



# Insights for Receiving Communities: Understanding US Climate Migration

Zube Lecture Series | September 5, 2024 | 4:00 ET

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# Lincoln Institute & UMass, Amherst Climate Migration Workshop, March 2024

People with lived and learned experience from communities, professional practice, and the academy

A glimpse at the state of knowledge, practice, thinking, and readiness for climate migration

Pre-convening survey + 1.5 day workshop



## And.... Work from UMass!

- *Receiving Communities During COVID-19: Lessons for Climate Migration*
- Omur Damla Kuru\*, Paromita Shome\*, E. Infield, H. Renski, E. Hodos\*
- Under review
- *Understanding US Internal Climate Migration: Research to Date and Implications for Planners*
- Paromita Shome\*, Omur Damla Kuru\*, E. Infield
- Under review

\* = PhD candidate, Masters student, or Post-doctoral Associate

# Climate Migration in the United States

- In 2022, 3.2 million people in the U.S. were displaced due to climate-related events, and 500,000 had not returned to their home one year later<sup>1</sup>
- In the U.S. alone, 162 million people (nearly 1 in 2) may experience a decline in the quality of their environment --more heat, less water, increased floods, etc.<sup>2</sup> (but will they move?)
- High-end projections suggest 13.1 million movers from SLR alone by 2100<sup>3</sup>
- At least 57% of U.S. adults state that climate-related events will influence their decisions to move<sup>4</sup>

1/ US Census

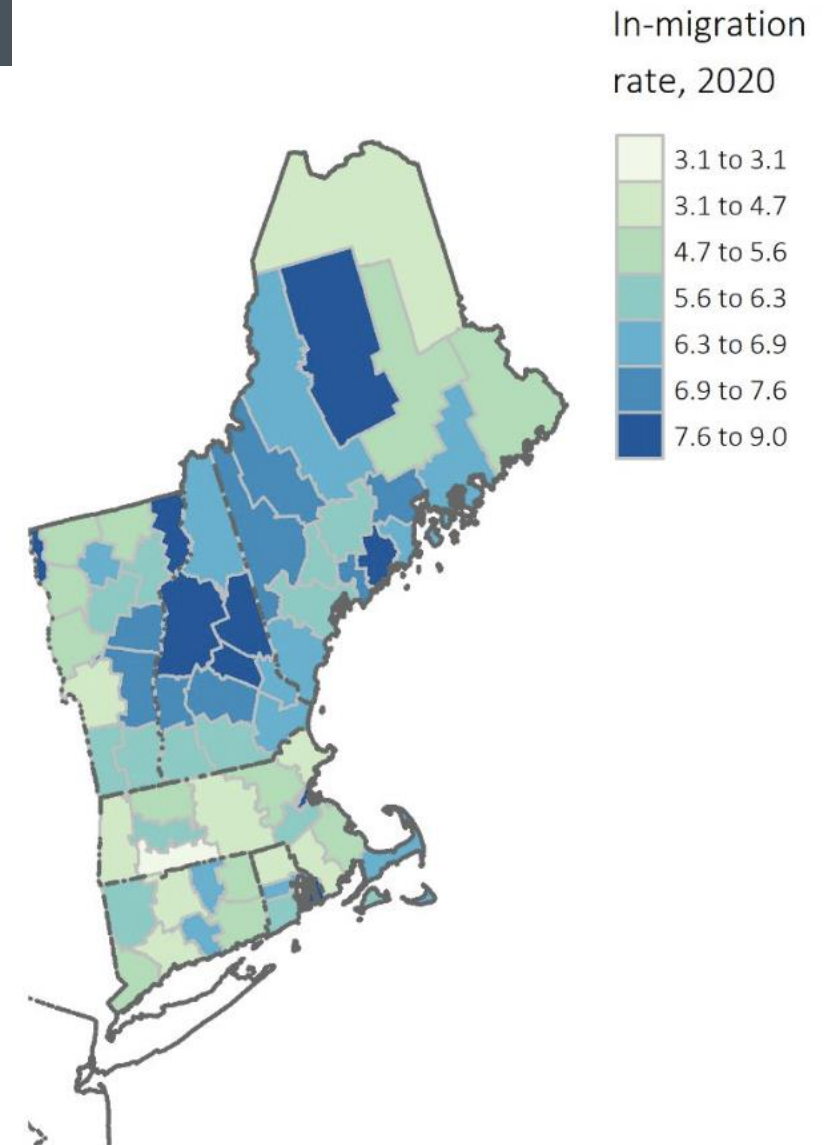
2/ [NYT Lustgarten](#)

