

High-Level Working Group on
Climate Change in the Caribbean

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Climate Change, Migration, and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples





HIGH-LEVEL WORKING GROUP ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE CARIBBEAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Perhaps no region in the world faces a graver threat from climate change than the Caribbean. As the effects of climate change worsen, the potential for intra-regional and extra-regional migration flows increase. Recently, the term “climate migration” has been coined to characterize the movement of people from one location to another for reasons related to climate change in the form of “sudden-onset events” or “long-term impacts.” Devastating hurricanes, rising sea levels, extreme heat, persistent drought, and failing agricultural systems provide good reasons for people to move elsewhere.

The Caribbean is hardly alone in facing the interrelated challenges of climate change and migration. According to the United Nations, least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are among the most vulnerable nations—totaling 91 countries with a population of around 1.1 billion.¹ The heightened climate change vulnerability of these countries is compounded by a mix of limited institutional capacity, scarce financial resources to contend with new challenges, and considerable sensitivity to systemic shocks. With this in mind, this report finds particular vulnerabilities, challenges, and opportunities for the Caribbean. These include:

- The majority of the population in the Caribbean live and work within two miles of coastlines. This includes major urban areas, ports, airports, refineries, and power plants. Population concentration in coastal areas and lack of climate-resilient infrastructure has made hurricane seasons damaging and often lethal.
- Changing weather patterns have brought less rainfall and frequent drought to some parts of the Caribbean and flooding in others, adding to migration pressures.
- The Caribbean has a history of migration, but the severe nature of climate change in the region and the rapidity of such changes could push entire countries from the lands of their birth.
- Two of the Caribbean’s most significant contributors to recent migration, both within the region and to North America, are Cuba and Haiti. Climate change is one of the major factors in this trend, though political and social factors weigh heavily.
- One of the most vulnerable groups to climate change in the Caribbean are indigenous and tribal peoples, who are largely concentrated in Dominica, French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname. In both Suriname and Guyana, these communities have been hit hard by climate change-related floods, while illicit gold mining and logging activities have encroached on and polluted their land.
- The issues of climate change, migration, and indigenous and tribal communities are closely related, and their solutions harken back to the challenge of financing climate-resilient infrastructure.

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), “*Climate Change and Migration in Vulnerable Countries*,” 2019. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/climate_change_and_migration_in_vulnerable_countries.pdf.

- One of the major challenges with climate change and migration are the different terms used to categorize the movement of people, including migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker. Though each term may appear synonymous to the layperson, the definitions have different policy and legal implications—making this an area that needs better clarification.
- Climate migration is already a problem, but it is set to become even more significant as Caribbean countries face stretched financial resources, heavy debt burdens, and lacking access to global credit to build climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Climate change also puts people at a higher risk of falling victim to human trafficking. Organized criminal groups are earning billions of dollars globally from trafficking and exploiting people. Trafficked persons are often subjected to rape, torture, debt bondage, unlawful confinement, and threats against their families.

Caribbean countries and the United States, as well as regional organizations, international institutions, development agencies, and international lawmakers must cooperate and coordinate to develop migration policies to account for the complex web of challenges that the human part of the equation presents.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of climate change is increasingly difficult to ignore. It can be argued that in the Caribbean—a region largely made up of island states—climate change is an existential crisis. This, in turn, raises the challenging question of migration. As Lisa Viscidi and M.K. Vereen noted in their study on climate change and Central America's Northern Triangle: "Climate change impacts are exacerbating endemic ills like poverty, inequality and malnourishment, and research increasingly suggest that climate change is a major contributing factor to migration, mainly to the United States."² This statement is equally true as it relates to the Caribbean. Climate change is not only a factor impacting the Caribbean, but addressing the issue must directly involve the United States—historically the primary destination for Caribbean migrants.

Indeed, the international community has already acknowledged that human-induced climate change has become a driving factor of contemporary migration. The 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) explicitly recognizes that the adverse effects of climate change are influencing migration patterns. Data shows that slow-onset events as well as sudden-onset natural disasters are already moving and will continue to move millions of people from their places of origin. In 2017 alone—after a particularly devastating Atlantic hurricane season—nearly 2 million people were internally displaced in the Caribbean, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.³

Similarly, the World Bank estimated that the most vulnerable communities in low- and middle-income countries will continue to pay a heavy price. Conservative projections point out that by 2050, nearly 216 million people from the poorest and most climate-vulnerable regions will be displaced due to the impacts of climate change. As a result, recent development gains will likely be wiped out, conflicts will rise, situations of fragility will intensify, and economic and health crises will worsen.⁴

Of these, Caribbean and Pacific SIDS,⁵ considered to be particularly susceptible to climate change, will suffer the most. Their exposure to multiple natural hazards as well as their financial constraints⁶ to allocate resources in capacity-building resilience and adaptation strategies, further

² Lisa Viscidi and M.K. Vereen, "Climate Threats in the Northern Triangle: How the United States Can Support Community Resilience," *The Dialogue*, February 2022. <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/climate-threats-draft-6.pdf>.

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), "Global Internal Displacement Database – Disaster Data," 2008-2021, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

⁴ Viviane Clement, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Susana Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nian Sadiq, and Elham Shabahat, "Groundswell Part 2 : Acting on Internal Climate Migration," 2021, World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248>.

⁵ Term recognized by the United Nations that encompasses 38 UN member states and 20 Non-UN members. It includes, all Caribbean islands countries and territories, Belize, Guyana, and Suriname with the exception of French Guiana.

⁶ Most Caribbean small states face many of the same economic challenges. These include long-standing low economic growth rates, lack of competitiveness in many sectors, structural imbalances, and limited qualified personnel for multiple tasks. This mix of factors often results in sizeable current account deficits and, in some cases, high, often unsustainable, debt levels. Global Americans, "Climate Finance in the Caribbean," June 2022. <https://theglobalamericans.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Climate-Finance-and-the-Caribbean-1.pdf>.

increase their vulnerability in relation to other regions. Impacts associated with sea level rise, intense tropical cyclones, storm surge, saltwater intrusion, droughts, changing precipitation patterns, and coral bleaching are degrading their terrestrial and marine ecosystems, increasing food and water insecurity, and stressing Caribbean economies and critical infrastructure.⁷ Indeed, according to the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index, Puerto Rico (1), Haiti (3), and the Bahamas (6) are three out the ten countries and territories most affected by extreme weather events.⁸

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has projected that without ambitious human interventions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and anticipatory adaptation strategies, the multiple impacts of climate change will likely render some small island nations uninhabitable within this century. As a result, the disruptive nature of climate change is going to be a driver of potentially large-scale migration flows. Vulnerable communities, such as indigenous and tribal peoples, will be among the hardest hit—their geographical exposure to multiple natural hazards, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and lack of legal protection further exacerbate their vulnerability to climate change. Indeed, entire indigenous communities, across the Western Hemisphere are already being relocated from their ancestral lands.

It is important to note that migration is not a decision reached easily by those involved. There are many reasons why people opt to uproot their lives (and those of their families) to immigrate to a different country. The reasons can be political, economic, security related, or a mix of factors. These factors and how they shape the discussion about migration will be analyzed in greater detail in this report. While understanding these motivations is important, the fundamental thrust of this policy paper is to assert that: the impacts of climate change are a clear and present danger in the Caribbean; the region is not fully equipped to deal with the consequences of these short- and long-term impacts; and that considerable work needs to be done to better prepare the Caribbean for increasing climate change-related challenges. Equally important, the international community needs to support Caribbean countries in addressing climate change-related threats. In particular, as the main recipient of Caribbean migrants and the largest cumulative carbon emitter, the United States must take the lead in providing the necessary assistance to the region before climate change triggers large-scale migration events.

⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “*Sixth Assessment Report Working Group II-Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability - Fact Sheet – Small Islands*, 2022.

https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/outreach/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FactSheet_SmallIslands.pdf.

⁸ David Eckstein, Vera Künzer, and Laura Schäfer, “*Briefing Paper: Global Climate Risk Index 2021*,” Germanwatch.

https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf.

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1. Migration in the Context of Climate Change

What exactly do we call the people who decide or are forced to move out of their homes and move to either a "safer" place in their own country or an entirely different country? Places that experience climate stressors can simultaneously experience conflict, political instability, low levels of economic development, and human rights abuses. Indeed, the United Nations has acknowledged that the multiplicity of migration drivers "makes it difficult to establish a direct causal link between the movement of people and the environment."⁹

To date, there is no consensus definition nor international legal framework that concretely identifies or grants protection to people moving due to or in the context of climate change. Although international refugee and human rights law imposes constraints on states' immigration policies, very few international mechanisms have been signed for immigration in general.¹⁰ Today immigration issues remain largely regulated at the national level—with a few exceptions such as Africa's Kampala Convention, which provides protection for people fleeing natural disasters and climate change—and countries have yet to adopt

specific legislation to address human mobility in the context of climate change.¹¹ As climate change drives people out of their places of residence, new international, regional, and national frameworks will be required to regulate the movement of people and provide protection. Failure to provide a concrete definition and legal framework will further complicate an already complex issue. For example, someone fleeing Haiti's security and economic crises may be considered a refugee or an economic migrant rather than an environmental migrant or climate refugee—despite Haiti's concurrent climate-related challenges. But what do we call the Bahamians or Dominicans (from Dominica) that moved to Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, or the United States after Hurricanes Dorian and Maria destroyed their homes? What about the estimated 129,000 Puerto Ricans that fled in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria to the Continental United States¹² or the rural Dominicans (from the Dominican Republic) migrating to Santo Domingo as the effects of climate change ravages their livelihoods? Do they all fall under the same category? Establishing a definition to identify these phenomena—one that includes migration and climate change as its main variables—is

⁹ United Nations University – Institute for Environment and Human Security, "5 facts on climate migrants," 2005. <https://ehs.unu.edu/news/news/5-facts-on-climate-migrants.html#:~:text=Fact%204%3A%20No%20one%20knows%20how%20many%20climate%20migrants%20will%20exist&text=This%20makes%20it%20difficult%20to%20decision%20to%20leave%20their%20home.>

¹⁰ David James Cantor, "Cross-border Displacement, Climate Change and Disasters: Latin America and the Caribbean," Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), July 2018.

https://caribbeanmigration.org/sites/default/files/cross-border_displacement_climate_change_and_disasters_lac_david_cantor_2018.pdf.

