

Climate Change and Its Impacts on Women's Health: Future Perspective

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RCOG Climate Sustainability Adviser Group

Health

- The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has created a group of advisers to help the college and its members address climate change.
- The group is made up of experts from across the UK, including climate scientists, public health experts, and environmental lawyers.
- Led by Rana Alhaidari, an international climate change expert, the group will advise the college on how to reduce its carbon footprint and promote sustainable practices.



Dr Taghreed Alhaidari

Honorary Fellow honoris causa


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to discuss

Global Scope of the Problem

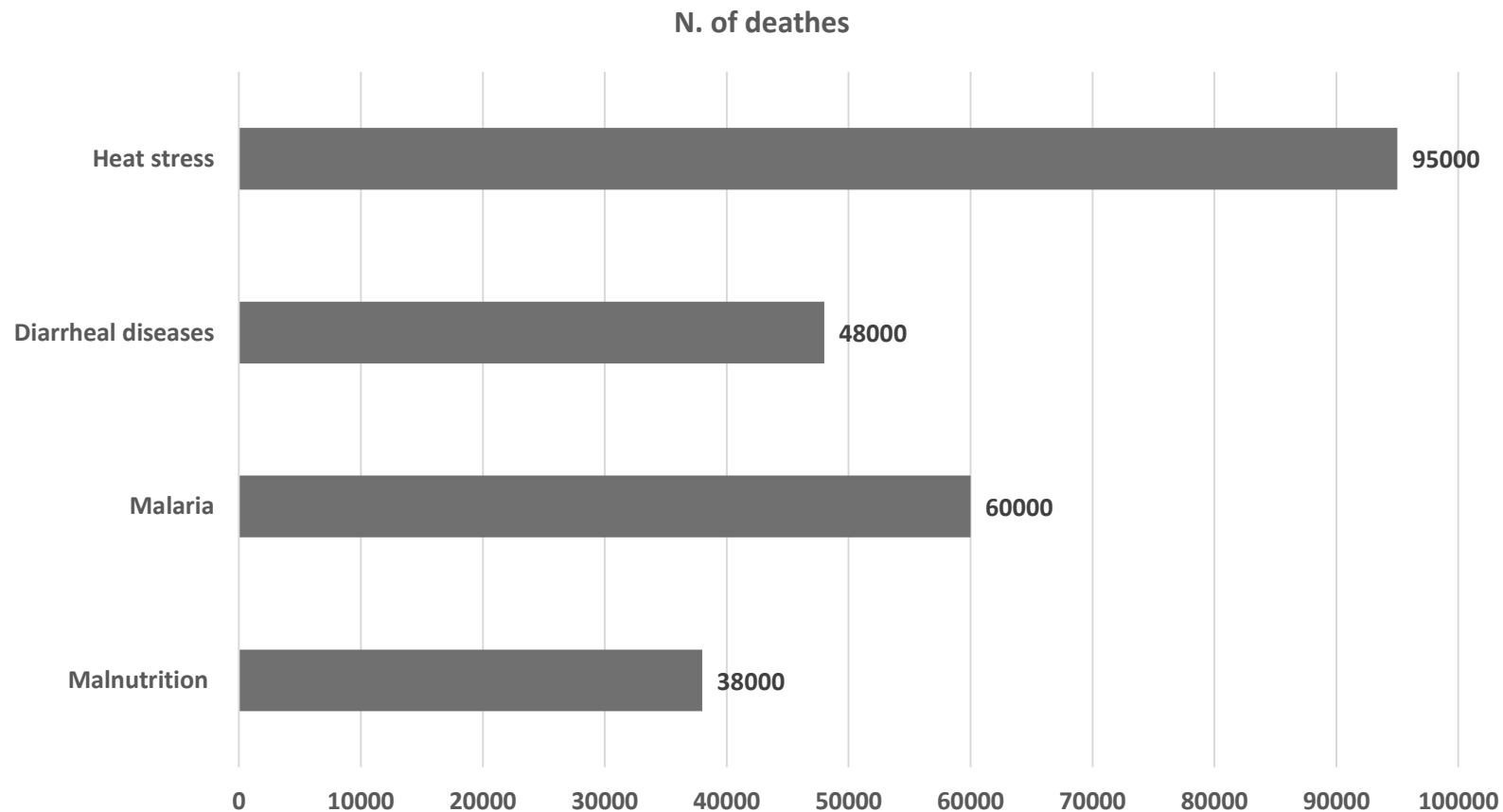




Why Is Climate Change a Women's Health Concern?

