered by the media.

### Climate migration as a story of distress and crisis

The dominant media frame for climate migration is the one of crisis. Seventy-two per cent of the reviewed articles focussed on displacement, loss and vulnerability, depicting communities as victims of extreme weather and other climatic impacts. Articles detail the precarious conditions faced by migrants, including forced bonded labour and trafficking. While these narratives highlight the severity of climate impacts, they risk portraying migration as arising only from helplessness, ignoring the socio-economic and political factors that also shape movement. Portraying migrants as powerless can inadvertently suggest that climate impacts are inevitable and beyond adaptation.

### Alarmist framing

Media articles also tend toward sensationalism, with a strong emphasis on aggregate figures and dramatic projections. Headlines cite large-scale displacement estimates drawn from various reports, yet fail to engage with the methodological nuances, regional specificities or the multi-causal nature of migration decisions. Such reporting often lacks context on how climate risks intersect with socio-economic vulnerabilities, structural inequalities, and local adaptation strategies. As a result, these narratives border on fear-mongering—framing migration as a looming crisis rather than a complex, adaptive response to environmental change.

## Examples of alarmist headlines

**Climate change could create 63 million migrants in South Asia by 2050; 45 million Indians may forced to move: Report**

Deccan Herald

**Climate change will lead to uncontrollable rise in migration: Study**

Times of India

**Climate-induced migration set to treble in South Asia by 2050, India to face displacement of 45 million people**

Times of India

**The climate change exodus**

Times of India

**Sea rise forces thousands out of Sunderbans**

The Hindu

### **Rural bias in reporting on climate migration**

Most stories frame climate migration as a story of distress and loss at the ‘source’ regions. They stress the loss of agriculture livelihoods and consequent migration due to climate impacts but rarely examine conditions at destinations. Nearly 65 per cent of the articles did not state the work that migrants would take up after moving. This gap matters because migration does not end at movement. Hazards such as flooding, drought and extreme heat follow migrants into cities, where many enter precarious informal jobs—construction, brick kilns, daily wage work, and domestic labour—with little protection or safe housing. By overlooking post-migration realities, coverage misses the continued vulnerabilities that climate migrants face in urban areas.

### **Climate migration as adaptation**

There is limited acknowledgement of migration as a deliberate adaptation strategy. Only 5 of the 76 articles explicitly acknowledged migration’s potential in reducing risk, diversifying income and opening new opportunities. This imbalance also has policy implications. When migration is framed mainly as a crisis, policy responses focus on relief or ways to reduce out-migration rather than supporting mobility as part of long-term adaptation plans.

### **Climate migration as a justice issue**

Articles reviewed rarely framed climate migration as a justice issue. Yet research shows that structural factors—gender, caste and class—shape who moves, under what conditions, and with what consequences. Dalit and Adivasi communities, for example, are disproportionately impacted by climate hazards, and face systemic barriers to mobility, but their experiences are seldom reported. Similarly, women’s migration experiences—as independent migrants or those left behind—receive scant attention, reinforcing a male-centric narrative of climate migration. By neglecting these intersecting inequities, most reporting misses how climate migration reproduces, and can deepen, existing social hierarchies.

## Finding balance: Evidence-based and missing voices

Our review shows articles rely mainly on published research and data (47 per cent) to report on climate migration. Numbers help convey the scale of the challenge, but without nuanced accounts of ground realities, they can come across as sensational or alarmist.

Human-interest stories offer nuance, yet they too often reinforce crisis narratives, focussed on climate impacts, loss and suffering. Migrants are thus portrayed as passive victims rather than as people making strategic choices under environmental and economic pressure.

Despite the prevalent framing of migrants as helpless victims, their voices are rare in media coverage. Only 38 per cent of articles reviewed include quotes from migrants, while 79 per cent quoted researchers, NGOs and policymakers to substantiate claims about climate migration. This tilt towards some 'experts' over lived experiences risks casting migrants as subjects of study or victims, rather than active agents with their own perspectives.

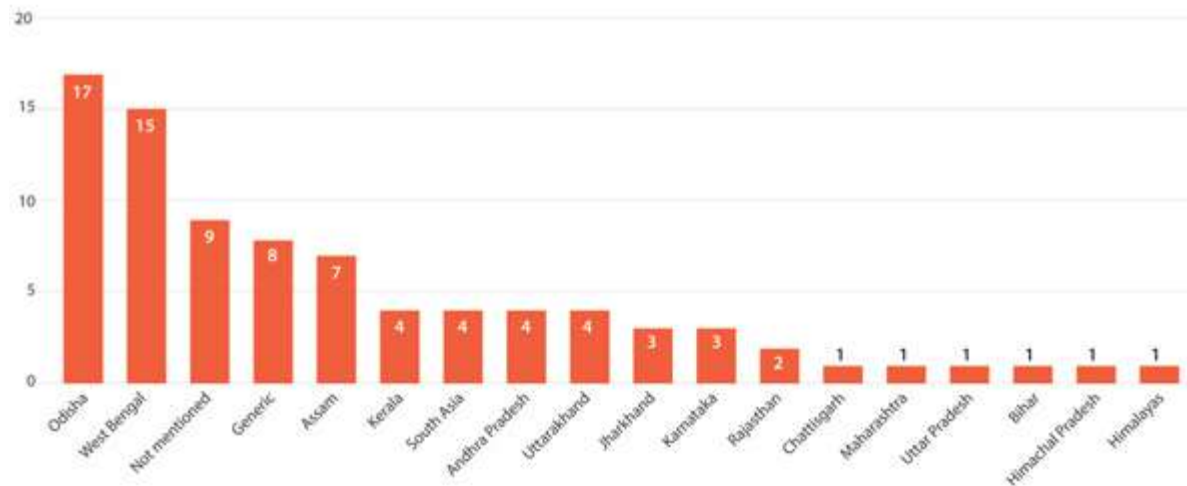
Overall, Indian media coverage of climate migration remains fragmented, crisis-driven and largely reactive. It highlights why people leave but seldom explores wider social and political dimensions of mobility in the context of changing climate. While these narratives are important in highlighting the human costs of climate change, a more balanced and layered approach is needed — one that combines data with lived realities, situates migration within adaptation strategies and policy frameworks, and centres issues of equity and justice.



