



Neighbours and Navigators

**Preparing for Climate
Mobility from
Tuvalu and Kiribati
to Aotearoa**

**Research Report
and Policy Brief**



Dr Olivia Yates, Dr Sam Manuela, Associate Professor Shiloh Groot (School of Psychology) and Professor Andreas Neef (Development Studies, School of Social Sciences), The University of Auckland.

Prepared with the support of the Tuvalu Auckland community Trust, West Auckland Kiribati Association, and Auckland Kiribati Society Incorporated, with input from the Warkworth Kiribati community, Te Nikabubuti Group, and the New Zealand Kiribati National Council.

This research was funded by the University of Auckland and the New Zealand Psychological Society.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 10/12/19 for six years, reference number 024001

Cite as: Yates, O., Manuela, S., Groot, S., & Neef, A. (2023). *Neighbours and Navigators: Preparing for Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa*. The University of Auckland.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
1. Setting the Scene	2
2. Methodology.....	4
3. Findings and Recommendations	
3.1. Making the journey easier.....	6
3.2 Regrowing Roots.....	9
3.3. Rewriting the Narrative	11
4. Acknowledgements	13
6. References	13
7. Appendices	15





Executive Summary

- There are currently no formal immigration pathways for Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati (Kiribati people) to migrate to Aotearoa for climate-related reasons. People who choose to leave become expert wayfinders (ocean navigators) and must navigate existing immigration channels with neither home nor host government support.
- The New Zealand Government has suggested using the Pacific Access Category (PAC) visa and Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme to facilitate climate mobility. However, relying on these policies risks recreating precarious living conditions in Aotearoa and entrenching poverty and poor health outcomes among Tuvaluan and Kiribati communities.
- Incomplete support for PAC and RSE visas shifts responsibility for resettlement onto wayfinding communities, often at the expense of their well-being. Some wayfinders can “fall through the cracks” in these policies into a life without a valid visa and ineligible for government support, creating cycles of precarity. Accordingly, climate change is not the most pressing issue shaping the communities’ lives.
- Nor is climate change the primary reason that people migrate from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa. Most community members had moved in pursuit of better lives for their families through healthcare, education, and employment, although more recent arrivals cite climate change as among their main motivations to have moved. Climate change nonetheless impacts wayfinders’ well-being and future aspirations, as returning to ancestral lands is no longer certain.
- Language, culture and identity can be protective factors against the adverse well-being impacts of climate mobility. However, many I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans fear that climate change will lead to loss of lands, languages, identities and cultures – all of which are intimately connected. Yet, many people believe that they will be able to maintain their cultural heritage through collective efforts and with ongoing government support.
- Most New Zealanders lack knowledge about Tuvalu, Kiribati, and climate mobility in general. They draw upon common representations of migration, Pacific peoples, and climate change as shown in the media to fill gaps in their understanding. However, these depictions are often incomplete and risk creating hostile attitudes towards climate migrants and any associated climate policies.
- Supporting the well-being of I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan wayfinders requires policy reform at multiple levels. These include:
 - **Making the journey easier** by implementing widespread immigration reforms.
 - **Supporting communities to regrow roots** through strengthened support services.
 - **Rewriting the narrative** of climate mobility through climate justice education.

1. Setting the Scene

The New Zealand Government's response to **climate mobility** supports Pacific peoples' desires to remain on their homelands, while also preparing for those who want to leave.¹ While this plan is under development, it is important to understand the experiences of those who migrate (**climate migrants**²) and the perspectives of those who welcome them (**host communities**).

It is difficult to estimate how many people will move because of climate change, as environmental factors interact with other migration drivers to both increase and decrease migration. People who do migrate are most likely to move within the same country, with up to forty-nine million people by 2050 likely to move internally across East Asia and the Pacific.³

However, low-lying atoll countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati have limited options for internal migration. Climate change is already impacting Tuvalu and Kiribati through sea level rise, saltwater intrusion (salinisation), more frequent extreme weather events and reduced food and water security.⁴⁵ While most people do not want to leave their ancestral lands, some are travelling to other countries to secure their futures.

There are currently no legally binding frameworks that support international climate migration (see Box 1). In Aotearoa, **none of our immigration policies directly permit climate mobility**. They also **do not consider climate justice nor the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840)**⁶. This means that Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati who wish to migrate must do so with neither the support of the New Zealand government nor their home country.