- Climate change is **not gender-neutral**; it disproportionately affects **women** in **low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)**.
- Health risks include **pregnancy complications, malnutrition, vector-borne diseases, and gender-based violence (GBV)**.
- Women face **higher social and economic barriers** that limit **adaptation and healthcare access**.

- **Projected Mortality Increase:** Climate change is expected to cause approximately **250,000 additional deaths per year** between 2030 and 2050. These deaths are anticipated from:





Climate Change = A Public Health Crisis

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** recognizes **climate change** as the **biggest health threat of the 21st century**.
- **Direct effects:**
 - ✓ Rising temperatures
 - ✓ Extreme weather events
 - ✓ Air pollution
- **Indirect effects:**
 - ✓ Water scarcity
 - ✓ Food insecurity
 - ✓ Displacement
 - ✓ Gender-based violence (GBV)

Climate change

Health risk

Vulnerability factors

- Demographic
- Geographical
- Biological factors & health status
- Sociopolitical
- Socioeconomic
- Health system capacity
- Gender & equity

Climate-related hazards

- Extreme weather events
- Heat
- Sea level rise
- Air pollution
- Vector distribution & ecology
- Water scarcity
- Reduced food production

Exposure

- People & communities
- Health workforce
- Infrastructure
- Energy systems
- Water systems
- Food systems
- Health systems

Environmental threats
and GHG emissions

Health outcomes



Injury and mortality
from extreme
weather events



Heat-related
illness



Respiratory
illness



Water-borne diseases
and other water-related
health impacts



Zoonoses



Vector-borne
diseases



Malnutrition
and food-borne
diseases



Noncommunicable
diseases (NCDs)



Mental and
psychosocial
health



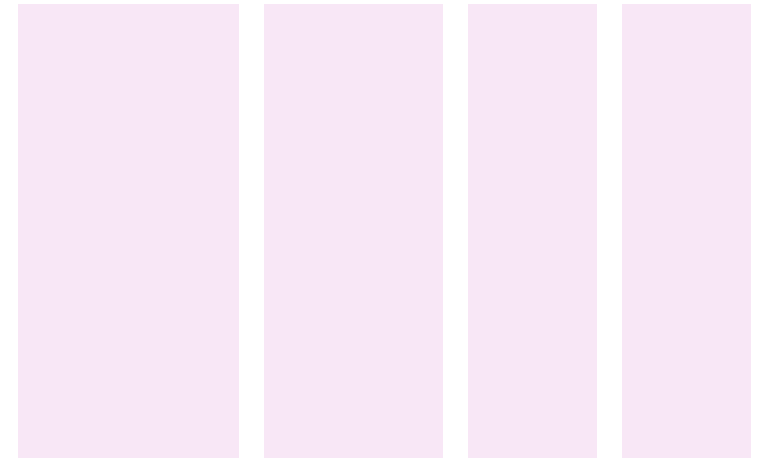
Impacts on
health care
facilities



Effects on
health systems

Why Are Women Disproportionately Affected?

- **Social and economic barriers** limit women's ability to adapt and access healthcare.
- **Greater exposure to environmental hazards** due to caregiving roles (e.g., water collection, cooking, child-rearing).
- **Limited decision-making power** in climate adaptation policies.
- **Higher rates of displacement** and vulnerability to **malnutrition, disease, and violence** in climate disasters.



Extreme Heat and Maternal Health



Heat exposure **increases pregnancy risks**, including:



Preterm birth, stillbirths, and low birth weight.



Higher rates of hypertensive disorders (e.g., preeclampsia, eclampsia).



Greater risk of dehydration and gestational diabetes.