## Box 1: Reported Origin and Destination Sites

Media coverage of climate migration is concentrated in certain geographies. Among the 76 articles reviewed, eastern coastal states—especially Odisha (17 mentions) and West Bengal (15 mentions)—dominate reporting on source locations. These states are climate hotspots, regularly affected by cyclones, floods, and coastal erosion. Notably, 14 of the 15 articles on West Bengal refer specifically to the Sunderbans delta, a region highly vulnerable to sea-level rise and submergence. The prominence of these states aligns with literature<sup>19</sup> that identifies high out-migration from these regions.

Overall, coastal states receive more media attention than inland (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan) or mountainous (Himalayas) regions. This suggests a spatial bias in coverage, with migration linked more often to coastal hazards, with migration stories from drought-prone and heat-stressed regions underrepresented.



On the destination sites, 35 articles point to metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata—framing climate migration largely as a rural-to-urban movement. Beyond generic references to cities, Tamil Nadu (7 mentions) and Kerala (9 mentions) emerge as key destination states.

Some articles refer to destination areas in vague terms such as ‘southern states’, ‘neighbouring states’, or ‘adjoining villages’. Interestingly, four articles highlight climate-induced migration within Kerala itself. This challenges the perception of Kerala solely as a destination, and highlights that receiving regions are also vulnerable to climate impacts. Such cases point to the need for more granular and regionally diverse reporting on both internal and cross-regional mobility under climate stress.

## How Photos Shape Climate-Migration Coverage

Photographs play a key role in shaping meaning in journalism. This study reviewed 76 news articles on climate and migration, of which 71 included photographs. A total of 206 images were analysed across three dimensions: image source, caption style, and whether the people shown were identified.

### 1. Who supplied the pictures?

Source	Count	Note
Reporter's own	91	Writers double as photographers
NGOs / local groups	34	Institutional actors influence visuals
Wire agencies	33	Generic imagery using symbolic tropes
Stock libraries	21	Ready-made visuals dominate quick turnarounds
In-house photojournalists	21	Richer in narrative framing
Social media	2	User-generated content almost absent

### 2. How were they captioned?

**Anchoring captions:** Limited to describing the image by mentioning time, place, subject (112 images, 60%).

**Expanding captions:** Going beyond timing, location to add context or analysis (75 images, 40%)

- Reporter-shot photos contained expanding captions 57% of the time, indicating journalists produced visuals are contextually enriched.
- Agency or stock photos relied on anchoring captions 71% of the time, lacking nuance.

**Implication:** High-volume, third-party agency and stock images come with boiler-plate text, stripping away nuance.

### 3. Are people named?

**Of 82 photos showing individuals, 62% (51) left them unnamed.**

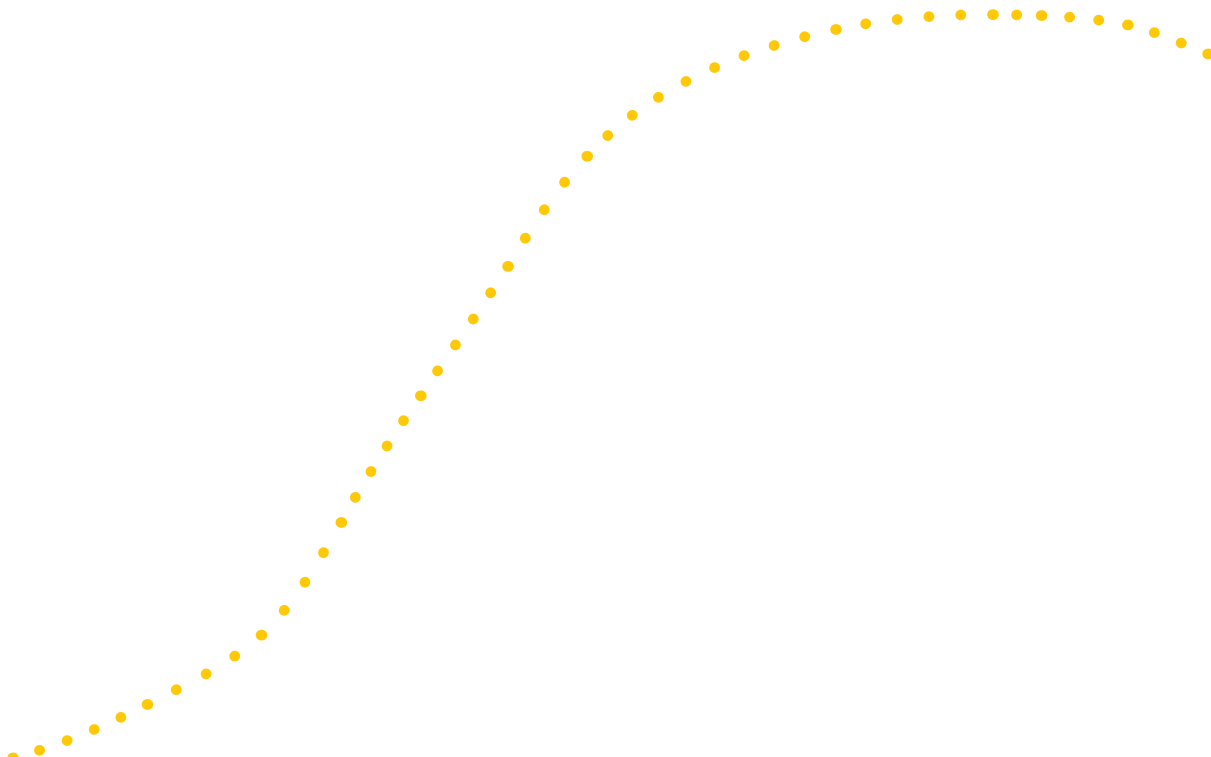
- Sometimes anonymity is protective in sensitive contexts, but often it signals lack of engagement with subjects. Unnamed individuals—when shown in vulnerable or distressing circumstances—risk being reduced to symbolic figures, devoid of voice or identity.
- Naming subjects affirms personhood and often signals direct engagement or informed consent, practices more feasible in journalist-driven visual reporting.