Aotearoa has a key role to play in supporting this movement. The concept of climate justice says that countries who have contributed the most to climate change are responsible for supporting those most impacted. Aotearoa has benefited from the systems and processes (capitalism and colonialism) that create climate impacts in the Pacific, and by this reasoning, has responsibilities to support its Pacific neighbours on the frontlines of climate change, such as I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans.⁷

Despite a shared colonial past as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans have distinct histories, cultures, identities and languages. Yet, being largely coral atoll nations, they share similar

Climate mobility

Movement across or within a country's borders that climate change at least partially drives or constrains.

Climate migrant

A person whose migration journey is shaped in some way by current and future climate impacts

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Pacific Climate Change-Related Displacement and Migration: A New Zealand Action Plan*.

² The term, 'climate migrants' is contentious but is used here in lieu of a more accurate and specific term. Refer to Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand." Chapters One and Three.


³ Clement. *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*.

⁴ The World Bank Group. 2021. *Climate Risks Country Profile: Kiribati*.

⁵ The World Bank Group. 2021. *Climate Risk Country Profile: Tuvalu*.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Climate Migration Bundle for OIAs*

⁷ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."



levels of climate change exposure and experiences of immigration to Aotearoa. According to the 2018 census, there were roughly 3225 I-Kiribati, 44% living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, and 4653 Tuvaluans, 69% living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, populations which are rapidly growing^{8,9}.

To support the well-being of these growing populations in the context of climate mobility, it is important to consider the big picture. This includes understanding people's resettlement experiences, Aotearoa's societal settings and the policies that enable or hinder immigration.

Drawing upon Pacific navigation traditions, this report and policy brief presents a novel case for a just approach to climate mobility. This approach reduces barriers to resettlement for climate migrants and enhances the likelihood of a warm reception by other New Zealanders (NZers). The findings and suggestions are based upon the first author's (Dr Olivia Yates') [doctoral thesis](#)¹⁰ and publications^{11,12,13,14} about climate mobility from Kiribati and Tuvalu to Aotearoa.

This report advocates for a three-pronged approach:

- **Making the journey easier:** Reforming existing visa pathways and creating a new climate mobility-specific visa pathway
- **Supporting communities to regrow roots:** Backing community-led initiatives to ease resettlement burdens, support the maintenance of roots (identity and cultural heritage), and foster community engagement.
- **Rewriting the narrative:** Developing a communications strategy to educate and prepare New Zealanders for climate mobility from the Pacific.

The report begins by summarising its methods then turns to key findings and policy solutions.

⁸ Stats NZ, "Kiribati Ethnic Group."

⁹ Stats NZ, "Tuvalu Ethnic Group."

¹⁰ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

¹¹ Yates et al., "Attitudes towards Climate Migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Roles of Climate Change Beliefs and Immigration Attitudes."

¹² Yates et al., "Reshaping Ties to Land: A Systematic Review of the Psychosocial and Cultural Impacts of Pacific Climate-Related Mobility."

¹³ Yates et al., "'There's so much more to that sinking island!': Restorying Migration from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

¹⁴ Yates et al., "Owning the Reality of Renting the Skies": Youth Climate Activism and Neighbourliness in the Context of Pacific Climate Mobility."

2. Methodology

Methods

This report draws on a larger collaborative research project investigating the well-being impacts of climate mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa. This was part of Dr Olivia Yates' [PhD in psychology](#) from the University of Auckland.¹⁵

The project was conducted between 2019 and 2022 in collaboration with the Kiribati and Tuvaluan communities in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (specifically, the Tuvalu Auckland Community Trust, the West Auckland Kiribati Association and the Auckland Kiribati Society Incorporated).

The research project comprises three separate studies (see Table 1) which explored climate migrants' experiences of climate migrants and host communities' perspectives. The studies were designed according to the talanoa research methodology and community psychology concepts with the support of a Pacific Advisory Board.

The studies are summarised below. More information on the projects' methods and methodologies can be found in the online thesis: <https://hdl.handle.net/2292/64635>

Table 1: Methods Across Studies

Study focus	People	Methods
Stories and experiences of climate mobility with/out dignity from Kiribati and Tuvalu ¹⁶	38 I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (aged 18-80) + field notes	Group talanoa
Aotearoa New Zealanders' attitudes towards climate migrants and justice ¹⁷	238 New Zealanders from across Aotearoa (aged 18-80)	Online quantitative survey
Youth climate activism and neighbourliness in the context of climate mobility ¹⁸	12 youth climate activists from across Aotearoa (aged 18 to 25)	One-on-one interviews

¹⁵ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

¹⁶ Yates et al., "'There's so much more to that sinking island!': Restoring Migration from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

¹⁷ Yates et al., "Attitudes towards Climate Migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Roles of Climate Change Beliefs and Immigration Attitudes."

