



CLIMATE & MIGRANT JUSTICE CASE STUDY SERIES

Harnessing the Power of the Immigrant Justice Movement for Climate Justice:

The Climate Justice Collaborative

at the National Partnership for New Americans





We are envisioning a world where all people, including immigrants, can be safe and protected from the most devastating impacts of climate change. This means advocating for equitable investments in resilience that allow people to stay safely in their homes and communities. And this also means that when it is no longer safe to stay, people have the right to migrate, safely and with dignity, and find refuge from the climate crisis.

Stephanie Teatro

Director of Climate and Migration
Climate Justice Collaborative

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Immigrants in the United States, along with many BI-POC and low-income communities, are living on the frontlines of the climate crisis, facing impacts ranging from record-breaking storms and historic fires to dangerous heat waves and increased pollution. They work in agriculture and construction where heat is a serious occupational hazard. Due to the lack of language capacity and cultural competency in government agencies, they cannot easily access help when disasters strike. And undocumented disaster recovery workers cannot utilize most federal aid for themselves and their own families.

In the face of these challenges, more and more local immigrant justice organizations have found themselves thrust into the struggle for climate justice. And they have responded with ingenuity, resourcefulness, and a solutions-focused approach. They are protecting communities from the worst impacts of disasters, creating more equity in climate resilience and adaptation, welcoming newcomers who have been displaced by climate, and advocating for workers' rights and a just transition. Their communities have unique cultural knowledge and lived experience to contribute to the climate movement.

In response to calls for coordination, capacity building, and peer learning for this emerging climate work, the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) launched the Climate Justice Collaborative in early 2022. The collaborative sees incredible potential to harness the power, energy, and experience of the immigrant justice movement to take action for climate justice. "Immigrant communities care about climate change and feel it in our daily lives. If we organize around those impacts, our communities can be a key constituency in the fight for climate justice," says Ahmed Gaya, Senior Strategist at the Climate Justice Collaborative.

Through capacity building, organizing, advocacy, and narrative work, the Collaborative is working to mitigate the impacts of climate change on all communities, including immigrants—and ensure that migration is seen as a solution to climate change.



National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA)


NPNA is a multi-ethnic, multiracial network with 60 member organizations with reach across 40 states. NPNA advances immigrant equity and inclusion at the local, state, and federal level through policy, advocacy, and direct services that create opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities to achieve full civic, social, and economic justice. NPNA organizes the annual National Immigrant Inclusion Conference, the largest conference of immigration organizers and practitioners in the US. NPNA also plays a leadership role in the broader immigrant justice field, co-leading the campaign for Universal Representation and anchoring several notable campaigns, including We Are All America and Naturalize 2 Million by 2022.

Climate adaptation

The process of adjusting to both the current and projected effects of climate change.

Climate resilience

The ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The term describes not just the ability to maintain essential function, identity, and structure, but also the capacity for transformation.



Staff and members of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee rights Coalition assess damage following a tornado in March 2020.

GROUNDING IN THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

The seeds for the Climate Justice Collaborative germinated in 2018, a pivotal year that made clear that climate change in the US is here and here to stay. It was the year of the Camp Fire, the deadliest and most destructive fire in California's history—and the second year in a row of intense fires on the West Coast. In the Midwest, massive floods devastated communities in Iowa and Michigan, and in the Southeast, Hurricane Michael battered Florida. "It wasn't just that there was a major disaster, but it was the recognition that climate change means we will deal with these disasters every year," says Gaya. "Folks realized we needed a strategy to protect our communities and invest in a climate resilient future." It's no coincidence, Gaya adds, that 2018 was the year when the immigrant justice movement began to seriously talk about climate change at NPNA's annual National Immigrant Inclusion Conference.

In 2019, NPNA member One America joined forces with the People's Climate Movement, an organization that grew out of the historic 2014 climate marches in New York City and has since mobilized more than one million people in small towns and big cities across the US. Together, the two organizations embarked on a year-long listening process, which in-

cluded 50 one-to-one interviews with leaders in the immigrant justice movement, with the goal of mapping how the movement was already responding to the challenges of climate change and identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, greater engagement. At that time, immigrant justice organizations had few opportunities to share, discuss, and exchange learning about their climate and environmental work with one another. Many of these organizations were working closely together on other projects, but they did not have similar collaborative structures related to climate.