A 1°C rise in temperature is associated with a 5% increase in stillbirths (WHO, 2022).

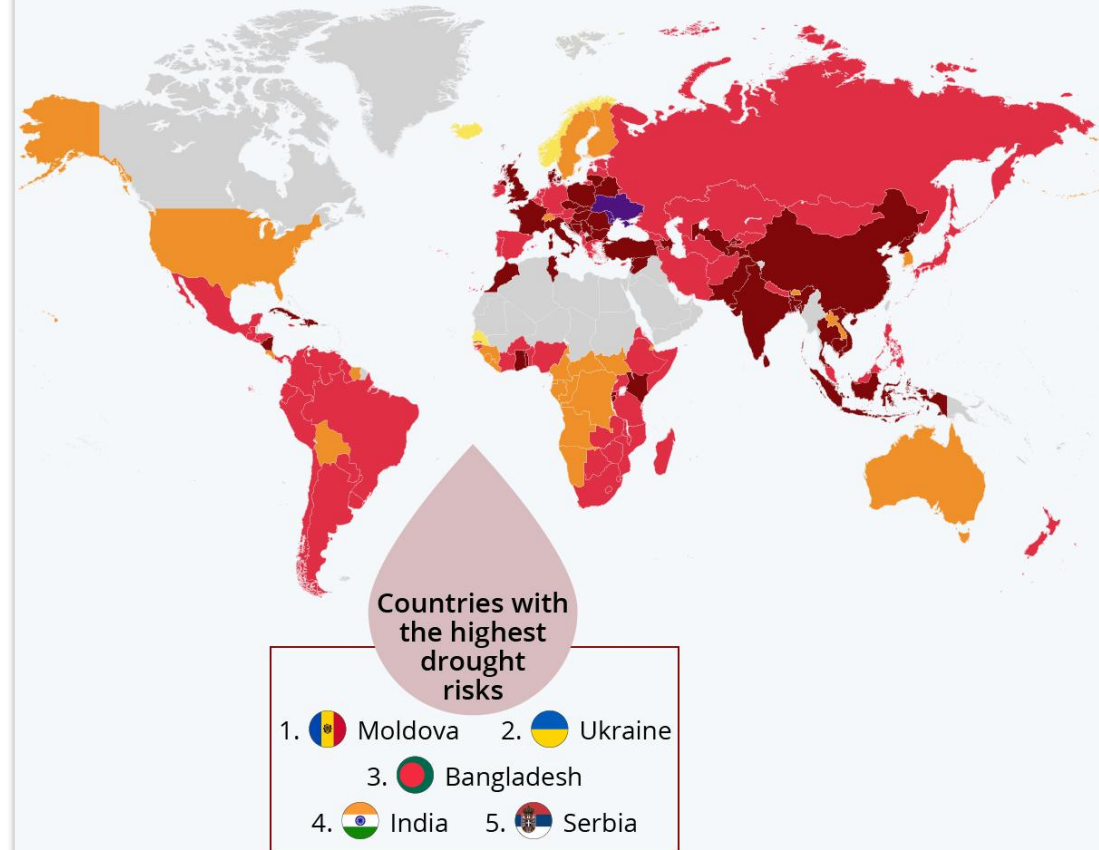


Water Scarcity and Women's Reproductive Health

- **Limited access to clean water** increases the risks of:
 - ✓ **Urinary tract infections (UTIs) and reproductive infections.**
 - ✓ **Menstrual hygiene issues**, leading to higher rates of infections and school dropout in young girls.
 - ✓ **Pregnancy complications** due to waterborne diseases.
 - ✓ **Climate change is increasing droughts and flooding**, disrupting water supply chains worldwide.