¹¹ Allehone Mulugeta Abebe, "The Kampala Convention and environmentally induced displacement in Africa," International Organization for Migration (IOM), March 2011.

¹² John D. Sutter, "130,000 left Puerto Rico After Hurricane Maria, Census Bureau says," CNN, December 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/12/19/health/sutter-puerto-rico-census-update/index.html>.

a complex technical task and a highly sensitive political issue.

Environmental migrant, climate migrant, or climate refugee are three of the multiple terms often used in policy forums, discussion papers, and public policy. However, they are usually used without a clear definition and leave questions as to the precise nature of each term. **What then is the difference between environmental migrants, climate migrants, or climate refugees?**

1.1. Climate Refugee

In 1985, amid the growing reckoning for the need to identify persons fleeing their homes due to environmental causes, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) researcher Essam El-Hinnawi, proposed that those "...who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their lives..."¹³ should be considered "environmental refugees." Ever since, the term environmental refugee or climate refugee has been used interchangeably by experts to describe those who are forced to move across borders in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. The term has been endorsed and expanded upon by numerous media organizations, climate action advocates, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and scholars. For example, Climate Refugee, a U.S.-based NGO, argues that people fleeing in the

context of climate change tend to be the most vulnerable. They maintain that climate refugee is a useful term because it increases public awareness and emphasizes the political responsibility of climate change.

Although advocates have emphatically argued that environmentally displaced persons ought to be eligible for international protection, an international legal framework to protect people moving in the context of environmental degradation and climate change remains elusive. The 1951 Refugee Convention—considered the cornerstone of international refugee law—only grants international protection to "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."¹⁴

1.2. Environmental Migration and Climate Migration

In an attempt to better identify the complexity of human mobility in the context of climate change, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) incorporated "environmental migration" as their main working definition in 2007. They define environmental migrants as "persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and

¹³ Essam El-Hinnawi, "Environmental Refugees, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)," United Nations Library, 1985. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/121267?ln=en>.

¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), "Article 1 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee," 1951. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

who move either within their country or abroad.”¹⁵

In contrast to the term “climate refugee,” this definition was deliberately framed in broad and flexible terms in order to include all types of population movements and environmental drivers (see Table 1.) Using this definition, environmental migrants are

considered those who move both forcefully or voluntarily, internally or internationally, and due to slow-onset events or sudden-onset ones. This definition also acknowledges that environmental factors interact with other migration drivers such as socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that influence a person’s decision to move.

Table 1: Climate Migration Key Variables

Migration driver	
Slow-onset events	Slow-onset events are gradually incremental changes occurring over many years. These are associated with the sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, glacial retreat and related impacts, salinization, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity, and desertification.
Sudden-onset natural disasters	Sudden-onset disasters occur within a matter of days or hours. These are linked to meteorological hazards including tropical cyclones, tornadoes, blizzards; and hydrological hazards including coastal floods and mudflows.
Type of movement	
Displacement	The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, particularly as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of natural or human-made disasters.
Migration	The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state.
Planned Relocation	In the context of disasters or environmental degradation, including when due to the effects of climate change, a planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or place of temporary residence, are settled in a new location and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives.

Sources: International Organizations for Migration (IOM), “*Glossary on Migration*”, 2019. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. UNHCR, *Key Concepts on Climate Change and Disaster Displacement*, <https://www.unhcr.org/5943aea97.pdf>.

¹⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Environmental Migration Portal, “*Environmental Migration*.”

<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>.

It is important to note that, the IOM and the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) are reticent to use the term “climate refugee” as they believe it generates confusion and fails to grasp the key aspects of human mobility in the context of climate change. According to IOM assessments, migration reflects a largely internal process and not a cross-border one, as the term “climate refugee” suggests. Using this definition suggests that policy solutions to help migrants should be focused on strengthening disaster risk management strategies, providing assistance to internally displaced people, and using existing human rights laws and instruments.

Although this definition has not been recognized through international law, it has gained partial endorsement. Governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, and scholars have introduced definitions that often fall under IOM’s environmental migration definition such as “climate change-related migration,” “climate-induced migration,” or “climate migration.” For example, the 2010 Cancun Agreement on climate change adaptation uses the term “climate change-induced” when referring to three different types of population movements in the context of climate change; “displacement, migration, and planned relocation.”¹⁶ On a similar note, the 2021 White House flagship report on the

impact of climate change on migration, uses “climate change-related migration” as an umbrella term to describe “the spectrum of climate change’s relationship with human mobility.”¹⁷ In 2016, the IOM also introduced “climate migration” to specifically refer to “the movement of a person or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border.”¹⁸

1.3. Framing Climate Change and Migration in the Caribbean

Scientists and experts agree that climate change represents an unprecedented challenge for Caribbean leaders. The financial barriers to implementing sound mitigation and adaptation measures, coupled with the region’s exposure to multiple natural hazards, likely, increase its vulnerability to climate change as much or more than anywhere else globally. In June 2022, United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres supported this notion when he dubbed the Caribbean as “ground zero” for the global climate emergency.¹⁹

This report uses “climate migration” as its primary framing term because it underscores the unique challenge that

¹⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), “*The Cancun Agreement.*” <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11411/files/07a01.pdf>.

¹⁷ The White House, “*Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration*, October 2021.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-on-the-Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Migration.pdf>.

¹⁸ International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Environmental Migration Portal, “*Climate Migration.*” <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>.

¹⁹ United Nations, “*The Caribbean is ‘ground zero’ for the global climate emergency: Guterres.*” July 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1121902> https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/application/pdf/soe_synopsis.pdf.

climate change poses to the Caribbean and acknowledges the interrelated nature of the causes for the movement of persons. Unlike the term “climate refugee,” this term recognizes the different types of population movements associated with climate change, as well as corresponding, disparate, and self-reinforcing drivers of movement. As will be explained in the following sections, the Caribbean has a multi-causal relationship between human mobility that includes political, economic, and social factors as well as and natural hazards that further entangle the nexus between climate change and migration.²⁰ Therefore, implementing a term that recognizes the overlapping nature of these relationships allows us to better comprehend and offer policy recommendations to account for a phenomenon which, by most accounts, will worsen in the coming decades.

2. Current Mechanisms to Cope with Climate Change and Migration

Although there is still no international legal framework that protects climate migrants, there are a growing number of mechanisms aimed at addressing its causes and

consequences as well as that lay the groundwork for future compromise.²¹

2.1. Global Mechanisms

The 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm marked the first time the international community gathered to specifically discuss international environmental issues—acknowledging that all people have the fundamental right to live in an environment that permits a life of dignity and well-being.²² During the 1990s, amidst the growing need to address the internal displacement of people within borders due to conflicts and natural disasters, the UN published in 1998 its Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This non-binding set of principles created a framework to protect persons impacted by natural or man-made disasters who are forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence but have not crossed a border.²³

Nearly two decades later, extreme weather events and environmental degradation have increased in frequency and intensity due to climate change, making the displacement of persons across borders a subject of even graver concern. The Swiss-Norwegian Nansen Initiative led one of the first substantial actions toward recognizing this new reality.²⁴ Established in 2012, it worked

²⁰ Caribbean Migration Consultation (CMC), “Consultation Towards a Framework for Regional Cooperation on Human Mobility in the Context of Disasters and the Adverse Effects of Climate Change in the Caribbean,” June 2019. <https://caribbeanmigration.org/events/regional-consultation-towards-framework-regional-cooperation-human-mobility-context-disasters>.

²¹ Joanna Apap and Capucine du Perron de Revel, “The Concept of ‘climate refugee’ Towards a Possible Definition,” European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), October 2021.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRI/2021/698753/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698753_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRI/2021/698753/EPRS_BRI(2021)698753_EN.pdf).

²² United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), “Principle 1 - Stockholm Declaration,” 1972. <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29567/ELGP1StockD.pdf>.

²³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” 1998.

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idyps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html>.

²⁴ The Nansen Initiative, “The Nansen Initiatives Definitions.” <https://www.unhcr.org/5448c7939.pdf>.

as a state-led consultative process that sought to build consensus on the need to establish a set of international standards to protect displaced people across borders resulting from disasters and the effects of climate change. The initiative concluded in 2015 with the landmark Nansen Agenda and the creation of its follow-up organization, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).²⁵

Building upon Nansen's principles as well as other international mechanisms related to climate action, disaster risk management, and migration, in 2016, the UN General Assembly unanimously approved the groundbreaking New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The resolution recognized the linkages between climate change and migration and led to the negotiation of the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Despite neither being legally binding, both agreements serve as political and moral commitments for states and other international actors to work together to take the necessary measures to provide assistance to those having to flee due to climate change.

The GCM specifically identifies slow-onset events, natural disasters, and climate change as key drivers of contemporary migration. In addition, it calls for the need to take action in disaster preparedness, disaster risk

reduction, and disaster response as a way to make migration a choice instead of a necessity.²⁶ Similarly, the GRC identifies and, importantly, clarifies that even though these are not causes of refugee movements, the climate, environmental degradation, and natural disasters “increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements.”²⁷ Moreover, it references the need to reduce disaster risks as well as calling relevant stakeholders to establish measures to address the protection and humanitarian challenges of disaster-related forced displacements.²⁸

Both agreements have provided an effective platform to increase cooperation on the governance of international migration and refugee movements. However, they do not concede a specific legal status for climate migrants. Instead, they focus on disaster risk management, resilience building, and planned relocation as adaptation strategies in order to address future displacement.

Given the complexities associated with establishing a new international legal framework to protect climate migrants and keeping in mind that immigration remains an area historically regulated by domestic law, national governments have started to coordinate at the regional level—this is

²⁵ The Nansen Initiative, “*Agenda for the protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change*,” December 2015. https://disasterdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/EN_Protection_Agenda_Volume_I_low_res.pdf.

²⁶ Dina Ionesco and Mariam Traore Chazalnoël, “*10 Key Takeaways From the GCM on Environmental Migration*,” IOM,

<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/10-key-takeaways-gcm-environmental-migration>.

²⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “*Climate change and disaster displacement in the Global Compact on Refugees*.” <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/environment/5c9e13297/climate-change-disaster-displacement-global-compact-refugees.html>.

²⁸ Ibid.

particularly evident in Africa, the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.^{29, 30}

2.2. Regional Mechanisms in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean have been progressively converging toward a common framework. Building upon the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees—which incorporated people threatened by generalized violence, internal conflicts, foreign aggression, massive violations of human rights, or other circumstances which seriously disturb public order to the refugee definition—the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action was adopted as a coordinated approach to refugee protection.³¹ Although the status of “refugee” was not extended to climate migrants, 25 countries and territories from Latin America and the Caribbean agreed to request that the UNHCR conduct studies on cross-border displacement due to climate change and natural disasters.³² These studies were commissioned to support the future “adoption of appropriate national and regional measures, tools and guidelines, including response strategies for countries in the region, contingency plans, integrated responses for disaster risk management and humanitarian visa programmes.”³³ It is important to mention that, given its broad scope, the Cartagena Declaration has been

used to admit persons fleeing from natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.³⁴

At the sub-regional level, Caribbean countries and territories have built an important network of agreements on migration and disaster risk management that help address some of the impacts of climate change. Although no country recognizes climatic factors as a basis for granting refugee status, the Caribbean has two integration mechanisms in place that have served to protect people displaced across borders.³⁵ According to climate displacement expert Ama Francis, CARICOM’s free movement principle and the OECS’ freedom of movement agreement have shown to be a useful tool to respond to the complex nature of climate migration. For example, in 2017, after Hurricane Maria decimated Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago—under CARICOM’s freedom of movement agreement—received displaced Dominicans. Likewise, the governments of Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, and Saint Lucia sheltered Dominicans under the OECS freedom of movement framework.³⁶

Caribbean countries and territories have also enacted advanced national disaster risk management policies to build climate

²⁹ 2009 Kampala Convention and the 2020 Africa Union’s Free Movement Protocol.

³⁰ 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism, 2016 Framework for Resilience Development in the Pacific (FDRP), and the 2019 SAMOA Pathway.

³¹ Caribbean countries signatories: Belize.

³² Caribbean countries and territories that adopted the Declaration: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos.

³³ “Brazil Declaration,” December 2014. <https://www.acnur.org/5b5101644.pdf>.

³⁴ Ama Francis, “Global Governance of Environmental Mobility – Regional Paper Latin America and the Caribbean”, KNOMAD – The New School, May 2021.

³⁵ Cuba’s Refugee definition and clarify that not all Caribbean have signed the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

³⁶ Ama Francis, “Free Movement Agreements & Climate-induced Migration: A Caribbean Case Study,” Columbia Law School – Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, September 2019. https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=sabin_climate_change.

resilience and establish comprehensive emergency response mechanisms. Furthermore, in an effort to increase regional coordination, the region's countries have created specialized agencies such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Central America and Dominican Republic Center for Coordination and Disaster Prevention (CEPRENAC per its Spanish acronym).^{37, 38} Although neither agency specifically addresses the issue of climate migration, they have pointed out the need to discuss the protection of migrants and compile more data.³⁹

In the context of climate change, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica became the first countries in the region to implement planned relocation strategies.⁴⁰ In 2014, the community of Boca de Cachón in the Dominican Republic was relocated to higher ground after being severely affected by the rising waters of Lake Eriquillo. Likewise, in Jamaica, three communities have been internally relocated under the national Resettlement Policy Framework. Although this strategy is seen as a last resort, a growing number of countries are in the process of implementing similar steps.

Though the region is at the cutting edge of planned climate relocation, providing comparable services and opportunities after resettlement remains a challenge for virtually all countries in the region. In fact, studies have shown that after relocation members of the Boca de Cachón community struggled to generate a stable income as they were resettled in an area disconnected from the main provincial road.⁴¹

In 2016, the Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC), a non-binding regional forum designed to develop and coordinate policies, was established.⁴² In June 2019, the CMC met to enhance regional cooperation in addressing human mobility in the context of disaster and climate change at the “Consultation Towards a Framework for Regional Cooperation on Humanitarian Mobility in the Context of Disasters and the Adverse Effects of Climate Change in the Caribbean.” The consultation highlighted the need to develop “a Caribbean policy on human mobility which includes displacement and environmental migration.” As a result, in May 2021, a group led by climate displacement expert Ama Francis produced a report containing a series of policy recommendations—including the

³⁷ Member states: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Republic of Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands and the Virgin Islands.

³⁸ Caribbean member states: Belize and the Dominican Republic.

³⁹ David James Cantor, “Cross-border Displacement, Climate Change and Disasters: Latin America and the Caribbean.”

⁴⁰ It is important to mention that Belize, although not in the context of climate change, was one of the first Caribbean countries to implement a plan relocation

measure. In 1966, the authorities decided to build a new capital after the devastation suffered by Belize City—the old capital—in the aftermath of Hurricane Hattie in 1961. Belmopan—the capital since 1970—was built 80 km inland from Belize City to avoid the effects of extreme weather events.

⁴¹ Caribbean Migration Consultation (CMC), “Planned relocation: Four Points To Consider In a Changing Environment.”

<https://caribbeanmigration.org/blog/planned-relocation-four-points-consider-changing-riq>.

⁴² International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Caribbean Migration Consultation (CMC)*.

<https://www.iom.int/caribbean-migration-consultations-cmc>.

need to harmonize regional approaches to environmental mobility governance, integrate environmental mobility into national development planning, and enhance data gathering and monitoring to develop data driven law and policy.⁴³

Despite these efforts, the multiple challenges the region faces, such as the impact of COVID-19, has stalled progress. Indeed, long-standing economic and financial constraints are also preventing the region from implementing much-needed mitigation, adaptation, and resilience measures to assuage potential large-scale migration events. Without significant measures to curb global warming and aid from developed countries to enhance climate action, projections show a dire future for the Caribbean that could end up resulting in large-scale migration events. According to a study conducted by the Stockholm Environment Institute U.S. Center, by 2050, the [annual cost of inaction](#) for the Caribbean in hurricane damages, tourism losses, and infrastructure damages could reach up to USD \$22 billion.⁴⁴

2.3. U.S. Involvement in the Caribbean on Migration and Climate Change Issues

As a key regional partner and the main destination of Caribbean migrants, the United States has been actively engaging in migration and climate change issues. In 2016, the U.S. government endorsed the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) guide which identifies best practices and measures for persons moving across borders after disasters.^{45, 46} In the context of the IX Summit of the Americas, countries across the region—including the United States—signed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. Despite not directly addressing climate migration, it recognizes “the need to promote [...] environmental conditions for people to lead peaceful, productive, and dignified lives in their countries of origin.”^{47, 48}

In terms of international cooperation, the United States—under the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership—is providing assistance and resources for capacity building to address the multiple challenges associated with climate change.⁴⁹ In

⁴³ Ama Francis, “Global Governance of Environmental Mobility – Regional Paper Latin America and the Caribbean”

⁴⁴ Ramón Bueno, “The Caribbean and Climate Change: The Cost of Inaction”, Stockholm Environment Institute US Center. <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G02498.pdf>.

⁴⁵ A non-binding multilateral forum established in 1996 to foster regional cooperation and strengthen migration governance. Caribbean member states: Belize and Dominican Republic. International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Regional Conference on Migration (RCM or Puebla Process).” <https://www.iom.int/regional-conference-migration-rcm-or-puebla-process#:~:text=The%20RCM%20is%20a%20Regi>

[onal.coordination%2C%20transparency%2C%20and%20cooperation.](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/)

⁴⁶ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁴⁷ Caribbean countries that adhered to the Declaration: Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica.

⁴⁸ The White House, “Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.”

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/.](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/)

⁴⁹ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/#:~:text=Migration%20should%20be%20>

particular, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a variety of programs in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and the Eastern and Southern Caribbean aimed at increasing resilience, reducing vulnerabilities, and avoiding further devastating climate-related impacts. For example, in 2021, USAID—aiming to reduce the costs of disasters—assisted the Jamaican government in issuing a Catastrophe Bond for natural disasters, providing the country protection against financial losses for up to USD \$185 million.⁵⁰ Similarly in Haiti—a country severely impacted by droughts—USAID was instrumental to assembling and installing six low cost solar-powered wireless weather stations to provide farmer's with reliable meteorological data in order to improve decision-making and their livelihoods.⁵¹

Although the United States does not recognize climate migration as grounds for granting refugee status, the current refugee law, in limited circumstances, can be applied when people fleeing in the context of climate change are subject to violence, conflict, or persecution when they return to their country of origin.⁵² For example, the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) has projected that, as global warming further increases pressure on the availability of land

and natural resources, climate change will increasingly become a background driver for asylum seekers. They pointed out that in 2020 a Honduran tribal and environmental defender—whose name was not disclosed—was granted asylum in the U.S. on the grounds that if she returned to Honduras, she would have been subject to persecution for her advocacy campaign against the Honduran government's efforts to illegally appropriate tribal land and natural resources.⁵³ Moreover, the U.S. Congress has enacted mechanisms to provide protections for foreign nationals impacted by natural disasters in their countries of origin. For example, temporary protected status (TPS) can be applied to foreign nationals who cannot safely return to their country of origin due to an environmental disaster. However, TPS can only be granted to foreign nationals already within U.S. territory, meaning that those fleeing after a natural disaster cannot apply for these protections.⁵⁴ In addition, the U.S. has other mechanisms to enhance regular migratory pathways in cases of assistance such as Humanitarian Parole, which “allows an individual who may be inadmissible or otherwise ineligible for admission into the United States to be in the United States for a temporary period for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit,”⁵⁵ as

[a%20voluntary, human%20rights%20and%20fundamental%20freedoms.](#)

⁵⁰ USAID, “Disaster Risk Reduction & Energy Resilience.” <https://www.usaid.gov/jamaica/our-work/disaster-risk-reduction-energy-resilience>.

⁵¹ USAID, “USAID/Haiti – Environment & Natural Resources Management,” January 2020. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/USAID_Haiti_Environment_Fact_Sheet_-_January_2020.pdf.

⁵² The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁵³ International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), “U.S. Opportunities to Address Climate Displacement,” August 2021.

