

FALL 2024

ENDURING CHANGE

A Data Review of Firsthand Accounts
of Climate Mobility Impacts

IRAP
International Refugee
Assistance Project



Contents

1	Introduction
3	Methodology
4	Findings
5	Respondent Demographics
6	Climate Impacts in Countries of Origin
8	Impacts of Disasters in Countries of Origin
10	Climate Change Impacts Destroy Homes and Physical Infrastructure
11	Climate Change Impacts Destroy Livelihoods
13	Climate Change Impacts Damage Human Health
14	Climate Change Impacts Exacerbate Violence and Conflict
16	Climate-Related Challenges in Transit
17	Impacts of Challenges in Transit
18	Human Health Impacts in Transit
19	Environmental Conditions Increase Vulnerability to Abuse and Exploitation
20	Recommendations
21	Issue Administrative Guidance on Climate Considerations in Refugee Resettlement and Asylum Adjudications
22	Improve Access to Legal Pathways
23	Designate Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status
24	Implement Humanitarian Parole Program for People Impacted by Climate Disasters
25	Conclusion

Executive Summary

Being forced to flee home is one of the most staggering impacts of the climate crisis. Climate change impacts and environmental disasters have already displaced whole communities, children, and families, and experts predict significantly more movement as climate impacts intensify.¹ Yet while comprehensive data exists on internal displacement, cross-border climate-related mobility remains poorly documented.² This report is the first of its kind to present cross-border climate data based on firsthand accounts of migrants and displaced people in the Americas.



“The...hurricane left us without a home, and the drought left us without water to drink.”

- 48-year-old Haitian woman

IRAP, in partnership with other legal organizations, including Al Otro Lado, Haitian Bridge Alliace, Kids in Need of Defense, and Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, gathered more than 3,600 responses from the migrants and displaced people we serve, more than 3,000 of whom are people from the Americas. We asked people who had entered or were seeking to enter the United States how climate-fueled disasters had prompted their journeys, exacerbated the challenges they faced in transit, and shaped their lives as they sought safety.

Key Findings

43% of respondents reported experiencing a climate-related disaster in their country of origin.

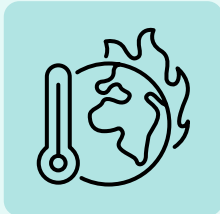
Among those who reported specific disasters, the most reported disasters were:

heavy rains



43%

extreme heat



40%

hurricanes



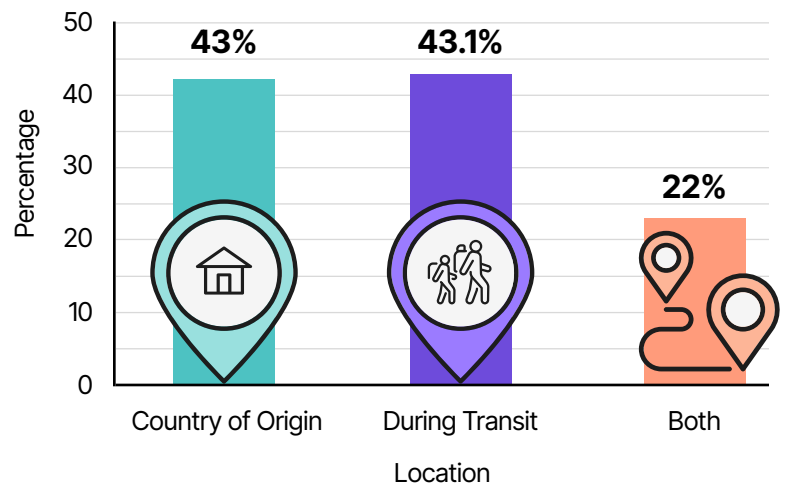
39%

flooding



38%

Where Climate Disaster was Experienced



More than half (64%) of those who reported disasters experienced two or more disasters.



43.1% of respondents encountered environmental challenges during transit to the United States.

Extreme heat (29%), extreme cold (27%), and heavy rains (15%) were the most reported among those who faced transit challenges.

extreme heat



29%

extreme cold



27%

heavy rains



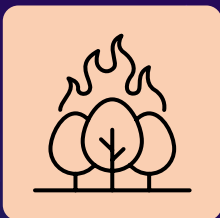
15%

This report provides definitive evidence that climate change and environmental disasters are substantially impacting people seeking immigration relief in the United States.

The findings show that disasters in countries of origin exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and that worsening environmental conditions due to climate change create severe challenges for migrants and displaced people in transit.

Given this reality, the report highlights the urgent need for effective policy responses. The current lack of adequate measures leaves individuals and communities impacted by climate disasters exposed to further harm. To fill this gap, the U.S. government should improve and expand access to protection pathways for people in the Americas, including Temporary Protected Status, refugee protection, humanitarian parole, and immigrant visas. Cross-border movement is inevitable in the face of escalating climate disasters, and planning for such movement will result in better outcomes for affected individuals and receiving communities.

[Skip to Recommendations](#)



“We suffered from heatstroke, we lost material possessions in forest fires, and we were left without a home due to landslides and floods.”

- 42-year-old doctor from Mexico

Introduction

The effects of climate change on human mobility patterns are becoming increasingly evident. Extreme weather events like hurricanes, floods, and droughts, along with environmental degradation, lead to the loss of homes, livelihoods, and essential services.³ These climate challenges often intersect with poverty, conflict, and political instability, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and causing both internal and cross-border movement.⁴ Yet legal protections for climate-displaced people are lacking, with no binding multilateral treaties and few domestic laws offering specific protection.⁵

In addition, cross-border journeys are becoming more perilous due to rising temperatures and extreme weather, making attempts to seek protection increasingly deadly. Governments, including the United States, have implemented policies that block and push back people seeking protection, forcing them to travel through harsh and dangerous terrain made more perilous by climate change.⁶

This report documents the challenges faced by migrants and displaced people seeking U.S. protection due to climate change. Existing data suggests that climate mobility is a growing crisis, but precise statistics and comprehensive information on climate-related cross-border movement are lacking.⁷ Advocates and researchers have long understood that human mobility is multicausal, and that climate change is increasingly interacting with and exacerbating targeted violence, conflict, and other drivers of movement.⁸ However, IRAP and others have found that people seeking U.S. humanitarian relief seldom self-identify climate-related or environmental impacts as their central reason for leaving their homes.⁹

In many cases, people who are primarily motivated to seek protection due to threats of violence have also been impacted by climate change and/or environmental disasters, but are unlikely to mention environmental factors unless interviewers specifically ask about them.¹⁰ Thus, specific case examples highlighting the connection between climate disasters and other types of persecution are scarce and no comprehensive study has yet been undertaken on the way climate change and environmental disasters impact people seeking U.S. humanitarian protection. This information gap undermines a comprehensive and informed response to climate displacement. In response, this report aims to provide initial evidence and first-hand accounts of climate change impacts on migrants and displaced people in support of legal solutions, narrative change campaigns, and advocacy efforts to enhance protection.

Methodology

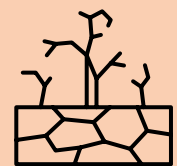
This report presents qualitative and quantitative data on how climate change impacts people seeking immigration relief in the US. based on survey data from the Climate Data Project, an initiative led by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) in collaboration with nonprofit legal service organizations, including AI Otro Lado, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, and Haitian Bridge Alliance. The findings are based on survey responses collected by participating organizations through client intake and screening procedures of people who have entered or seek to enter the United States and sought services from IRAP and partners.

Between August 2023 and August 2024, more than 3,600 migrants and displaced people completed a comprehensive survey exploring how climate change and environmental disasters have impacted respondents in their countries of origin, as well as climate-related challenges in transit. While the ongoing project is global in scope, this report focuses on the 3,005 respondents from the Americas, who account for 82% of total respondents.

Engagement with the survey varied due to differences in intake and screening methods. Some organizations used client-facing forms, while others had staff members conduct interviews and complete the survey on behalf of clients and potential clients. To accommodate the diverse needs of clients and organizations, the surveys included questions of varying

detail. All respondents answered a “yes” or “no” question about whether they experienced disasters in their country of origin or during transit. Those who completed the more extensive versions of the survey were provided with picklists of specific disasters and impacts. The percentages this report presents describe responses of a subset of respondents who answered the relevant questions. Additionally, all respondents were given the opportunity to provide further details in open-response boxes.

The analysis below is based on responses to both picklist questions and insights gathered from open-text responses. Case examples in the report and attached appendix include direct quotes from these open-text responses. All names are pseudonyms for the sake of participants’ privacy.



“The heat has exceeded 50 degrees Celsius. We don’t have potable water, and our family’s corn crop dried up completely.”

- 38-year-old man from Mexico

Findings



43.1% of respondents from the Americas reported experiencing a disaster in their country of origin.



43% experienced environmental challenges in transit.



22% of respondents faced both.

This report finds that climate change has profoundly disrupted the lives of people in the Americas, with climate-related disasters causing widespread destruction of homes and infrastructure, destroying livelihoods, and increasing violence and conflict. En route to the United States, many people also encountered dangerous environmental conditions that exacerbated the challenges they faced in transit.