¹⁸ Yates et al., "'Owning the Reality of Renting the Skies": Youth Climate Activism and Neighbourliness in the Context of Pacific Climate Mobility."

Foundations

Based upon the studies in this project, the research findings and policy recommendations are grounded in three core concepts:

These are explained in detail in [the thesis](#), Chapters Five, One/Six, and Three, respectively.



Neighbourliness

The New Zealand Government often discusses climate change in relation to the impact on its Pacific neighbours.¹⁹ More than a generalised sense of goodwill towards the Pacific, this report takes neighbourliness to be a relational and ethical code of behaviour. It includes three core components: accepting accountability, rethinking hospitality, and negotiating relationality.



Vā

Attending to vā is part of negotiating relationality. Vā is a diverse Pacific concept that tends to refer to the sacred space within relationships (e.g., in Tongan, Samoan) and contains obligations to care for the state of the vā.²⁰ Mutually engaging with the vā between policymakers, climate migrants, and host communities is likely to restore balance between neighbours and lead to climate-just outcomes.



Te Vaka or te Wa Journey

This report uses the metaphor of a vaka or te wa journey. This depicts climate mobility as an ongoing, circular process, shaped by diverse challenges and community members' aspirations for the future. In this, community members are **wayfinders**, those who navigate across oceans using the stars, the sun, and other clues from nature.

Te vaka (Tuvalu, other Pacific languages) or te wa (Kiribati) symbolises the connection between **roots** (land, cultural heritage, identity) and **routes** (mobility). This connection is important because many Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati express reciprocal, relational ties to land – te aba (Kiribati), fenua (Tuvalu) – as the source of life and identity.

¹⁹ Ardern, "NZ Boosts Support for Climate Action Across the Pacific."

²⁰ e.g., Anae. "Pacific Research Methodologies and Relational Ethics."

3. Findings and Recommendations

2.1. Making the Journey Easier

"It's over three years now that we've been here. And we're vying for some recognition of being here, based on climate change... but the mind would be more settled if indeed we are given PR status."

– Solofa, Tuvaluan elder

"Here, fifteen-minute break is fifteen minutes. Not fifteen minutes and one second. And we call it the Palagi time aye? But we don't have a choice. We have to obey and abide by those because we don't want to lose our jobs or get in trouble, and we can't really explain why we are a bit slack, maybe we are sick or unwell, but... we have to, you know, work hard. No matter what."

– Emeri, Kiribati elder

Upon arriving in Aotearoa, Tuvaluan and I-Kiribati community members are met by unexpected obstacles in the migration journey (as outlined in Chapter Three of the thesis²¹). Climate change is not the only issue: current immigration policies can entrench poverty and poor health outcomes among wayfinding communities. The lack of climate mobility policy heightens existing immigration challenges and can recreate precarious living conditions in Aotearoa.

- **Most Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati migrate to Aotearoa in search of better opportunities in education, employment, or healthcare or to re-join family.** However, more people every year cite climate change as one of their primary migration motivations. Some people came to Aotearoa before learning about climate change but no longer wish to return to their home islands due to future uncertainties.
- **People who wish to climate-proof their livelihoods through migration have limited visa avenues available to them.** The Kiribati, Tuvaluan and New Zealand governments prefer for people to stay and adapt to climate change^{22 23 24}. This means that people must migrate with neither home nor host government support.
- **Some people seek residency in Aotearoa through recognised immigration schemes** (e.g., the Pacific Access Category (PAC) and Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme [see Appendix 1]). Other wayfinders follow irregular migration pathways, such as via short-term visas, and seek permanent residency from within Aotearoa. In all instances, this mobility is self-funded – people use their retirement savings to cover travel costs, and if unsuccessful in their efforts, return home with next to no money.

²¹ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

²² Government of Kiribati. *Kiribati Climate Change Policy*.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism, Environment and Labour. *Te Kaniva: Tuvalu National Climate Change Policy 2012-2021*.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Climate Migration Bundle for OIAs*.

- **These existing schemes do not support the well-being of Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati.** The various visa schemes' fees, quotas, age limits, job requirements, health standards, extensive paperwork, and narrow timeframes can prevent some people from receiving visas or lead people into debt. Visa barriers are greatest for the elderly, people with disabilities, and people without disposable income.
- **The PAC shifts the cost of climate mobility onto existing Tuvaluan and Kiribati families.** PAC quotas are rarely filled due to the visa's strict requirements and limited government-funded resettlement support. Community members fill resettlement gaps by providing a range of social, housing and employment support. This creates cycles of hardship, as PAC residents then host incoming applicants at their own cost.
- **Community members can become stuck in low-wage and insecure employment.** Employment conditions under the PAC and RSE can expose aspiring wayfinders to exploitation. Many cannot challenge their employers on risk of unemployment or deportation. Others are un(der)employed because their professional, cultural or social skills, including Indigenous climate change knowledges, are unrecognised and undervalued.
- **Strict visa requirements lead climate migrants to “fall through the cracks” of the immigration system.** No one intentionally 'overstays' their visas; people aim to get permanent residency, but health, employment, language and other barriers prevent them from finalising their applications.²⁵ Irregular migrants can feel some relief from their climate worries, but without a visa they are left in limbo, unable to access social welfare and in constant fear of deportation.

