

Fake News at UN-2, the saga continues

[December 17, 2021](#), [good to know](#), [Extreme events SCE-info](#)

by Ludwik Budyn, Degree in Chemical Sciences, Université Libre de Bruxelles

A few weeks ago we published an article¹ demonstrating the deception of the 2020 UNDRR (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction²) report entitled :

« *Human Cost of Disasters - An Overview of the Last 20 Years - 2000-2019*³ ».

We presumed then that this was the beginnings of a larger movement.

And this year, it is the WMO (World Meteorological Organization) that has dedicated itself to proving us right⁴.

On August 31, 2021, the WMO, in collaboration with CRED (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters⁵) and UCL (Catholic University of Leuven), published a report entitled :

« WMO ATLAS OF MORTALITY AND ECONOMIC LOSSES FROM WEATHER, CLIMATE AND WATER EXTREMES (1970–2019)⁶ ».

It contains this graph, grouping by decade the natural disasters and the economic losses they cause, with the following comments :

¹<https://ludwik-budyn.medium.com/fake-news-at-the-un-2bbbad36ed49>

²<https://www.undrr.org/>

³<https://www.undrr.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Human%20Cost%20of%20Disasters%202000-2019%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/weather-related-disasters-increase-over-past-50-years-causing-more-damage-fewer?fbclid=IwAR0yDVBy8i0H2hu45_uJKbLXz36UBWm4XzKSawhD6gEPnxwSP_-9aoXNpAE

⁵All data used in the Atlas come from CRED (<https://www.cred.be/>), a research center of the Catholic University of Leuven. It is part of the School of Public Health located in Brussels, Belgium.

It collaborates on international studies on the humanitarian and health consequences of natural disasters. To this end, it manages a database, EM-DAT, which records natural disasters throughout the world. CRED's results are published in *Our world in data* (<https://ourworldindata.org/natural-disasters>), an online publication of the University of Oxford.

⁶https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10902

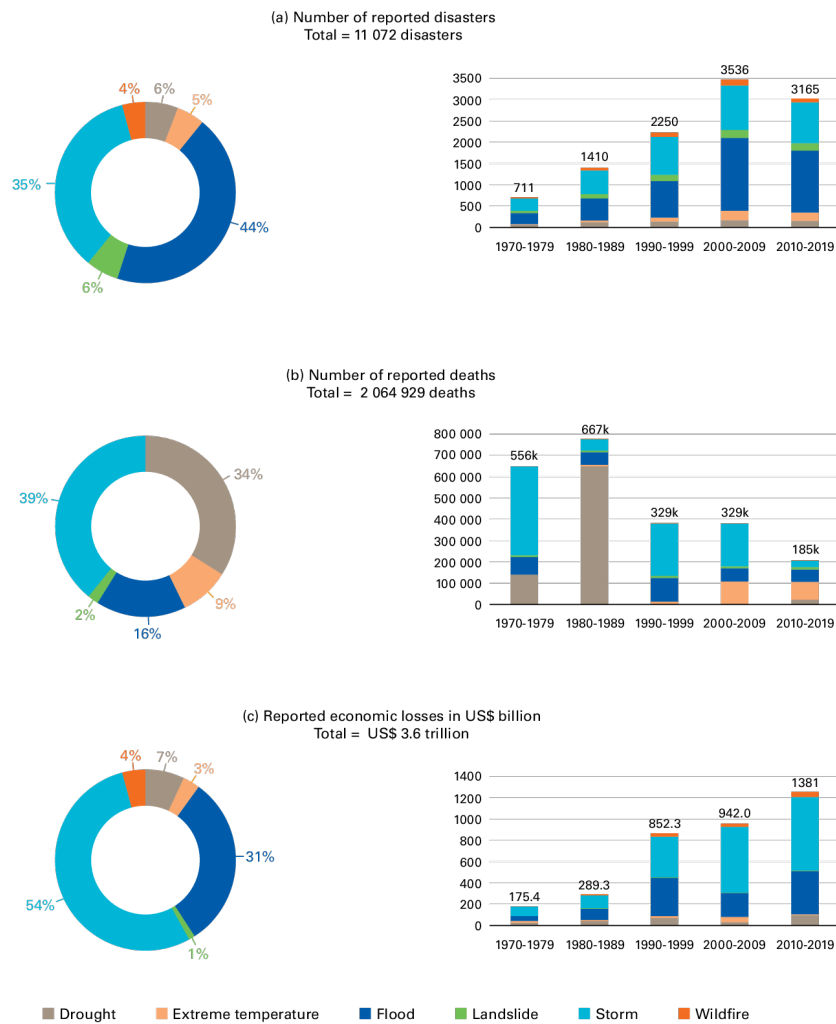


Figure 4. Distribution of (a) number of disasters, (b) number of deaths and (c) economic losses by hazard type by decade globally

