PLACE, POWER & POSSIBILITY:
A Climate + Migrant Justice Guide Series

Policy Advocacy
at the
Climate-Migration Nexus

THE SOLUTIONS PROJECT

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This guide series is co-published with The Solutions Project and Just Solutions.

The following organizations also informed the series:

- APEN
- Catalyst Miami
- PODER
- PUSH Buffalo
- WeCount!
- Justice for Migrant Families

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OVERVIEW

Frontline communities have the power to shape policies that impact their families and communities in a time of increasingly rapid impacts brought on by climate change.

Community organizations and grassroots movements are early responders in shaping how frontline communities adapt to the compounding effects of environmental injustice, climate change, and forced migration. Whether you're a practitioner, policymaker, or funder, this guide is intended to support reflection, implementation, and sustained policy strategies that strengthen climate resilience and migrant justice in tandem.

OVERVIEW

This guide is part of The Solutions Project's Place, Power & Possibility: A Climate + Migrant Justice Guide Series

These guides advance integrated strategies across community governance, policy advocacy, and narrative change.

Each guide speaks to a distinct set of strategies and audiences while contributing to a shared vision of climate resilience rooted in equity and community power.

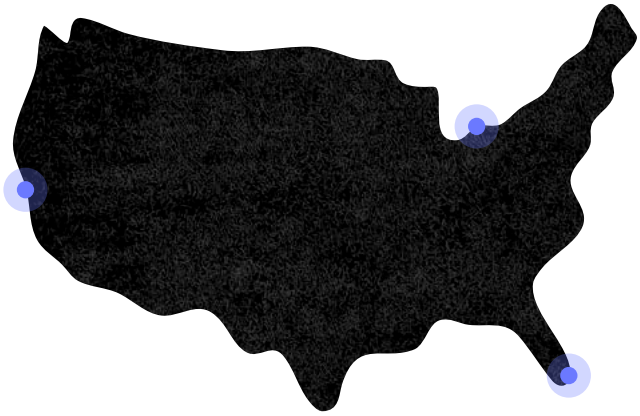
The Policy Advocacy Guide is designed to support community-based leaders, organizers, policymakers, and frontline organizations by offering frameworks, strategies, and practical tools for advancing policy solutions at the intersection of climate change and migration. It explores how issues such as housing justice, worker protections, language access, resilience infrastructure, and equitable development must be addressed to meet the migration and climate realities facing frontline communities.

Grounded in the lived experience of grassroots organizations participating in The Solutions Project's Climate + Migrant Justice cohort, this guide draws from leadership in Buffalo, NY; Miami, FL; and the San Francisco Bay Area, CA—regions navigating distinct but interconnected climate and migration dynamics. Across these regions, partners are advancing policy campaigns that respond to immediate climate impacts while building long-term structural protections for immigrant and low-income communities.

Whether you're a practitioner, policymaker, or funder, this guide is intended to support reflection, implementation, and sustained policy strategies that strengthen climate resilience and migrant justice in tandem.

INTRODUCTION

POLICY ADVOCACY AT THE CLIMATE-MIGRATION NEXUS



Climate change and migration are reshaping communities—but policy systems have not kept pace.

At a time when reactionary forces threaten progress on civil rights, environmental justice, and immigrant protections, frontline organizations are advancing policy strategies that center community leadership and structural equity. This guide showsnexamples from across South Florida, upstate New York, and the San Francisco Bay Area, how grassroots movements are demonstrating that climate resilience and migrant justice can be addressed together, rather than in separate silos.

The policy advocacy guide at the nexus of climate and migrant justice draws from a cohort of organizations convened by The Solutions Project that are responding to diverse political and environmental contexts while advancing integrated policy campaigns. These efforts span housing justice, worker protections, language access, resilience infrastructure, and community-driven development—recognizing that environmental risk, displacement, and economic inequality are deeply interconnected.

Developed through The Solutions Project's Climate + Migrant Justice initiative—with support from The Democracy Fund and Unbound Philanthropy and in collaboration with Just Solutions Collective. This guide complements companion publications focused on community governance and narrative strategy. Together, the series recognizes that governance, policy, and narrative are interdependent pillars of climate and migrant justice.

Across regions, several shared lessons emerge that shape the structure of this guide. The following section explores these principles in depth, drawing from real-world campaigns and organizing strategies.

