

Migration and Climate Change

PREPARED TO CARE



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

In recent times, cross-border migration and its implications for host countries have captured global attention. Additionally, the accelerating internal movements of people within their own countries is reshaping societies. Every year, millions of people are displaced by disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, saltwater intrusion, glacial melting and others. In 2017, there were 30.6 million new displacements associated with conflict and disasters across 143 countries and territories, 61% triggered by disasters. In sum, climate change is expected to trigger growing population movements within and across borders.

In the aftermath of climatic shocks or natural disasters, most migrants move internally or to neighboring countries. Since gradual environmental change and slow- or sudden-onset natural disasters influence population migration patterns in different ways, the links between climate change and migration are far from simple and direct.

In places of destination, a mass influx of migrants can affect the environment. Faced with an earthquake in 2010, for example, environmental strain was produced in Haiti by unmanaged urbanization as well as camps and temporary shelters. On the other hand, in places of origin, out-migration may alleviate population and land use pressure, allowing a degraded local ecosystem to recuperate.

The push away from home is often wrenching. In rural Honduras, for example, farming has been many residents' livelihood for generations. But now, rising temperatures and declining rainfall are killing crops and jeopardizing the farmers'

Mindful of the health and wellbeing of creation in a time of disasters intensified by climate change, this ELCA Advocacy resource series invites reflection on being #PreparedToCare.

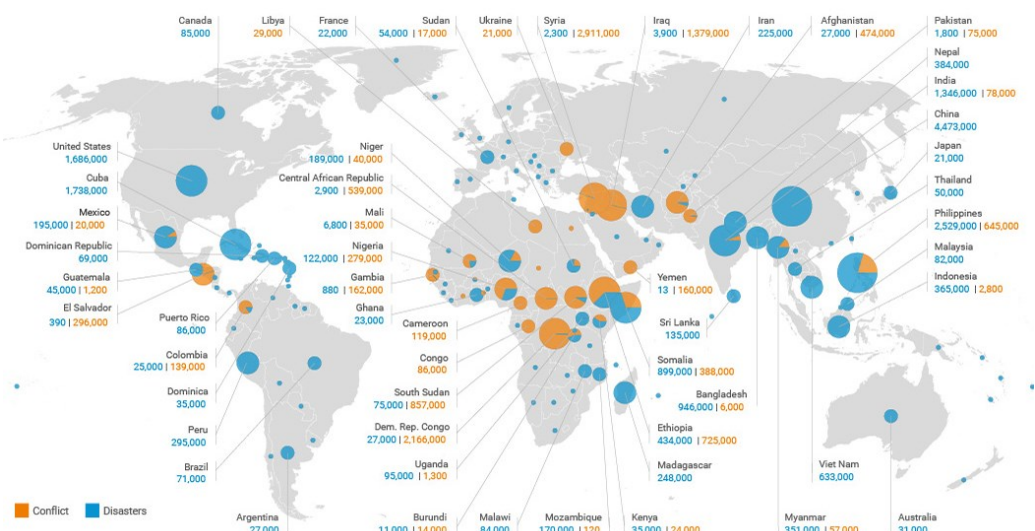
Do you have a personal experience or impression that connects?

What are strengths of your congregation in this area?

How might you make a difference in your community?



Be part of the ELCA Advocacy network. Sign up for news and Action Alerts at impactfulmomentsfromelca.org/advocacy/signup.



New displacements by conflict and disaster in 2017 • SOURCE: [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](http://InternalDisplacementMonitoringCentre)

very survival, driving them into urban areas and, ultimately, out of the country. In a [PBS NewsHour interview](#) (April 2, 2019), a Honduran farmer said 10 years ago he could harvest around 4,000 pounds of corn seasonally, but now he gets around 500 pounds – a loss of over 90% of his yield. “I am desperate,” Don Alfredo said. “That is my personal situation, and that of many other families here. We are desperate. Not having food makes one desperate. Not eating for just one day causes distress. We will have to get out of here.”

Migration is not a failure to adapt—it is one of the possible adaptation strategies to climate and environmental change.

Policy considerations

In the aftermath of climatic shocks or natural disasters, migrants have needs and vulnerabilities that must be addressed. Consequently, rather than be treated as threats, migrants should be received and integrated into host societies for the benefit of all.

In fact, migration is a powerful driver of sustainable development for migrants and their communities, according to the [International Organization for Migration](#). For example, prospective remittances, or global monetary transfers from migrants, may in practice help those left behind in impacted locations to deal with shocks.

It is important to take into consideration that people migrating for climate-related reasons do not fit into any of the categories set out by international law for asylum-seekers, but they are [partially protected by international human rights law](#), as stated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of the U.N. Agency for Refugees (UNHCR). However, despite these international declarations and guidelines, the legal status of environmental migrants remains complicated.

Faith reflections

As members of the ELCA, we are called to love and welcome all. We answer the call when neighbors arrive on our doorstep. We believe in protecting and caring for those who are most vulnerable by providing services to ensure their safety, upholding their human rights, and recognizing and preventing risks of exploitation as with the [AMMPARO program](#) (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities).

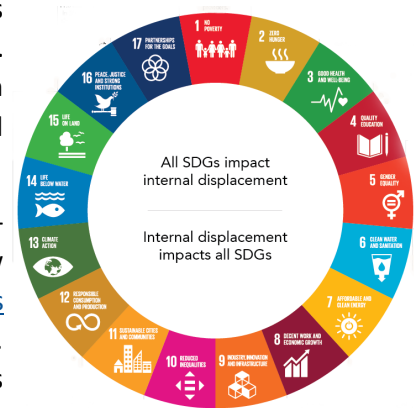
Lutheran Disaster Response brings God’s hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world.

For migrants in particular, the ELCA social message on “Immigration” builds on additional ELCA social teaching and policy documents and says: “We draw on the best of our nation’s traditions as a refuge and haven for the persecuted and destitute when we affirm that ‘we support a generous policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants,’

and that we ‘will advocate for just immigration policies, including fairness in visa regulations and in admitting and protecting refugees. We will work for policies that cause neither undue repercussions within immigrant communities nor bias against them’ ” ([elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Immigration](#), page 5).

“The presence of newcomers in our church and society heightens our awareness of these realities and of the experience of new immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in the United States. This awareness makes us more appreciative of the gifts our new neighbors bring and of the barriers and opportunities they encounter. It deepens our belief that “all people are God’s creatures, sinners for whom Christ died” and that it’s our responsibility to respect the human dignity of all refugees and asylum-seekers in the United States.”

“Immigration” social message, page 2



SOURCE with details:

[internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2018/](https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2018/)

“God, our refuge and strength,
you have bound us together in a common life.
In all our conflicts, help us to confront one
another without hatred or bitterness,
to listen for your voice amid competing claims,
and to work together with mutual forbearance
and respect;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 76