« The number of disasters has **increased by a factor of five** over the 50 years period: whereas 711 disasters were recorded for 1970–1979, 3 536 were recorded in 2000–2009 (Figure 4) », and

« Economic losses due to weather, climate and water extremes have **increased sevenfold** from the 1970s to the 2010s (Figure 4). The reported losses from 2010–2019 (US\$ 383 per day on average over the decade) were **seven times** the amount reported from 1970–1979 (US\$ 49 million) ».

There would have been a fivefold increase in the number of natural disasters and a sevenfold increase in economic losses during the period under consideration !

On the subject of disasters, a few questions immediately arise :

- Why compare the first decade to the second last and not the last ? Is it because the result is more frightening ?
- Has it been verified whether the number of countries reporting these disasters is of the same order during these two periods ? Because this is not the case, an annual average of 47 countries during the first decade for 126 during the penultimate one. The use of a different statistical sample in these two cases makes any comparison illusory.
- Finally, why not compare the last two decades ? Addressing two consecutive periods, therefore more comparable from every point of view, with a similar number of reporting countries, 126 and 119, would reveal a more realistic picture of the evolution of the situation. But also, and this answers the question, we would see a decrease in the number of disasters since the beginning of the 21st century.

About economic losses, we know that between 1970 and 2019 :

- the number of reporting countries increased from 45 in 1970 to 126 in 2019, a rise of 180% ;
- the world population⁷ increased from 3.7 to 7.7 billion, a growth of 108% ;
- the urban population has increased from 1.35 to 4.30 billion, i.e. an increase of 218%, which has led to a growing exposure to risks ;
- the number and cost of infrastructures built have increased proportionally ;
- progress has generated new potential targets.

Yet the authors do not consider these elements to be factors that should be taken into account in order to relativize their comparisons between the data of the two periods.

They consider that neither the population, nor the economic environment⁸, nor the number of reporting countries have changed over the past 50 years and that, therefore, the absolute data⁹ for the two periods can be compared as is. It is therefore sufficient for them to note that multiplying the economic losses of the first decade by 7 gives a result close to that of the last decade, in order to be able to claim to « *highlight significant... [and] discernible trends over time* » during the past 50 years : the sevenfold increase in economic damage. Astonishing !

All the more astonishing when, speaking of the consequences of natural disasters, we read :

« From a disasters analysis point of view, population growth and patterns of economic development are more important than climate change or cyclical variations in weather when explaining this upward trend. Today, not only are more people in harm's way than there were 50 years ago, but building in flood plains, earthquakes zones and other high-risk areas has increased the likelihood that a routine natural hazard will become a major catastrophe¹⁰ ».

⁷<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/>

⁸While, « *in constant 2017 US dollars, both weather-related and non-weather related catastrophe losses have increased, with a 74% increase in the former and 182% increase in the latter since 1990. However, since 1990 both overall and weather/climate losses have decreased as proportion of global GDP* » in « Tracking progress on the economic costs of disasters under the indicators of the sustainable development goals » : <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.1080/17477891.2018.1540343?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁹Only prices, in U.S. dollars, are discounted to their 2018 value.

¹⁰« The Human cost of Natural Disasters — 2015 — A global perspective » : https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PAND_report.pdf

And who came up with these common-sense findings ?

CRED, the main source of the WMO report, in a 2015 study, so just a few years ago.

So it is safe to say that the number of disasters, deaths, as well as the amount of economic damage resulting from natural disasters have all, in relative terms, decreased¹¹ or remained stable over all these years. And this is confirmed by the CRED data¹² !

The scientists from WMO, CRED and UCL, who came together to write the report, were undoubtedly well aware of these realities but, despite this, decided to ignore them.

And there is nothing surprising in all these « oversights ». For, clearly, their aim was not to describe to us the real situation of the world in which we live.

Their aim is political. It is to present a frightening picture¹³ of the situation, which will allow different interest groups to influence the decisions of the authorities, in order to defend their own interests. This is done by implementing policies that correspond to their vision of the future, which is very different from that of the vast majority of the population. This report, as well as that of the UNDRR, are only instruments to achieve these objectives. And this with the benevolent complicity of some scientists.