Case studies and issue spotlights will illustrate how these principles take shape in practice—highlighting campaigns related to language access, worker justice, community resilience, and housing justice.

This guide reflects direct input from regional partners including:

APEN
Oakland, CA

PODER
San Francisco, CA

WeCount!
Miami, FL

Catalyst Miami
Miami, FL

PUSH Buffalo
Buffalo, NY

Justice for Migrant Families
Buffalo, NY

Their insights offer practical lessons for climate justice and immigrant justice movements, as well as policymakers committed to building resilient and welcoming communities.

The nexus of climate and migrant justice is complex. Too often, policies focusing on immigrants or immigration fail to take into account the role of climate change and environmental degradation in migration. At the same time, strategies to address climate change often overlook the importance of preparing for forced migration as a consequence of climate impacts. Policies related to internal US climate migration are often nascent or fail to draw on learnings from the immigration experience. Communities receiving migrants too often fail to provide the tools necessary to enable meaningful economic or linguistic integration or render immigrant communities more vulnerable to adverse environmental impacts. For example, being slow to provide language access for disaster response crises, or to provide access to services without burdensome identity and immigration status requirements.

Frontline communities, including immigrant and refugee communities and those displaced domestically due to climate impacts, are living in perilous times. The current federal leadership is dismantling critical due process protections to attempt to implement a massive, militarized deportation program targeting immigrants, it has reversed entire regulatory systems that had been in place to protect communities from pollution and exploitation. This current reality brings into focus the need for new approaches that draw from both the climate and migration movements and fields of policy.

As evidenced in this guide, strategies that pursue climate and environmental justice can intentionally incorporate and address the needs of immigrants who are living in precarious conditions due to barriers created by language and immigration status. The spotlights and strategies profiled in this guide provide glimpses into a future where frontline communities have the power to shape policies that impact their families and communities in a time of increasingly rapid impacts brought on by climate change.

The organizations participating in this cohort demonstrate that effective policy advocacy at the climate and migrant justice nexus requires coordinated strategies across governance, labor, housing, and environmental systems.

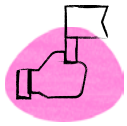
KEY INSIGHTS AND LESSONS

Climate resilience, labor protections, housing justice, immigrant rights, and environmental policy are deeply interconnected in practice, even when they are separated in traditional advocacy structures. The most effective policy campaigns at this moment are those that resonate with real people's lived experiences and advance solutions that cut across issue silos.

Whether operating in communities that are receiving new residents, experiencing climate threats, or serving as long-standing gateways for immigrant populations, the degree to which communities will be more welcoming and resilient will depend on how well communities are organized and prepared to respond. Over time, the places that thrive will be those that build durable organizing infrastructure, cross-movement collaboration, and policy strategies rooted in community leadership.

Effective work at the nexus of climate and migrant justice requires simultaneous engagement at multiple scales and across multiple strategies to advance equitable policy outcomes.

STRATEGIES AND SCALES TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE POLICY OUTCOMES



EMPOWER COMMUNITIES

Root policy demands in the leadership of impacted people and communities.

Empower communities through leadership development and organizing tools that give direct agency to community members. Examples include know-your-rights education, distributed leadership across rapid response networks, disaster preparedness training, access to legal representation, mutual aid programming, and other skills and opportunities that equip organizations to create their own baseline security.

UTILIZE CAMPAIGNS

As organizing and power building vehicles, keeping an eye on how to sustain momentum, morale, and energy.

Organizations emphasized that campaigns must address immediate material conditions (protection for individuals seeking status or worker protections, affordable and quality housing, job opportunities), create opportunities for worker/community leadership, deliver concrete wins (even small ones) to sustain morale, and build toward long-term structural change. When short-term policy fights fail, effective organizations are prepared to pivot to alternative strategies that keep the base engaged. Furthermore, they anticipate the potential for prolonged engagement in the implementation of victories, and what it may take to ensure that policy victories can be fully realized over time, despite changes in political and budget context.

EMPHASIZE SOCIAL COHESION AND CONNECTION

Boost community resilience in increasingly diverse communities in both the short and long term across increasingly diverse communities.