The World Map of Drought Risk

Countries by their drought risk index score (2019)



Based on past drought intensity, water stress, drought vulnerability, population, crop and livestock density

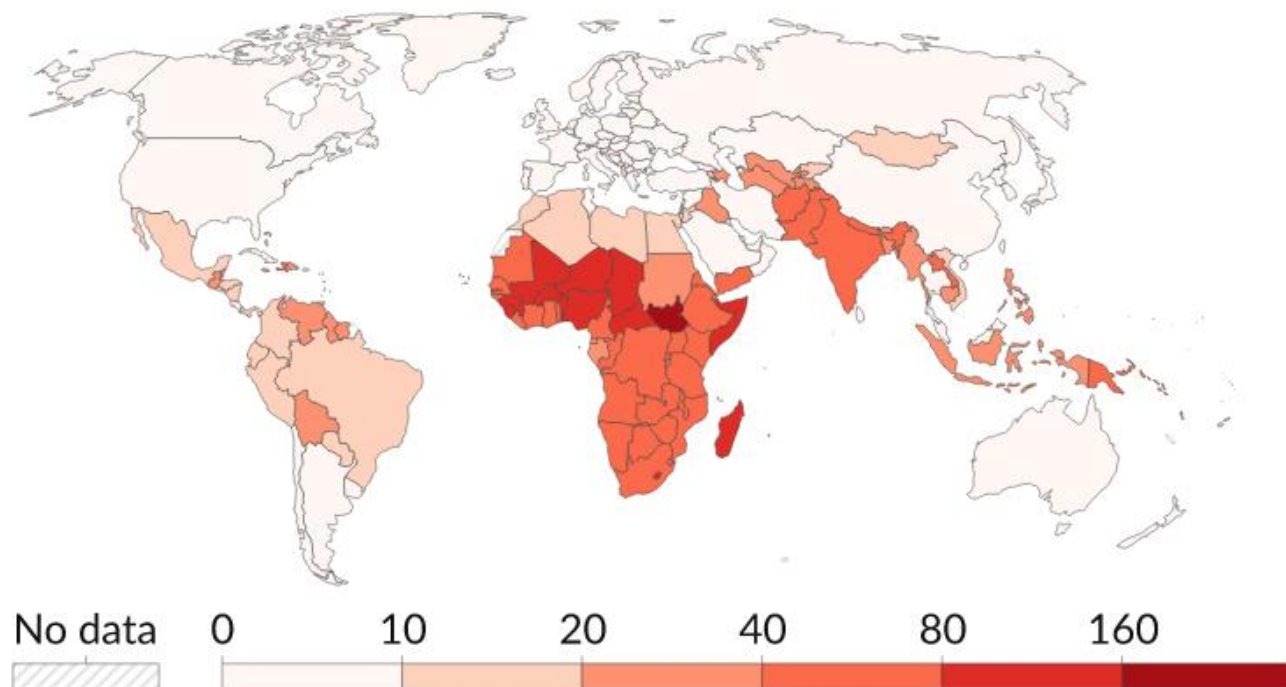
Source: Aqeduct by World Resources Institute

How Food Insecurity Affects Women's Health

Child and maternal malnutrition death rate, 2021

Our World
in Data

The estimated number of deaths attributed to child and maternal malnutrition, per 100,000 people.



Data source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2024)


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Note: To allow for comparisons between countries and over time, this metric is age-standardized.