Approximately 43.4% of respondents from the Americas reported experiencing an environmental disaster in their country of origin;¹¹ 43% experienced environmental challenges in transit.¹² Over 22% of respondents faced both. Because of the self-selection of the sample and variations in survey methods, our findings should not be interpreted as statistically reflecting the experience of all people seeking immigration relief in the United States. However, these numbers demonstrate that climate change has a significant impact on people's mobility and displacement.

Respondent Demographics

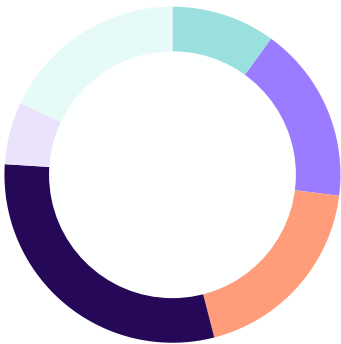
This report’s analysis focuses on the subset of respondents from the Americas and Caribbean, who account for 82.6% of migrants and displaced people surveyed. Of the respondents from the Americas, most come from Mexico, accounting for 30.3%. This is followed by Honduras with 19.0%, Guatemala with 16.9%, El Salvador with 10.28.7%, Haiti with 8.9%, and Venezuela with 5.3%. Other respondents are from Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru.



“There was a lot of damage to my house from wind and water. Many difficulties arose at that moment. That day left a scar on my heart and mind because we truly suffered. Our children were suffering as they couldn’t go to school. We also lost our garden, which was our only resource. The whole family was in tears. It was an unforgettable moment.”

- 32-year-old Haitian woman

Respondents’ Country of Origin



El Salvador	10%
Guatemala	17%
Honduras	19%
Mexico	30%
Venezuela	6%
Other	18%

The respondents represent a diverse group, with nearly equal distribution of cisgender men and women and a variety of ages. Demographics of respondents are largely shaped by the populations participating organizations serve. Three participating organizations serve primarily Hispanic clients, one serves primarily Haitian clients, and one serves only children under the age of 18.

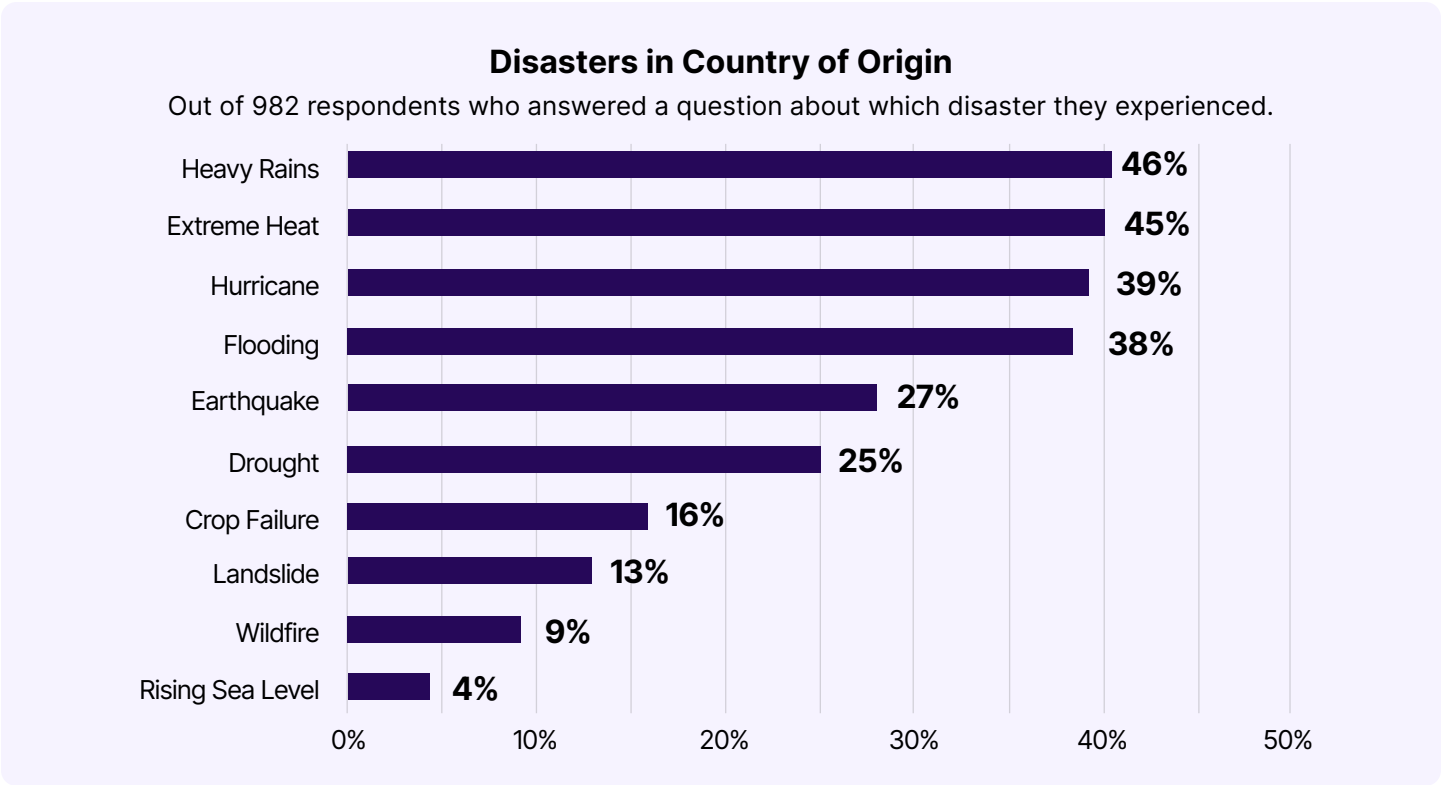
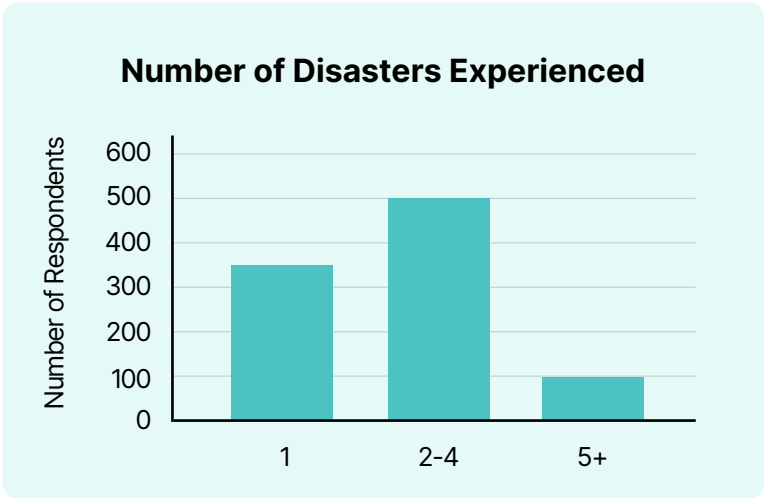
A significant number of children participated in the survey – about 44% of the respondents are children under the age of 18 and approximately half of respondents are aged 19 to 54, with some older than 54.

Climate Impacts in Countries of Origin

This report shows that climate change significantly impacts people seeking immigration relief in the United States. Approximately 43% of respondents reported experiencing a disaster in their country of origin. Adults and children noted a range of disasters they experienced in their home countries before making their migration journey. Among the 982 survey respondents who experienced climate-related disasters in their countries of origin and answered a multiple-choice question about specific disasters, 46% experienced heavy rains, making this the most frequently reported disaster. Extreme heat was reported by 40% of these respondents, followed by hurricanes (39%), flooding (38%), earthquakes¹ (27%), drought (25%), crop failure (16%), landslides (13%), wildfires (9%), and rising sea level (4%). Notably, 64% of those who reported disasters experienced multiple disasters.

Survey participants from the countries with the most respondents—Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti, and Venezuela—reported experiencing a variety of climate-related disasters, with heavy rains, extreme heat, and hurricanes

1 Though earthquakes are not climate-related disasters, they are included in this report because their impacts on affected individuals and communities mirror those of disasters that can be linked to climate change and require comparable policy and humanitarian responses.

