

Excerpt from “[The Great Climate Migration](#)”

For all the ways in which human migration is hard to predict, one trend is clear: Around the world, as people run short of food and abandon farms, they gravitate toward cities, which quickly grow overcrowded. It’s in these cities, where waves of new people stretch infrastructure, resources and services to their limits, that migration researchers warn that the most severe strains on society will unfold. Food has to be imported — stretching reliance on already-struggling farms and increasing its cost. People will congregate in slums, with little water or electricity, where they are more vulnerable to flooding or other disasters. The slums fuel extremism and chaos.

It is a shift that is already well underway, which is why the World Bank has raised concerns about the mind-boggling influx of people into East African cities like Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia, where the population has doubled since 2000 and is expected to nearly double again by 2035. In Mexico, the World Bank estimates, as many as 1.7 million people may migrate away from the hottest and driest regions, many of them winding up in Mexico City.

But like so much of the rest of the climate story, the urbanization trend is also just the beginning. Right now a little more than half of the planet’s population lives in urban areas, but by the middle of the century, the World Bank estimates, 67 percent will. In just a decade, four out of every 10 urban residents — two billion people around the world — will live in slums. The International Committee of the Red Cross warns that 96 percent of future urban growth will happen in some of the world’s most fragile cities, which already face a heightened risk of conflict and have governments that are least capable of dealing with it. Some cities will be unable to sustain the influx. In the case of Addis Ababa, the World Bank suggests that in the second half of the century, many of the people who fled there will be forced to move again, leaving that city as local agriculture around it dries up.

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