### 4. Why it matters?

**Heavy use of wire/stock pictures with anchoring captions reduces complex realities to generic 'victim' tropes.**

- Unnamed faces in photographs reinforce stereotypes of victims, instead of highlighting structural causes or solutions.
- Journalist-produced, well-captioned images better locate people within the social and environmental forces driving migration.

**Take away:** Invest in on-site photography, detail-rich captions with ethical, named subjects to move coverage beyond stereotypes and towards nuanced representation of climate migration.



## What Journalists Told Us About Reporting on Climate Migration

We spoke to a diverse group of journalists—editors, reporters, freelancers, and founders of independent newsrooms—across both mainstream and independent media in India. Their insights reveal how climate and migration are reported, the challenges involved, and what responsible coverage can look like. This section presents key themes from these interviews, with examples and reflections from the journalists.

### Climate change coverage is mainstream, but migration still is not

Journalists noted that climate change was now a regular part of newsroom coverage. Extreme weather events like floods, heatwaves and droughts have made the issue urgent and visible.

Migration, in contrast, remains outside the mainstream news agenda. It is not treated as a dedicated beat in most newsrooms and is often tucked under rural reporting, which itself gets little attention in urban-centric media. As a result, migration is covered mostly during crises—like the COVID-19 lockdown—and rarely in a sustained way. Climate-linked migration is even more underreported. Journalists shared that these stories often appear under labour, health or disaster beats, with little focus on environmental factors.

Shivani Singh of *Hindustan Times*, “We have a better understanding now of why people migrate not just for jobs, but because agriculture is failing, floods keep coming back, or people want a better life for their children. There is a climate angle there, but it is not always reported as such.”

Vasudevan Mukunth of *The Hindu*, said, “While *(The) Hindu* covers migration stories across India, it is

*often difficult to directly link individual migration events to climate change because the effects of climate are visible only in aggregate, over time and space. Migration tends to be covered as local social or economic events, with the climate connection becoming clear only when viewed across multiple stories. It is important to rely on verified data and trusted institutions when making such links; causal attribution in climate reporting is challenging.”*

### Balance data with people’s voices

Journalists stressed the need to balance lived experience with evidence. Reporting often leans one way, either relying on data and experts without local voices or telling personal stories without grounding them in facts. Sahana Ghosh (*Nature India*) and Vaishnavi Rathore (*Scroll*) emphasised the need to combine the two. “Speak to farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists but you can’t just go talk to a few villagers and say it’s a climate story,” said Sahana.

*“You must be careful about attribution and avoid oversimplifying. Ecological histories, which trace how environments, ecosystems, and human-environment interactions have changed over time, can provide powerful insights into the causes and patterns of migration. These histories, including deep-time perspectives, reveal how natural climate variability,*

land degradation, sea-level rise, deforestation, or desertification have shaped human settlements over centuries. They also carry warnings about how regions might respond to future human-driven changes,” Sahana added.

Many journalists now use ‘triangulation’—verifying field insights against peer-reviewed studies, expert interviews, and official records. Useful sources include Google Scholar for peer-reviewed studies, district Krishi Vigyan Kendras for crop trends, and regional IMD offices for rainfall data to ground insights from the field and local voices.

Priti David of *People’s Archive of Rural India (PARI)* put it simply, “People may not say the words ‘climate change’, yet they will tell you that their forests are thinning, crops are failing due to unseasonal and erratic rainfall, and potable water is further away. Their knowledge is precise—just expressed in terms relating to their livelihood and lives.”

### Proving the climate link to migration is difficult

Linking migration directly to climate change remains a major challenge. Journalists agreed that while the connection is real, it rarely shows up in official data. Migration stems from overlapping factors—poverty, job loss, land degradation—making attribution complex. Migrants themselves rarely use the term ‘climate change’.