And, since no one is taking the trouble to check the data or examine the conclusions drawn from it anyway, why bother. Let's quintuple and septuple without complex.

This makes the authors, unaware of the irony of the statement, say :

« *For this second edition [of the report], WMO set the bar even higher* ».

But let's go back to the numbers for a moment and see what their source, CRED, says.

The UNDRR report considered the last 40 years, from 1980 to 2019, with a total of 11560 natural disasters recorded for this period.

The WMO report considers the last 50 years, from 1970 to 2019, but does not take into account geophysical¹⁴ and biological¹⁵ disasters. This explains the slightly lower total, 11072 disasters counted, even though the period examined is longer.

Nevertheless, the difference between the two totals remains minimal, around 4%.

¹¹« *Results show a clear decreasing trend in both human and economic vulnerability, with global average mortality and economic loss rates that have dropped by 6.5 and nearly 5 times, respectively, from 1980–1989 to 2007–2016* » : <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378019300378>

¹²<https://ludwik-budyn.medium.com/how-much-time-do-we-have-left-12-years%C2%B9-8-years%C2%B2-less-than-2-years%C2%B3-ae2838cad520>

¹³<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1098662>

¹⁴Mainly earthquakes and volcanism.

¹⁵CRED generally classifies natural disasters in 5 subgroups : biological, geophysical, climatological, hydrological and meteorological. The report omits the biological subgroup. Yet, climate change has a considerable impact on the environment and the entire biosphere. For the authors of the study, apparently not.

We are therefore in an ideal case.

Indeed, both reports :

- deal with the same subject, the evolution of the frequency of natural disasters ;
- use the same database, EM-DAT¹⁶ ;
- cover almost the same period ;
- announce, for the period covered, a very similar overall figure.

Logic would therefore dictate that they reach the same conclusions, or close to it.

But this is not the case. They come to very different conclusions.

While the UNDRR report was content to speak of a meager « *doubling*¹⁷ » of the number of natural disasters over the period under consideration...

...the WMO, setting « *the bar even higher* », discovers a « *quintupling* » !

So, doubling or quintupling¹⁸ ?

What is certain, in any case, is that the two statements cannot be true simultaneously. Arithmetic does not allow it.

And, in truth, neither of them is.

As we showed in detail in our previous article¹⁹ dealing with the UNDRR report, CRED, on numerous occasions, has argued that the increase in natural disasters, in the twentieth century, is primarily the result of better information gathering.

In a 2011 article, about the « increase » in natural disasters during the period 1900-1999, the CRED director states :

« *The data represented in Fig. 2.1 [note the similarity in the general appearance of this graph and that of the WMO] might lead one to believe that disasters occur more frequently today than in earlier decades. However, it would be wrong to reach such a conclusion based solely on this graph... One of the main factors contributing to this apparent increase in natural disasters is improved reporting*²⁰ » :

¹⁶<https://public.emdat.be/>

¹⁷This is how the report was perceived, as the title of the UN news agency points out : « *Le changement climatique, moteur du doublement des catastrophes naturelles au cours des 20 dernières années* » :
<https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/10/1079642>

¹⁸Funny thing is that both organizations, UNDRR and WMO, are located at the same address in Geneva, so probably in the same building. Maybe they should consult each other sometimes.

¹⁹<https://ludwik-budyn.medium.com/fake-news-at-the-un-2bbbad36ed49>

²⁰https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225207827_Earthquakes_an_Epidemiological_Perspective_on_Patters_and_Trends