Engaging members to co-develop and lead their own solutions also builds connection, cohesion, and innovative policy angles. Policies and practices that bring diverse communities together, ensure quality cross-cultural interaction, and build relationships before disasters happen create the resilient fabric communities need to respond to

crises and opportunities. Such strategies also create the capacity to advance multiple strategies simultaneously. Policies that reinforce these efforts include language access ordinances, sanctuary laws that limit local collaboration with federal immigration enforcement agencies, and investments in resilient community infrastructure (both hard infrastructure, like community centers, and soft infrastructure, like block clubs and community capacity-building for mutual aid and support).

CREATE ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

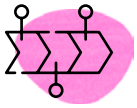
Through sustainable, cooperative programs that balance community development and voice with environmental sustainability.

Worker cooperatives, community land trusts, public banking, and local capital circulation (programs that keep money in the community) offer models for community wealth-building and climate adaptation that don't depend on extractive development. Together these distributed ownership approaches present important alternatives to extractive economic systems, and are seen as a compelling frontier for organizations involved in this cohort. Policy campaigns can play a critical role in shaping what collective strategies will be available to communities. And further investments in community governance strategies will be even more important over time (see the complementary guide on governance to learn more about models and examples).

SHIFT TO STRATEGIES AND POLICY DEMANDS

When policy pathways are blocked, use community leverage to demand corporate accountability.

In challenging political contexts, there will be a limit to what can be possible through policy advocacy alone. Creative organizers will need to assess what power and leverage communities have available to them: if community members are afraid of taking action due to violent immigration enforcement tactics, perhaps there are ways communities can use economic pressure, like boycotts; if local governments see their ability to enact policy reforms pre-empted by state governments, perhaps there are points of leverage still available through zoning, permitting, or other policy mechanisms. Campaigns can identify and use market leverage, create and apply community benefits agreements, and build worker-driven social responsibility models that secure enforceable protections across supply chains.



POLICY INNOVATION

Keep an eye on the long horizon, understanding that policy experimentation will be necessary.

Impacts accelerate, communities need visionary thinking about cooperative ownership models, land use that accommodates periodic flooding, insurance reform, and what it means to have agency to move or stay. Creating a clearer future vision or north star can seed more transformational policy goals even when near term opportunities may feel constrained by current political context. It's helpful to remember that the solutions we need aren't likely to come from the systems and approaches that caused the problems we're confronting.

The work of these organizations offers a roadmap for others navigating similar challenges: in hostile political terrain, communities must organize with courage and creativity, building power through direct relationships with workers, wielding consumer pressure strategically, and creating local alternatives to failed systems while never ceasing to fight for the policies and protections their communities deserve.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The strategies outlined in this guide emerge from these distinct regional contexts.

While each region faces unique conditions, the policy lessons across them reflect shared commitments to community leadership, cross-movement alignment, and structural transformation.

- **Buffalo, New York**
  Considered to be a "welcoming community" because of its location (proximity to fresh water, relatively fewer extreme weather events), organizations are learning from past natural disasters while strengthening language access and housing policy.

- **San Francisco, Bay Area**
  Considered to be a "resilient community" because it is likely to remain a major gateway for immigrants and internally displaced people who may move on to other places, climate action is being directly linked to tenant protections and anti-displacement efforts.

- **South Florida**
  Considered to be a "threatened community" because of the anticipated impacts of sea-level rise and increasingly extreme weather events, organizers are advancing worker protections and immigrant rights in a politically constrained environment.

ADVANCING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH LANGUAGE JUSTICE

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Civic Engagement Infrastructure

Public strategies to strengthen disaster resilience and economic inclusion too often overlook the vital role of language justice - that everyone has the right to speak, participate, and be heard in the language they know best.

Without attention to language and literacy barriers, community members may be excluded from emergency warnings in times of climate emergencies. Receiving inadequate or incorrect information related to public services, employment opportunities, or educational services. For communities with large or growing immigrant populations, lack of language justice may also contribute to misunderstandings, cultural rifts, and social isolation.

New York Justice for Migrant Families is working on a county-level language access ordinance, emphasizing that true access is more than just interpretation services and translated documents. The organization asserts that language access requires "fluidity of communication" that enables social ties and community inclusion.

They are working to establish a public commitment to:

- Social interaction across racial/ethnic lines
- Economic integration via job training and language access
- Credential recognition for immigrant professionals
- Social cohesion before climate disasters strike
- Creating on-ramps for civic engagement and community participation

NYJFMF has a campaign informed by the Buffalo Blizzard in 2022 that claimed the lives of many immigrants and refugees. It stranded thousands, overwhelmed public services, and served as a reminder of how vulnerable any community can be to the impacts of climate change.