Chiranjeevi Kulkarni (*Deccan Herald*) noted that government data doesn’t track why people migrate. Even where data exists, it doesn’t specify whether people left due to drought, floods or crop failure. “Unless you ask people directly, you won’t know. And they won’t say ‘climate change’—they’ll say ‘there’s no water’ or ‘we couldn’t grow food,’” he said.

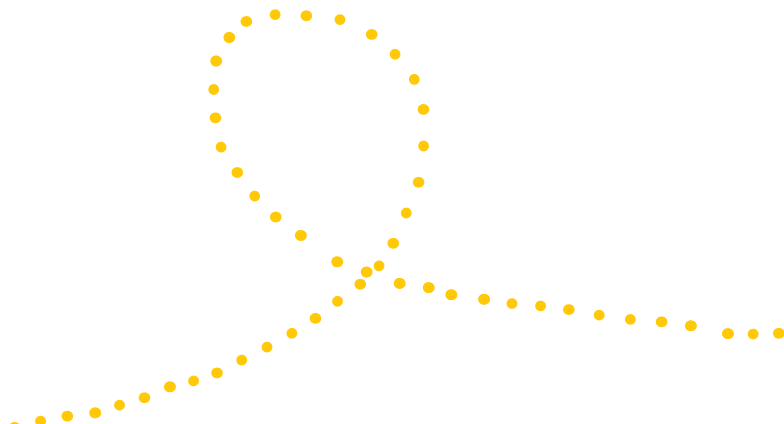
This gap forces reporters to rely more on fieldwork. Shivani Singh (*Hindustan Times*) said that researchers needed to communicate these links in real time, so that journalists could reflect them in their work.

### Gendered and nuanced narratives on climate migration are missing

Many journalists noted that gender was largely missing from climate migration coverage. Migrants were treated as a uniform group, with little attention to how caste or gender shaped experiences. Climate impacts were driving invisible, low-wage female migration, which often went unrecognised or misreported. In cities, women faced added hurdles—discrimination, poor job access, and exclusion based on region. Women left behind took on farm work and caregiving roles, while dealing with climate stress—yet they remained underreported. Safety concerns and gender-based violence were also ignored.

Ayswarya Murthy (*101Reporters*) said, “We need more stories on how these women are coping. What solutions or policies can ease their burden?”

Priti David (*PARI*) added, “When we say ‘migrant’, we picture a male construction worker—but he’s not alone. His wife and child/children are there too, often unpaid, isolated, and unheard. We ignore gender in migration far too easily. In *PARI* we try to look beyond the individual.”



### Journalists need better training

Interviewees agreed that targeted training can improve climate migration reporting. Building climate literacy — understanding basic concepts, terminology, and how to apply them in local contexts — is a key need.

Another challenge is scale. Grassroots reporters often struggle to link local stories to national or global trends. *“Reporters struggle to validate what they’re observing are not erratic or isolated events but part of larger phenomenon,”* said Murthy. Roli Srivastava (*The Migration Story*) called this the ability to ‘zoom out’ to link relevant data and/or research to human stories to provide the big picture to the readers.

Shivani Singh (*Hindustan Times*) and Kavitha Iyer (*Article 14*) noted that training should not be limited to environmental reporters. Those on beats like crime, health, or civic coverage also needed a climate lens. Often, climate and migration stories emerged at the intersections with daily lives, and in unexpected ways while reporting on accidents, access to water and civic amenities in informal settlements, heat stress, informal and domestic labour — if reporters were trained to ask the right questions and had sensitivity to listen.

### Climate migration reporting should follow the full journey

Many journalists said migration reporting was often framed narrowly, limited to source areas. But migration is a process, to understand it journalists must cover both origin and destination — ideally, tracing the entire journey. Our media review showed a tilt for stories at the source with only four articles explicitly exploring migrant livelihoods and lives in destination cities.

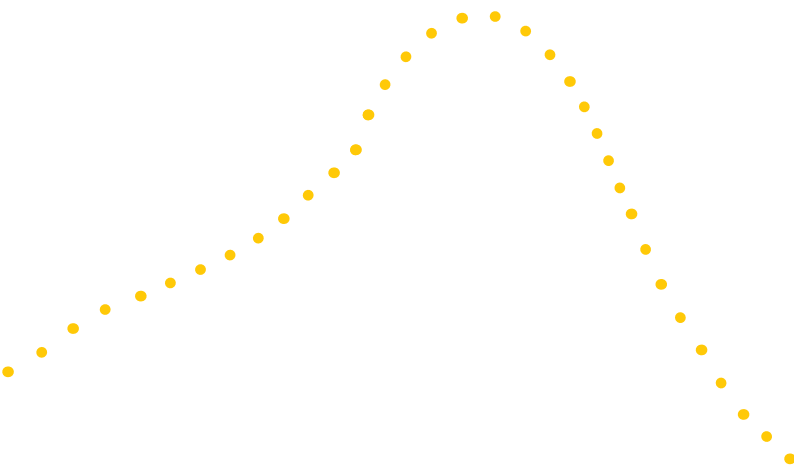
At *Scroll*, Vaishnavi Rathore and Ajay Krishnan shared how their reporting followed people from Odisha all the way to Kerala.<sup>20</sup> This helped them capture a fuller picture: why people left, what they faced on arrival, and the social and emotional costs of migration.