3/ [Hauer et al 2016](#)

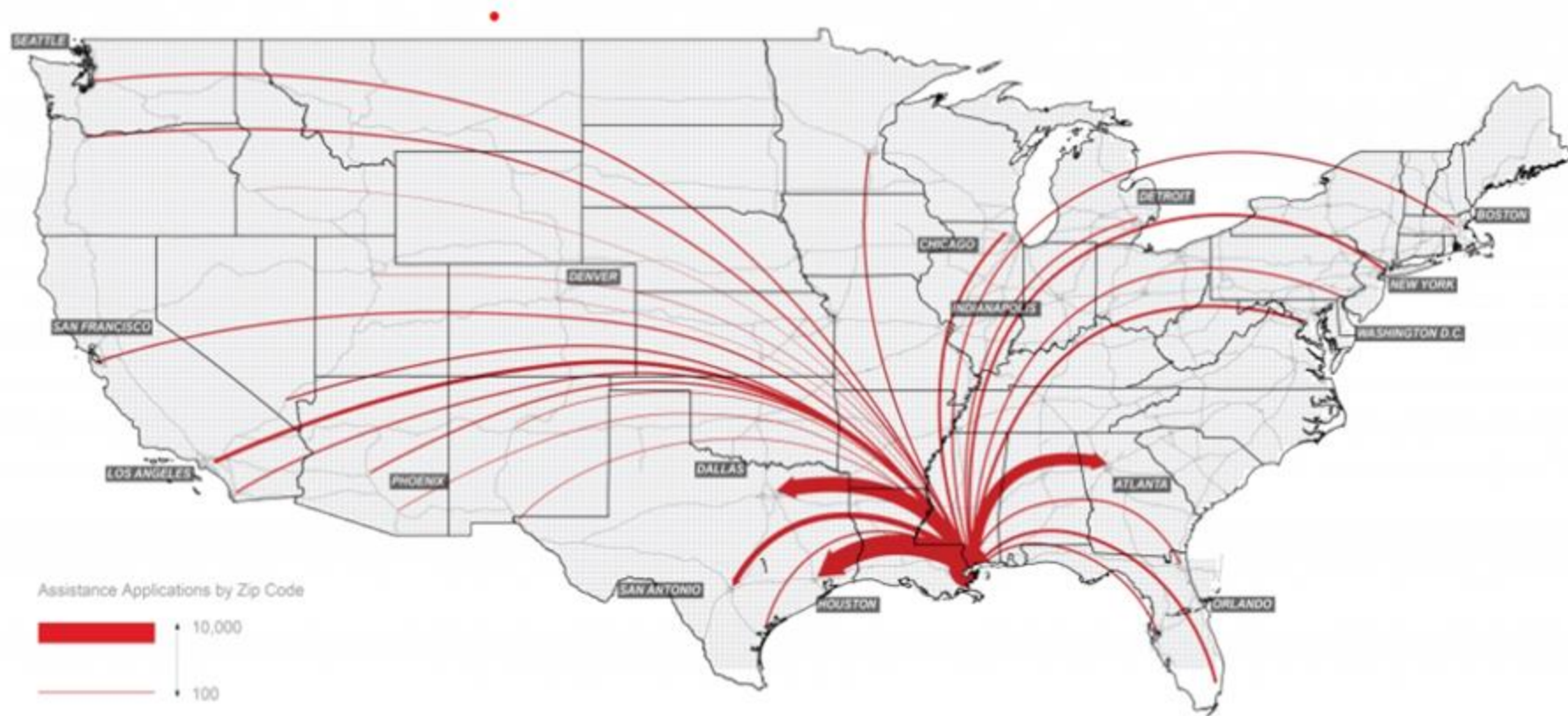
4/ [Kim, Kay and Shuldt 2021](#)