How Food Insecurity Affects Women's Health

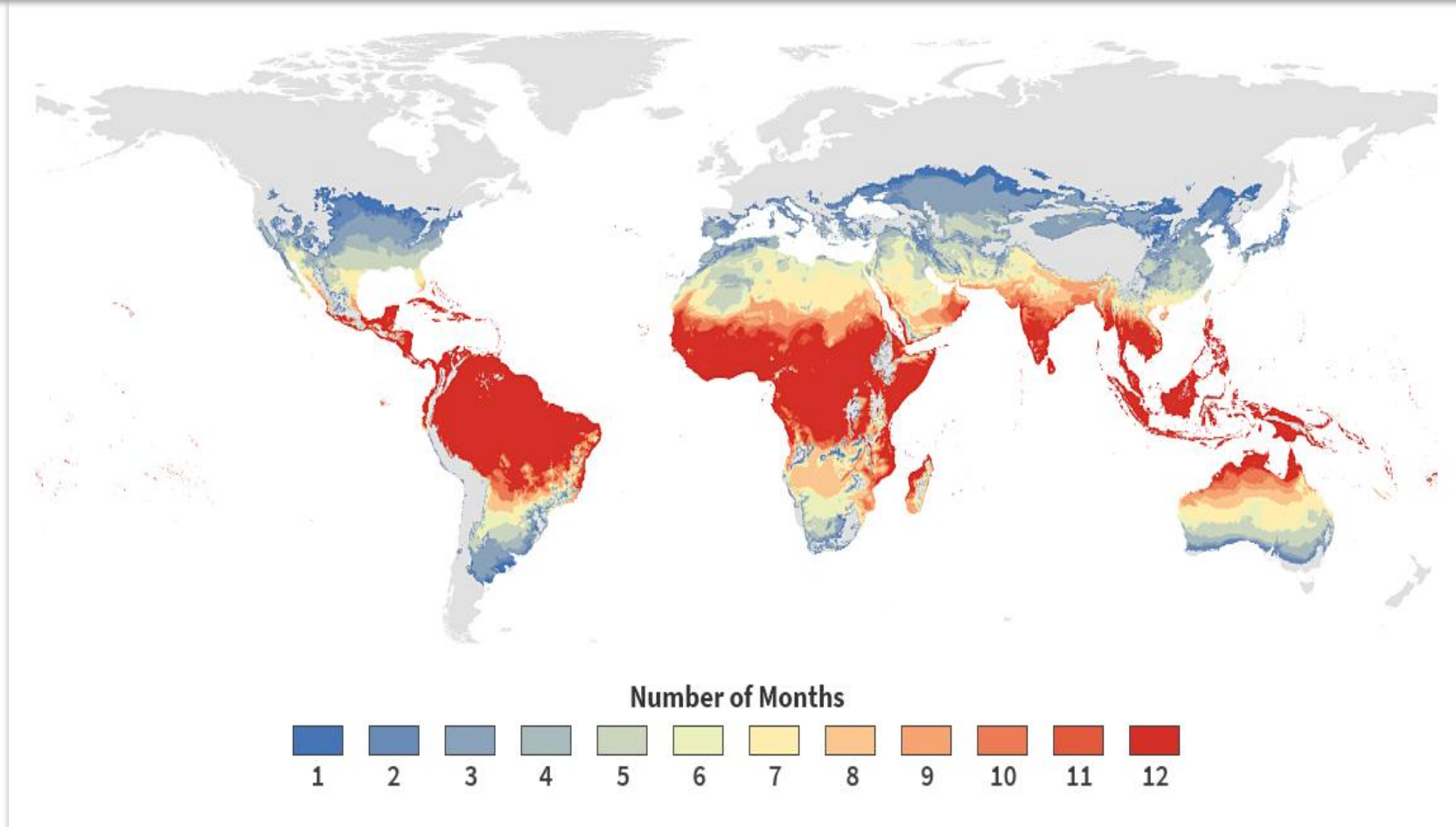
- Climate change is causing **crop failures, rising food prices, and malnutrition**, which disproportionately affect women. + ●
- **Maternal health impacts of malnutrition:**
 - ✓ Increased maternal mortality due to anemia and vitamin deficiencies.
 - ✓ Higher rates of birth defects, low birth weight, and infant stunting.
 - ✓ Iron deficiency anemia affects 42% of pregnant women worldwide (WHO, 2023).



Vector-Borne Diseases and Women's Vulnerability

- **Rising global temperatures** have expanded the range of diseases such as **malaria**, **Zika virus**, and **dengue fever**.
- **Pregnant women are at greater risk** due to:
 - ✓ **Malaria** → Higher chances of **miscarriage**, **preterm birth**, and **maternal anemia**.
 - ✓ **Zika virus** → Causes **birth defects** like **microcephaly**.
 - ✓ **Dengue fever** → Increases **immune complications** in **pregnant women**.
 - ✓ **Flooding and poor sanitation** contribute to outbreaks of **cholera**, **typhoid**, and **diarrheal diseases**, leading to **maternal and infant mortality**.