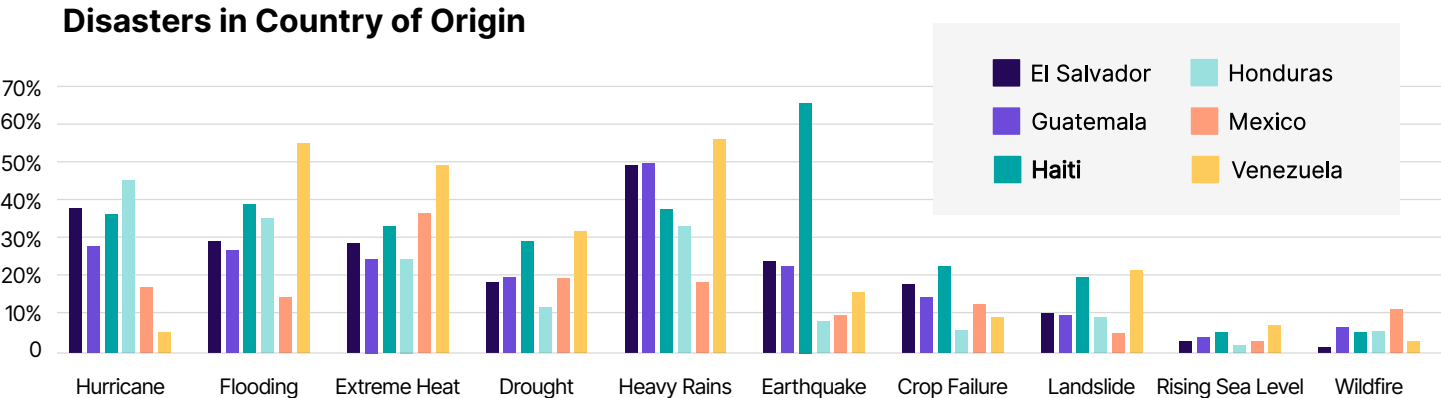


being particularly common across multiple countries. Latin America and the Caribbean have faced a surge in climate-related disasters and rising temperatures, leading to frequent storms, floods, droughts, and other extreme weather events. For example, hurricanes Eta and Iota devastated Central America in 2020,¹³ displacing thousands, while the “Dry Corridor” from Guatemala to Nicaragua and Mexico’s drought-prone regions face significant threats to agricultural productivity and food security.¹⁴

Among 911 respondents from Mexico, 42% experienced disasters, with extreme

heat (36%) and heavy rains (19%) being the most prevalent among the disasters reported. Among Hondurans, 54% of its 571 respondents experienced disasters, with hurricanes (44%), flooding (36%), and heavy rains (32%) being the most common disaster among those who specified which disasters they experienced.

Among Guatemalans, 36% of the 508 respondents experienced disasters, with heavy rains (50%) and hurricanes (28%) being the most common among those who experienced disasters and answered the relevant question.



Among 307 respondents from El Salvador, 36% experienced disasters in their country of origin, with the most frequently reported disasters being heavy rains (49%), hurricanes (38%), and extreme heat (29%) among those who experienced disasters and answered the relevant question. From Haiti, 60% of the 268 respondents experienced disasters, with earthquakes (65%) and hurricanes and heavy rains (38%) being the most frequently reported among those who experienced disasters and answered the relevant question. Fi-

nally, among Venezuelans, 38% of the 162 respondents experienced disasters, with heavy rains (56%) and flooding (54%) as the most common among those who experienced disasters and answered the relevant question.

“Hurricane Otis blew off the entire roof of our houses, and with everything exposed to the elements, everything was damaged and spoiled. We also lost our crops.”

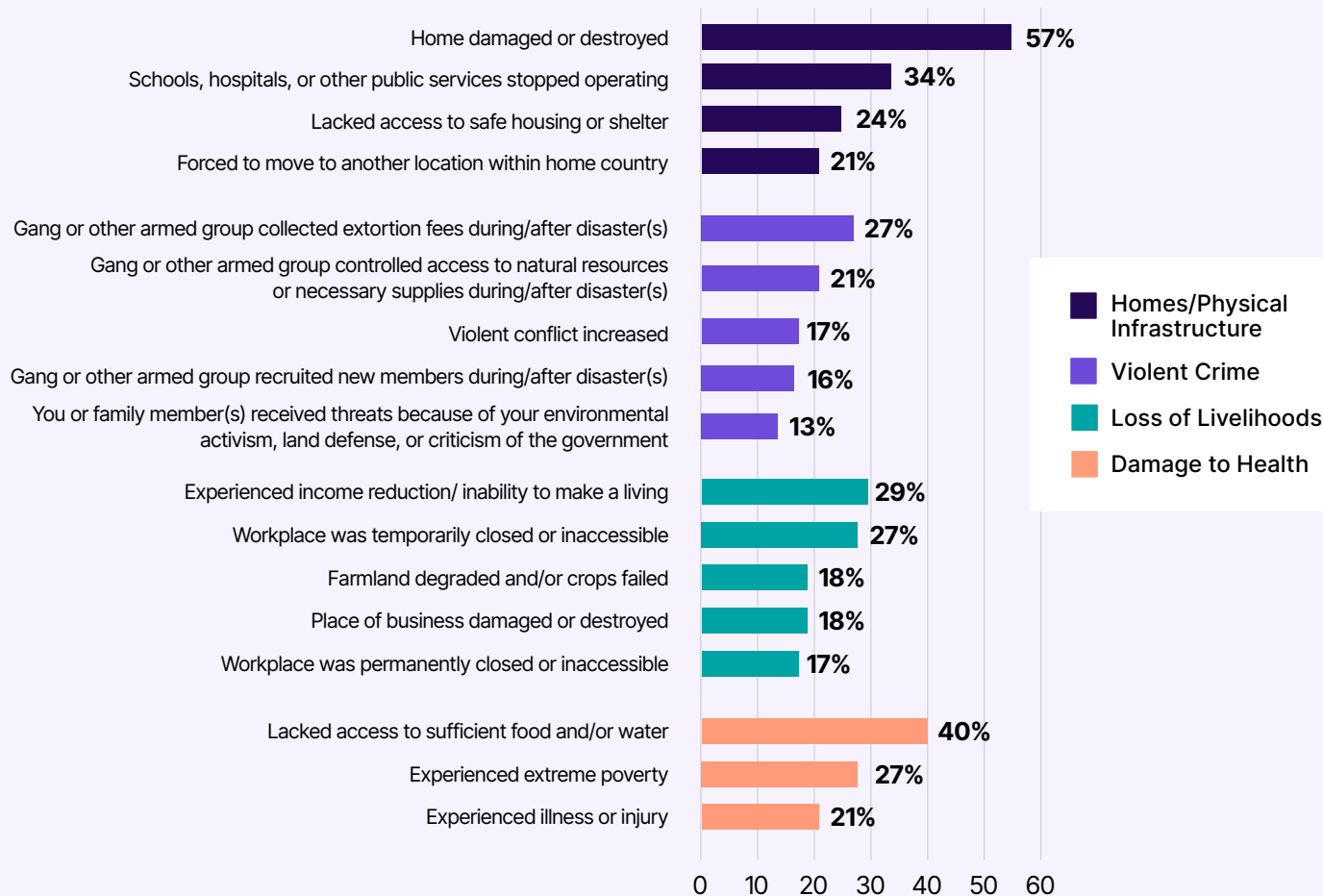
- 39-year-old Mexican man

Impacts of Disasters in Countries of Origin

Climate-related disasters have profoundly disrupted the lives of respondents, causing significant damage to homes, livelihoods, health, and safety. Hurricanes, storms, flooding, and other disasters forced families to relocate under challenging conditions and live without proper housing for extended periods. Economic impacts were severe, with many experiencing reduced income or inability to make a living due to crop failures and business closures, leading to food insecurity. Health issues were critical, with frequent reports of illness

or injury from climate impacts, exacerbated by inadequate medical care and poor living conditions. Extreme poverty and the collapse of essential services like schools and hospitals worsened these impacts. Disasters also increased conflict, with reports of extortion and violence by armed groups. In the face of these challenges, many respondents reported insufficient or no government assistance at all. 21% of respondents who answered a question about specific disaster impacts were also forced to relocate within their home country after a disaster. Significantly, many people faced several compounding challenges.

Effect of Disaster in Country of Origin





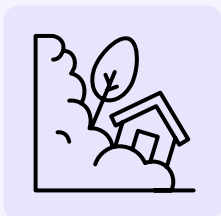
Maria is a 23-year-old woman from El Salvador who experienced multiple disasters, including extreme heat, landslides, and drought, before fleeing home: **“The crops were lost,”** she said.

“What was recovered was little and very expensive, the basic food basket prices increased, and the salary remained the same, very little, not enough to cover all food and education expenses.” She decided to journey to the US, traveling by foot through desert terrain and across rivers, and often sleeping outside or in tent encampments. It was very hot and very cold. She described her experience: **“The exhaustion, the heat of the sun burned the feet of me and my son. [We went through a] drought, and the cold of sleeping outside in parks or on streets with bags or cardboard.”**

Climate Change Impacts Destroy Homes and Physical Infrastructure

The destruction of homes and physical infrastructure emerged as a prevalent issue among respondents, with more than half (57%) of those who answered a question about specific impacts reporting their homes were severely damaged or completely destroyed. Climate-related disasters such as flooding, extreme heat, heavy rains, and hurricanes had devastating ef-

fects. Families were often left without shelter for prolonged periods, forced to sleep on unsuitable land, or relocate within their country. The destruction of homes also resulted in the loss of personal belongings and means of livelihood. Numerous respondents reported that government assistance was lacking or inadequate to redress the significant losses they experienced.



“Our house was destroyed, and I spent a year sleeping on land that was not even in good condition”

– 31-year-old Haitian woman

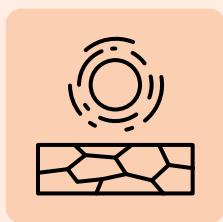


“In the flood, we lost all our belongings. We had a rented house, and we lost our beds. The government did not help us at all.”

– 23-year-old Afro-descendent Mexican woman

Climate Change Impacts Destroy Livelihoods

Respondents reported severe economic hardship, with many experiencing a significant reduction in income or an inability to make a living, often due to crop failures and disaster-induced business closures. These challenges led to widespread food insecurity, leaving many without adequate access to food and water. Among the 486 respondents who reported disaster impacts, 29% faced income loss or an inability to sustain their livelihood, while 18% were affected by degraded farmland and crop failures. Additionally, 45% of adult respondents noted that their workplace was either closed or inaccessible, with 27% reporting temporary closures and 17% facing permanent shutdowns.