Recommendation: Make the Journey Easier

Reset existing immigration pathways to reduce immigration obstacles, focus on well-being and uphold Aotearoa's responsibilities in the Pacific on the grounds of climate justice.

Climate Mobility Pathways

1. Increase the choices available to I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans by strengthening in-situ adaptation and improving existing migration avenues to Aotearoa (see below).
2. Co-design a regional climate mobility visa together with iwi Māori and with Pacific governments that is grounded in Pacific understandings of mobility and well-being.²⁶
3. Provide amnesty for all undocumented Pacific migrants.

²⁵ Nguyen & Kenkel, *Teleni Seki Atagina: Te Akasakiga o Kaaiga Tuvalu Seki Nofo Tumau Iluga i Aotearoa Niusila / Hidden Gems: Lived Experiences of Tuvaluan Hope Seekers and Their Families in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

²⁶ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand," Chapter 6.

Pacific Access Category (PAC):

1. Double the PAC quota for Kiribati and Tuvalu by 2030 and expand the eligibility criteria to include elders and disabled people (ie. remove the Acceptable Standard of Health)²⁷.
2. Provide wraparound, resettlement support before *and* after migration, face-to-face and online. Within Aotearoa, this can include transitional housing, translation services, employment assistance, and help with documentation.
3. Provide a PAC-specific temporary visa that matches the 8-month duration of the job-seeking period and includes rights to subsidised healthcare.
4. Require accredited PAC employers to pay a living wage (\$26) to support PAC applicants to adapt to the higher cost of living in Aotearoa.

Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme:

1. Require accredited RSE employers to pay a living wage (\$26).
2. Introduce longer-term employment cycles for high-demand industries. This can be modelled off Australia's Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.²⁸
3. Permit families to accompany longer-term temporary workers, as modelled by Australia's PALM.²⁹
4. Provide a pathway to residency for RSE workers who have worked in Aotearoa for more than two seasons as recognition of their dignity and contributions to Aotearoa.



²⁷ Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu, Tuvalu Climate Action Network, and International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD). *Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): Consideration of the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Submitted by New Zealand.*

²⁸ Pacific Australia Labour Mobility. "Welcome to the Palm Scheme."

²⁹ Pacific Australia Labour Mobility. "Family Accompaniment – Frequently Asked Questions for Workers."

2.2. Regrowing Roots

Some people feared that if they are relocated to another country, maybe our ways as I-Kiribati will be ... no, overturned, overcome [sic] by the country we, we transferred to, or relocated to aye. But, it is important for our language and culture to remain. And it's us to do that. -Kiribati women's maroro, Emeri

If we don't continue to speak about our culture and how things are or continue to teach the younger generation the language, then what is going to happen to Tuvalu and the culture itself? Like yes, I'm Tuvaluan, and me not being able to speak Tuvaluan fluently doesn't make me any less Tuvaluan. But if we don't have a home to go back to, if we don't have our elders to teach us the ways... then where does Tuvalu sit in like 50 years? – Nui, Tuvalu

Kiribati and Tuvaluan wayfinders carry their roots – identities, cultures, languages, livelihoods and ties to place – on their wa or vaka to rebuild a sense of belonging in Aotearoa. People are worried about losing their cultures, language and identities, which are protective factors against the mental health impacts of climate mobility. (Refer to Chapter Three of [the thesis](#).)