*“If we had only stayed in Odisha,”* Vaishnavi said, *“we would have missed the entire impact of migration, the changes in family dynamics, the difficulties of adjusting to a new culture, the sense of dislocation. That is why we made sure to trace the entire journey.”*

### Reporting is limited by resources, geography and media bias

Many journalists pointed out that climate migration stories were expensive and time-consuming. They required travel, extended fieldwork, and covered multiple geographies—costs that most mainstream media avoid. Editors shared that most legacy outlets prioritised stories that appeal to urban audiences or advertisers, leaving little space for nuanced rural, or migration-focused reporting.

As Kavitha Iyer (*Article 14*) summed it up: *“It’s expensive to do these stories. Unless they are essential, mainstream media won’t invest due to disinterest and cost. Independent media is more willing, but they need funding support. A lot of climate funding goes into research, think tanks, or CSR. None of it is channelled into reportage.”*



## Getting the Story Right

### In Jaisalmer: gone with the windmills

[People's Archive of Rural India \(PARI\)](#)

### Migrants...don't lose that number

[People's Archive of Rural India \(PARI\)](#)

### Pedalling through heatwaves in India's bicycle capital

[www.themigrationstory.com](http://www.themigrationstory.com)

### Assam's 'left-behind' women wage lonely, futile battle against extreme floods

[101reporters.com](http://101reporters.com)

### Uprooted by climate change, Uttarakhand's villagers battle for survival in Delhi

[101reporters.com](http://101reporters.com)

**After The Coromandel Train Wreck:  
Unemployed, Young Migrant Workers  
Struggling With Health Costs &  
Lost Wages**

[article-14.com](http://article-14.com)

**Displaced and  
disregarded: The plight of  
Assam's erosion victims**

[www.themigrationstory.com](http://www.themigrationstory.com)

**Sugar's Bitter Truth: No  
Contracts, No Fair Wages, No  
Healthcare For Migrant Workers  
As Climate Risks, Accidents Rise**

[article-14.com](http://article-14.com)

**We work in burning kilns,  
but this is hotter**

[www.themigrationstory.com](http://www.themigrationstory.com)

# 4. Responsible Reporting on Climate and Migration

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This section distils practical advice on telling climate migration stories with care, accuracy, and fairness.

## Make Climate-Migration Data Easy to Understand

Climate migration reporting includes interpreting various kinds of data from the census, national labour and health surveys to climate projections and models.

- **Decode jargon:** Simplify complex terms for general audiences. For example, explain RCP 8.5 as a high-emissions scenario, representing a future where greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise sharply.
- **Always set context:** For example, “Five million may be displaced by 2050” is abstract; spell out why, where from and where to, and under what conditions.
- **Show, don’t tell:** Tools like [Datawrapper](#)<sup>21</sup> or [Flourish](#)<sup>22</sup> turn spreadsheets into simple maps and charts. Satellite imagery from [Google Earth Pro](#)<sup>23</sup> can be used to show coastal erosion patterns to anchor interviews.
- **Localise numbers:** A global sea-level statistic matters most when tied to a nearby coastal district.
- **Flag uncertainty:** Note margins of error and missing datasets.
- **Go-to sources:** [Migration Data Portal](#)<sup>24</sup>, [NASA Data](#)<sup>25</sup>, IMD data portal for regional data and projections. See [IndiaSpend’s coverage of heat stress and internal migration](#)<sup>26</sup>, which blends datasets with human interest interviews.

## Fact-Check Relentlessly

Misinformation and unverified claims are rampant in climate migration. To ensure credibility, journalists must verify data, quotes, claims made in their stories.

- **Use trusted datasets:** International agencies like the [IPCC](#)<sup>27</sup>, the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#)<sup>28</sup>, and government portals such as [data.gov.in](#)<sup>29</sup>, [NITI Aayog](#)<sup>30</sup> or [Census](#)<sup>31</sup> and peer-reviewed journals.
- **Cross-verify claims:** Ask development organisations for their raw numbers and compare with district records or that of local governments.
- **Check dates and methods:** Climate indicators change fast; old data can mislead.
- **Use the right vocabulary:** A good starting point is [Climate Change Reporting 101](#)<sup>32</sup>, the [IPCC Glossary](#)<sup>33</sup>, and [UN Climate Dictionary](#)<sup>34</sup>.
- **Consult several experts—not just one:** Platforms like the [Global South Climate Science Database](#)<sup>35</sup> or India-based university climate research centres are good starting points.
- **Spot misinformation:** Tools, like [Hot Air](#)<sup>36</sup> developed by the University of Exeter and Tortoise Media, track climate misinformation online. [CARDS Climate Chat](#)<sup>37</sup>, by the same team, maps how false narratives

spread. [The Debunking Handbook 2020](#)<sup>38</sup>, by 22 misinformation experts, provides clear strategies to counter false claims. AFP offers a free one-hour course, [Verifying Climate Claims](#)<sup>39</sup> to help journalists assess misleading climate content.

- **Verify visuals:** Run reverse-image searches using [Google Images](#)<sup>40</sup> or [TinEye](#)<sup>41</sup> or [InVID](#)<sup>42</sup> before publishing photos or videos.

## Interview with Empathy

Interviews humanise data, record lived experiences and uncover root causes of climate migration. But conducting ethical, respectful, and effective interviews, especially with vulnerable communities, requires thoughtfulness and empathy.