“The drought left my family without food, with poor harvests and no employment. The government made promises but did not provide anything.”

– 53-year-old Cuban man

Those reliant on agriculture were particularly impacted. Intense rains, droughts, and floods destroyed crops and livestock, causing significant food shortages and economic strain. Farmers reported losing entire harvests and arable land to disasters, leading to prolonged periods without income. The lack of water for irrigation further hindered agricultural productivity for some respondents. Many farmers were forced to relocate or abandon their agricultural activities.

Climate-fueled disasters also significantly disrupt livelihoods and alter ecosystems that many communities rely on for their economic survival.¹⁵ Many respondents reported that disasters caused businesses to close, disrupting local economies and employment, including when landslides and other extreme weather events made roads impassable. In some cases, the loss of livelihoods led to extreme poverty and hunger, as many were left without the necessary resources to survive.



Pierre is a 21-year-old Haitian man who faced multiple climate impacts including hurricanes or severe storms, extreme heat, landslides, heavy rains, earthquakes, crop failure, and drought. These events destroyed his home, undercut his access to food and water, reduced his income, and led to crop failure. **“It made me very sad**

because my grandparents had nowhere to sleep due to the damage to their house,”

Pierre said. **“These disasters caused us a lot of suffering; what we planted did not grow, which meant we could neither sell nor buy, leading to hunger. The strong hurricanes destroyed all the plantations with strong winds, landslides carried land into rivers and ravines, and the roads were damaged, preventing vehicles from circulating.”**

Climate Change Impacts Damage

Human Health

Health issues emerged as a critical concern, with 21% of respondents who reported specific impacts citing illness or injury related to climate change and disasters. Common health problems included dehydration, heatstroke, respiratory issues, fever, digestive problems, and severe skin conditions, all exacerbated by inadequate medical care and poor living conditions during and after disasters.

The combination of extreme weather, inadequate access to food and water, and the breakdown of public services had a severe impact on overall health. 27% of respondents who answered a question about specific climate change impacts were driven into extreme poverty, a factor that significantly contributes to adverse health outcomes.¹⁶ Additionally, 40% reported lacking access to sufficient food and water. The closure of schools, hospitals, and other public services was reported by 34% of respondents. Such disruptions can hinder immediate medical responses and worsen health outcomes.¹⁷ Poor living conditions during and after these disasters—including insufficient shelter, sanitation, and clean water—further deteriorate physical health. The psychological toll of these traumatic events also led to widespread mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, as reported by numerous respondents.



“We were without a roof, which means without a house. We had no electricity, no food, and faced a lot of heat. Currently, there are people who have not recovered, there are no medicines in the hospitals, and more.”

– 51-year-old Cuban woman

“I lived through an unforgettable moment with a major [disaster] that killed many people. My family and I lost our home, we couldn’t go to school because it was destroyed, food was scarce, and potable water became difficult to find. Bandits were kidnapping people in the tents. This caused my mother to fall into depression because she was not used to these kinds of things at all.”

– 36-year-old Haitian man

Climate Change Impacts Exacerbate Violence and Conflict

Increases in violence and conflict following climate-related disasters have compounded the challenges for those already struggling with the impacts of climate change. Approximately 17% of survey respondents who answered a question about specific disaster impacts reported an increase in violent conflict. Among adult respondents who specified disaster impacts, 27% experienced extortion by gangs or other armed groups, 21% reported that gangs or armed groups controlled access to necessary supplies and resources in the wake of disaster(s), and 16% reported gang recruitment during or after disasters.

Rising temperatures and more frequent environmental disasters exacerbate conflicts by limiting resource availability and increasing community vulnerability, which can lead to displacement.¹⁸ Climate change impacts often escalate armed conflicts, particularly when combined with socio-economic disparities, political instability, and poor governance. In states already facing high levels of violence, climate change impacts and disasters can worsen these issues.¹⁹ Criminal entities exploit the chaos and scarcity of resources caused by climate disasters, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.²⁰ In the Americas, gangs and cartels use violence and extortion to control communities, often with support from local law enforcement and officials.²¹ Organized criminal groups also monopolize vital resources in areas where climate disasters have destroyed crops and weakened local economies.²²



Juan fled El Salvador due to threats from gangs and the impact of natural disasters, including rising sea levels, which made it impossible for him to continue working as a fisherman and supporting his family. In 2023, severe floods destroyed his home, prompting the government to issue a “red alert” that prohibited fishing boats from operating due to hazardous conditions from storms, heavy winds, and flooding. **“We could not work for more than a month, but the government did not help us at all,”** he said. A gang exploited the situation, offering food and other resources, which significantly increased their influence in the community. They aggressively recruited new members and threatened Juan for refusing to join.

In addition, climate change-related land and resource dispossession is a significant driver of movement, as environmental degradation depletes land and natural resources, creating scarcity.²³ This scarcity incentivizes government officials, private developers, and organized criminal groups to exploit the lands and resources of Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities.²⁴ 13% of adult respondents who reported specific disaster impacts reported facing threats due to their environmental activism, land defense, or criticism of the government.

Climate-Related Challenges in Transit

Migrants and displaced people experience significant environmental challenges while traveling to the United States. The land route to the U.S.-Mexico border passes through regions experiencing more frequent and severe weather events due to climate change, such as high temperatures, flooding, and storms. These extreme weather conditions make already perilous journeys even more dangerous.

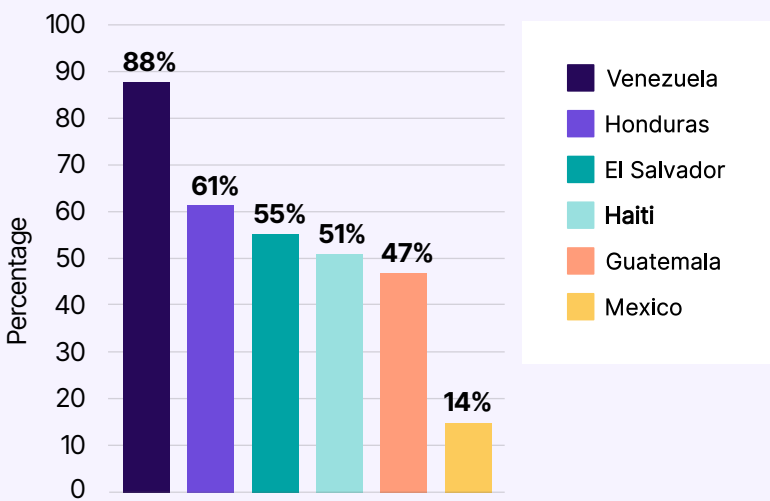
43.1% of survey respondents reported experiencing environmental challenges in transit. More than half of respondents from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, and Venezuela reported environmental challenges in transit, with 88% of Venezuelan respondents reporting such challenges. Many respondents experienced extreme weather events during their transit, including extreme heat (29%), extreme cold (27%), heavy rains (15%), and other extreme weather events (9%).

“Traveling to the United States was the worst thing that has happened to us.”

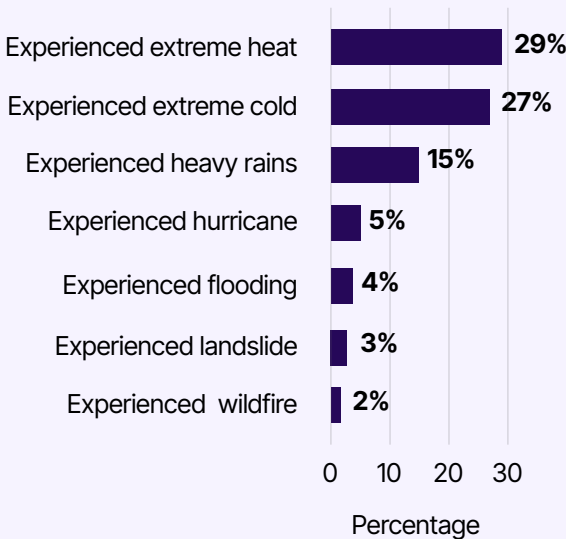
– 29-year-old Venezuelan man

Other environmental challenges reported include flooding (4%), landslides (3%), and wildfires (2%). Of the 1,105 respondents who answered a follow-up question, many reported experiencing severe conditions: 53% traveled by foot across rivers or other waterways, 46% traveled through a desert on foot, 43% traveled through mountainous terrain on foot, and 28% traveled by boat across oceans, rivers, or other waterways. Additionally, 28% of respondents reported sleeping outside or in tent encampments due to lack of access to shelter.

Experienced Challenges in Transit



Environmental Challenges in Transit



Impacts of Challenges in Transit

Climate change significantly exacerbates the challenges faced by people forced to undertake perilous journeys through harsh terrain to seek protection across borders. Altered weather patterns lead to more frequent and severe extreme weather events, such as intense storms, extreme heat, and dangerous river conditions.²⁵ These environmental changes create additional obstacles, making it harder for migrants and displaced people to find shelter, access basic necessities, and maintain their health and safety during transit.