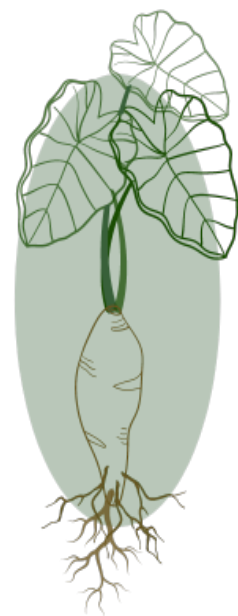
- **Community, extended family and church groups are a home-away-from-home for many Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati.** Here, community members can speak their home languages and live in te katei ni Kiribati (the Kiribati way) or faka Tuvalu (in the style of Tuvalu), feeling connected to their homelands, ancestral knowledge and identities. Elders are core knowledge holders in these spaces and bind together families.
- **Climate change increases the urgency of preserving Kiribati and Tuvaluan cultural heritages.** Many I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans are concerned that their knowledges, languages and cultures will slowly be lost through assimilation. Climate change heightens these concerns, because being separated from their ancestral lands long-term is likely adversely impact identity, language, culture, and overall well-being.
- **Social exclusion can prevent people from connecting to their roots.** Many elders without valid visas are unable to participate fully in community. Other I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans feel like a "minority within a minority", like their cultures and identities are invisible within Aotearoa's social and political structures. These forms of exclusion prevent the transmission of language and cultural heritage across generations
- **Climate change uncertainties increase worries about losing cultural heritage.** Many Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati feel that they do not know enough about climate change to be reassured about their peoples' futures. Some people see climate mobility as inevitable; others are optimistic that their homelands will remain habitable. However, most are unsure about the future and are uncertain about the safety of loved ones, whether they will be able to return, and the future of their identities and cultural heritages.

- **Many community members remain hopeful about Tuvalu or Kiribati’s ability to adapt, evolve and rise.** They do not believe that cultural loss is inevitable, as long as their communities remain collectively committed to maintaining their languages and cultures, and that they receive adequate government support.
- **The Kiribati and Tuvaluan communities are already working to uplift collective well-being and support future climate migrants to settle with dignity.** For example, they strive to uphold cultural practices and speak Kiribati or Tuvaluan at home. They are developing physical and online cultural resources, such as bilingual books^{30,31} and social media content, and are advocating for improved resettlement support and pathways to residency for irregular and future migrants³²

Recommendation: Support Communities to Regrow Roots

Work with communities to provide resources that support well-being and cultural maintenance.

1. Increase funding opportunities for Kiribati and Tuvaluan community activities that uphold cultural and/or language practices and centralise available funding and support into online hubs.
2. Fund primary and secondary education in Tuvaluan or Kiribati languages. In primary school, this could be modelled off the Kiribati bilingual language unit in Finlayson Park School, Manurewa. In secondary school, this could include providing Tuvaluan and Kiribati as NCEA-accredited subjects.³³
3. Co-design community centres with local Tuvaluan or Kiribati communities according to their specific needs and cultural practices. The Warkworth Kiribati community’s [proposed maneaba](#) (meeting house)³⁴ could be adapted for other regions.
4. Provide financial literacy training in Tuvaluan and Kiribati languages to support property investment and the development of community hubs.
5. Fund Tuvaluan and Kiribati community members to support education about climate change within their communities.
6. Develop mental health services specific to climate mobility, wherein service providers are knowledgeable about climate change, Pacific understandings of well-being, and Pacific peoples’ diverse experiences in Aotearoa.



³⁰ e.g. Tokalau, "Tuvalu Language Week: Children's Bilingual Books Launched to Mark Independence Day."

³¹ T-Pole, "Bilingual Children's Books Launch in Time for Kiribati Language Week 2021."

³² Pailate, "Petition of Makahokoalu Pailate for Pacific Leadership Forum: Provide Pathways for Overstayers to Gain Permanent Residency in NZ on Compassion."

³³ Finlayson Park School, "Welcome"

³⁴ Hoppood, "New Cultural Centre Planned by Kiribati Community in NZ."

2.3 Rewriting the Narrative

Kiata: "Cause when we go to other places and they say, "Where are you from?" and we say, Kiribati," and they don't know where that places [sic] is. And now they're slowly knowing, like, "Oh so you're the sinking island!" And we go, "No, not the sinking island!"

Mateata: *There's so much more to that sinking island! Get your facts right!* (I-Kiribati youth)

Meli*: *And I would hope that if the time comes my, like, our people are welcomed ...And they treat it like they have their dignity, and yeah, not being pitied, and being like, "Oh, yeah, we're helping you."*

Nia*: *...'Cause really, like, our people are more than capable of helping themselves* (Tuvaluan youth)

Tuvaluan and I-Kiribati community members are rewriting the narrative around climate mobility. They are highlighting their strengths and agency instead of their vulnerability to climate change. However, this perspective is not widely understood by other NZers.³⁵