- **Use open-ended questions:** “What led you to move?” or “What changes have you noticed in your land or water sources?” reveals more than “Did climate change force you to migrate?”
- **Respect privacy and agency:** Do not identify people without consent, especially if they fear backlash. For example, a migrant worker who is sharing their experiences of working in poor conditions or lack of affordable housing. Blur faces or anonymise quotes when needed.
- **Get informed consent:** Introduce yourself clearly. Explain how the interview will be used and what is its intent. Be extra careful when interviewing children, women, and marginalised communities. Never film or quote without permission.
- **Go beyond the surface:** “What help did you expect but didn’t get?” or “What would you want a government official to know?” can unpack policy gaps.
- **Use support tools:** The [Climigration Network’s Community Guide](#)<sup>43</sup> offers ethical tips for interviewing migrant communities.

## Listen to All Voices

Climate impacts and migration patterns differ by caste, gender, class, and geography. Diversity ensures depth and fairness in reporting.

- **Include missing voices:** If your story only includes male experts and government officials, it is likely incomplete. Try to include perspectives from across caste, class, gender, age, religion spectrums.
- **Avoid tokenism:** Do not use marginalised individuals as props. Centre their experiences, leadership, and analysis.
- **Reflect your positionality:** Be aware of your privilege and how it shapes storytelling.
- **Build relationships, not just reports:** Share published stories with interviewees and connect them to support networks if relevant.

## Use Respectful and Sensitive Language

Words carry power. Wrong language can cause harm, reinforce stereotypes, or mislead audiences.

- **Use person-first language:** Say “people affected by floods,” not “flood victims.”
- **Avoid criminalising migration:** Terms like ‘invasion’, ‘wave’, or ‘illegal migrant fuel stigma.
- **Be precise:** ‘Climate refugee’ is not legally recognised. Use ‘climate-displaced person’ or ‘internal migrant’ instead.
- **Stay away from stereotypes:** Do not portray migrants as poor or helpless. Many bring knowledge, skills, and resilience that are crucial for adaptation.
- **Translate carefully:** Write carefully in regional languages. Direct translations from English can cause confusion or offense. Work with local translators or community media to make sure the meaning is clear and culturally appropriate. See this [op-ed on metaphor and migration from the Mixed Migration Centre](#)<sup>44</sup>.

## Use Images Responsibly and Ethically

Photojournalists must aim<sup>45</sup> to take images that are truthful, fair and respectful. Since not every situation is the same, using common sense and good judgement is essential.

Before publishing, ask<sup>46</sup>:

- Who is identifiable in the image, and how are they portrayed?
- What is the photographer trying to say?
- Who will see this image, and how might they react?
- What is the image meant to achieve?

## Tell Stories Ethically

- Avoid stereotypes<sup>47</sup>, positive or negative. Show migration in all its complexity<sup>48</sup>.
- Video is a powerful way to tell personal<sup>49</sup> stories, but it can also affect the safety, dignity, and privacy of the people shown.
- Never publish a story or an image that could put a person or child at risk, even if their identity is hidden.
- **Always get informed consent** before filming or photographing someone and explain clearly how their story or image will be used. Understand that consent can change later, especially if circumstances change.
- Ask if the person feels comfortable being filmed, photographed and/or recorded and **let them know how you will use all of this**.
- Be sensitive when someone is grieving or in distress. Think twice before taking pictures and videos of people in distress.
- Always remember the context. Photos and videos can be reused or archived. The story does not end there.
- Make sure people know who owns the image or video rights, whether it is the journalist or the media outlet.

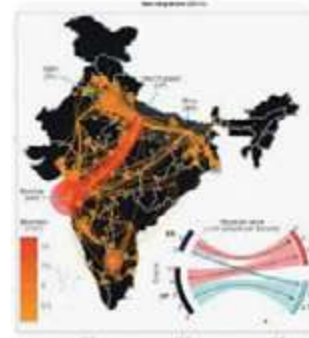
## Create Climate Visuals with Impact and Care

- **Avoid clichés:** One striking image does not tell the full story. Show broader realities and contexts.
- **Find ways to tell a bigger story:** Add context by including history and intersecting issues. Highlight solutions that communities have already tried.
- **Show everyday life:** Images do not always have to show climate change directly, they can capture how it feels<sup>51</sup>—in everyday life. What has changed, and what has not changed?
- **Centre human stories to add nuance:** Collaborate<sup>52</sup> with those featured to tell their stories in their own way. The more personal the story, the more universal it becomes. Acknowledge that multiple stories are connected to climate-linked migration.

“This is one part of the story but it becomes a shorthand... We need to fill in a whole sort of reality that’s missing here.”

Kate Stanworth<sup>50</sup>

Google search:  
Climate migration India



**Nature**  
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**IDR**  
climate refugees ...



**NIDM**  
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**Scroll.in**  
Bangladeshi illegal migrants ...



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**New Security Beat**  
Climate Change in South As...



**Law School Policy Rev...**  
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**One India One People Foundation**  
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**Migration Policy Institute**  
Article: Climate Change in Bangla...



**Forbes India**  
Victims of the weather: How clima...

**Related**



**The Diplomat**  
Taking India's Climate Migrants ...



**Dialogue Earth**  
climate migration together ...



**AP News**  
Climate Migration: Indian kids find ...

## 5. Research and Data Sources



This list of global and Indian resources can help access trusted data, expert insights, and real-life case studies. Global sources such as the IPCC, IOM, and NASA provide big-picture information and tools. Indian sources such as the the Indian Meteorological Department and Census" offer national data and region-specific insights.

Use these resources to understand the climate–migration link, back your reporting with evidence, identify affected communities, and track impacts across time and geography.