This campaign is about creating opportunities for belonging, creating connections, and building meaningful inclusion. The organization envisions language support that can enable communication with neighbors, trusted community hubs that can serve all residents (including immigrants) compassionately, job training programs that connect language learners to meaningful economic pathways, public spaces that can bring diverse communities together, and opportunities to build "durable social ties" and relationships before crises arise. Language justice is meaningful civic engagement and social cohesion, so that no one is left behind.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Language access and justice policies are also a longstanding priority of other members of the climate and migrant justice cohort. In San Francisco, PODER points to their language access ordinance, which the City strengthened in 2024. That ordinance focuses on four languages (Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese) based on population thresholds, and it is implemented by the City's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs.

For PODER, language access is fundamental civic engagement infrastructure, critical to ensuring community members are informed and engaged irrespective of language barriers. Such measures are essential foundations for "inclusion infrastructure" for any jurisdiction experiencing or anticipating population growth from migration. These policies and approaches should be baseline elements of any climate and disaster resilience efforts.

The City's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs Enforces the Following Provisions:

- Support for a Language Access Network of community groups that conducts spot checks on city departments
- Requires staff (not just volunteers) to fulfill language requirements, and provides additional compensation to attract bilingual staff
- Reporting requirements for all city departments

PODER's own Promotora program trains immigrant women to conduct know-your-rights workshops in Spanish at schools, churches, and community organizations, combining immigration rights education with climate justice outreach. As immigration enforcement has intensified, promotoras have courageously continued street outreach, recognizing "the community needs the information now even more than ever."

FORGING NEW PATHWAYS FOR WORKER PROTECTIONS

POLICY SPOTLIGHTS

Community Benefit Agreements

Worker Driven Social Responsibility

In Florida and other states controlled by conservative political leaders, governors and state legislatures have increasingly blocked cities and counties from passing their own labor, environmental, and social justice policies - a tactic called preemption that puts proactive reforms for migrant and environmental justice at risk.

This has forced organizations like WeCount! and Catalyst Miami, which had previously won numerous groundbreaking local policies, to pursue alternative avenues to win rights, protections and voice for their members and constituents.

The impetus to continue fighting for worker protections even as political barriers increase is a matter of literal survival for workers, and a vivid example of where climate and migrant justice converge. One construction worker dies every four days in Florida. Amidst rising heat exacerbated by climate change, agricultural workers - most of them immigrants - are up to 35 times more likely to die of heat-related illnesses than the general population. Meaningful enforcement of key occupational safety and health rules is virtually non-existent, leading to occupational accidents, illnesses, and injuries.

35x

Immigrants are more likely to die of heat-related illnesses

COMMUNITY BENEFIT AGREEMENTS

After a multi-year campaign by WeCount! called "Que Calor," which advocated for a municipal heat standard for outdoor workers in Miami-Dade, the Florida State Legislature passed HB433 to preempt local heat protection ordinances in Miami-Dade and all Florida municipalities.

In response, WeCount! pioneered a workaround by advocating for Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) with private developers on major development projects in South Florida. CBAs are legally binding agreements between community groups and project developers. Their successful advocacy with local municipal governments and private developers has established a new precedent for enacting workplace standards that Florida policymakers had previously blocked, including heat protections for construction workers. WeCount!'s campaign, "Build a Better Miami," resulted in a groundbreaking agreement with the Swerdlow Group, a major real estate developer, that will protect nearly 4,000 construction workers on the largest redevelopment project in Miami history, including the following commitments:

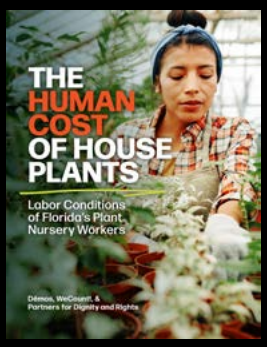
- Heat standards for construction employees, including water, shade, and rest breaks;
- An on-site cooling center with hydration stations and medical providers;
- Prevailing wages and responsible contracting standards (prohibiting contracts with contractors who have wage theft or OSHA violations in the previous 5 years); and
- Affordable housing requirements throughout the project

The CBA model accounts for the limits of preemption: while Miami-Dade County cannot directly legislate local heat protections for outdoor workers because of HB433, private developers like the Swerdlow Group can enter binding private agreements with worker organizations and labor-community coalitions, flanked by government approval processes. As one WeCount! staff member explained: developers need permits, zoning changes, and subsidies, which provides local government with leverage to incentivize these agreements.

