

Climate Scientist: Heat From Global Warming Won't Trigger Refugee Crisis

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A new study claiming temperature increases will drive “500 million people” out of the Middle East and North Africa has already drawn the ire of a few scientists.

The study, published Monday in the journal Climatic Change, predicts that global warming would drastically change the regions' environment, causing huge heatwaves. These temperature increases would force a population of 500 million to migrate to other areas, causing considerable political instability. The study indicated that a mass migration would occur even if the world manages to meet President Barack Obama's goal of limiting global warming to 2.0° Celsius.

On the other hand, rising temperatures from global warming could likely only cause minor changes in behavior, a dissenting climate scientist told The Daily Caller News Foundation.

Chip Knappenberger, a climate scientist at the libertarian Cato Institute, thinks rising temperatures will cause people to change their behavior, not cause mass migration. Knappenberger previously authored scientific research, published in the scientific journal Nature, saying increasing numbers of heat waves causes people to adapt their behavior to the changing conditions, ultimately leading to fewer deaths and little migration.

“Too often, stories of projected large-scale negative outcomes from global warming run contrary to known and reasonable anticipated responses. This seems to be another such instance,” Knappenberger told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “When it comes to questions about heat and human health, it turns out that we are very good at adapting to it—an adaptation that becomes better the more we are exposed to extreme heat.”

Knappenberger and many other climate scientists, believe that humans are very adaptable to extreme heat and can easily handle temperature changes, especially if the heat waves are a regular occurrence.

“Across the U.S., for example, the population has become much less sensitive to heat waves over the past 40-50 years—even as the frequency/magnitude of heat waves has increased. In fact, it is the hottest places in the country that exhibit the lowest rates of heat-related mortality. In hot places, Miami, Dallas, Phoenix, for example, people know how to live with the heat,” Knappenberger continued. “I imagine that the same is true in the Middle East and Northern Africa—traditionally hot places where the lifestyles are well-adapted to such conditions.”

In developed countries, hot cities have the lowest rates of heat-related mortality while cooler cities in the northeast have the highest rates. Once people get accustomed to heat, they take the actions necessary to survive it. Scientific studies show heat waves that occur a few years after especially deadly heat waves result in far fewer deaths as the population has readily adapted.

Knappenberger concluded: “As air conditioning becomes more widespread—made possible through cheap and reliable energy sources—this adaptation can come close to becoming complete,” Knappenberger concluded.

Heat deaths in wealthy countries have been declining since 1960 despite predicted temperature increases.