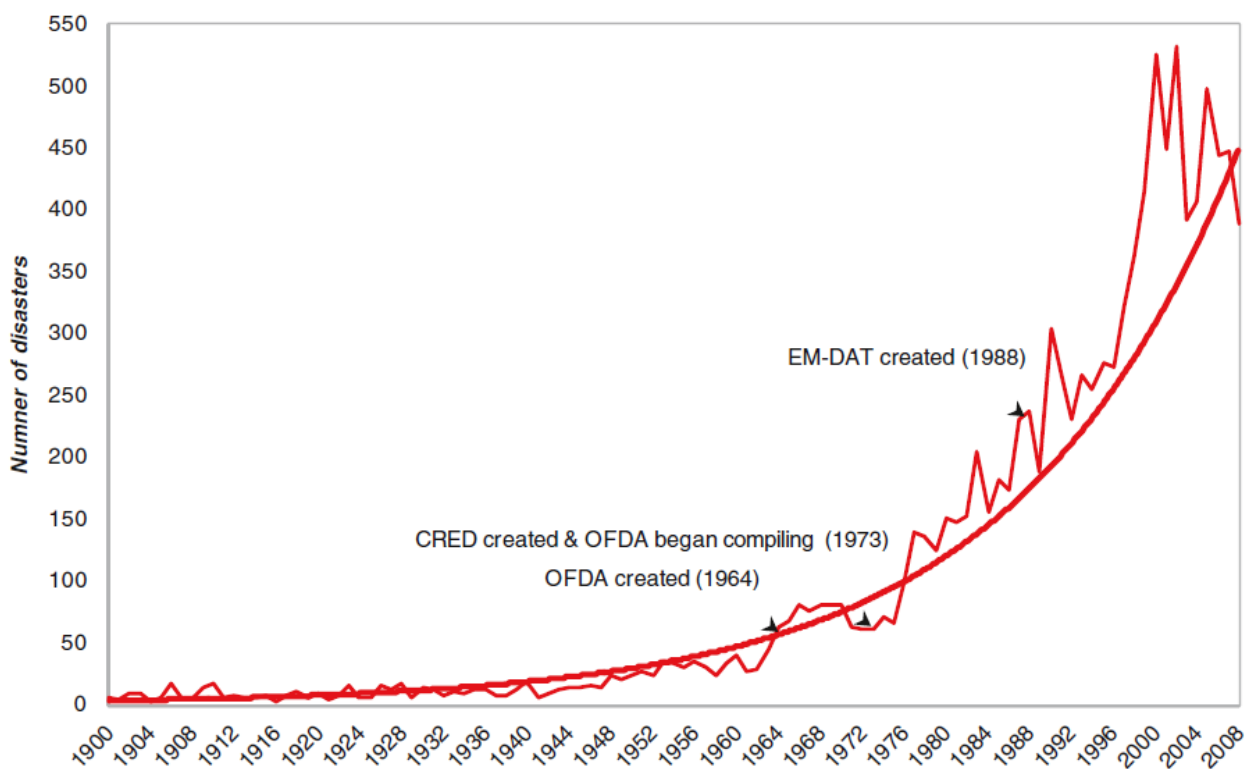


Fig. 2.1 Reported natural disaster occurrence in EM-DAT (1900–2008)

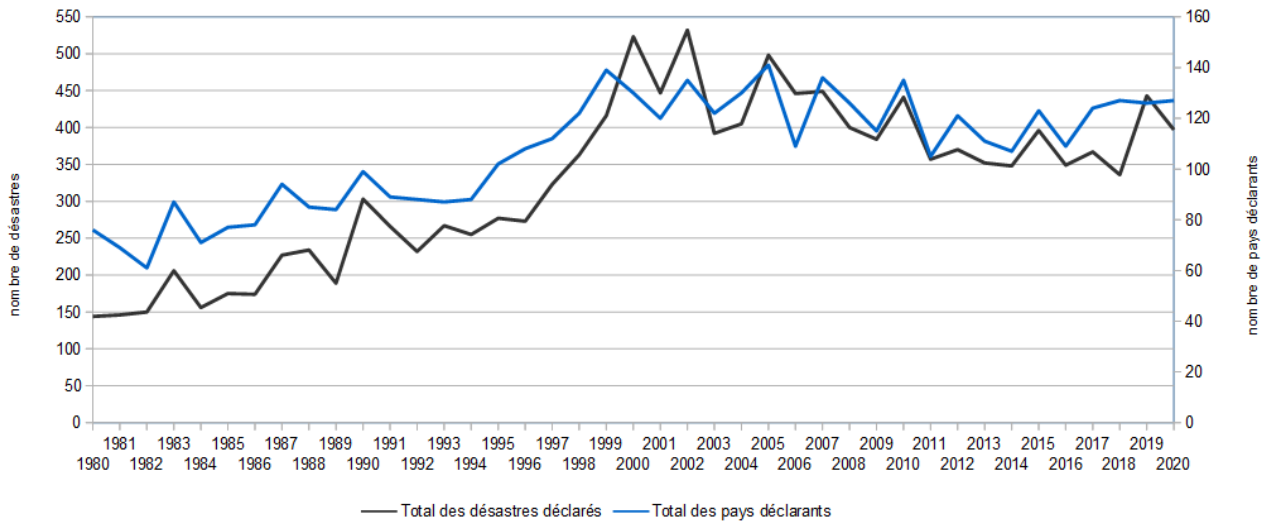
Identical statements can be found in the 2004²¹, 2007²² and 2015²³ reports.