After three years of conversations, a core group of NPNA members decided the network's track record of capacity building and standing up new programs made it uniquely positioned to lead this work. They asked the network to launch The Climate Justice Collaborative. The Collaborative's founding members include OneAmerica, CASA, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Michigan United, the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium, and the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. Members of the Climate Justice Collaborative team—including Stephanie Teatro, Ahmed Gaya, and Rich Stolz—are some of the country's foremost immigrant justice and climate justice leaders.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

Building the capacity of the immigrant justice movement to engage in climate justice is at the heart of the Climate Justice Collaborative's strategy. Drawing on lessons from NPNA's numerous successful capacity-building initiatives, the Collaborative's approach includes partnering with local and state groups to undertake demonstration projects that build models for effective organizing at the intersection of climate and migration, coordinating that work on a regional and national level, and establishing a peer-learning community and a coordinated ecosystem to facilitate and support cross learning and partnerships.

In response to more frequent and destructive disasters, many immigrant justice organizations have found themselves as frontline responders to the climate crisis— filling in the gaps left by government agencies. But unlike campaigns for immigrant inclusion, such as access to driver licenses or in-state tuition, these organizations have largely been isolated and disconnected from one another, and many do not know where to begin. NPNA members identified fighting for immigrant inclusion and equitable disaster response and resilience as a key first priority for the Collaborative.

“ The immigrant justice movement knows how to respond to crises in a way that builds power and works to transform systems. Just like we developed models for responding to ICE raids, we can respond to climate disasters in a way that keeps people safe and builds the power we need to win a better future.”

Stephanie Teatro

Director of Climate and Migration
Climate Justice Collaborative

In year one, the Collaborative is making subgrants to members that are creating innovative local campaigns around climate resilience and disaster response. They are also providing technical assistance to member organizations exploring strategies like advocating for federal investments in resilience infrastructure, creating local disaster recovery funds for community members ineligible for federal assis-



Members of the Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants (LORI) distribute aid and provide information to immigrant families in St James Parish (LaPlace) after Hurricane Ida.

tance, and fighting for language access in emergency management.

These campaigns will build on and replicate successful campaigns from across the network in recent years. For example, members of the Florida Immigrant Coalition introduced a state bill to protect workers from heat stress, and in California, CHIRLA led efforts that changed county policies to allow undocumented residents to get emergency water access during droughts.

The Collaborative will take these learnings and develop a playbook of state and local policies for equitable disaster response and recovery and channel these local experiences into national efforts to push the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal agencies to adopt reforms towards more equitable disaster response.

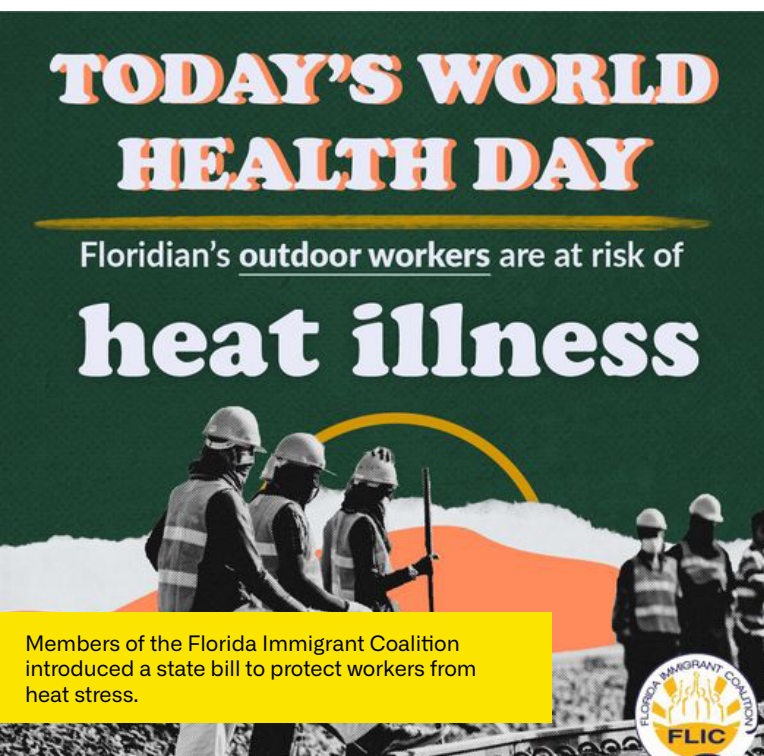
“We want to make sure it’s not just wealthy and white communities that are protected from disasters, but that all communities are protected from the worst impacts of climate change,” says Teatro. “From the ground up, immigrant communities can be part of transforming our nation’s disaster recovery and resilience strategies so no one is left behind.”

ADDRESSING CLIMATE-RELATED DISPLACEMENT

Climate is now the leading cause of global displacement, surpassing conflict as the main driver. An estimated 1.2 billion people worldwide are at risk of displacement by 2050, yet there are currently no multi-lateral treaties or domestic laws that specifically aim to protect climate-displaced people. The need to expand pathways and the scale of this issue will require multiple movements to come together, learn from one another, and work in collaboration. It will also require multiple complementary strategies. The Climate Justice Collaborative aims to expand safe pathways for climate-displaced people and counter right-wing authoritarianism through narrative and organizing strategies.

