



Immigration Justice and the Climate Emergency

Climate-related disasters and extreme heat are making parts of the world unlivable, uprooting 25-30 million people each year. While conflict, violence, and poverty remain the main drivers of displacement in much of the world, climate change has become a growing factor, especially in the Global South. In many countries, extreme weather patterns have increased poverty and displaced families that count on agriculture to sustain themselves. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, climate shocks led to the displacement of 7.4 million people in 2022.

Climate change makes every other crisis people face more difficult. It deepens economic hardships and other challenges, forcing people to leave their homes and the lives they know. Most climate migration is within countries. Families first try to find work and living

alternatives in their homelands. But they can't always find a way to sustain themselves, leaving them with no option but to seek refuge in another country.

A recent survey of 3358 immigrants* found that 43 percent of them were affected by some form of climate disaster in their country of origin. The most common of these were severe rainfall and flooding, hurricanes, and extreme heat. The number of people relocating due to climate change will only increase as the effects of climate change worsen.

Some countries grant special status to and accept immigrants who are fleeing natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. But no country offers a legal path to entry for those who are

* The 2023 KFF/LA Times Survey of Immigrants ([tinyurl.com/survey-immigrants](https://www.tinyurl.com/survey-immigrants))



displaced by climate change—by floods, extreme heat, drought, and fires. There is also no international protection. The UN has declared that such people are not “refugees” under international law, so they have no legally protected status anywhere.

A global wave of authoritarian movements is now expanding across

Western democracies—movements that systematically use brutal scapegoating of migrants and displaced people. At the same time, wherever they gain power, these authoritarian governments expand the fossil fuel economy and delay action on the climate emergency. Climate and immigrant rights movements will succeed or fail together; our futures are inextricably bound.



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



SustainingAllLife.org



UnitedToEndRacism.org



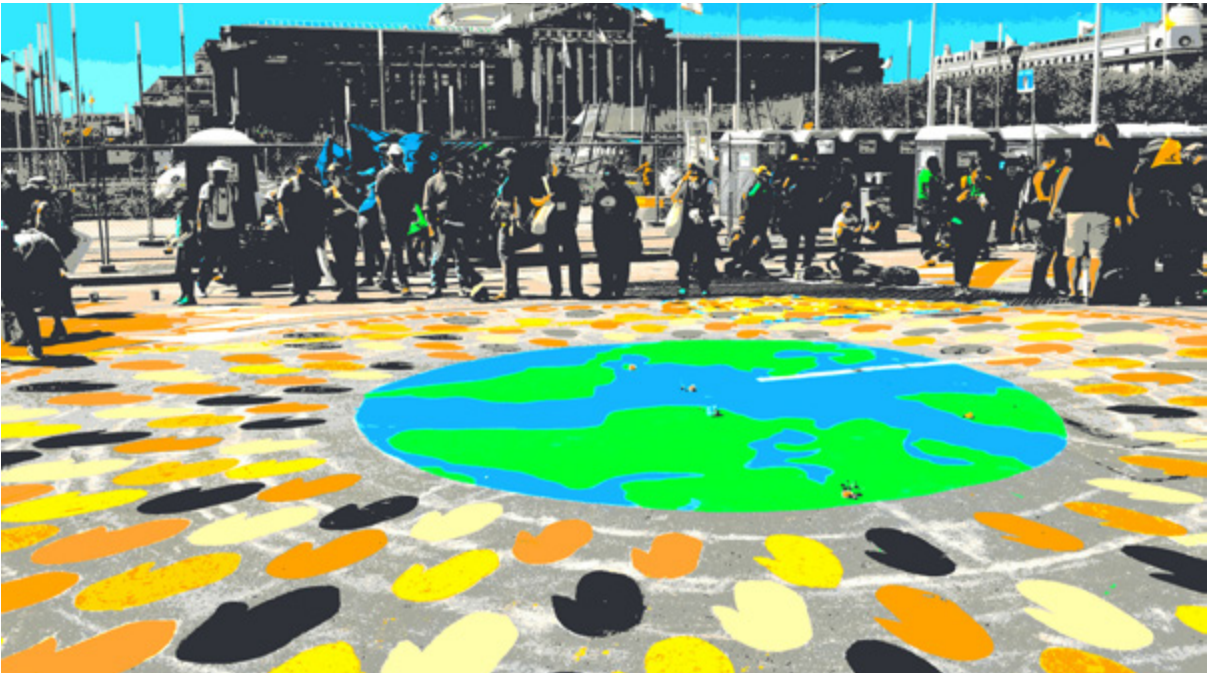
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So, what can be done?

The most effective way to reduce climate migration is to reduce the effects of climate change by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. But given the slow progress on this front, other solutions are needed as well. Here are some ideas on what you can do:

- Debunk the myth that immigrants are a threat to your country and your way of life.
- Highlight the contributions immigrants have made to your country throughout its history.
- Help people reclaim their immigrant connections, no matter how long ago their ancestors left their home countries.
- Highlight the intersection of immigration policies and racism.

- Help people find ways to get involved and support immigrants, including by:
 - Supporting the work immigrant organizations and advocates are doing to protect immigrants.
 - Advocating for rational, humane immigration policies.
 - Committing to the fight against mass detention and deportation of migrants, including urging your local authorities to resist cooperating with them.
 - Being involved with elected officials, community groups, and other advocates and allies to ensure that the people with humane and intelligent policies are voted into office at every level.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy, our energy systems, and our lives in the next five to ten years. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of climate change, racism, and exploitation.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Our experience is that though people are vulnerable

to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm. In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing.

By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



For more information, see:

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