Environmental Conditions Hinder Access to Shelter and Basic Necessities

Many respondents reported that harsh environmental conditions significantly hindered their access to shelter and basic necessities during their journeys to the United States. 417 respondents identified specific impacts of environmental challenges in transit. Of them, 24% of individuals reported an inability to access safe and secure shelter or housing. Extreme weather, such as intense heat, heavy rains, and cold temperatures posed significant obstacles to finding and maintaining safe shelter. Many respondents slept outside, in forests, or in makeshift tents, often exposed to the elements without adequate protection. This lack of secure housing often left them vulnerable, exacerbating their already precarious situation.



“We had to walk for almost three days under the sun and on foot because no means of transportation wanted to take us.”

– 48-year-old Haitian woman

Furthermore, the scarcity of food and clean water was a common struggle, with many experiencing severe hunger and dehydration due to the harsh conditions and the inability to access necessary supplies. 27% reported an inability to access necessary supplies and/or sufficient food, and 28% of respondents who answered this question indicated that their personal property was damaged or destroyed.

“I traveled for 12 hours on foot in the rain, my feet were swollen and my thighs were chafed. I slept under the stars, causing a cold that never went away.”

– 36-year-old Haitian woman

Human Health Impacts in Transit

The journey for many respondents was physically and mentally taxing, with numerous respondents reporting significant health issues due to the environmental conditions they faced in transit. Illness or injury was reported by 39% of respondents that responded to the question on transit challenges. Many suffered from dehydration, heat exhaustion, and other heat-related illnesses due

to extreme temperatures. Others experienced respiratory problems, fevers, and infections from prolonged exposure to cold and damp environments. The physical toll of continuous walking, often for days on end, led to swollen feet, fatigue, severe blisters, and other injuries. Additionally, 21% were unable to access medical treatment for injury or illness. The psychological impact of such arduous conditions manifested in stress, anxiety, and depression.

Marie is a 31-year-old Haitian woman who fled Haiti after multiple disasters led to extreme poverty, insufficient food and water, and the loss of her livelihood. During her journey to find safety, she traveled by foot through desert and mountainous terrain, crossed rivers and oceans by boat, and often slept outside or in tent encampments due to the lack of shelter. She endured extreme cold and heavy rains, further exacerbating her challenges. She became ill, struggled to find safe and secure shelter, and had difficulty accessing necessary supplies and food throughout her journey.



She said, **“It was not easy at all for me because I lost the people I was with. They took another route, and I had to take the death road through the mountains with my cousin’s child. I had no food to eat or clothes for the baby because everything was left with my cousin and my partner. When someone gave me something to eat, I had to give it to the baby so that the baby wouldn’t die.”**

Environmental Conditions Increase Vulnerability to Abuse and Exploitation

Harsh environmental conditions during transit make perilous journeys even more arduous. Survey respondents reported being targeted by human traffickers and criminal organizations who took advantage of their desperate situations. Among those who provided specifics, mistreatment, abuse, or exploitation by police, immigration agents, or other government officials was reported by 41%, while 30% faced similar treatment by private actors, including members of criminal organizations such as smugglers. Many were robbed, extorted, and, in some cases, subjected to physical violence. The lack of safe shelter and the constant need to move left migrants and displaced people exposed to these dangers, with little to no protection. This vulnerability was compounded by physical and mental exhaustion.

“I was kidnapped in Durango, Mexico, for 20 days and released only after my family paid a ransom of 2,500 dollars.”

– 64-year-old Ecuadorian woman

Recommendations

This report clearly demonstrates that climate change is significantly impacting migrants and displaced people en route to and already in the United States, and there is an opportunity to use existing U.S. law to better protect them. In some cases, people displaced by climate change should qualify for refugee and asylum status. Nationals from countries facing severe climate emergencies could receive Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Additionally, implementing a new humanitarian parole program for climate-displaced individuals would align with existing legal authority and precedent for group-based parole programs. Strengthening and ensuring access to pathways for climate-displaced people is an essential part of an equitable climate response.

Issue Administrative Guidance on Climate Considerations in Refugee Resettlement and Asylum Adjudications

Climate change impacts and environmental disasters often intersect with and exacerbate other forms of persecution that qualify climate-displaced people for refugee protection. In 2023, the U.S. administration made some updates to existing Refugee, Asylum and International Operations (RAIO) training materials to address the role of climate in refugee resettlement and asylum claims. To build on this, the administration can adopt a standalone training on climate considerations in asylum and refugee protection adjudications. This training would comprehensively address how climate factors form legally cognizable elements of protection claims.

Additionally, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) should issue policy memoranda directing officers and immigration court judges to consider the intersection of climate change with other drivers of displacement as grounds for refugee protection under existing U.S. law. Taking these steps would clarify for adjudicators how climate change interacts with current grounds for refugee protection, in line with UNHCR recommendations,²⁶ ensuring that applicants with viable climate-related claims are recognized.

Improve Access to Legal Pathways

The U.S. administration should take steps to ensure people impacted by climate change can access existing pathways to safety. Individuals displaced by climate change may qualify for existing U.S. immigration pathways, including asylum, parole, and family reunification processes.

The Safe Mobility Initiative may be a useful vehicle for increasing access to refugee resettlement for people affected by climate change, as some climate displaced people possess cognizable refugee claims or qualify for other relief. In all U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) contexts, including the Central American Minors Refugee and Parole Program, Protection Transfer Arrangement, Safe Mobility Office entry to USRAP, and traditional USRAP, USCIS refugee officers should ensure standard interview questions contemplate mixed-motive and one-central-reason refugee claims involving climate-related persecution.

Additionally, the administration should ensure that people seeking protection can access the asylum process at U.S. ports of entry, including by increasing asylum processing capacity and rescinding the “Securing the Border” interim final rule, which violates the rights of asylum seekers, contravenes U.S. law, and gravely increases

the risk of *refoulement*.²⁷ The rule effectively requires registration through the flawed CBP One app for asylum eligibility, leading to wait times of many months, and in some cases more than a year, to access the asylum process at ports of entry.²⁸ These wait times often force individuals into makeshift tent encampments or onto the streets, where they are exposed to extreme heat and other adverse climate impacts.²⁹

Further, without access to the asylum process at ports of entry, people fleeing danger are often driven to undertake dangerous crossings between ports of entry, where extreme heat, rough terrain, and treacherous rivers create deadly hazards made more dangerous by climate change, especially as the borderlands experience record temperatures.³⁰ Soaring numbers of border-crossers are subjected to deadly environmental hazards where policies restricting freedom of movement force them into harsh terrain—not only at the U.S.-Mexico border, but throughout the Americas as they travel north.³¹ The United States should reverse measures that are restricting access to asylum and driving people into dangerous crossings, including the funding and coordination of deterrence efforts in Latin American countries.³²

Designate Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status

Designating Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is crucial due to the country's extreme vulnerability to climate-related disasters. Among survey respondents from Guatemala who reported specific disasters, the most frequently experienced events were heavy rains (53%), hurricanes or severe storms (29%), flooding (29%), extreme heat (26%), earthquakes (23%), drought (21%), and crop failures (15%). These disasters had severe impacts: among those who reported specific impacts, 43% suffered damage to or destruction of their homes, 29% lacked access to sufficient food and water, 23% saw a reduction in income, 21% experienced the cessation of public services, and 19% faced extreme poverty.

Unlike Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, Guatemala has not received TPS designation despite recommendations from Congress³³ and requests from the Guatemalan government, particularly following hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020.³⁴ In 2022, another storm further devastated the country, displacing tens of thousands of people.³⁵ TPS designations for other Central American countries have been granted due to environmental disasters. For instance, Honduras received TPS in 1999 due to Hurricane Mitch, and El Salvador was granted status following two severe earthquakes.³⁶ Given these precedents, designating Guatemala on the basis of **climate-related impacts would constitute a consistent application of policy and provide essential protection for Guatemalans. It would also reinforce the use of TPS as a critical tool for addressing the impacts of climate change.**

Implement Humanitarian Parole Program for People Impacted by Climate Disasters

The administration can utilize parole authority to authorize the entry of climate-displaced individuals, creating a new parole program for those needing relief from climate-related disasters in specifically designated regions. This program would be consistent with the U.S. government's history of using parole authority to respond to specific circumstances faced by particular populations abroad through "categorical parole" programs, designed to consider parole for entire groups of individuals based on pre-set criteria, such as the CHNV Humanitarian Parole and Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) programs.³⁷ Based on survey responses, such a program could significantly benefit people from agricultural communities in Mexico impacted by drought or extreme heat, as well as those from Central America affected by hurricanes and severe storms.

The climate-based parole program would allow U.S. residents to sponsor eligible individuals. The eligibility criteria would align with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) authority to grant parole for "urgent humanitarian" reasons, which include protection against "targeted or individualized harm," or for "significant public benefit" reasons. For instance, the administration jus-

tified the CHNV program on both grounds, claiming "a significant public benefit for the United States by reducing unauthorized entries along our southwest border while also addressing the urgent humanitarian reasons that are driving [eligible people] to flee their home countries."³⁸ A climate-based parole program would similarly satisfy both criteria by offering critical relief to those affected by environmental disasters.