Similarly, other non-profit organizations like Catalyst Miami have pursued CBAs to combat climate gentrification, working to ensure agreements to expand affordable housing in gentrifying communities aren't merely "for show." They strategically focus on developers who receive significant government subsidies, and their vision includes deeply affordable housing units, contributions to resilience funds for historically underinvested and high climate-risk neighborhoods, and protections against displacement.

As a tool, CBAs can be leveraged as private sector mechanisms enforceable through lawsuits and can require green building standards, quality job guarantees (union labor or strong labor protections), childcare facilities, public parks and green space. Successful campaigns to win these agreements require strong, broad coalitions (including labor unions, faith organizations, and community groups), media and communications strategies to counter propaganda and public affairs efforts used by developers, and access to legal services.

WORKER-DRIVEN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



With "Planting Justice," WeCount! is bringing the power of the internationally recognized Worker-Driven Social Responsibility (WSR) model to the houseplant sector, creating new pathways for worker protections, accountability, and climate resilience.

Worker-Driven Social Responsibility (WSR) is a model for protecting human rights in corporate supply chains that is defined by being designed, monitored, and enforced directly by the workers themselves. Inspired by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program and other WSR programs across the country and world, WeCount! is working to secure direct binding agreements with corporations and brands at the top of the houseplant industry to win industrywide protections for workers. These efforts have been made more urgent due to the growing impact of excessive heat and other climate-related impacts.

Miami-Dade County is the national epicenter of the houseplant industry, with over 1,500 registered nurseries supplying retailers across the country including the largest big-box stores and grocery chains. Plant nursery workers are primarily Mayan Indigenous, Latino, and Haitian immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Haiti, facing extreme heat exposure and labor violations. WeCount! Initiated a survey process with hundreds of plant nursery workers as a basis for developing a Code of Conduct that includes labor and human rights standards, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and protections against wage theft, gender-based violence, labor trafficking, and retaliation. A core provision of the Code of Conduct is establishing a heat illness prevention standard for all plant nursery workers, including an enforceable right to heat, safety, education, water, shade, and rest breaks.

WeCount!'s Planting Justice campaign is organizing plant nursery workers, consumers, and community allies to call on big-box stores, grocery chains, and other large corporations to adopt the Planting Justice Code of Conduct for all of their suppliers, including the plant nurseries where they source their houseplants. The protections included in the Planting Justice Code of Conduct are subject to independent monitoring and enforced through real market-based consequences, including suspension for non-compliance.

The WSR model recognizes that worker organizations like WeCount! can leverage the power of workers, consumers, and other public and private stakeholders to hold corporations accountable for the labor and human rights abuses in their supply chains. Through Planting Justice, WeCount! is showing that it's possible to protect workers from extreme heat, even when laws and regulations are blocked or rendered unenforceable in practice.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Physical and Social Infrastructure

In California, APEN was an important force in influencing the State of California to establish the Community Resilience Center Program, an innovative model for responsive, community-controlled climate adaptation infrastructure.

The strategy is rooted in a vision for building communities with the social cohesion and physical infrastructure to survive and thrive through climate and environmental impacts.

The program provides funding to communities to invest in resilience hubs - sites designed by community members, outside of traditionally siloed funding programs, allowing people to holistically define their needs for disaster response and recovery and broader resilience efforts. Resilience hubs can take places that people already know and trust like youth centers, schools, libraries, and places of worship, and turn them into spaces that can support communities. Hubs are meant to encourage local ownership and governance, providing area residents agency and decision-making over the design, priorities, and resources of the resilience hubs to address climate-related emergencies impacting their families and communities.

APEN's resilience funds are community-directed: for example, they can be invested in projects that are focused on energy efficiency and/or affordable housing and/or emergency response. Projects can be multi-year efforts, with five to ten year (or longer) timelines for ideation, design, and if necessary, construction. Funding may be tied to a community shepherding process, a structured process to accompany the community in enacting desired changes incorporating diverse participation and inclusive decision-making.