Currently, most narratives related to migration and climate portray climate-related displacement as a crisis and a security threat. These narratives are both misleading and harmful. They blame people migrating, rather than climate change as the real threat.

The Climate Justice Collaborative is building a narrative ecosystem and developing strategies that frame migration as a natural and necessary part of adapting to climate change. The Collaborative is part of an emerging workgroup that is



“ These narratives run the risk of fueling right-wing authoritarianism and nativist solutions to the climate crisis—like border militarization over climate finance—undermining both climate justice and migrant justice goals.

Ahmed Gaya

Senior Strategist for Climate and Migration
Climate Justice Collaborative

pioneering new narratives to transform mental models about climate change and migration.

Through providing subgrants that invest in community organizing and through developing curriculum and legal services programming, the Climate Justice Collaborative is partnering with member organizations to develop a cadre of NPNA leaders from around the country who identify as climate-displaced people. These leaders can powerfully communicate their stories and experiences, connect with one another, and organize to create safe pathways for climate-displaced people.

The Climate Justice Collaborative also seeks to help the climate movement see migration as a form of adaptation to climate change, and to address the rights of climate-displaced people. To this end, the Collaborative is partnering with climate organizations to develop resources and trainings on climate-related displacement, and to support those organizations to take informed action for displaced people when climate disasters strike.

TAPPING THE MOVEMENT'S POWER FOR CLIMATE ACTION

“There’s a lot of untapped potential for the immigrant justice movement to be a formidable constituency in the US to slow global warming, to be another political voice for climate action,” says Teatro. “NPNA member organizations are some of the biggest drivers of the immigrant justice movement’s political power. Leveraging the strength of these organizations and their membership can contribute to state climate justice wins and accelerate national climate policy victories.”

Members of the Collaborative believe the way to organize immigrant communities to be a powerful constituency in the movement for a Just Transition is by starting with the immediate climate impacts they experience, including disasters and migration. They see this work building alignment between the immigrant and environmental justice movements, organizing climate-displaced people as a unique voice on climate, and creating a pipeline of education and action for members to engage in efforts to stop climate change.

To the Climate Justice Collaborative, this also means having an early seat at the table to shape policies and to bring an analysis of the unique ways that immigrants are impacted by climate change—and to ensure that climate policy is not replicating existing exclusions. As Gaya explains, “Too often our communities are engaged at the very end when a climate bill is facing a tough vote. We want to show up meaningfully with leaders who have been deeply engaged and who feel deeply connected to the issue.”

Creating policies that are inclusive of immigrants could mean equitable investments in resilience infrastructure and reducing pollution in immigrant and other impacted neighborhoods. Such policies could also ensure that immigrants and other historically excluded communities have access to job opportunities in the green economy. Some NPNA members already play a role influencing local climate legislation, like OneAmerica which helped craft and lead a statewide ballot initiative in Washington for equitable climate policy in 2018. With the Climate Justice Collaborative, these groups hope to help the many state partners that are engaging with this work for the first time and to project a stronger voice to influence national climate policy.

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Unbound Philanthropy is on a learning journey to explore the intersections of climate change and migration– to understand how climate change is driving migration, how climate change impacts immigrant communities, and how these communities are leading solutions. And importantly, we seek to uncover innovative work happening at these intersections and how funders can support a healthy ecosystem.

Throughout our exploration, we have come to understand that while climate change affects everyone, the damage is compounded for countries and communities that are made vulnerable by restrictive immigration policies, patriarchal beliefs and systems, structural racism, and by economic stress and exploitation– and that these same communities are leading solutions shaped by their experiences.

Unbound Philanthropy is a small part of a broader network that is working and investing at the intersections of climate and migrant justice, including frontline organizations and organizations working nationally and internationally to transform systems and narratives, as well as grantmakers and funding intermediaries.

We are honored to partner with a cohort of path-breaking organizations working at the intersections of climate and migrant justice: the Climate Justice Collaborative at the National Partnership for New Americans, the International Refugee Assistance Project, and others. In this collection of case studies, we seek to shed light on this emerging and complex area of work– to lift up these outstanding organizations, as well as the ecosystem that they are forming.

We believe that we will only find solutions to the greatest challenges of our time if we recognize them as interconnected, and if we respond to them in partnership. We invite you to learn with us, and please reach out if you'd like to learn more about how you can become involved. We are eager to hear what you are learning and working on at this intersection as well.

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