## Finding the Right Resources

[Census of India](#): Collects demographic and socio-economic data, including migration data. Useful to understand migration patterns, analyse decadal trends in rural-urban migration, origin and destination of migrants.

[Centre for Science and Environment \(CSE\)](#): An environmental think tank known for investigative journalism and advocacy. Publishes reports on water stress, land degradation, and environmental justice.

[Climate Change Local Adaptation Pathways \(CLAPs\)](#): CLAPs tackles climate change adaptation in India's evolving landscape. It is a collaborative project, co-led by IIHS, the University of Exeter (UoE), and the University of East Anglia (UEA), along with the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) and Gram Vikas. Useful for accessing knowledge products on climate migration.

[Climate Impact Lab](#) by University of Chicago: Quantifies climate impacts such as migration, mortality, and energy use using economic models. Offers interactive tools on projected climate change impacts on human movement.

[Environmental Justice Foundation \(EJF\)](#): Combines research, advocacy, and multimedia to highlight environmental human rights violations with a focus on climate migrants from Global South.

[Indian Meteorological Department \(IMD\)](#) Provides weather forecasts, monsoon data, and climate records. Essential for linking weather events to migration trends.

[Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#): Tracks internal displacement due to conflict, disasters, and climate events worldwide. Its annual [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#) includes disaggregated data on climate-induced displacement.

[International Institute for Population Sciences \(IIPS\)](#): Research and teaching institution in population sciences dedicated to the development of evidence-based policy and programmatic initiatives to improve population health outcomes. Useful for research on migrant groups, immobile populations, and labour mobility.

[International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#): UN agency dedicated to migration. Offers data, policy guidance, and field research on environmental migration. Also hosts region-specific reports and databases, including the [Environmental Migration Portal](#).

[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#): Provides scientific assessments on climate change. IPCC reports are consensus-based documents created by thousands of scientists worldwide; Working Group II reports include in-depth sections on climate-induced migration, vulnerability, and adaptation.

[Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change \(MoEFCC\)](#): Leads India's environment and climate policy, including reporting on national communications under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)). Publishes the National Action Plan on Climate Change ([NAPCC](#)), state action plans, and emission inventories.

[Moving Climate: Alex Randall's Newsletter on Migration and Climate Change](#): Reflections on how climate and migration debate plays out in global media narratives and public discourse by a leading expert on climate driven displacement and migration. Useful to decode ongoing public narratives along with just, humane responses to climate migration

[NASA Earth Data](#): Open access to satellite imagery and climate indicators like temperature shifts, sea-level changes, and vegetation cover. Useful for mapping and visual stories on climate stress leading to migration.

[National Disaster Management Authority \(NDMA\)](#): Apex body for disaster management in India. Issues policies, institutional-mechanisms, guidelines on disaster management, including disaster-induced migration and resettlement, useful for context and trends.

[National Sample Survey Office \(NSSO\)](#): Provides large-scale, household-level surveys on employment, migration, and consumption. Enables long-term trend analysis of labour and seasonal migration patterns.

[ReliefWeb](#) by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA): Aggregates humanitarian news, crisis data, and situation reports globally. Offers real-time data on climate disasters, responses, and migration patterns.

[Summary for Urban Policymakers \(SUP\)](#): The SUP series, anchored by the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, provides a distilled overview of the IPCC Assessment Report 6, to inform and advance climate action at a regional and city level. Useful to understand climate concepts including systems transitions, feasible adaptation and mitigation actions, and climate resilient development.

[The Energy and Resources Institute \(TERI\)](#): Focuses on sustainable development, climate science, and energy policy. It produces regional climate vulnerability assessments relevant for slow-onset migration.

[UNHCR Climate Action](#): Focuses on climate-displaced populations — refugees, asylum seekers, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). It includes country-level data, case studies, including legal and humanitarian perspectives.

[World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#): Provides data on climate risks and impacts, including socio-economic vulnerability data at national and sub-national level.

## Finding the Right People to Talk to

Speaking to credible experts is essential. Look for those who understand the science, policy landscape, and lived experiences of affected communities, including migrants themselves. While India lacks a centralised expert database, several trusted platforms can help you connect with researchers, journalists, and policy specialists working on climate and migration.

[Reuters Hot List: The World's Top 1,000 Climate Scientists](#) A ranking of the 1,000 most influential climate scientists globally, developed by Reuters. The list is based on metrics such as publication volume, citation frequency, and media presence. Journalists can identify leading experts in various climate science domains.

[The Global South Climate Database by Carbon Brief](#) A publicly accessible, searchable database featuring over 1,000 climate scientists and experts from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. This database aims to diversify expert voices in climate

reporting by providing access to specialists from the Global South, covering areas like climate science, policy, and energy.

[United Nations Network on Migration: Experts Database](#) A directory of professionals specialising in migration-related topics, including climate-induced displacement. It offers access to experts in migration policy, humanitarian response, and climate mobility, aiding journalists in sourcing informed perspectives on migration issues.

[Columbia Climate School: Climate Experts](#) A compilation of researchers from Columbia University specialising in various aspects of climate science and policy. It provides journalists with direct access to academic experts for insights on climate-related topics, including migration and adaptation strategies.