To help people fleeing disasters rebuild their lives, USCIS should make this category of parolees eligible for work authorization. Though parole provides only temporary permission to enter the United States, many climate-displaced individuals would likely qualify for permanent protection pathways, such as asylum and family-based petitions. Congress should also be encouraged to authorize resettlement benefits for climate-displaced parolees, similar to those provided to individuals paroled through the U4U program. Additionally, as with U4U, there should be no pre-departure medical screening, and decisions on parole applications should be made within three months. The administration should also fund organizations to coordinate sponsor recruitment, training, and oversight.

Conclusion

Our results highlight highlight the severe and complex impacts of climate change on human mobility, revealing the need for targeted policy responses. Migrants and displaced people reported extensive damage to homes and infrastructure, significant disruptions to livelihoods, and a host of health issues caused by climate-related disasters. During their transit, many respondents also faced harsh environmental conditions. These findings underscore the critical need for policy responses that provide pathways to safety for climate-displaced people and protections for people on the move from climate-related hazards in transit.

Appendix: Case Examples

Climate Impacts in Countries of Origin

Climate Change Impacts Destroy Homes and Physical Infrastructure

A 33-year-old woman from Cuba has endured hurricanes or severe storms, extreme heat, and flooding. These disasters have resulted in a lack of access to sufficient food and water, the cessation of public services like schools and hospitals, and increased violent conflict. She recounted, **“We spent days without electricity and water. We had to fetch water from another town.”** She noted, **“There was no help from the government.”**

A 48-year-old man from Mexico has been affected by extreme heat, crop failure, and drought, leading to difficult living conditions. He stated, **“The lack of good harvests causes food and job shortages under very difficult conditions.”** He also traveled through desert terrain, sleeping outside and facing extreme heat and cold.

A 32-year-old LGBTQ+ person from Mexico has faced multiple climate impacts, including hurricanes or severe storms, extreme heat, flooding, heavy rains, and rising sea levels. They explained, **“I am from the coast, where it rains a lot, the heat is very intense, and during the rainy season, there are always hurricanes that cause sea levels to rise, flooding businesses and homes.”**

A 39-year-old man from Mexico experienced hurricanes or severe storms, heavy rains, and crop failure. He described how Storm Otis destroyed their homes, leaving them exposed to the elements, which ruined everything and caused crop loss. He said, **“Storm Otis blew off all the roofs of our houses. The exposure damaged everything. The storm also caused crop loss.”**

A 56-year-old man from Mexico has suffered from extreme heat, floods, and heavy rains. He recounted, **“The intense rains affected us greatly; my parents and siblings and I had to sweep the water out with brooms and containers to prevent it from damaging our home.”** He has also faced mistreatment by authorities, racism, and threats, as well as extreme weather conditions during his journey, leading him to sleep outside. He added, **“I slept outside due to lack of access to shelter, enduring extreme heat, cold, and flooding.”**

A 31-year-old woman from El Salvador has faced extreme heat, flooding, heavy rains, and drought. She shared, **“My house flooded, and all my belongings were damaged. I couldn’t go out to work during that time.”**

A 65-year-old woman from Venezuela said **“Where I rented, the adobe house flooded due to intense rains”** noting, **“the government only helped with food, not with housing materials because I was renting.”**

A 24-year-old woman from Honduras faced significant challenges due to multiple climate-related disasters, including hurricanes, severe storms, flooding, heavy rains, and wildfires. She recounted, **“We lost our house because we lived by the edge of a stream; we lost everything.”**

A 50-year-old woman from Honduras said, **“My house flooded, losing material things and smaller household items and furniture...the government did not provide any help.”**

A 32-year-old man from Mexico reported that due to intense rains and flooding, **“we lost the house, and the furniture and other things were also damaged due to intense rains and flooding.”** He added, **“The army helped clean up the mud and debris, but we were left to fend for ourselves afterward.”**

A 46-year-old man from Colombia reported that after the flooding of his house and the loss of material goods, government support was **“short-lived and inadequate,”** adding, **“the government occasionally provided food and shelter for a few days, but then there was no more support.”**

A 39-year-old man from Guerrero, Mexico recounted, **“Hurricane Otis blew off the entire roof of our houses, and with everything exposed to the elements, everything was damaged and spoiled, including the loss of crops.”** Additionally, he has been a victim of extreme violence in his home region: **“They murdered my brother and decapitated him.”**

An 18-year-old man from Colombia said that during storms, **“Floods would enter the house and fill it with water.”**

A 32-year-old woman from Mexico endured hurricanes and flooding, resulting in the destruction of her home and a forced relocation within the country. **She “lost their material belongings from their house,”** and **“received only basic supplies and clothing”** from the government.

A 23-year-old man from Venezuela stated, **“The house flooded, damaging appliances and furniture,”** and mentioned, **“We did not receive any support from the government.”**

A 24-year-old man from Venezuela shared, **“The farm flooded,”** and explained, **“We received no help.”**

A 46-year-old man from Colombia experienced severe impacts including **“Flooding of the house and loss of material goods,”** and noted, **“The government occasionally provided food and shelter for a few days, but then there was no more support.”**

A 23-year-old man from Venezuela **“suffered from a tidal wave due to living near the coast; the tide rose and damaged properties, homes, and belongings due to intense rains last December, losing personal belongings.”** He added, **“The government did support us by providing a house in a safer location and helping with dengue and chikungunya.”**

A 32-year-old woman from Venezuela shared, **“With a lot of heat and intense rains, the houses collapse, many floods, and landslides affect the roads because they block the routes.”** She noted, **“We did not receive any support”** from the government.

A 64-year-old woman from Ecuador has experienced landslides, heavy rains, and an earthquake, which caused significant damage and drove her into extreme poverty. The woman's **"house (made of wood and bamboo) almost completely collapsed due to intense rains because it is located in a high-risk area with loose, movable soil"** She added that she received **"no help from the government."**

A 23-year-old man from Venezuela has experienced flooding and heavy rains, resulting in the destruction of his home and a lack of food and water. He shared, **"The house flooded, damaging appliances and soaking furniture,"** and noted the lack of government support.

A 29-year-old woman from Mexico has suffered from crop failure and drought, leading to reduced income and degraded farmland. She said, **"The price of basic food items increased due to the drought and loss of agricultural land in the community,"** and mentioned that **"the government did not support the farmers in their lost farmland."**

A 23-year-old woman from Mexico has faced hurricanes, extreme heat, landslides, heavy rains, wildfires, earthquakes, and rising sea levels. She said, **"My house was destroyed, and even a hill near my house collapsed."**

A 23-year-old woman from Honduras has endured hurricanes, flooding, and landslides, leading to the destruction of her home and extreme poverty. Her family was forced to split up to seek shelter with other relatives and in shelters. She told a researcher her **"family scattered to seek refuge due to the loss of their home and personal belongings."**

A 51-year-old man from Mexico has faced hurricanes, extreme heat, and earthquakes, resulting in the destruction of his home and lack of food and water. His **"house was damaged by an earthquake, and during hurricanes, the sheets were lost from his house,"** and the government assisted **"Only with a single food parcel."**

A 28-year-old woman from Mexico has experienced an earthquake that caused significant damage to her home. She recalled, **“My kitchen fell, the land collapsed, and rooms were destroyed.”**

A 21-year-old man from Haiti has faced hurricanes, extreme heat, landslides, heavy rains, earthquakes, crop failure, and drought. These disasters led to the destruction of his home, lack of food and water, reduced income, and degraded farmland. He shared, **“It made me very sad because my grandparents had nowhere to sleep due to the damage to their house.”** He added, **“These disasters caused us a lot of suffering; what we planted did not grow, which meant we could neither sell nor buy, leading to hunger. The strong hurricanes destroyed all the plantations with strong winds, landslides carried land into rivers and ravines, and the roads were damaged, preventing vehicles from circulating.”**

A 37-year-old man from Haiti has experienced extreme heat, earthquakes, drought, and other challenges, including violence, hunger, and unemployment. He lost his home and access to safe housing, and his place of business was destroyed. He faced increased violent conflict and extortion by gangs and was forced to relocate within his country. He shared, **“This brought a lot of sadness, stress, and worry for me.”** He added, **“Due to violence, I had to leave my home and stay in other areas and people’s homes. Hunger made everything expensive, and we couldn’t find work. My children, wife, and close family members are all suffering. The earthquake destroyed my home, and we spent days on the streets before finding shelter.”**

A 25-year-old woman of African descent from Honduras said due to a landslide, she was **“Left without a house.”**

A 29-year-old woman from Mexico said that due to drought, **“We were left without work and means to survive.”**

A 28-year-old woman from Mexico has faced flooding and earthquakes, leading to the destruction of her home, reduced income, degraded farmland, and the temporary closure of her workplace. She also experienced increased violent conflict and gang recruitment and was forced to relocate within her country. She shared, **“Our house flooded every time it rained.”**

A 30-year-old woman from Mexico has experienced hurricanes, landslides, heavy rains, earthquakes, and rising sea levels. She shared, **“We lost the little we had, which was our clothes, my children’s and mine, all the appliances were damaged, and the things we had at home. I was alone with my two children, dealing with the fear and terror they experienced. The house where we live is eroding day by day because the wall collapsed.”**

Climate Change Impacts Destroy Livelihoods

A 46-year-old woman from Mexico has suffered from crop failure. She said, **“The failure of crops affects us because the prices of basic food products have increased.”**

A 33-year-old Indigenous man from Mexico said that due to heavy rains, **“I couldn’t go to work and lost my job.”** During his journey, he walked through desert terrain and suffered from extreme heat, which led to food deprivation. He shared, **“It was very bad, I couldn’t eat for two days.”**

A 34-year-old man from Mexico has experienced extreme heat and heavy rains, which have significantly impacted his livelihood. He shared, **“We were left without work due to tremors and heat-related illness.”**

A 28-year-old man from Nicaragua, has experienced hurricanes or severe storms, heavy rains, crop failure, drought, and rising sea levels. His home was damaged, and he suffered from extreme poverty and income reduction, with failed farmland. He said, **"I lost my corn, yucca, and banana crops. I also fished, but storms at sea almost caused a shipwreck."** He received no government support. During his journey, he traveled through various terrains and endured extreme weather, resulting in muscular pain and flu. He stated, **"I experienced muscle pain and flu during my journey."** He also faced mistreatment by authorities and private actors, lack of access to safe shelter, and food scarcity.