Creating the program took years, and involved many organizing and advocacy steps, including the development of pilot projects to demonstrate demand, the creation of a Community Resilience Working Group (made up of environmental justice groups) to document case studies, statewide tours that brought legislators to see community-led solutions in communities, and a sophisticated advocacy effort to secure state budget funding. APEN's legislative win to scale up community resilience hubs across California was built on years of persistent organizing, advocacy, and research in their communities as well as through coalitions and relationships built with California legislators. An ongoing challenge for the program is to

secure future funding to maintain the sustainability of the model. Funding for the Community Resilience Center Program was recently cut by half in California's last state legislative session, bringing home the importance of continued advocacy and demonstrating the impact of the program on an ongoing basis.

Community members, including refugee and immigrant members, contributed to the design of the pilots for Community Resilience Hubs, with leadership from a peer-selected steering committee of a dozen residents. For APEN, the Lincoln Recreation Center (LRC) in Oakland's Chinatown serves as an ideal example of a community resilience center. LRC is a city-run recreation center featuring volunteer-led programming, and has served as a gathering spot for new immigrants for decades. The partnership between municipal staff and community members is an important step toward building shared ownership and commitment to the project, and is critical to its vibrancy and sustainability.

APEN has successfully been awarded funding – half of which was raised by the community through foundation grants and grassroots fundraising – through engaging in organizing and advocacy efforts at the state and federal level –to include the LRC to a capital improvement plan. The revitalized LRC is set for groundbreaking in the spring of 2026. The site will be designed with intentional climate resilience principles. Today, there are buckets stationed throughout the building to catch rainwater to support harvesting of water. APEN envisions a restored LRC with solar panels and battery back-up power so that it can keep essential programming and culturally competent communications during times of crisis, including offering overnight shelter capacities in the event of disasters. But more importantly, restoring the LRC will preserve the longstanding role of the center as critical community resilience infrastructure: a site where APEN and its allies have organized emergency trainings in Cantonese, hosted events that made 5,000 emergency kits for allies across Oakland, and served as a joyful, intergenerational gathering place for people to connect and keep each other safe.

While the community resilience center program is a valuable model policy, it underscores the critical role of civil society and relationships as a precondition for community resilience.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

As emphasized by APEN's leadership, resilience centers are more than just physical infrastructure.

What is equally critical is the social infrastructure. These locations are already gathering places where there are opportunities to build connection, relationships, and social cohesion. The LRC, for example, is already a place where communities come to share information, get resources, and to support each other. And like the LRC, this creates more spaces that can serve as bases for organizing.

A similar vision is guiding work in Buffalo, NY that PUSH and Justice for Migrant Families are participating in. Working across issue silos and communities, these and other organizations are raising resources for and exploring ways to develop neighborhood mobilization hubs to train tenants in self-help resilience measures – simple equipment like battery-operated radios and flashlights for when the electricity goes out, training in first aid, emergency response, and leadership. The work resembles traditional block-by-block organizing.

The heart of the work is making sure that neighbors know their neighbors so that when something happens – like the blizzard of 2022 when residents were forced to shelter in place without heat – the community will have the connections, relationships, and resources to respond to ensure that a natural disaster doesn't also become a human one. And it builds critical community muscle to both survive and thrive through natural disasters and the community relationships necessary to advocate for neighborhood needs among immigrants, refugees, and native born residents.

HOUSING JUSTICE AT THE CLIMATE AND MIGRATION NEXUS

POLICY SPOTLIGHTS

Fighting for Tenants and Safe Homes

Decarbonizing Housing

Confronting Climate Displacement

Toward a Vision for Affordable and Green Social Housing

A common thread that cuts across all three sites participating in the cohort is housing justice.

For immigrants and internally displaced migrants who may lack economic resources, encounter language barriers, risk exploitation due to immigration status, or face racial or religious discrimination - housing is a primary challenge. But they find themselves in the same search for affordable housing facing longtime residents, presenting important challenges for organizers and communities anticipating competition for limited resources. The issue of housing justice cuts in many ways.