- **Most NZers know little about Tuvalu and Kiribati.** Simplistic media representations can lead NZers to see all Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati as victims of sea-level rise or so-called 'climate refugees'.^{36,37} Most I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans reject these ideas because they imply that their home countries are at fault and that they are helpless to choose their futures.
- **There is gap in public knowledge of climate mobility.** On average, New Zealanders are more positive towards immigrants (in general) than climate migrants specifically. This may be because New Zealanders are uncertain about what climate mobility means for Aotearoa, so they create an idea of climate mobility based upon their lived experiences and climate change and immigration rhetoric.
- **Media representations of climate mobility often only tell one side of the story.** Climate mobility is variably framed as a forced movement, a distant issue, an immediate phenomenon, a societal threat, or a reason for justice. These incomplete representations can positively and negatively impact public opinion (see Appendix 2).
- **Public opinion has very real impacts on the lives of frontline Pacific communities.** Public perceptions about who deserves residency influence political will to change immigration policy. This can lead to restrictive immigration policies, and in turn, increase barriers for frontline communities to migrate away from sites of climate risk.

³⁵ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand." Chapters Four and Five.

³⁶ Climate refugees are not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the term has been widely rejected. Refer to: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The 1951 Refugee Convention*.

³⁷ Neef and Bengel, "Shifting Responsibility and Denying Justice: New Zealand's Contentious Approach to Pacific Climate Mobilities."

- **People who understand climate justice feel more responsibility towards their Pacific neighbours and are more open to climate migrants.** They recognise that Aotearoa is partly responsible for climate change in the Pacific, given its role in colonisation and its high-emissions profile.³⁸ They are more likely to conclude that Aotearoa has justice-based duties to support those most affected.

Recommendation: Rewrite the narrative to focus on climate justice.

Design targeted communications using climate justice principles to increase public support for climate mobility initiatives.



1. *Frame climate mobility in terms of justice, strengths and responsibilities.* Highlight frontline communities' minimal contributions to the climate crisis in comparison to Aotearoa's (and other major emitters') historic and current emissions, and Aotearoa's responsibilities to our Pacific neighbours. Communities' climate change exposure may be discussed if their dignity and needs for recompense are front and centre.
2. *Provide critical climate justice education in primary and secondary school.* Explain the links between Aotearoa's colonial history, its past and current emissions profiles, and its responsibilities to its Pacific neighbours. Underline the connectedness between tangata whenua, tangata Tiriti, and tangata Moana, and encourage students to visualise their own positions and responsibilities in relation to the climate crisis.³⁹
3. *Create opportunities for connection between Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati and other NZers.* Encourage other NZers to attend Tuvaluan and Kiribati events (e.g., the Pacific Language weeks), listen to their stories and learn about their cultures and languages. This is likely to inspire NZers to learn more about Tuvalu and Kiribati and climate change. In turn, NZers would be more likely to support climate migrants coming to Aotearoa and maintaining their cultures and languages across generations.
4. *Foster ongoing, reciprocal relationships between Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati and other NZers.* Opportunities for connection may be modelled off Immigration New Zealand's Community Refugee Sponsorship Programme⁴⁰ or the New Zealand Red Cross' Refugee Support Volunteer system.⁴¹ For community members, such relationships can increase their sense of belonging in Aotearoa. For other NZers, these connections can motivate learning about the climate crisis, which evoke empathy and build solidarity.

³⁸ Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand." Chapters One and Five.

³⁹ Similar education has proven affective elsewhere, e.g., Stapleton, "A Case for Climate Justice Education: American Youth Connecting to Intragenerational Climate Injustice in Bangladesh."

⁴⁰ Community Refugee Sponsorship

⁴¹ New Zealand Red Cross. "Refugee support volunteer."