<https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/U.S.-Opportunities-to-Address-Climate-Displacement.pdf>.

⁵⁴ The White House, “Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.”

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Humanitarian Parole”, <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/explore-my-options/humanitarian-parole>.

well as other specific paroles designed for certain nationalities such for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans. Unlike TPS, people from the nationalities designated for special parole can apply from their countries of origin.

The United States has received Caribbean displaced people after sudden-onset natural disasters. In 2019, in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, between 600 and 700 Bahamians holding pre-approved visas evacuated to the U.S.⁵⁶ The majority of them went to Florida, the epicenter of the Bahamian diaspora. Local humanitarian foundations as well as extended family networks helped evacuees find protection. In addition, both public and private schools in Florida enrolled K-12 Bahamian students.⁵⁷ Though the U.S. has a patchwork of legislation that offers some relief to some climate migrants, presently there is no plan to develop a comprehensive strategy to address a challenge that—by all accounts—will grow significantly by 2050.⁵⁸

3. Caribbean Migration Patterns

There is nothing novel about migration in the Caribbean. The movement of peoples in the region predates the arrival of Europeans, with local Amerindian populations—namely the Taino (Arawak) and Caribs—moving from the South American mainland up

through the Lesser and Greater Antilles. From 1492 to 1870, European colonial empires provided money for the capture and forced migration of over 10 million enslaved African people. This particular movement of persons stands out for its scale and brutality. As abolition gained traction in the hemisphere, the colonial planter class facilitated the recruitment of indentured workers from modern-day China, India, and Indonesia in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a supplementary source of labor for the plantation system. Further waves of migrants also arrived in the Caribbean. The inflow of different peoples, cultures, and religions has left its imprint on the cultural mosaic of the region—with rich fusions emerging such as Papiamentu in the ABC islands, Voodoo in Haiti, and Indian Arrival Day in various countries.

Though migration patterns have changed, the movement of people continues to shape the region's identity. Since the 1960s, the United States has been the primary destination for Caribbean migrants.⁵⁹ The impacts associated with climate change are increasingly a key driver of internal migration. Both slow-onset events and sudden-onset natural disasters fostered by climate change have forcibly displaced millions of people. Likewise, albeit not in the same magnitude, the intra-regional movement of people as well as immigration flows from other regions have also

⁵⁶ John Marazita, “Displacement in Paradise – Hurricane Dorian slams the Bahamas.”

⁵⁷ Madeline Holcombe and Natalie Johnson, “Schools in Palm Beach County, Florida, enroll displaced Bahamian students,” CNN, September 2019.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/11/us/bahamian-evacuees-dorian-palm-beach-schools/index.html>.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Processes

for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans”. <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>.

⁵⁹ Jane Lorenzi and Jeanne Batalova, “Caribbean Migrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute (MPI), July 2022.

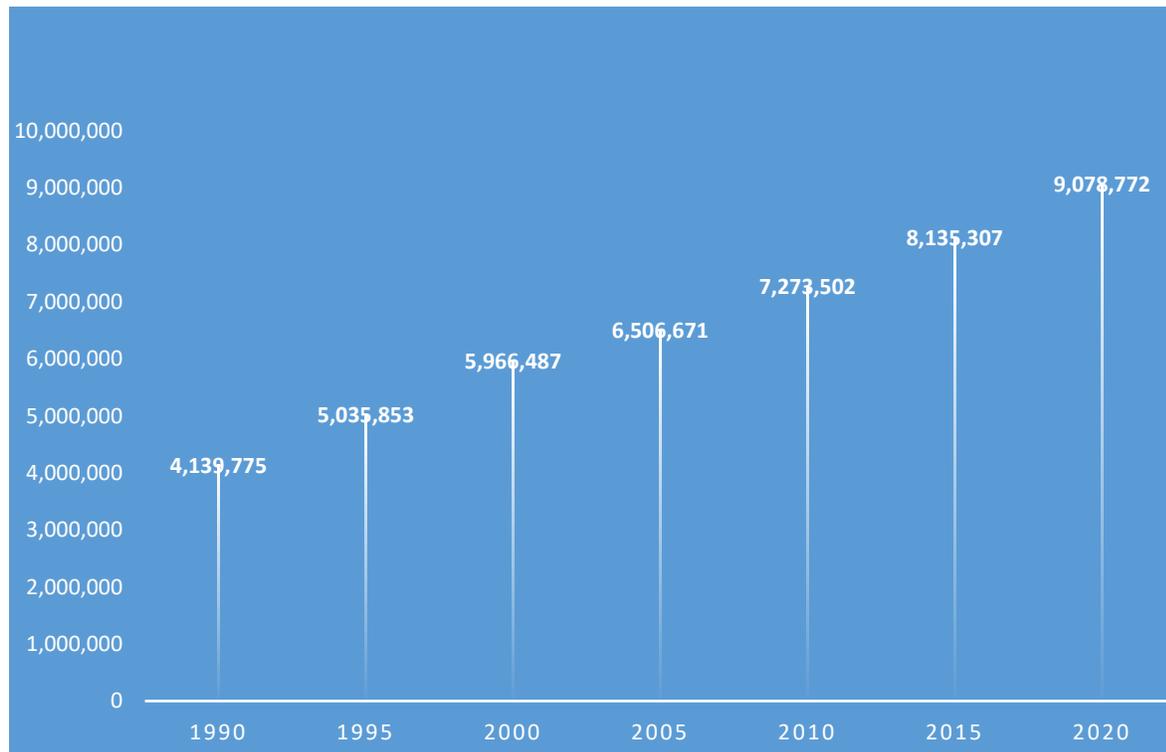
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states#Diaspora>.

increased. With more people on the move, reports show that crimes related to migration—such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling—have also risen.

According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs population figures (See Chart 1) from 1990 to 2020 migration in the Caribbean increased by approximately 117 percent.⁶⁰ While in 1990

some 4.1 million Caribbeans lived outside their country or territory of origin, thirty years later the number has progressively increased to 9.08 million.⁶¹ The vast majority of migrants are from the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico (1.8 million), Haiti (1.7 million), Cuba (1.7 million), the Dominican Republic (1.6 million), and Jamaica (1.1 million).⁶²

Chart 1. Caribbean Migrants Around the World



Source: UNDESA. International migrant stock at mid-year, both sexes combined (1990-2020)

⁶⁰ Migration Data Portal, “*Migration in the Caribbean*,” July 2021. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/migration-data-caribbean>.

⁶¹ The UN definition of Caribbean excludes Belize, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname.

⁶² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “*International Migration Stock 2021*.” <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>.

UN population figures show that in 2020 about 20 percent of Caribbeans lived outside their country or territory of origin—a significant percentage compared to the 5 percent of Latin Americans living outside their countries in the same year. Indeed, countries like Guyana and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have more nationals living abroad than within their own borders—with 55 percent of Guyanese and roughly 50 percent of Vincentians were living abroad in 2020.⁶³

Reasons associated with lack of economic opportunities, political persecution, and humanitarian emergencies have historically driven Caribbeans to migrate extra-regionally. Indeed, it is estimated that by 2020 close to 90 percent of Caribbean migrants lived in another region.⁶⁴ Both Europe and North America—mainly the United States—have represented the main destinations for Caribbean migrants. As a result, remittances now represent a crucial source of revenue for many countries in the region. According to the World Bank,

remittances accounted for a large portion of national GDPs across much of the Caribbean in 2020—representing 25.3 percent in Jamaica, 20 percent in Haiti, and 11.4 percent in the Dominican Republic (See Table 2).⁶⁵

As economic and political conditions have deteriorated in some countries, Caribbeans continue to move intra-regionally as well. For example, in past decades, hundreds of thousands of Haitians have migrated to the neighboring Dominican Republic, as well as to the Bahamas—in 2020 Haitians represented 66 percent of the total number of intra-regional migrants.⁶⁶ Regional free movement agreements—established to foster economic development between CARICOM and Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries—contributed to the intra-regional movement of people. Between 2006 and 2017, it is estimated that CARICOM's Single Market and Economy (CSME) facilitated the movement of two million persons.⁶⁷

Table 2: Personal Remittances, received (% of GDP) Caribbean Countries, 2021

Country	Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)
Antigua and Barbuda	3.4
Barbados	2.3
Belize	5.4
Dominica	10.4
Dominican Republic	11.4
Grenada	6.6
Guyana	8.0

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Migration Data Portal, “*Migration in the Caribbean.*”

⁶⁵ World Bank, “*Personal remittances, received (% of GDP).*” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWK.R.DT.GD.ZS?locations=ZJ-JM-HT-DO>.

⁶⁶ Migration Data Portal, “*Migration in the Caribbean.*”

⁶⁷ Estela Aragón and Briana Mawby, “*Free Movement of Persons in the Caribbean: Economic and Security Dimensions.*” International Organizations for Migrations, 2019. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/free_movement_in_the_caribbean.pdf.

Haiti	20.0
Jamaica	25.3
St. Kitts and Nevis	4.3
St. Lucia	3.7
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	9.5
Suriname	4.9
Trinidad and Tobago	1.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.8

Source: The World Bank

3.1. Assessing the Impact of Climate Migration in the Caribbean

The internal movement of people within countries and territories became a determining factor in assessing of climate migration in the region. Data from organizations such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) allow researchers to isolate migration drivers such as sudden-onset natural disasters from economic, political, or social ones for internal migration.⁶⁸ The IDMC assessed that from 2008 to 2021, approximately 9.6 million people were internally displaced due to natural disasters in the Caribbean.⁶⁹ From 194 natural disaster events reported in the region during this time span, 7.7 million people were displaced by storms and 172,000 by floods. Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic represent the three countries with the most displaced people in the world.⁷⁰ These numbers are striking when compared with those of other

regions, such as neighboring Latin America. In the same time frame, 3 percent of Latin America's population was forcibly displaced due to natural disasters while the share of displaced persons from the Caribbean comes in at an astounding 17 percent.