## Further Reading

- IIHS, 2025: [Internal Migration and Climate Resilience in India: Are current policies and interventions providing adaptive social protection?](#)
- IIHS, 2024: [Accelerating India's Climate Transition: Pathways to the 1.5°C Goal](#)
- IIHS, 2023: [Climate Finance in India 2023](#)
- IIHS, 2021: [Reporting in a Warming World: A Media Review](#)
- IIHS, 2021: [Ways of Telling: A Handbook for Reporting on Climate Change in South India](#)
- UNDP, 2023: [The Climate Dictionary](#)
- IOM, 2019: [Glossary on Migration](#)
- IOM, 2020: [Reporting on Migration - A Handbook for Journalists in West Africa](#)
- UNESCO, 2018: [Getting the Message Across Reporting on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: A Handbook for Journalists](#)
- Journalismfund Europe, 2024: [Climate Migration Uncovered: Journalism Workshops on Myths, Narratives, and Visualization](#)
- IOM, 2021: [Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021-2030 by International Organisation on Migration](#)
- Covering Climate Now, 2023: [Climate Solutions Reporting Guide](#)
- [Ethical Journalism Network](#)
- [Solutions Journalism Network](#)
- [The Solutions Project](#)

## EXPLAINER

# Solutions Journalism: Looking Beyond the Problem

## What is Solutions-based Reporting?

Solutions-based journalism<sup>53</sup> is a style of reporting that goes beyond problems and looks at how individuals, communities, and governments are responding to or addressing major social and environmental challenges. This type of reporting highlights how people are coping, adapting, and finding ways to move forward.

It asks:

- What is being done to address this issue?
- How well is it working?
- Can this approach be useful elsewhere?

## Why Does It Matter for Climate Migration Reporting?

Most stories about climate migration focus on disasters and displacement:

- Floods wash away homes, forcing families to move to cities.
- Droughts destroy crops, pushing farmers to migrate for work.
- Heatwave kills people
- Rising sea levels make coastal villages unliveable.

These are important stories, but they often show only one side. Constant focus on suffering can leave audiences feeling hopeless. It also removes a sense of agency from the communities most affected by climate change. Policymakers may then view migration only as a problem rather than a complex process that also includes resilience and adaptation. Solutions-based reporting shifts this narrative by drawing attention to how people are responding to climate impacts—through adaptation strategies that includes innovation, local knowledge, and collective action.

## Examples of solutions-based reporting

**The remarkable floating gardens of Bangladesh**<sup>54</sup> (BBC): Farmers in low-lying areas of Bangladesh are using traditional hydroponic techniques to grow crops on floating rafts made from water hyacinth. This method ensures food security and income, despite frequent flooding.

**Eco Hope**<sup>55</sup> series (Mongabay): This is a collection of over 50 stories highlighting environmental solutions across India, with a focus on women-led and community-driven initiatives using sustainable practices.

**The white roofs cooling women’s homes in Indian slums**<sup>56</sup> (BBC Future): The Mahila Housing Trust (MHT) is helping women in urban slums reduce indoor temperatures by painting roofs with solar-reflective white paint. This low-cost solution improves living conditions during extreme heatwaves.

**Sundarbans Adopts ‘Rooftop Farming’ to Thrive Amid Cyclone Challenges**<sup>57</sup> (News Sense): Faced with repeated flooding and soil salinity, communities in the Sundarbans are turning to rooftop farming to grow food and maintain livelihoods.

## What are the pitfalls of reporting only ‘good news’?

Not all solutions are complete or permanent. A village might install a rainwater harvesting system to tackle water scarcity. This may help in the short term, but if rainfall becomes more erratic or groundwater continues to dry up, the root problem remains.

**Ask whether this is a short-term fix or part of a long-term adaptation strategy. Do not stop at the first visible ‘success’. If possible, revisit the story to see if the solution endures.**

Not all communities benefit equally. A housing project for flood-affected areas might help—but what if only wealthier or well-connected families are included, while the most vulnerable are left out?

**Ask, “Who is this helping, and who is left behind?” Speak to a range of people within the community, especially women, informal workers, lower-income groups, and migrants.**

Government or NGO-led projects are often framed as success stories. But how do the intended beneficiaries actually experience them? A climate-resilient farming programme might be praised publicly, while farmers struggle to afford the techniques or adapt to new methods.

**Go beyond official narratives. Speak directly to those meant to benefit. Was it accessible? Affordable? Practical?**

Small-scale efforts can give the impression that the broader problem is being solved. For instance, painting rooftops white in Ahmedabad helps reduce indoor heat, but without long-term urban planning and quality healthcare, it is not enough.

**Is this part of a bigger plan or just a band-aid fix? Be clear about the limits of the solution.**

Many reports focus on small, local efforts like tree planting or crop changes without discussing the wider political or economic drivers of the crisis.

**Do not stop at the surface. Ask whether structural change is taking place—are there changes in funding, policy, or justice for affected communities?**

Urban or expert-led solutions often get more visibility than those from rural or Indigenous communities, despite the latter having long-standing knowledge and practices.

**Ask if local knowledge is being valued or overlooked. Make space for indigenous and community-based voices.**

Solutions do not exist in a vacuum, they need political will, budgets, and leadership. A project may succeed locally, but if state or national policies do not support it, it cannot grow or be implemented elsewhere.

**Ask, who made this possible? What's stopping it from being scaled up or replicated elsewhere?**

Not every solution helps everyone. A solar irrigation system might work for some but leave others worse off if water access becomes unequal. *Be honest about trade-offs.*

**Ask, who might be unintentionally harmed?**

Solutions journalism is not about feel-good stories: It must be evidence-based, critical, and grounded in real-world context. In climate and migration reporting, this means highlighting how people adapt, while also asking tough questions about power, equity, and accountability.

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