A 27-year-old man from Honduras has faced extreme heat, landslides, wildfires, crop failure, and drought. These conditions have resulted in job loss and food scarcity due to poor harvests. He noted, **"Droughts leave us without work and food due to poor harvests."** During transit, he walked through desert terrain and slept outside due to lack of shelter, experiencing extreme cold. He recalled, **"We got sick from the cold and hunger, our feet swelled."**

A 30-year-old man from Venezuela wrote, **"The intense rains caused the flooding and loss of six hectares of crops,"** noting, **"the government did not help us at all."**

A 53-year-old man from Cuba who faced multiple climate-related disasters recounted, **"The drought left my family without food, with poor harvests and no employment. The government promised and did not give anything."**

A 34-year-old Honduran man faced multiple climate-related disasters in Honduras, including hurricanes, severe storms, flooding, landslides, and drought. These events severely impacted his livelihood, leading to a lack of sufficient food and water and extreme poverty. He described experiencing **"loss of basic crop products,"** noting, **"There was no support from the government, they only provided a small solidarity bag of food: rice, beans, etc. to each family."**

A 24-year-old woman from Mexico faced severe crop failure and drought, which impacted her livelihood. She stated, **“Due to lack of water, we did not have good harvests, which is what we rely on in Guerrero.”**

A 38-year-old man from southern Mexico faced severe violence and environmental challenges including extreme heat. He said, **“the heat has exceeded 50 degrees Celsius. We don’t have potable water, and our family’s corn crop dried up completely.”** The family also faced violence: **“We were attacked—my wife, my child, and I—in our own home. They robbed us at gunpoint, demanding money for protection because we had a small grocery store and my wife is a teacher. They thought we had a solid economy and threatened to kill us if we didn’t pay.”**

Climate Change Impacts Damage Human Health

A 42-year-old woman who had worked as a doctor in Mexico fled with her three children after experiencing a series of devastating disasters. She said, **“we suffered from heatstroke, we lost material possessions in forest fires, and we were left without a home due to landslides and floods.”** In addition to these environmental challenges, the family also faced threats of violence. The woman said, **“I do not feel safe in Mexico because I have experienced extortion by Mexican authorities.”**

A 48-year-old Haitian woman who survived multiple disasters recalled, **“The earthquake and hurricane left us without a home, and the drought left us without water to drink.”**

A 20-year-old woman from Mexico has endured extreme heat, wildfires, and drought. She expressed her vulnerability, saying, **“I have a wooden house and no means to protect myself from the heat.”**

A 27-year-old man from Venezuela has suffered from extreme heat, heavy rains, and drought. His home was damaged, and he experienced a lack of food and extreme poverty. He recalled, **“The heat is unbearable, followed by storms that leave you frozen and soaked, with dry lips and throat.”** He lost everything when he left home and went days without food during his journey, experiencing extreme weather conditions. He shared, **“We lost everything when we left home; we ran out of food on the way and lived days without eating.”**

A 35-year-old Haitian man experienced hurricanes, severe storms, flooding, heavy rains, and earthquakes in Haiti, which caused significant damage to his home and community and deprived him of safe housing and sufficient food and water. **“This affected me a lot; it happened to me in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where the church I attended collapsed completely, three stories high. I had a younger brother who died in the earthquake, and my godfather’s child died under the rubble,”** he wrote. The disasters led to the disruption of public services such as schools and hospitals, increased violence, and threats from gangs who killed the man’s father.

A 31-year-old Haitian woman reported severe challenges due to an earthquake in Haiti. She said, **“They took my mother’s business and took everything from home, including money. Our house was destroyed, and I spent a year sleeping on land that was not even in good condition.”**

A 51-year-old woman from Cuba experienced hurricanes and other disasters, described her experience as “terrible,” adding, **“We were without a roof, which means without a house, no electricity, no food, a lot of heat. Currently, there are people who have not recovered, there are no medicines in the hospitals, and more.”**

A 17-year-old Indigenous man from Mexico has faced extreme heat, flooding, and drought. He expressed, **“I have felt bad in the head due to the lack of water. My brother and I need to work, but we haven’t worked out of fear that we will be killed”**

A 37-year-old Quechua man from Bolivia reported earthquake damaged his home, leaving him without safe housing. He lacked access to sufficient food and water and faced extreme poverty. The disaster resulted in income reduction and an inability to make a living. Organized criminal groups controlled access to natural resources and necessary supplies during and after the disaster, and they also recruited new members. He received threats due to his environmental activism, forcing him to move to another location within his home country. He noted, **“Due to fires, we cannot breathe well, and this has caused respiratory problems.”**

A 37-year-old woman from Mexico has suffered due to extreme heat in Mexico, noting **“Lack of support because I can’t buy an air conditioner.”** She fled her home **“Due to lack of job opportunities because of my orientation and not having a way to have dignified shelter during times of rains and extreme heat.”**

Climate Change Impacts Exacerbate Violence and Conflict

A 48-year-old woman from Nicaragua has faced escalating violence exacerbated by climate disasters. She endured hurricanes, extreme heat, flooding, landslides, wildfires, earthquakes, and drought. The degradation of farmland and crop failures, along with the cessation of public services like schools and hospitals, increased her community’s vulnerability. **“In the planting of beans and yucca, we lost everything due to lack of rain,”** she recounted. In the wake of these disasters, violent conflict surged in her community. Gangs and armed groups exploited the chaos, extorting fees, controlling access to scarce resources, and aggressively recruiting new members. Her family’s environmental activism and criticism of the government made them targets for threats and intimidation, forcing them to seek refuge in Costa Rica.

A 36-year-old man from Haiti has endured significant climate impacts in his home country, including earthquakes and droughts. These disasters led to severe hardships such as lack of safe housing, reduced income, farmland degradation, and the cessation of public services like schools and hospitals. Additionally, violent conflict and gang activity escalated, with gangs extorting fees, controlling access to resources, and recruiting new members. He describes his experience: **“I lived through an unforgettable moment with a major earthquake that killed many people. My family and I lost our home, we couldn’t go to school because it was destroyed, food was scarce, and bandits were kidnapping people in the tents. This caused my mother to fall into depression because she was not used to these kinds of things at all. Potable water became difficult to find.”**

A 36-year-old Salvadoran man fled due to threats from gangs and the impact of natural disasters, including rising sea levels, which made it impossible for him to continue working as a fisherman and supporting his family. In 2023, severe floods destroyed his home, prompting the government to issue a “red alert” that prohibited fishing boats from operating due to hazardous conditions from storms, heavy winds, and flooding. **“We could not work for more than a month, but the government did not help us at all,”** he said. A gang exploited the situation, offering food and other resources, which significantly increased their influence in the community. They aggressively recruited new members and threatened Juan for refusing to join.

An Indigenous man from Mexico experienced crop failure, which forced him to leave his hometown. He shared, **“That’s why I left my village because the harvest has not been good, and another thing is there’s a lot of crime, mostly drug trafficking.”**

Climate-Related Challenges in Transit

Environmental Conditions Hinder Access to Shelter and Basic Necessities

A 36-year-old Haitian man during his journey to the United States traveled by foot through mountainous terrain, across rivers, and slept outside or in tent encampments due to the lack of shelter. He faced heavy rains and numerous hardships. He recalls: **“During my journey with my family, we suffered a lot because we crossed rivers, seas, mountains, forests, slept in the mud, ate in poor conditions, got injured, sick, etc. We experienced all of this during the journey.”**

A 31-year-old Haitian woman described traveling through desert and mountainous terrains on foot. Without access to shelter, she had to sleep outside or in makeshift tent encampments, enduring extreme weather conditions such as heavy rains and freezing cold. She wrote, **“It was not easy at all for me because I lost the people I was with. They took another route, and I had to take the death road through the mountains with my cousin’s child. I had no food to eat or clothes for the baby because everything was left with my cousin and my partner. When someone gave me something to eat, I had to give it to the baby so that the baby wouldn’t die.”**

A 36-year-old Haitian woman faced severe hardships during her journey. She recounted, **“I walked for 12 hours in the rain, my feet were very swollen, and my thighs were chafed. I slept in the open air, which caused a persistent cold that I still have.”**

A 23-year-old woman from El Salvador during her journey to the United States traveled by foot through desert terrain and across rivers, often sleeping outside or in tent encampments due to a lack of access to shelter. She faced extreme heat and cold. She describes her experience: **“The exhaustion, the heat of the sun burned the feet of me and my son, the drought, and the cold of sleeping outside in parks or on streets with bags or cardboard.”**

A 29-year-old man from Venezuela faced many challenges during his journey such as having to sleep outside in a tent encampment because of a lack of shelter, experiencing extreme weather, and exposure to flooding. He said, **“Traveling to the United States was the worst thing that has happened to us.”**

Climate Impacts in Transit Are Detrimental to Human Health

A 37-year-old woman from Haiti reported that after an earthquake, armed groups had control of natural resources. During her journey, she traveled by foot through desert terrain and waterways, being exposed to heavy rain. She said, **“I had many difficulties in the forest: hunger, violence, people dying.”**

A 28-year-old man from Haiti recounted the experience of being forcibly displaced from his home and having little access to necessary supplies during his journey. He said, **“We had great difficulties finding food and water.”**

A 42-year-old woman from Haiti said, **“We were almost dead, the difficulties were many.”** On her journey she was unable to access medical treatment for injuries, unable to access shelter and food, and was abused by government officials.