A few case studies conducted by scholars and NGOs within the region identify how the slow-onset environmental degradation processes prompt internal migration from rural to urban areas. For example, in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, prolonged temperature variability, changing rainfall patterns, and soil erosion combined with high levels of poverty, food insecurity, and natural disaster have played a major factor in driving internal movements of people from rural to urban areas.⁷¹ According to the World Bank, between 2005 and 2020 the Dominican Republic registered a 50 percent increase in urbanization.⁷² Today 83 percent

⁶⁸ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), "Global Internal Displacement Database – Disaster Data," 2008-2021. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

⁶⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), "Global Internal Displacement Database – Disaster Data," 2008-2021. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

⁷⁰ Haiti (2.3 million), Cuba (6.8 million), and Dominican Republic (317,300). Internal

Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), *Global Internal Displacement Database – Disaster Data*.

⁷¹ David James Cantor, "Cross-border Displacement, Climate Change and Disasters: Latin America and the Caribbean."

⁷² Banco Mundial, "Habilitación el camino para el desarrollo de ciudades y territorios prósperos," May 2022.

<https://www.bancomundial.org/es/country/dominican-republic/publication/habilitacion-el-camino-para-el-desarrollo-de-ciudades-y-territorios-prosperos>.

of Dominicans live in urban areas.⁷³ Likewise, the World Bank estimated in 2018 that approximately 133,000 Haitians move to urban areas every year.⁷⁴ In 2020, 58 percent of the Haitian population lived in urban areas—a significant increase considering that in the 1950s, nearly 90 percent lived in rural areas.⁷⁵ This rapid increase in urbanization has brought challenges that further exacerbate already existing vulnerabilities. In both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, as in many low- and middle-income countries, rapid urbanization tends to be disorderly, with settlers building informal structures in areas that are vulnerable to natural disasters and often underserve residents in terms of basic services.⁷⁶

Although climate migration remains largely an internal process, there are a number of reports suggesting growing cross-border trends. Recent studies have shown a

correlation between slow-onset environmental degradation processes and international migration in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti.⁷⁷ Likewise, emergent data shows that the impact of hurricanes and tropical storms in the Caribbean correlates with an increase in regular migration to the United States.⁷⁸ The mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. following Hurricane Maria in 2017 is one of the clearest examples in recent memory. Although census data suggests that between August 2017 and August 2018, 129,000 Puerto Ricans left the territory, some social media trace-based studies show that roughly 476,000 people left the island.⁷⁹ Despite the lack of methodological tools to identify who is migrating across borders due to climate change, studies from the Caribbean increasingly show linkages signaling the need for governments to seriously plan for cross-border migrants.

⁷³ The World Bank, “Urban Population (% of Total Population).”

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=S3-ZJ-DO-HT-CU>.

⁷⁴ The World Bank, “Five Reasons why Haiti should invest in Resilient Cities,” January 2018.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/01/23/five-reasons-why-haiti-should-invest-in-resilient-cities>.

⁷⁵ Economist Intelligence Unit, “Haiti struggles to address urbanization,” April 2018.

<https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=866651470&Country=Haiti&topic=Economy>.

⁷⁶ Banco Mundial, “Urbanización y Desarrollo Territorial en República Dominicana,” June 2022,

<https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/infographic/2022/06/01/urbanizacion-y-desarrollo-territorial-en-republica-dominicana>; Tegan Blaine; Julia Canney;

Chris Collins; Jessica Kline, and Rachel Locke, “Climate Change, Migration and the Risk of Conflict in Growing Urban Centers,” United States Institute of Peace, June 2022,

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/climate-change-migration-and-risk-conflict-growing-urban-centers>.

⁷⁷ Kira Monin, Jeanne Batalova, and Tianjian Lai, “Refugees and Asylees in the United States, Migration Policy Institute (MPI),” May 2021.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2021#latin-american-caribbean-refugees>.

⁷⁸ David James Cantor. “Cross-border Displacement, Climate Change and Disasters: Latin America and the Caribbean.”

⁷⁹ Rolando J. Acosta, Nishant Kishore, Rafael A. Irizarry, and Caroline O Buckee, “Quantifying the dynamics of migration after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS), November 2020.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2001671117>; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “Sixth Assessment Report Working Group II- Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability - Fact Sheet – Small Islands,” 2022.

https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/outreach/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FactSheet_SmallIslands.pdf.

3.2. The U.S. – The Destination of Choice for Caribbean Migrants

Rising cross-border and climate-induced migration would affect the United States most in absolute terms. The United States currently represents the largest destination for Caribbean migrants. According to IOM assessments, Cuba-U.S. and Dominican Republic-U.S. remain the two most important migration corridors in the Caribbean. Due to its relatively stable political and economic situation, the United States remains an attractive destination for many people around the world—not just from the Caribbean. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, first-generation immigrants compose almost 14 percent of the U.S. population—or a little over 44.9 million people in 2020.⁸⁰ While the majority of migrants are from Mexico, India, China, and

the Philippines as well as a sizable number from the Northern Triangle countries—El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala—the Caribbean is well-represented, especially from Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Haiti.

In 2020, approximately seven out of ten Caribbean migrants lived in the United States.⁸¹ This represents 4.5 million people or about 10 percent of the total foreign-born population living in the United States—a sizeable figure considering that the Caribbean population only represents 0.6 percent of the world's population. Compared to the rest of the foreign-born population, Caribbean immigrants, are, on average, more likely to be lawful U.S. permanent residents. In 2019, roughly 3 percent of the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. were from the Caribbean.⁸²

⁸⁰ United States Census Bureau, “Foreign Born.” <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born.html>.

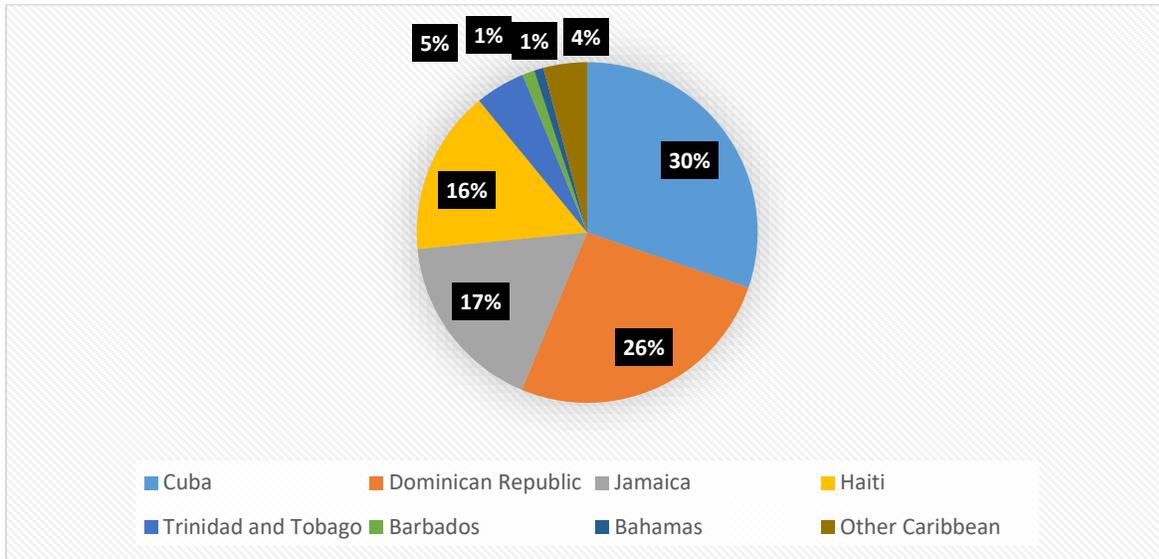
⁸¹ This figure does not include Puerto Ricans. According to the UN in 2020, the total number of Puerto Ricans living in Continental U.S. was 1.8 million people.

Jane Lorenzi and Jeanne Batalova, “Caribbean Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute (MPI), July 2022.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states#Diaspora>; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “International Migration 2020.” https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd_2020_international_migration_highlights.pdf.

⁸² Jane Lorenzi and Jeanne Batalova, *Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*.

Chart 2. Caribbean Migrants in the United States per country (2019)



Source: Jane Lorenzi and Jeanne Batalova, “*Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*”, Migration Policy Institute (MPI), July 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states#Diaspora>

Estimates suggest that nearly 8.7 million people in the U.S. claim to have been born in the Caribbean or have Caribbean ancestry.⁸³ However, despite its impressive size and the fact that many are able to vote, the Caribbean diaspora is fractured and lacks a common organization capable of promoting regional interests. The Cuban, Dominican, and Haitian diasporas have built an important network with representation in professional classes, government, media, and culture.⁸⁴ However, of these, the Cuban diaspora represents the best organized and most influential in Washington. Caribbean experts Georges Fauriol and Wazim Mowla have noted that the wider Caribbean diaspora’s lack of organization has contributed to the compartmentalization of U.S. policy toward the region. The authors suggest that a united Caribbean diaspora has

a better chance of leveraging regional interests in conversations with the U.S. government than acting independently.

3.3. Recent Trends and Challenges

Despite representing a net source of migration, in 2020, nearly 750,000 immigrants resided in the Caribbean—mainly people coming from North and South America as well as Europe. In recent years, the worsening of the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has contributed to the arrival of thousands of Venezuelan migrants and refugees to the Caribbean. According to the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela (R4V) by 2021, nearly 200,000 Venezuelan migrants and refugees lived in the Caribbean—with 58

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Georges Fauriol and Wazim Mowla, *Strengthening U.S.-Caribbean relations through the Caribbean diaspora*, Global Americans, April 2022,

<https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/04/strengthening-u-s-caribbean-relations-through-the-caribbean-diaspora/>.

percent of them living in the Dominican Republic.⁸⁵

Likewise, the deterioration of the political and economic situation in both Haiti and Cuba has prompted new waves of emigration from these countries. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency's figures, since 2020, the number of encounters at the southwest land border, including apprehensions and expulsions of Haitians and Cubans, has steadily increased—growing from 17,945 in 2020 to 85,929 in 2021 and 278,818 in 2022.⁸⁶

With more people on the move, crimes associated with migration are on the rise. A 2019 CARICOM study on human trafficking estimated that between 80,000 and 120,000 persons are trafficked or smuggled through the region every year.⁸⁷ Migrants are particularly vulnerable to falling victim to crime when they move through illegal channels, have no access to legitimate forms of employment, and lack legal status or access to social protection. Organized crime often subjects migrants to

forced labor, criminal recruitment, sexual abuse, and other severe human rights violations.⁸⁸ In particular, the absence of a regular migratory pathways and poor state control over some borders have further exacerbated this problem. According to a recent report from William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, the lack of effective surveillance on the Haiti-Dominican Republic border and some coastal and interior regions of Suriname and Guyana have paved the way for organized crime to engage in human trafficking.⁸⁹

Moreover, climate change is further complicating this phenomenon, as climate-internally-displaced persons are already subject to human rights abuses in the Caribbean. According to an IDMC report, in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, displaced and undocumented Haitians living on Great Abaco in the Bahamas had to go into hiding as they feared deportation from the Bahamian law enforcement authorities.⁹⁰ As a result, these people were unable to access to public services or legal protection and

⁸⁵ Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela (R4V), "América Latina y el Caribe, refugiados y migrantes venezolanos en la región," Junio 2021.

