

# Is climate change really a threat to human life?

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If a 60-mile (100-kilometer) wide asteroid were to hit Earth tomorrow, it would render the planet uninhabitable for all but the most hardy of extremophiles. This mass extinction event would wipe humanity off the face of the Earth or leave no survivors.

For some experts, this is the true definition of an ' *existential threat* .' Traditionalists would say the term describes a risk that threatens the existence of something—in this case, humanity. In recent years, that definition has been largely loosened to include global warming. Scientists, politicians, and world leaders all describe the climate crisis as an existential threat to humanity. This human-caused phenomenon is already changing life as we know it on a planetary scale, but could it actually lead to human extinction? Some experts say it could, in the most dire of scenarios.

## Weather forecast

Asia-Pacific countries have suffered an average of six natural disasters a year over the past three decades – about twice as many as developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and about three times as many as sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2022 alone, extreme weather events killed more than 7,500 people, affected more than 64 million people, and caused an estimated \$57 billion in economic losses. Countries with high poverty rates are also the most vulnerable to natural disasters.

## **Biodiversity loss**

The planet's biodiversity is threatened by habitat loss, pollution, overexploitation and invasive species, which are all linked to factors causing climate change.

Since 1970, the Asia-Pacific region has seen the world's third-largest biodiversity loss, after Latin America and Africa. Such ecological and environmental pressures pose increasing risks to the hundreds of millions of people in the region who depend on forests for their health and livelihoods.



## **Epidemic**

Climate change is creating new health challenges. Changing temperatures and weather patterns increase the risk of infectious diseases, including pandemics, while biodiversity loss and pressure on nature can lead to outbreaks of diseases that jump from animals to humans.

The risk of a major pandemic like COVID-19 occurring in the next 25 years has risen to 50% and continues to rise each year. With its high population density and connectivity to the rest of the world, the Asia-Pacific region is at the heart of these challenges.

## **Rising sea levels**

Much of the Asia-Pacific economy depends on its coastlines, with key industries such as tourism, fishing and commerce concentrated in coastal areas. Asia-Pacific is home to 70% of the global population vulnerable to rising sea levels, and about a third of all employment is in sectors that rely on climate-affected natural resources, such as agriculture and fisheries.

The region is home to six of the world's largest coastal megacities, including Tokyo and Mumbai. Economic dependence on these coastal areas increases the potential impact of coastal hazards on the region's economy and livelihoods.



## Climate Migration

In 2022, natural disasters displaced 32.6 million people worldwide, 41% higher than the 10-year average. The majority were due to weather-related hazards, with Asia-Pacific accounting for 70% of the total. Climate-related migration is widespread in Asia-Pacific. Climate-related disasters threaten the most vulnerable, disrupting livelihoods, endangering health, and reducing employment opportunities and social capital.

In short, stepped-up action on climate change is urgently needed so that we can give future generations a future they deserve.

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