

\$129bn in extreme weather losses last year

Extreme weather caused some \$129bn in economic losses last year, said a report on Tuesday, 31 October, that warned the bill will keep climbing as climate change boosts droughts, storms and floods.



Climate_Change, Flickr, OIF Action

There was a 46% increase in weather disasters from 2010 to 2016, with 797 "extreme" events recorded last year, according to research published in *The Lancet* medical journal.

These "resulted in \$129bn in overall economic losses" - a figure roughly matching the budget of Finland. Losses were counted as damage to physical assets and did not include the "economic value" of deaths, injury or disease caused by extreme events.

An observed increase in weather disasters in recent years, the report said, cannot yet be unequivocally attributed to climate change. But the evidence "might plausibly be interpreted as showing how climate change is changing the frequency and severity of these events", the authors wrote.

Climate scientists are loath to blame any particular weather event on global warming - a phenomenon that needs to be monitored over decades. But looking to the future, the authors are under no illusions that climate change will fuel the

"frequency and severity" of tropical storms, droughts and flooding around the world.

The finances of poor countries are disproportionately hard hit, said the report compiled by experts from 24 academic institutions and inter-governmental bodies including the World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization. Their losses from freak weather events were more than three times higher in 2016 than in 2010, and as a proportion of GDP, much greater than in rich nations. In high-income countries, about half of economic losses were insured, compared to less than 1% in poor nations.

The researchers calculated that rising temperatures caused a loss of about 5.3% in labour productivity in outdoor workers since 2000. Over the same period, the number of vulnerable people exposed to heatwaves - putting them at risk of heatstroke, heart failure or dehydration - increased by about 125-million. The rising mercury also caused a near 10% rise since 1950 in the disease-spreading "vectoral capacity" of a mosquito bearing the potentially deadly dengue virus.

"Climate change is expected to have an impact on crop production, with a one-degree-Celsius rise in temperatures associated with a 6% decline in global wheat yields and a 10% decrease in rice grain yields," said a statement in *The Lancet*, warning of growing hunger.

The world's nations have pledged to limit average global warming caused by humankind's emission of fossil fuel gases, to two degrees Celsius from pre-Industrial Revolution levels. We have already reached about 1 C. US President Donald Trump has pulled his country out of the pact, though the withdrawal can only become effective in about four years.

On top of the risk to life, limb and property from heatwaves, floods and storms, as well as the spread of water-borne diseases and disease-bearing insects, climate change may also pose longer-term health dangers, the report said.

"Indeed, emerging evidence is suggesting links between a rising incidence of chronic kidney disease, dehydration, and climate change," the authors wrote. Experts commenting on the report agreed more research is needed to clearly attribute health impacts to climate change. There was no doubt, however, of the link between temperature trends and human activities, nor about "the urgency of addressing the issues raised by this report", said Clare Goodess of the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit.

Source: AFP