<https://www.r4v.info/es/document/r4v-america-latina-y-el-caribe-refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-en-la-region-junio-2021>.

⁸⁶ Figures are reported in fiscal years (October to September.) U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Nationwide Encounters*, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>.

⁸⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Discussion Document on Smuggling of Goods and Human Smuggling in the Caribbean: The Role of the Fisheries Sector," Blue Justice, 2020. <https://bluejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Smuggling-of-Goods-Caribbean.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Fiona David, Katherine Bryant, and Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, "Migrants and their Vulnerabilities:

To Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Forced Labour," International Organization for Migrations (IOM), 2019.

<https://publications.iom.int/books/migrants-and-their-vulnerability-human-trafficking-modern-slavery-and-forced-labour>.

⁸⁹ Mary C. Ellison and Kathleen M. Vogel, "Human Trafficking Trends in the Western Hemisphere", William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies – National Defense University, June 2020. http://williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Human%20Trafficking%20Trends%20in%20the%20Western%20Hemisphere.pdf.

⁹⁰ John Marazita, "Displacement in Paradise – Hurricane Dorian slams the Bahamas", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, May 2020. https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/202005-displacement-in-paradise_FINAL.pdf.

were targeted by local organized crime. Projections from the World Bank and the IPCC show that climate migration is expected to increase in the Caribbean.⁹¹ If there are no comprehensive policies aimed at providing regular migratory pathways, then migrants will be increasingly vulnerable to becoming victims of organized crime.

4. Climate Change and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

As a minority throughout the Caribbean—and often politically underrepresented—indigenous and tribal peoples are both among the most vulnerable to climate

change and one of the world's most vital players in the fight against it. It is estimated that approximately 53 million indigenous peoples and 27 million tribal peoples live across Latin America and the Caribbean.⁹² Although the international community has recognized, through multiple agreements, indigenous and tribal peoples' rights to self-determination and participation in the decision-making process regarding the activities that may impact their own societies and territories, few states have ratified them.⁹³ This lack of recognition has further exposed them to discrimination, economic marginalization, and political exclusion, as well as to the adverse effects of climate change.

Who are considered as “Indigenous peoples” and “Tribal peoples”?

To date, there are no internationally recognized definitions of “indigenous peoples” and “tribal peoples.” However, international organizations such as the United Nations have developed a modern understanding of these concepts. Based on José R. Martínez Cobo groundbreaking 1981 study on the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations, the 1989 ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 set general criteria to identify both indigenous peoples and tribal peoples:⁹⁴

⁹¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “Sixth Assessment Report Working Group II-Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability - Fact Sheet – Small Islands.”; Viviane Clement, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Susana Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nian Sadiq, and Elham Shababat, “Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration.”

⁹² The World Bank, “Indigenous Peoples Overview.”

Latin America and the Caribbean”, 2021. [https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2953en.](https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2953en.”)

⁹³ 1957 ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107); 1989 International Labour Organization Convention (No. 169); 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

⁹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), “C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention,” 1989.

Indigenous peoples are often “descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”

Tribal peoples often have “social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.”

It is important to note that the international community has agreed that self-determination ought to be the guiding principle for determining who should be considered as part of an indigenous group or tribe. The 1989 International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the 2016 Organization of American States (OAS) American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have specifically underscored the indigenous peoples and tribes have the fundamental right to self-determination.

According to recent data from the World Bank, in Latin America and the Caribbean, indigenous people represent 17 percent of the population living in extreme poverty—a striking figure, considering they only represent 8 percent of the regional population.⁹⁵ The 2021 United Nations 5th State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples volume reported that indigenous peoples continue to be victims of systematic human rights violations, from forced internal displacements, loss of cultural identity, to

the destruction and pollution of their lands and territories.⁹⁶

In this context, climate change only deepens existing vulnerabilities. Not only does it challenge their food systems, making them vulnerable to food and nutritional insecurity, but also degrades their lands to the point of rendering them uninhabitable.⁹⁷ The International Labour Organization (ILO) has identified a set of characteristics that help explain why indigenous peoples are far more

<https://www.oas.org/en/sare/documents/DecAmIND.pdf>.

⁹⁵ German Nicolas Freire, Steven Daniel Schwartz Orellana, Melissa Zumaeta Aurazo, Damasceno Costa Costa, Jonna Maria Lundvall, Martha Celmira Viveros Mendoza, Leonardo Ramiro Lucchetti, Laura Moreno, Liliana Do Couto Sousa, “*Indigenous Latin America in the twenty-first century : the first decade*”, World Bank Group.

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/145891467991974540/Indigenous-Latin-America-in-the-twenty-first-century-the-first-decade>.

⁹⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “*5th Volume State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples*,” 2021.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2021/03/State-of-Worlds-Indigenous-Peoples-Vol-V-Final.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Carol Zavaleta-Cortijo, James D. Ford, Ingrid Arotoma-Rojas, Shuaib Lwasa, Guillermo Lancha-Rucoba, Patricia J. García, J. Jaime Miranda, Didacus B Namanya, Mark New, Carlee J. Wright, Lea Berrang-Ford, the Indigenous Health Adaptation to Climate Change Research Team, Sherliee L. Harper, “*Climate change and COVID-19: reinforcing Indigenous food systems*,” *The Lancet*. September, 2020.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7413660/>.

vulnerable to climate change than other segments of society. Among these are high rates of extreme poverty, natural resources dependency to support their economic activities and livelihoods, geographical exposure to climate change, gender inequality, and absence of national recognition and institutional support. In particular, the lack of consultation and participation, as well as exploitation and discrimination, are considered by the ILO to be the “root cause” of indigenous peoples' social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities to climate change.⁹⁸

As with other vulnerable communities across the world, indigenous peoples are becoming climate migrants. Although data remains scarce, the IPCC and the ILO have assessed that climate change is increasingly forcing indigenous peoples to retreat from their ancestral lands.⁹⁹ The IOM has noted that persistent droughts, changing rain patterns, wildfires, coastal erosion, and the rise in sea level have severely disrupted indigenous communities' ability to hunt, practice agriculture, and follow their

traditions and cultural practices, forcing them to abandon their lands.¹⁰⁰

Plans to relocate indigenous communities are underway throughout the Western Hemisphere. For example, the indigenous Guna community, located on the small Panamanian Caribbean island of Gardi Sugdub, is set to be relocated to the mainland as their island becomes increasingly uninhabitable due to climate change.¹⁰¹ Other types of climate migration movements among indigenous communities have also been registered in the region. The World Bank has reported that indigenous communities in the Andes region are increasingly choosing to temporarily migrate to urban areas as a way to diversify their income due to the loss of agricultural production to extreme weather events.¹⁰² Similar trends are evident in the United States.¹⁰³

Likewise “tribal peoples” in Latin America and the Caribbean—a term recognized and applied by the Inter-American Human Rights system to identify certain rural, Afro-descendent communities—are among the

⁹⁸ International Labour Office Geneva, “*Indigenous peoples and climate change*,” 2017.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_551189.pdf.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ International Organization for Migration (IOM), “*Environmental Migration and Indigenous Peoples: What Is at Stake?*” Medium, September 2018.

<https://medium.com/@UNmigration/environmental-migration-and-indigenous-peoples-what-is-at-stake-edb077c028b7>.

¹⁰¹ Beatriz Felipe Pérez and Alexandra Tomaselli, “*Indigenous Peoples and climate-induced relocation in Latin America and the Caribbean: managed retreat as a tool or a threat?*” *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, April 2021.

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13412-021-00693-2.pdf>.

¹⁰² Jakob Kronik and Dorte Verner, “*Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*,” The World Bank, 2010.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2472/555400PUB0Indi1EPI1958810601PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁰³ Adaptation Clearinghouse, “*From Newtok to Mertarvik: A Native Alaskan Tribal Village Relocation*,” Georgetown Climate Center.

<https://www.adaptationclearinghouse.org/resources/from-newtok-to-mertarvik-a-native-alaskan-tribal-village-relocation.html>; U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), “*Alaska Native Issues: Federal Agencies Could Enhance Support for Native Village Efforts to Address Environmental Threats*,” May 2022.

<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104241>.

most vulnerable communities in region.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, like indigenous peoples, they not only face deep social and economic problems inequalities, but often have their rights to territory curtailed as well—though the ILO 169 also nominally protects them. Unlike indigenous people, tribal people's territory is understood as the geographical place where they were able to resist from enslavement and develop their own culture and identity.¹⁰⁵

Climate change is also increasing pressuring tribal peoples across the hemisphere. Brazil is home of the largest Afro-descendant population in region—the *Quilombolas* who built their close-knit communities in hard-to-reach areas away from plantations to resist recapture. After centuries of resilience, these rural communities have been increasingly threatened by drought, rapid deforestation, structural racism, and government mismanagement. Due to these external pressures, many are being forced to leave their lands and find work in nearby cities.¹⁰⁶

Although further studies are needed to determine the real impact climate migration is having on indigenous and tribal peoples, emerging data suggests that it is indeed

severely threatening the continuity of entire communities. According to recent analyses, planned relocation strategies are both difficult and painful. Poorly organized and implemented plans in Alaska, the Asia-Pacific region, and Latin America and the Caribbean are creating conflicts and divisions among communities as well as disrupting cultural ties and local economies.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, indigenous and tribal communities who migrate to urban areas often live in informal settlements where they are not only subject to various forms of discrimination, but also lack access to basic services and infrastructure. In this regard, the ILO and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have warned that as climate change deepens and climate migration increases, the future of entire indigenous and tribal communities is at stake.¹⁰⁸

4.1. The Threat of Climate Change

Archaeological studies show that the first movements of people to the Caribbean islands occurred approximately between 6,000 and 7,000 years ago. Over the millennia, different peoples have moved from the Yucatan Peninsula, Central America, and northern South America to the

¹⁰⁴ Ariel E. Dulitzky, "When Afro-Descendants Became 'Tribal Peoples': The Inter-American Human Rights System and Rural Black Communities", UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs, 2010.