A 30-year-old man from Venezuela reported traveling through difficult terrain, a lack of access to shelter, and experiencing extreme weather conditions, and health issues including **“dehydration due to extreme heat during the journey.”**

A 44-year-old man from Peru reported him and his child experiencing many challenges and physical hardships on their journey such as extreme weather and a lack of access to shelter. He said, **“My youngest child got sick on the journey, with rash and itching on the skin.”**

A 38-year-old woman from Honduras experienced illness, injury, and inability to access medical treatment during her journey. Her family **“fell ill with colds, coughs, and fever.”**

A 31-year-old woman from El Salvador described challenges along her journey, which required travel by foot through desert terrain and across rivers: **“The exhaustion, the heat of the sun burned the feet of me and my son, the drought, and the cold of sleeping outside in parks or on streets with bags or cardboard.”**

Environmental Conditions Increase Vulnerability to Abuse and Exploitation

A 34-year-old man from Haiti faced multiple climate-related disasters as well as mistreatment or exploitation by government agents. He recounted, **“We lost our suitcase because of immigration chasing us.”**

A 42-year-old woman from Haiti faced multiple climate-related disasters and was exposed to mistreatment and exploitation from smugglers during her journey. She said, **“We faced a lot of problems, robbers took our money.”**

A 46-year-old person from Haiti faced multiple climate-related disasters such as extreme weather and a lack of shelter. Recounting abuse during her journey, she said, **“I met a lot of difficulties throughout the journey, for example, so-called police took all the money I had on every route, stopping the bus to take our money.”**

A 64-year-old woman from Ecuador faced multiple climate-related disasters and was exploited and abused by members of criminal organizations. She recounted, **“I was kidnapped in Durango, Mexico, for 20 days and released only after my family paid a ransom of 2500 dollars.”**

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Julia Neusner, with substantive input in drafting from Ama Francis of IRAP. Thanks to José Miranda, Hannah Flamm, and Sunil Varghese for their additional edits, and Rachel Margolis for design. Naziha Sultana conducted data analysis, while Tiffany Baily, Antonella Ortiz, and Aish Shukla coordinated the technology for data collection. We are grateful to our Climate Data Project partners—Dahene Gustave (Haitian Bridge Alliance), Jennifer Babaie (Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center), Meghan Zavala (Al Otro Lado), and Priya Konings (Kids in Need of Defense)—for their critical role in implementing and refining this project, which was led by Ama Francis. Thanks also to Camila Bustos, Christine Coakley, Julia Neusner, and Kathleen List for their input on the survey questions. IRAP extends its gratitude to the donors and foundations whose invaluable support advances our work on climate mobility, with special thanks to the Open Society Foundations, including Liliana Gamboa, for their critical role in resourcing this project. Above all, we are deeply thankful to the migrants and asylum seekers who courageously shared their stories, in the hope of advancing protection for displaced people worldwide.

For more information or to join the project, please contact climate@refugeerights.org.

Endnotes

- 1 Abraham Lustgarten, Where Will Everyone Go?, ProPublica (July 23, 2020), <https://features.propublica.org/climate-migration/model-how-climate-refugees-move-across-continents/>
- 2 Ian Fry, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change: Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change. U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (Oct. 1, 2020), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html>, (April 18, 2023). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G23/073/25/PDF/G2307325.pdf?OpenElement> [hereinafter Fry, Special Rapporteur Report]
- 3 U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report. IPCC (2023) at 51. (hereinafter IPCC 2023). https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Fry, Special Rapporteur Report (previously cited)
- 6 Julia Neusner, Deadly Journeys: Climate Change, U.S. Border Enforcement, and Human Rights, 56 Case W. Res. J. Int'l L. 337 (2024) at 362. <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol56/iss1/16> [hereinafter Neusner, Deadly Journeys].
- 7 Fry, Special Rapporteur Report (previously cited) at 2.
- 8 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (Oct. 1, 2020), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html>
- 9 See Julia Neusner et al., U.S. Comm. For Refugees & Immigrants et al., Climate of Coercion: Environmental and Other Drivers of Cross-Border Displacement in Central America and Mexico 3 (2023), <https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Climate-of-Coercion-Report.pdf> [hereinafter Neusner et. al., Climate of Coercion].
- 10 Ibid. at 7.
- 11 Environmental disasters identified in the survey include hurricanes or severe storms, extreme heat, flooding, landslides, heavy rains, wildfires, earthquakes, crop failures, droughts, and rising sea levels.
- 12 Environmental challenges in transit identified in the survey include traveling by foot through deserts, mountains, and across waterways, sleeping outside due to lack of shelter, and facing extreme weather such as heat, cold, hurricanes, storms, flooding, landslides, heavy rains, and wildfires.
- 13 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Final Report Central America: Hurricanes Eta – Iota, IFRC (August 31, 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/457633a7-fce0-4523-b85a-382e9e273096/MDR43007fr.pdf>
- 14 See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Initiative for the Dry Corridor (2022). <https://www.fao.org/hand-in-hand/investment-forum-2022/the-dry-corridor/en>
- 15 See Alex de Sherbinin, Climate Impacts as Drivers of Migration, migration pol'y inst. (Oct. 23, 2020), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-impacts-drivers-migration>.
- 16 See Julia Neusner and Ama Francis, Public Health and Human Health Implications of Climate Mobility, Columbia Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, June 2024, https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/sabin_climate_change/227/.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 See Nat'l Intel. Council, National Intelligence Estimate: Climate Change and International Responses Increasing Challenges to US National Security Through 2040 (2021), https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIE_Climate_Change_and_National_Security.pdf
- 19 Becca Andrasko, Environment, Fragility and Conflict, Foreign Policy Mag. (Jan. 12, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/12/environment-fragility-and-conflict/>
- 20 See Clionadh Raleigh & Henrik Urdal, Climate change, environmental degradation and armed conflict, 26 Political Geography 674 (2007).

- 21 See Neusner et. al., Climate of Coercion (previously cited) at 6.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Massive Displacement, Greater Competition for Scarce Resources Cited as Major Risks in Security Council Debate on Climate-Related Threats, U.N. Press (Jan. 25, 2019), <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13677.doc.htm>.
- 24 States Must Transform Natural Resources from Driver of Conflict into Development Tool to Foster Peace, Cooperation, Secretary-General Tells Security Council. 8372nd Meeting (AM), SC/13540, U.N. Press (Oct. 16, 2018), <https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13540.doc.htm>
- 25 IPCC 2023 (previously cited).
- 26 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (Oct. 1, 2020), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html>.
- 27 Securing the Border (June 2024), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/06/07/2024-12435/securing-the-border>.
- 28 Christina Asencio, Trapped, Preyed Upon, and Punished, Human Rights First (May 2024) at 9-10. https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Asylum-Ban-One-Year-Report_final-formatted_5.13.24.pdf.
- 29 Ari Sawyer, “We Couldn’t Wait:” Digital Metering at the US-Mexico Border, Human Rights Watch, (May 1, 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/01/we-couldnt-wait/digital-metering-us-mexico-border>.
- 30 Neusner, Deadly Journeys (previously cited) at 340-341.
- 31 Ibid. at 359-362.
- 32 Ibid. at 348-349.
- 33 U.S. Senate Letter to Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken, (Jan. 10, 2022). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/199IYHL1SlzWjqWcBKqJWk-WB1-79x0AiZ/view?pli=1>
- 34 FWD.US, The Urgent Need for (Re)Designating El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Nepal, and Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), (Nov. 29, 2023). <https://www.fwd.us/news/the-urgent-need-for-redesignating-el-salvador-honduras-nicaragua-nepal-and-guatemala-for-temporary-protected-status-tps/>
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Congressional Research Service, Immigration Parole, 13 CRS Reports (Oct. 15, 2020). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46570>
- 38 American Immigration Council, The Biden Administration’s Humanitarian Parole Program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans: An Overview (Oct. 31, 2023). <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/biden-administrations-humanitarian-parole-program-cubans-haitians-nicaraguans-and-venezuelans>