Stanford researchers explore the effects of climate change on disease



Current worldwide distribution of the mosquito *Aedes aegypti* – which can spread dengue fever, Zika virus, chikungunya and yellow fever – by duration of time in each region. (Image credit: Sadie Ryan)

Climate-Induced Displacement and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

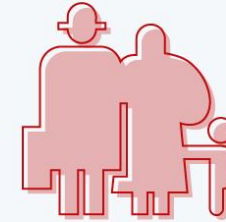
- Climate disasters lead to **forced displacement**, increasing the risk of **GBV, sexual violence, and exploitation**.
- Women in **refugee and displaced communities** face:
 - ✓ Higher rates of sexual violence and trafficking.
 - ✓ Limited access to reproductive healthcare and contraception.
 - ✓ Increased domestic violence due to economic stressors.
 - ✓ Studies show a rise in GBV cases following extreme weather events (e.g., hurricanes, droughts).



Climate-Induced Displacement and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Climate Change, the Great Displacer

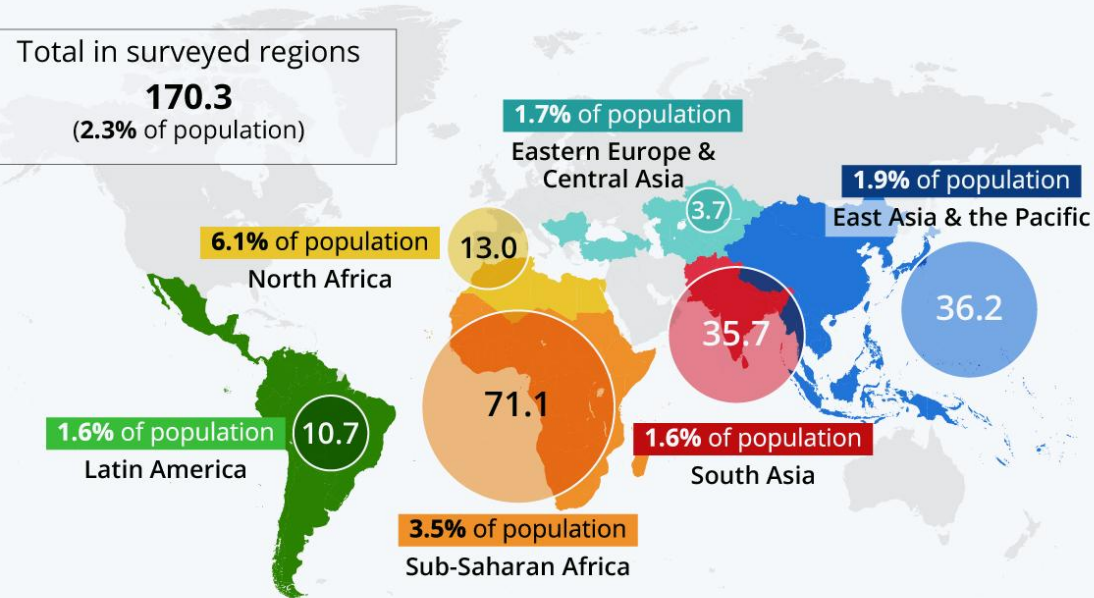
Average number of internal climate migrants
by 2050 per region (in millions)*



Total in surveyed regions

170.3

(2.3% of population)



* Modeled on pessimistic reference = High emission & unequal development scenarios concerning water availability, crop productivity and sea-level rise

Source: World Bank





Global Climate Policies Addressing Women's Health

- The **UN's Gender Action Plan** integrates **women's health into climate policies**.
- **WHO** emphasizes the need for **climate-resilient health systems** to protect vulnerable women.
- **COP27 and COP28 commitments:**
 - ✓ Increased funding for gender-sensitive climate adaptation programs.
 - ✓ Strengthened climate-health research on maternal risks.





**Supporting our membership to respond to the
climate crisis and advocating for a healthier future
for women and girls**





RCOG's Policy on Climate and Women's Health

- RCOG advocates for international commitments to reduce healthcare emissions.
- Key policy recommendations:
 - ✓ Increase **funding for maternal and reproductive healthcare** in climate-affected areas.
 - ✓ Implement **climate-informed obstetric and gynecologic care protocols**.
 - ✓ Strengthen **medical training on climate and women's health**.
 - ✓ The upcoming **April 23rd RCOG Climate Sustainability Meeting** will address these priorities.