<https://law.utexas.edu/faculty/publications/2010-When-Afro-Descendants-Became-Tribal-Peoples-The-Inter-American-Human-Rights-System-and-Rur/download>.

¹⁰⁵ FAO, "Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and climate change in Latin America—Ten scalable experiences of intercultural collaboration", 2021. <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/fr/c/CB4847EN/>

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Sax and Mauricio Angelo, "We are invisible': Brazilian Cerrado quilombos fights for

lands and lives", Mongabay, 2020.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2020/04/we-are-invisible-brazilian-cerrado-quilombos-fight-for-land-and-lives/>.

¹⁰⁷ Beatriz Felipe Pérez and Alexandra Tomaselli, "Indigenous Peoples and climate-induced relocation in Latin America and the Caribbean: managed retreat as a tool or a threat?" Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, April 2021. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13412-021-00693-2.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ International Labour Office Geneva, "Indigenous peoples and climate change."; FAO, "Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and climate change in Latin America—Ten scalable experiences of intercultural collaboration."

Caribbean basin. In particular, the Taino (Awarak) and Carib peoples—the two largest and predominant indigenous peoples in the Caribbean—were able to develop highly complex societies. According to Caribbean historian Samuel M. Wilson, the relative isolation of the region allowed Caribbean indigenous peoples to create distinct societies and completely different from mainland indigenous societies.¹⁰⁹

However, soon after the first Europeans arrived, most indigenous peoples in the Greater Antilles fell victim to disease, forced labor, and conflict, causing entire communities to perish during the first wave of colonization. With the European colonization of the Caribbean, the demography of the region changed forever. When European settlers started to experience labor shortages, they expanded the transatlantic slave trade exponentially. As enslaved people gained their freedom, some moved away from a society that did not extend them the same rights—instead choosing to live in more remote areas and building tribal communities. These people became known as “Maroons” in Jamaica, Haiti, Suriname, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Cuba, and Guyana. In Belize, the Garifuna people are the descendants of African enslaved people and indigenous peoples.¹¹⁰

While colonization and different migration flows in subsequent decades meant the disappearance of entire communities, Caribbean indigenous peoples and tribes remain a vital and vibrant demographic group in the region. Today, indigenous peoples and tribes are primarily located in Belize, Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana, and Dominica.

In Belize, Mayans and Garifuna represent 11.6 and represent 6.1 percent of the country’s population, respectively. Similarly, in Suriname, the indigenous population makes up 3.8 percent of the population while tribal peoples make up an additional 21.7 percent. The indigenous Guyanese population, formed by nine indigenous nations, represents 10.5 percent of the population.¹¹¹ In French Guiana, the Kali’na Tileuyu, Lokono, Pahikweneh, Wayãpi, Teko, and Wayana peoples, represent 4 percent of the total population. On the other hand, the Kalinago people of Dominica—considered to be the last direct descendants of the Caribs in the eastern Caribbean islands—are a minority group in the country with nearly 4,000 members.¹¹²

Although the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples in the Caribbean varies from country to country, there are some important similarities. Most Caribbean states have not ratified the 1989 ILO Indigenous and Tribal

¹⁰⁹ Jerald Pinson, “Indigenous communities used the Caribbean Sea as an aquatic highway,” Florida Museum, June 2022.

<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/science/indigenous-communities-used-the-caribbean-sea-as-an-aquatic-highway/>.

¹¹⁰ Pamela D. Reed, “Maroon Community,” Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/maroon-community>;
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Belize/Climate#ref467891>.

¹¹¹ Max Ooft, “Indigenous people in Suriname,” International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), March 2021.

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/suriname/4250-iw-2021-suriname.html>; Minority Rights Group International,

“World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Belize,”

<https://minorityrights.org/country/belize/>.

¹¹² Minority Rights Group International, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Dominica.”

<https://minorityrights.org/country/dominica/>.

Peoples Convention No. 169. Instead, many have chosen to recognize indigenous and tribal peoples' rights in their constitutions and laws to varying degrees.

Furthermore, most indigenous and tribal communities are located in areas vulnerable to the impacts of climate. For example, in Belize, the Dangriga and Hopkins villages—both Garifuna communities—are located in low coastal areas that are highly sensitive to floods and coastal erosion. According to a 2019 assessment from the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (CCCCC), both villages have experienced the loss of beachfront at alarming rates. It is estimated that in just five years, the shoreline has retreated between 20 to 25 feet.¹¹³

Likewise, Caribbean indigenous and tribal peoples have higher rates of poverty and unemployment than non-indigenous populations. According to a 2017 UNICEF report, indigenous peoples in the Amazon region—including Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana—experience poverty rates two to five times that of the rest of the population. For example, in Guyana, poverty rates in the provinces with the highest indigenous population shares are two to three times higher than the national average.¹¹⁴

4.2. The Cases of Dominica and Suriname

There is no doubt that climate change poses an unprecedented threat to the future of the Caribbean's indigenous and tribal people. Their geographical exposure to climate change, combined with high poverty rates, natural resource dependency, and absence of national recognition, further expose them to climate change. However, it is important to note that some countries in the region are better prepared to assist their communities than others.

Dominica stands out in the region, not only for being the only Caribbean country to have ratified ILO Convention No. 169, but also for having actively recognized and protected the Kalinago people's rights since the country gained independence. For example, the 1978 Carib Reserve Act, established the Carib Council—a democratically elected body formed by a Chief and six other members—to control and administer the Carib Territory—an enclave of 3,782 acres of land that stretches over 9 miles on the East Atlantic coast of Dominica. In addition, in 2005, the government created the Ministry of Carib Affairs (previously known as the Department of Caribs Affairs) to improve the socio-economic conditions, preserve the cultural heritage, and promote the integration of the Kalinago people into the rest of Dominican society.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), "Hope for Hopkins And Dangriga: Coastal Erosion Assessment To Be Conducted." <https://www.caribbeanclimate.bz/blog/2021/08/26/hope-for-hopkins-and-dangriga-coastal-erosion-assessment-to-be-conducted/#:~:text=The%20loss%20of%20the%20beach,over%20the%20past%205%20years.>

¹¹⁴ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Study on Indigenous Women & Children in

Guyana," 2017.

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/4691/file/PDF%20Study%20on%20indigenous%20women%20and%20children%20in%20Guyana.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Commonwealth of Dominica, "Social Assessment for Indigenous Peoples Plan, Carib Territory," The World Bank.

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/zh/443411468245971907/pdf/IPP7010V20REVI00Box385171B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

Although poverty and unemployment remain high among the Kalinago people, their development remains a priority for the Dominican government. For example, the Kalinago people have actively participated in the negotiations that led to the new 2022 National Forest Policy. According to the World Bank, this legislation is expected not only to create new sources of revenue for the community, but also protect vital forest resources that are key for climate change adaptation and mitigation plans.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Kalinago people are the center of the current efforts of the Dominican government to transform Dominica into the “first world’s climate-resilient nation.” With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the government aims to ensure equal access to climate change adaptation solutions and the preservation of Kalinago traditions and culture.¹¹⁷

In contrast, Suriname stands out as one of the least prepared countries in the region to protect its indigenous and tribal people from the adverse effects of climate change. Although Suriname voted in favor of adopting the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it has not

ratified the ILO Convention No. 169 nor recognized any rights of its indigenous and tribal peoples at the national level.¹¹⁸ As of today, both a constitutional amendment proposal and the draft Law on Collective Rights of Indigenous people and Tribal groups—that could grant indigenous and tribal peoples their rights and forbid mining concessions without their consent—remain stalled in the Surinamese parliament.¹¹⁹

Indeed, the Suriname’s indigenous—formed by the Kaliña, Lokono, Trio, and Wayana peoples—and the tribal peoples—made up of Maroons—face an uphill battle. Both the Association of Village Chiefs of Suriname (VIDS), as well as KAMPOS (Kwinti’s, Aluku’s, Matawai, Pamaaka, Okanisi, Saamaka)—the two most important indigenous and tribal organizations in Suriname—are actively working for their rights to be recognized. Much of this population lives in the country’s vast forested interior, a place where nearly 90 percent of Suriname’s natural resources are located. The lucrative gold mining industry, which represents 80 percent of the country’s exports, has been their main antagonist. Not only has it polluted their lands and seriously impacted their health, but they have also not received any compensation for the

¹¹⁶ The World Bank, “*The importance of Dominica’s Indigenous Kalinago community in the protection and sustainable management of the fragile tropical rainforest ecosystems*,” [August 2022](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/08/05/the-importance-of-dominica-s-indigenous-kalinago-community-in-the-protection-and-sustainable-management-of-the-fragile-t), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/08/05/the-importance-of-dominica-s-indigenous-kalinago-community-in-the-protection-and-sustainable-management-of-the-fragile-t>.

¹¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “*Dominican Government, with Support from UNDP, Moves to Make Indigenous Kalinago Communities more Resilient to Climate Impacts*,” February 2022.

<https://www.undp.org/barbados/press-releases/dominican-government-support-undp-moves-make-indigenous-kalinago-communities-more-resilient-climate-impacts>.

¹¹⁸ Max Ooft, “*Indigenous people in Suriname*,” International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), March 2021.

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/suriname/4250-iw-2021-suriname.html>.

¹¹⁹ Charles Lyons and Charlie Espinosa, “*Can Two New Bills Reshape Indigenous Rights and Illegal Gold Mining in Suriname?*” Mongabay, September 2022. <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/09/can-two-new-bills-reshape-indigenous-rights-and-illegal-gold-mining-in-suriname/>.

exploitation of their lands. This has further marginalized and rendered Suriname's indigenous and tribal peoples one of the most vulnerable communities of Suriname.¹²⁰

Furthermore, although there are no official studies on the impact of climate change on these communities, in an August 2022 letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres,

the Association of Village Chiefs of Suriname and KAMPOS warned that years of extreme weather events related to climate change made their crops and harvest fail and increased their food insecurity.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ine Apapoe, "Maroons and Indigenous people in Suriname: the struggle for land rights," Global Americans, December 2020. <https://theglobalamericans.org/2020/12/maroons-and-indigenous-people-in-suriname-the-struggle-for-land-rights/>.