With respect to affordability, lack of access to affordable housing in many locations across the US is forcing lower income residents, including new arrivals, into precarious shelter conditions and/or consuming more of a household's income, leading to food and other forms of insecurity. Climate impacts - including increasing insurance costs in climate-vulnerable areas - are contributing to housing costs. Higher income property owners, for example in Miami are seeking homes or safer investments in areas less vulnerable to climate impacts, like flooding or sea level rise. This includes increasing investments in communities that may have once been redlined. This is contributing to the gentrification of historically lower-income communities of color, increasing property values, displacing residents and contributing to greater competition over existing affordable housing options. And lack of affordable housing stock in cities presents both near-term and long-term challenges, especially for communities that may anticipate population growth as a result of changing climate, with new arrivals from locations in the US that are becoming less livable or disaster threatened due to climate change.

Lower income residents must also contend with the lack of tenant protections in many communities, rendering them vulnerable to displacement due to unreasonable rent increases or to arbitrary evictions. In some cases they may live in communities more vulnerable to climate impacts, like sea level rise, flooding, fire, and severe weather events, or they may live in housing structures less resilient to such events. This can include housing that is less insulated from weather (heat or cold), more exposed to toxics (both outside and inside the home), or determined to be unworthy of repair due to low property values, limits on or lack of insurance.

The lack of affordable housing is proving to be a significant challenge for new arrivals (whether displaced from another community in the US or from somewhere else in the world), and affordability is placing significant burdens on a household's ability to survive, thrive, or adapt to community conditions.

FIGHTING FOR TENANTS AND SAFE HOMES

Buffalo is an increasingly diverse community in Upstate New York considered by some to be a potential climate haven, because of its proximity to fresh water and its relative geographic position keeping it out of the path of many climate events, the 2022 blizzard notwithstanding.

As a City, Buffalo is also home to a large number of vacant properties given historic economic shifts shaped by changes in manufacturing and industry. Yet these dynamics have not prevented Buffalo from experiencing a housing affordability crisis.

PUSH Buffalo is currently campaigning to ensure local implementation of statewide policies designed to protect tenants and prevent arbitrary evictions. Requiring good cause for evictions is one way tenants can protect themselves from gentrification, as increasing demand drives the cost of housing upward. For the last couple of years, Buffalo has been one of the "hottest" real-estate markets in the country. For Buffalo's immigrant and refugee populations who are disproportionately living in rental housing and older housing stock, these protections could have increased importance.

At the same time, PUSH is also advocating to maintain funding for the state's flagship low-income energy efficiency and building electrification program, EmPower+. PUSH leads the state-funded Western NY Regional Clean Energy Hub and helps connect vulnerable households to the EmPower+ program, which provides access to whole-house insulation, air sealing, and fossil-free heating and cooling technologies which, together, enhance the "passive survivability" of Buffalo's older housing stock during extreme winter and summer weather events. During Buffalo's deadly blizzard, weatherized homes maintained temperatures 10°F warmer than un-weatherized homes during power outages. In dilapidated housing, indoor temperatures plummeted to 32°F within 12 hours. Low-income families, including many immigrants and refugees, live in the worst housing stock. Ensuring building-level resilience keeps people safe from exposure in their own homes when other infrastructure fails.

DECARBONIZING HOUSING

PODER and APEN together are working to implement the CA Equitable Building Decarbonization (EBD) at state and local levels, working to ensure equitable implementation of the California Energy Commission's (CEC) program, which they also helped to create. The organizations are working with local municipalities and other partners to leverage the program for greater implementation and wider community access.

The Program Enables:

- Funds for deferred maintenance related to health and safety concerns such as mold and lead
- Tenant protections during retrofits so people are not priced out of improved apartments
- Funds to incentivize replacement of appliances with healthier, greener equipment
- Prioritization for historically negatively impacted communities, including low-income communities and communities of color
- Prioritization of communities facing extreme heat, sea level rise, or the effects of wildfire smoke and other air quality crises (for example, refinery explosions)

CONFRONTING CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT

Catalyst Miami frames their mission as “building a Miami where people can afford to stay and live well for generations to come.” Climate gentrification has accelerated since the early 2000s, with predominantly Black communities in higher elevation areas being displaced to lower-lying, more flood-vulnerable zones. That these communities were segregated and redlined to those higher elevation areas like Liberty City in the last century, and are now being pushed out, is an especially egregious example of history repeating itself. Post-COVID migration from other states has worsened housing shortages and driven up costs.

Insurance presents a critical challenge. Miami-Dade is tied with Houston as the most uninsured county in the country. Many homeowners cannot afford flood or wind insurance after purchasing homes. The public option (known as Citizens in Florida) often rejects applicants or offers insufficient coverage. When hurricanes strike, companies like Lennar buy out entire blocks from desperate homeowners in insurance disputes, accelerating corporate consolidation and community displacement.