Thus, according to CRED itself, the apparent growth in natural disasters up to the beginning of the 21st century is the result of better information collection thanks, among other things, to the increase in the number of reporting countries. Afterwards, this number stabilizes and then decreases slightly.

²¹« Thirty years of natural disasters 1974–2003 : the numbers » : « Figure 2 might lead one to believe that disasters occur more frequently today than in the beginning of the century. However, reaching such a conclusion based only on this graph would be incorrect. In fact, what the figure is really showing is the evolution of the registration of natural disaster events over time » : https://www.preventionweb.net/files/1078_8761.pdf

²²« Annual Disaster Statistical Review — The Numbers and Trends 2007 » : « Indeed, justifying the upward trend in hydro-meteorological disaster occurrence and impacts **essentially through climate change would be misleading...** For instance, one major contributor to the increase in disasters occurrence over the last decades is the constantly improving diffusion and accuracy of disaster related information » : <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/annual-disaster-statistical-review-numbers-and-trends-2007>

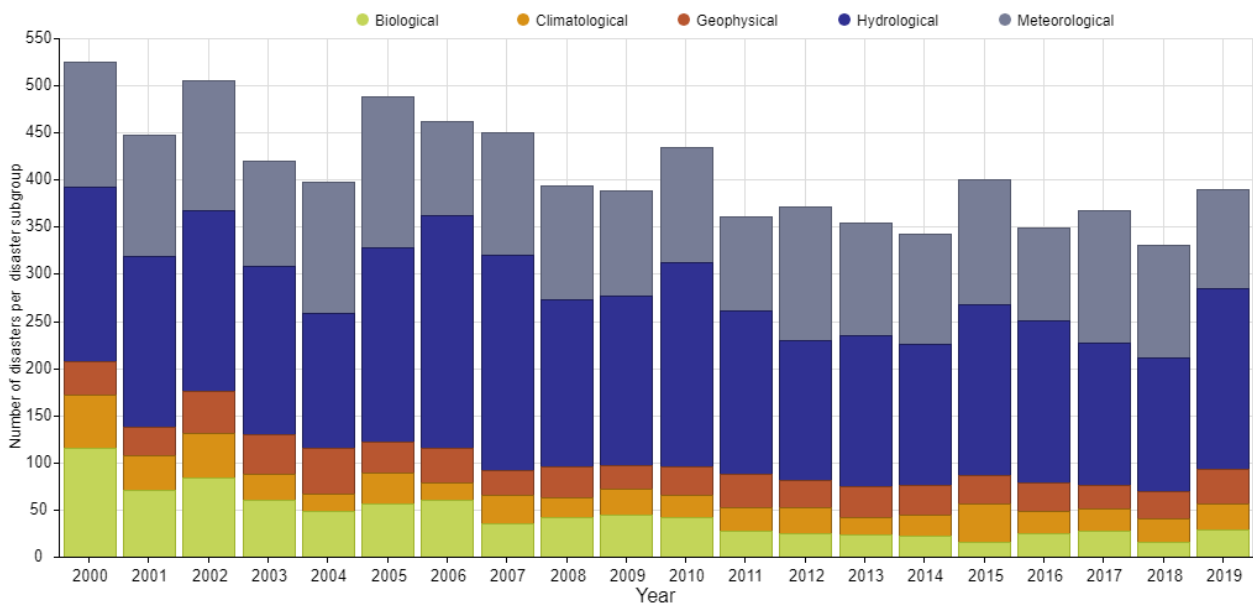
²³« The Human cost of Natural Disasters 2015 : A global perspective » : « The arrival of CRED in 1973 further improved data recording, while the development of global telecommunications and the media, plus increased humanitarian funding and reinforced international cooperation, also contributed to better reporting of disasters. Thus part of the apparent increase in the frequency of disasters in the past half-century is, no doubt, due to improved recording » : <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/human-cost-natural-disasters-2015-global-perspective>



In other words, it is the last 21 years that are the most representative of reality.

However, these years show neither a « doubling » nor a « quintupling » of the number of natural disasters. On the contrary.

The CRED data show a decrease in the annual frequency of natural disasters since the beginning of the 21st century. And to convince us of this, let's leave the final word to the CRED graph :



Source: EM-DAT: The Emergency Events Database - Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) - CRED. D. Guha-Sapir - www.emdat.be. Brussels, Belgium