¹²¹ Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden in Suriname (VIDS), "Letter to The Secretary-General of the United Nations H.E. Antonio Guterres," July 2020. <https://vids.sr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Letter-VIDS-KAMPOS-to-UN-Secr-Gen-02Jul2022.pdf>.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

These challenges require thoughtful and innovative solutions. Yet, constructing a set of recommendations will invariably touch upon politically sensitive issues—ranging from admission numbers and processes to resource allocation and citizen security. These recommendations reflect the pressing need to modernize immigration policy to include climate change and migration, both at the national and regional levels, and develop a more robust framework.

Prevention and Planning

- Caribbean organizations must leverage and prioritize non-Caribbean bilateral relationships to expedite substantive action from potential recipient countries. The United States stands out as the primary destination for climate migrants. However, both Mexico and Canada are extremely valuable partners for U.S. goals with respect to migration.
- Caribbean and SIDS countries must continue to use their voices and votes in international forums to pressure the United States, European Union, China, and other large economies to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. The Caribbean has moral authority on this issue as, despite its small contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, the region still stands as one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world.
- Design tiered policies where each tier produces tangible projects and results in the short term while simultaneously build on one another. Development and infrastructure are the two critical issues that require improvement. However, both require large amounts of financing over a long period of time. It is very difficult to see projects like this to completion. A series of cheaper, short-term projects are more likely be completed, allowing for building on gains over time rather than betting on mega projects.
- Incentivize private companies to adopt sustainable practices that will reduce climate impact on affected areas and make financial contributions to the region's sustainable development needs. Consumer behavior is slow to change, especially when it deals with a collective, abstract concept like climate change. However, the private sector has the potential to make a large impact and will respond to financial and ESG incentives—many of which governments are able to provide.
- Link climate migration to broader initiatives that address the structural drivers of migration. It is extremely hard to pinpoint a single driver behind migration—which is evident in the many diplomatic labels that can be applied. Governments, like that of the United States, will prioritize security matters over climate concerns as the former tends to be more pressing and politically expedient. As such, priority should be given to programs that target structural solutions that are complementary to solving climate-related migration rather than short-term migration relief measures.
- Link climate relocation efforts to multilateral environmental initiatives in international fora. When making agreements to cut emissions, multilateral institutions like the UN would do well to include provisions to incentivize accepting climate-displaced people. This could offer historical emitters another avenue to take ownership of their climate responsibility. For example, recipient countries could connect those affected by climate impacts to labor

opportunities within sectors with labor shortages. This approach can be especially effective for addressing slow-onset disasters because recipient countries could invest in training in specific sectors for at-risk communities and then develop organized migration programs that account for labor demand.

- Focus on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency relief and funding when it comes to working with international institutions. Many barriers exist to efficiently working with international institutions—slow bureaucracy, getting multi-state buy-in, and securing sufficient execution efforts. Emergency, humanitarian, and relief funds in the wake of a natural disaster must be quickly accessible and deployable. This is a good space to foster international cooperation as it is a topic that is relatively easy to generate buy-in and designed to be ready on short notice.

Climate Migration Governance

- Create regular migratory pathways for people affected by climate change. For example, the U.S. could extend its parole program.
- Engage the Caribbean diaspora. Diaspora communities can have a strong reach across many different areas including working with NGOs, lobbying foreign governments, funding (through remittances), and providing the domestic support network for newly arrived migrants or refugees.
- Develop a national policy for planning and implementing planned relocation in the face of a climate catastrophe. The first step in this is identifying at-risk communities and settlements within each sovereign state.
- Support the design and enforcement of climate-resilient building regulations at the local and national levels. Considering the rising risk from climate change, regional institutions such as CARICOM should establish a fully integrated planned relocation strategy into national planning, development, or disaster risk reduction policies.
- Create and staff a pan-Caribbean climate-change data agency that brings together the English, Spanish, Dutch, and French Caribbean.
- Include climate-induced migration as an agenda topic in the First Cities Summit of the Americas (the Summit is scheduled to be held April 2023 in Denver, United States) since cities are often the first stop for climate-related migrants and ensure adequate participation of the Caribbean cities at the Summit.
- Support, strengthen, and expand Caribbean regional integration mechanisms such as CARICOM, the Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC), and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

- Strengthen non-governmental organizations such as agricultural associations, indigenous and tribal peoples organizations, and community-based conservation groups. This is particularly important for indigenous and tribal communities. As indigenous and tribal

communities face challenges on many fronts, climate change represents an opportunity for national governments to make up for past injustices.

- Encourage Caribbean countries to sign the 1989 International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples and fully recognize the rights of their indigenous and tribal peoples.
- Leverage indigenous and tribal knowledge to stem climate change and eco-system deterioration. Cash-crop farming practices have deforested, desertified, and damaged soil chemistry in many parts of the Caribbean. In a changing climate, indigenous knowledge—including farming practices—can often restore soil and even reclaim deforested or desertified land.

7. ANNEX 1: International and Regional Mechanisms that Acknowledge Climate Migration

Mechanisms	Description
Cancun Agreement	Signed at the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference, it represents one of the most comprehensive agreements to help developing countries deal with Climate Change. The Cancun Adaptation Framework invites parties to “enhance understanding, coordination, and cooperation with regards of climate change induced displacements, migration, and planned relocation.” ¹²²
Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change	Endorsed in 2015 by a global intergovernmental consultation process led by the Swiss-Norwegian Nansen Initiative, consolidates a set of international standards to protect displaced people across borders resulting from disasters and the effects of climate change. ¹²³
New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants	Resolution 71/1 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, recognizes that adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or environmental factors, as well as economic reasons, conflict, poverty, human rights violations are long-standing migration drivers. ¹²⁴
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM)	Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/195 on December 2018, the GCM acknowledges the need to understand, predict, and address migration movements that may result from the adverse effects of climate change. Calls states to develop adaptation and resilience

¹²² United Nations Climate Change Conference, “Cancun Adaptation Framework”, 2010.

https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/adaptation_committee/application/pdf/1_cp.16.pdf.

¹²³ Nansen Initiative, “Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change”, 2015.

https://disasterdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/EN_Protection_Agenda_Volume_I_-_low_res.pdf

¹²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, “Resolution 71/1 – New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants”, 2016. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_71_1.pdf.

	strategies, as well as to develop coherent approaches to address the challenges of migration in the context of both sudden-onset and slow-onset natural disasters. ¹²⁵
Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)	Endorsed by United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/151 and adopted on December 2018, the GCR expresses concern on the pressure climate change is having on the movement of refugees. Urges the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to develop policies and take the necessary measures. ¹²⁶
Cartagena Declaration on Refugees	Signed in 1984, the agreement defines refugees as “persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.” This definition—integrated by 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries—has been used to admit Haitians in the aftermath of the 2010 Earthquake. ¹²⁷
Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action – A Framework for Cooperation and Regional Solidarity to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees, Displaced and Stateless Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean	A Latin America and Caribbean regional declaration signed in 2014, recognizes the challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters, as well as by the displacement of persons across borders, requested the UNHCR to take action and provide policy recommendations. ¹²⁸

¹²⁵ United Nations General Assembly, “Resolution 73/195 – Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”, 2018. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/451/99/PDF/N1845199.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹²⁶ United Nations General Assembly, “Resolution 73/151”, 2018. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/unhcrannual/5c4088f44/resolution-adopted-general-assembly-17-december-2018.html>; United Nations, “Global Compact on Refugees”, 2018. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Global%20compact%20on%20refugees%20EN.pdf>.

¹²⁷ Ama Francis, “Global Governance of Environmental Mobility – Regional Paper Latin America and the Caribbean”; The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, 1984. https://www.oas.org/dil/1984_cartagena_declaration_on_refugees.pdf New School, May 2021.

¹²⁸ “Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action – A Framework for Cooperation and Regional Solidarity to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees, Displaced and Stateless Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean”, 2014. <https://www.acnur.org/5b5101644.pdf>.

8. ANNEX 2: Free Movement Agreements in the Caribbean

Mechanism	Description	Signatories
Caribbean Community (CARICOM) – Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas	CARICOM nationals have the right to stay up to six months without visa requirements in another CARICOM member state. In addition, skilled workers have the right to temporary residence without the need to obtain a work permit for two years, with the possibility of extension. ¹²⁹	Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Members of CARICOM who are not parties of the free movement agreement: the Bahamas, Haiti, and Montserrat.
Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) – Revised Treaty of Basseterre and its Protocol	OECS nationals have the right of indefinite stay upon arrival to an OECS member state. Not required to obtain a work permit. ¹³⁰	Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Members of the OECS who are not parties of the free movement agreement: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Martinique, and Guadeloupe.

¹²⁹ Estela Aragón and Briana Mawby, “Free Movement of Persons in the Caribbean: Economic and Security Dimensions,” International Organizations for Migrations, 2019.

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/free_movement_in_the_caribbean.pdf; Ama Francis, “Free Movement Agreements & Climate-induced Migration: A Caribbean Case Study,” Columbia Law School – Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, September 2019.

https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=sabin_climate_change; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Guyana, “CARICOM Free Movement of Skills Overview,” <https://www.minfor.gov.gy/caricom-free-movement-of-skills-overview/>.

¹³⁰ Estela Aragón and Briana Mawby, “Free Movement of Persons in the Caribbean: Economic and Security Dimensions,”; Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), “Free Movement of persons in the Eastern Caribbean,” [https://www.oecs.org/en/free-movement-in-the-eastern-caribbean#:~:text=The%20Free%20Movement%20of%20persons,Treaty%20of%20Basseterre%20\(RTB\)](https://www.oecs.org/en/free-movement-in-the-eastern-caribbean#:~:text=The%20Free%20Movement%20of%20persons,Treaty%20of%20Basseterre%20(RTB).).