References

- Anae, Melani. "Pacific Research Methodologies and Relational Ethics." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, edited by Oxford University Press. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.529>.
- Ardern, Jacinda. "NZ Boosts Support for Climate Action Across the Pacific." Beehive.govt.nz. Updated August 15, 2019. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-boosts-support-climate-action-across-pacific>.
- Clement, Viviane, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Blake Jones, Salvatore Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nadia Sadiq, and Ehsanul Shabahat. *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*. The World Bank Group, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1596/36248>.
- Community Refugee Sponsorship. <https://www.refugeesponsorship.org.nz/#:~:text=The%20programme%20supports%20groups%20to,life%20in%20Aotearoa%20New%20Zealand>.
- Finlayson Park School, "Welcome". <https://www.finlaysonpark.school.nz/>
- Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu, Tuvalu Climate Action Network, and International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD). *Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): Consideration of the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Submitted by New Zealand*. 2020. https://icaad.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/INT_CRPD_CSS_NZL_49534_O-1.pdf.
- Government of Kiribati. *Kiribati Climate Change Policy*. 2018 https://www.climatelaws.org/rails/active_storage/blobs/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBcDhGIiwiaXhwLjpuZDVsLCJwdXliOiJibG9iX2lkIn19--dfb91ce7dc9c984815023d678628ad9e03c99c22/f.
- Hopgood, Sela J. "New Cultural Centre Planned by Kiribati Community in NZ." RNZ, Updated August 17, 2020. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/423700/new-cultural-centre-planned-by-kiribati-community-in-nz>.
- Ministry for Pacific Peoples. *Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa*. 2021. <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Economy-Research-Report-on-Unpaid-Work-and-Volunteering-in-Aotearoa.pdf>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Climate Migration Bundle for OIAs* (OIA No. 27038). 2021.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Pacific Climate Change-Related Displacement and Migration: A New Zealand Action Plan*. Wellington, New Zealand: 2018
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism, Environment and Labour. *Te Kaniva: Tuvalu National Climate Change Policy 2012-2021*. 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/tuvalu/te-kaniva-tuvalu-national-climate-change-policy-2012-2021>.
- Neef, Andreas, and Lucy Bengé. "Shifting Responsibility and Denying Justice: New Zealand's Contentious Approach to Pacific Climate Mobilities." *Regional Environmental Change* 22, no. 94 (2022): 1-12. <https://doi.10.1007/s10113-022-01951-x>.
- New Zealand Red Cross. "Refugee support volunteer." <https://www.redcross.org.nz/get-involved/volunteer-in-new-zealand/find-a-volunteer-role/refugee-support-volunteer/>.
- Nguyen, Hoa and Kenkel, David. *Taleni Seki Atagina: Te Akasakiga o Kaaiga Tuvalu Seki Nofo Tumau Iluga i Aotearoa Niusila / Hidden Gems: Lived Experiences of Tuvaluan Hope Seekers and Their Families in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Auckland: Unitec Institute of Technology, 2021. <https://www.unitec.ac.nz/sites/default/files/public/documents/Tuvalu%20project%20report%20-FINAL-13.12.2021.pdf>.
- Pacific Australia Labour Mobility. "Family Accompaniment – Frequently Asked Questions for Workers." <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/resources/family-accompaniment-faqs>.
- Pacific Australia Labour Mobility. "Welcome to the Palm Scheme." <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/>.
- Pailate, Makahokoalu. "Petition of Makahokoalu Pailate for Pacific Leadership Forum: Provide Pathways for Overstayers to Gain Permanent Residency in NZ on Compassion." New Zealand Parliament. Updated June 20, 2020. <https://petitions.parliament.nz/b20c231a-f241-4f68-b40b-78c1a58fcd58>.

- Stapleton, Sarah R. "A Case for Climate Justice Education: American Youth Connecting to Intragenerational Climate Injustice in Bangladesh." *Environmental Education Research* 25, no. 5 (2019): 732-750. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1472220>.
- Stats NZ. "Kiribati Ethnic Group." <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/kiribati>.
- Stats NZ. "Tuvalu Ethnic Group." <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/tuvaluan>.
- The World Bank Group. *Climate Risk Country Profile: Tuvalu*. 2021. https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/15824-WB_Tuvalu%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.
- The World Bank Group. *Climate Risks Country Profile: Kiribati*. 2021. https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/countryprofiles/15816-WB_Kiribati%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.
- Tokalau, Torika. "Tuvalu Language Week: Children's Bilingual Books Launched to Mark Independence Day." Stuff, Updated October 1, 2022. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/130020211/tuvalu-language-week-childrens-bilingual-books-launched-to-mark-independence-day>.
- T-Pole, Marama. "Bilingual Children's Books Launch in Time for Kiribati Language Week 2021." TP+, Updated July 15, 2021. <https://tpplus.co.nz/education/bilingual-childrens-books-launch-in-time-for-kiribati-language-week-2021/>.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The 1951 Refugee Convention*. 1951. <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee>.
- Yates, Olivia E. T., Manuela, Sam, Neef, Andreas, and Groot, Shiloh. "Reshaping Ties to Land: A Systematic Review of the Psychosocial and Cultural Impacts of Pacific Climate-Related Mobility." *Climate and Development* 14, no. 3 (2022): 250-267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2021.1911775>.
- Yates, Olivia Elizabeth Teryle. 2022. *Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand*. PhD diss., The University of Auckland. Accessed July 18, 2023. <https://hdl.handle.net/2292/64635>.
- Yates, Olivia, Shiloh Groot, Sam Manuela, and Andreas Neef, "'Owning the Reality of Renting the Skies': Youth Climate Activism and Neighbourliness in the Context of Pacific Climate Mobility," in *Handbook of Climate Migration and Climate Mobility Justice*, edited by Andreas Neef, Bukola Salami and Natasha Pauli. De Gruyter, in press.
- Yates, Olivia, Shiloh Groot, Sam Manuela, and Andreas Neef, "Attitudes towards Climate Migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Roles of Climate Change Beliefs and Immigration Attitudes," *Regional Environmental Change* 22, no. 3 (2022): 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-022-01942-y>.
- Yates, Olivia, Shiloh Groot, Sam Manuela, and Andreas Neef, "There's so much more to that sinking island!": Restoring Migration from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand," *Journal of Community Psychology* 51, (2023): 924-944, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22928>.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Pathways for Climate Mobility to Aotearoa⁴²

