

Global sea levels are rising as the world's land ice is disappearing.

Sea levels have risen 6 to 8 inches in the past 100 years, and Antarctica has been losing more than 100 cubic kilometers of ice per year since 2002. By the year 2100, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that sea levels will rise as much as 20 inches.

While rising sea levels ultimately influence the entire planet, they pose the greatest threat to the islands currently residing at sea level. A rising water table is already turning salty in the center of islands, killing staple food crops like taro, and many other kinds of plants.

Here are some of the islands — many of them small nations — likely to face this crisis first.



Kiribati

The Republic of Kiribati, independent from the UK since 1979, is a low-lying island nation comprised of 33 atolls and reef islands and one coral reef island.

The islands are protruding tips of undersea volcanoes only a few feet above sea-level. It's highest point is 266 feet. Most of the island is less than 3 feet above sea level. Kiribati Island Nation is considering moving the entire population to Fiji to escape climate change effects.

Fiji

The people of Kiribati may want to rethink their plans to relocate to Fiji, as this 7,056-square-mile island nation in the South Pacific is pondering its own ways to face the challenges of climate change.

While its larger islands contain mountains as high as 4,000 feet above sea level, Fiji is still concerned about the effects of climate change. As the World Health Organization reports, climate change is expected to influence extremes of too little and too much water in the form of severe storms and droughts.

Further, such extreme weather is expected to make the island's population of 909,000 more sensitive to climate-sensitive diseases, such as water-borne illnesses.

Micronesia

Micronesia consists of 607 islands containing both mountains and low-lying coral atolls in the Pacific. It lies 1,800 miles east of the Philippines. This 270-square-mile nation holds a population of roughly 107,000. The threat is to their existence and survival, not only as a people — but as a culture. They now have just flat beaches — the wash comes in and hits the roots of coconut trees. Experts say sea levels will rise more than 3 feet in the next 90 years, but even a small rise of one foot will be devastating to the nation.



Solomon Islands



Five of the Solomon Islands in the western Pacific have disappeared due to rising sea levels over the past seven decades. Another six islands there have lost more than 20 percent of their surface area, forcing people to relocate.

Sea levels in the Solomon Islands have been climbing by 1/4 inch per year since 1994. The human element of this is alarming. So many people have lost their family home that they've had for four to five generations. It's quite alarming.

Tangier Island, Virginia



Located on the Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Island is about 12 miles from mainland Virginia. A recent survey found that the island has lost two-thirds of its landmass since 1850. Tangier also faces issues because of its location in the center of the bay, as well as its crumbly surface made primarily of sand and silt.

The combination leaves the island fragile and unprotected. There is an engineering proposal for a \$30 million plan that might preserve the island. If not, it is estimated that residents have about 50 years before they will have to vacate. ■