Green Maternity Conference

 Wednesday 19 March 2025  London



Health
Innovation
Network



New policy position

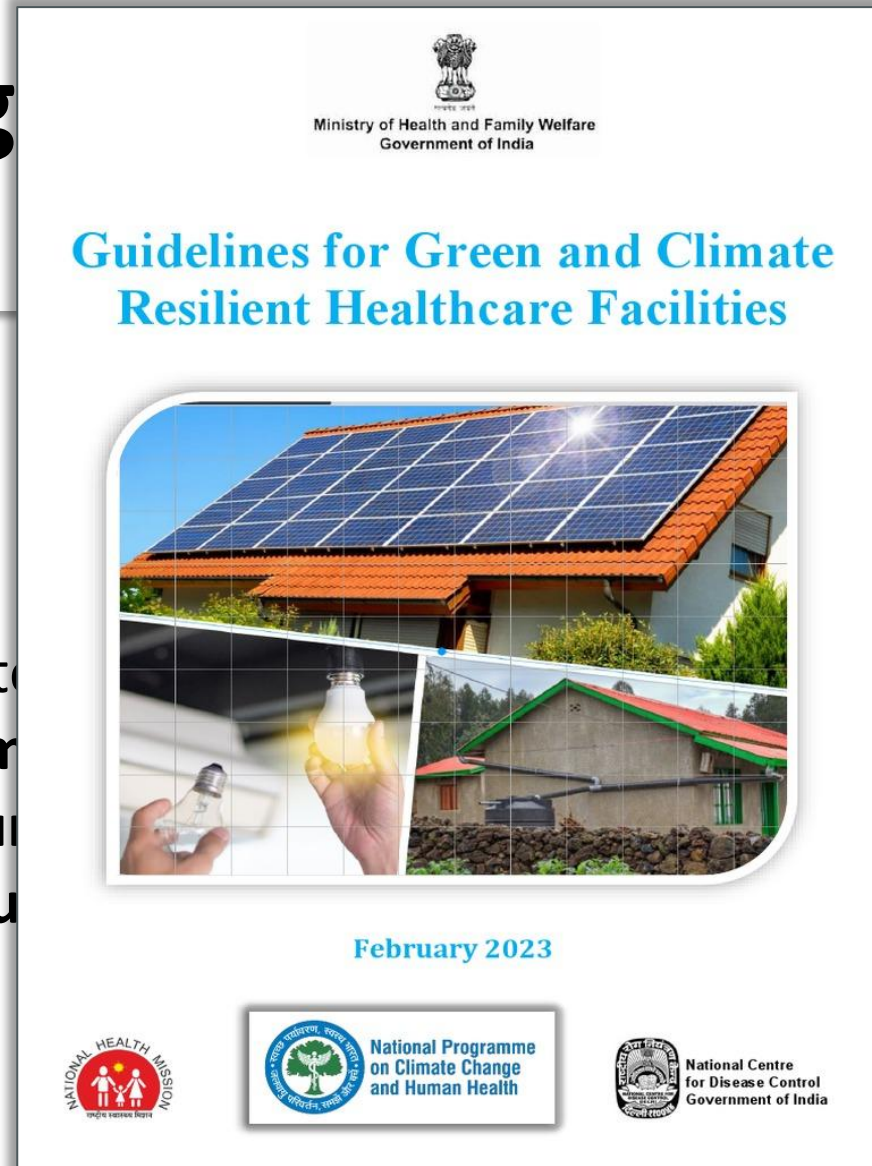
Climate change in women's health

Building

- Healthcare systems climate crises.
- Key adaptation strategies
 - ✓ Heat-adaptive measures
 - ✓ Mobile health units
 - ✓ Strengthened surveillance

Healthcare

of maternal care during
tion, cooling systems).
es and emergency care.



| Thank you

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