International Frameworks

1951 Refugee Convention

Climate migrants are ineligible without evidence of a breach of the right to a life with dignity.

Other non-binding legal frameworks

Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Global Compact on Refugees

Boe Declaration on Regional Security

Aotearoa's Frameworks

Climate Humanitarian Visa

Proposed by Aotearoa in 2017 but withdrawn to respect its Pacific partners' preference to remain on their ancestral lands.

This or similar is not yet implemented by any country

Pacific Access Category (PAC) Visa

Permanent residency

150 people from Tuvalu and 150 people from Kiribati and their immediate families.

Names drawn from ballot can apply for residency

Eight months between name being drawn and applying in which to find a job

People aged 18-45 are eligible

Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE)

Temporary work visa for up to nine months in any eleven-month period

Number depends upon demand for work by New Zealanders

For work in the horticulture and viticulture industries

Employer provides pastoral care

Allows for return of experienced workers in future seasons

Irregular migration

Migration without a valid visa

Typically the result of not being able to meet visa conditions or deadlines

Excludes migrants from state support and subsidised services

Excludes migrants from participating in the formal economy

Family Reunification Visas

Category of 20 visa types that allow family to come to Aotearoa to live, visit or work.

Cover dependent children of residents/visa holders and their partners or parents.

Generally depend upon the relationship's nature and/or existing residents' income and job status.

Skilled migrant visa

Permanent residency

55 years or under

Open to people with skills and qualifications that the Government prioritises for economic growth

⁴² Summarised from Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."

Appendix 2. Media Representations of Climate Mobility and their Impacts

Media Frame	Example and explanation	Positive Impact	Negative impact
Climate mobility as forced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pacific peoples have no other choice but to migrate, being helpless to stop climate change and its catastrophic impacts on their lives and livelihoods. Typically associated with notions of vulnerability and victimhood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases compassion and rates of public acceptance. Draws attention to issues of climate justice and human rights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplifies climate mobility to a single story that ignores the structural and economic causes of climate mobility. Produces deficit-based climate solutions, Entrenches negative stereotypes of Pacific peoples as vulnerable. Subjective about what counts as forced.
Climate mobility as distant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate mobility is a future phenomenon for which we ought to gradually prepare. Commonly used by non-Indigenous/ Pākehā-dominated organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases time to carefully prepare for climate mobility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignores people's stories of climate mobility in the present. Reduces public and government pressure to legislate on climate mobility. Shifts responsibility onto future generations of hosts and policymakers.
Climate mobility as immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate mobility is a current and ongoing issue. Associated with the myth that climate migrants are already migrating to Aotearoa en masse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases public pressure to legislate on climate mobility. Increases rates of public acceptance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sparks fear of climate migrants, increasing hostility and discrimination towards Pacific people. Bypasses the time needed for building reciprocal relationships, producing misrepresentative policies.
Climate mobility as a societal threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate migrants are disruptive to New Zealand's economy and neoliberal values. Emphasis on people's economic value e.g., preference for climate migrants with capital and recognised qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases rates of public acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces Pacific peoples to their productive capacity. Scapegoats Pacific peoples for economic failures, echoing the Dawn Raids era. Fuels hostility towards people seen as economically burdensome e.g., irregular migrants; elders, despite evidence otherwise.⁴³
Climate mobility as cause for justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate migrants did not cause the climate crisis, therefore countries who are the most responsible should support them to choose their futures (e.g., stay and adapt, move internally, migrate overseas). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases compassion and rates of public acceptance. Increases solidarity and pressure for climate mobility legislation. Respects Pacific peoples' chosen narratives and self-determination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to impact people who strongly disagree with ideas of justice and that climate change has human causes.

Refer to Chapters Four and Six of [the thesis](#) for further explanation.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ministry for Pacific Peoples. *Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa*.

⁴⁴ Summarised from Yates, "Stories of Neighbours and Navigators: Perceptions and Implications of Climate Mobility from Tuvalu and Kiribati to Aotearoa New Zealand."