TOWARD A VISION FOR AFFORDABLE AND GREEN SOCIAL HOUSING

California is experiencing a housing affordability crisis that especially impacts low-income and working-class immigrant communities in the state. Many immigrants cannot afford to live near where they work and cannot access key culturally competent resources. In California, over half of residents are rent burdened, meaning that they spend over 30% of their income on housing and only 17% of residents can afford a median priced home. This is the context that motivates APEN's advocacy for solutions that lower costs and increase protections for immigrant renters and increase the production of affordable housing across the state.

+30%

Income California residents spend on housing

of California residents can afford a median priced home

17%

Affordable Housing Helps Preserve Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Cultural Districts

Many of APEN's members are seniors who live in affordable housing units in Oakland Chinatown. These affordable housing units have been critical to fight displacement of AAPI immigrants with fixed and low incomes who wouldn't be able to afford market-rate housing in the Bay Area. Affordable housing developments allow for the preservation of important Asian cultural districts. These districts allow AAPIs to access critical culturally competent resources for food, community, health, finance, and recreation.

Fighting Unaffordable Rent Increases in California

A study conducted by AAPIs for Civic Empowerment (AAPI Force) showed that four in five Asian American voters in California cited cost of housing as an extremely or very important issue to them personally in deciding how to vote. From 2020-2025, rents grew by 42% in California, far outpacing wage growth. Working-class and immigrant communities are being forced out of major economic centers limiting their job opportunities.

Green Social Housing as a vision for California

APEN is pursuing policy solutions to build toward a vision of green social housing across the state, reflecting the commitment to treating affordable, quality housing as a right. This means housing that is permanently affordable, publicly/community-owned and produced to meet a human need, democratically controlled by residents, and powered by clean energy with access to clean air and water.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

This guide spotlights a handful of promising policy initiatives and organizing campaigns at the intersection of climate and migration from six organizations in three regions of the United States. These examples underscore the importance of organizing in frontline communities, and highlight the power of solutions that come from those most impacted by climate change and forced displacement.

Their innovations and experiences are paralleled by efforts across a growing ecosystem of organizations from Florida to Alaska that are spearheading innovations in everything from new funding mechanisms taxing polluters to fund climate disaster resilience and insurance, to creating more welcoming communities, to investments in community land ownership and affordable utilities, and even internationally-focused advocacy to ensure safer migration routes between countries.

The connection between climate justice and migrant justice feels stronger than it did just one year ago. At the time of the writing of this guide (early 2026), federal agencies are surging immigration enforcement into frontline communities to arrest, detain, and deport undocumented immigrants. In doing so, they are trampling rights of free speech, religious practice, and due process, and they are enlisting a growing system of surveillance technologies, militarized law enforcement tools and warehouse-style detention centers. This is happening at the same time that the federal government is being used as a tool of deregulation to remove climate, environmental and other protections intended to protect workers, families, and communities.

Climate justice leaders in these sites and across the country have made clear that they will do what they can to protect immigrants, and work with immigrant rights organizations to protect both our democracy and the climate. For their part, immigrant-rights and immigrant-serving organizations are finding common cause with climate and environmental justice leaders. Together, they are pushing back on attacks against frontline communities, including attacks to civil rights and climate and environmental protections. This political moment, which has also been punctuated by a series of natural disasters along the way, has made clear to a growing cross section of movement leaders that this is a time to move beyond silos, building community power at scale to protect communities and advance new community-led strategies to prepare for a changed climate, including a future many communities are already experiencing.

The cross-movement organizing now underway in places ranging from Minneapolis to Charlotte, Homestead to San Francisco, and Buffalo to Honolulu reflects this commitment, as organizations contribute to the creation of rapid response networks, know your rights training, and aligned advocacy strategies.

The US is at an inflection point on both climate and migrant justice. Facing an uncertain future and amidst fear-driven policies that undermine protections for people and climate, organizers and activists across the nation are painting a radically different picture where the interplay of climate and migrant justice presents a bold and inclusive vision for our country. The vibrant and imaginative initiatives at the nexus of climate and migrant justice described in this guide present the building blocks of an alternative vision where communities are organizing to adapt, to welcome, and to transform in a world increasingly changed by climate.