## But is CM happening now?

- Questionable.
- Real estate brokers in New England areas receiving a lot of out-of-state incomers during Covid
- Reported that few clients indicated climate as their first concern
- But it was second or third on the list for many (Kuru et al 2024)



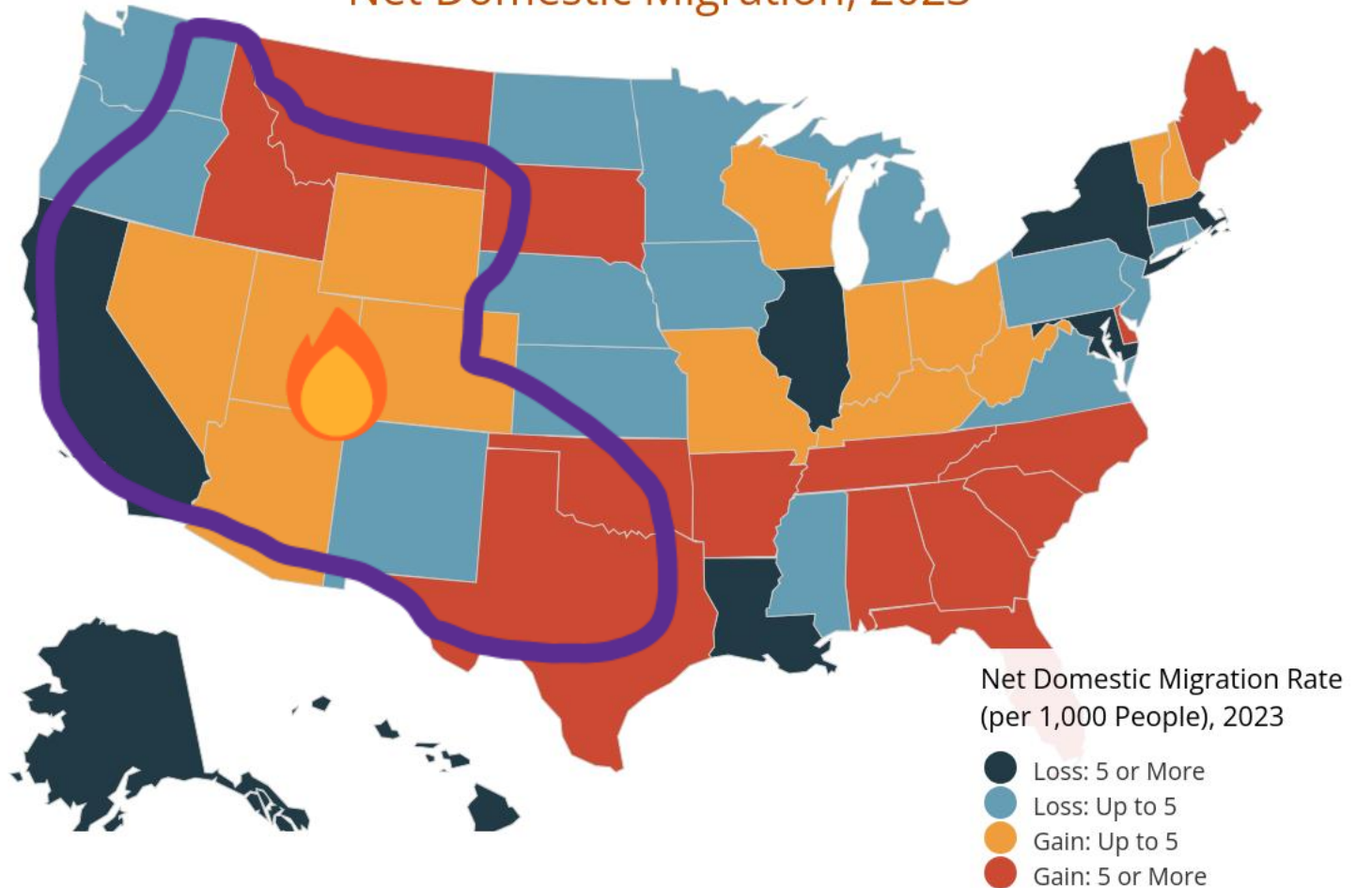
# What does U.S. climate migration look like?



The Katrina Diaspora: Distribution of the **1.36 million** FEMA assistance applications in the months following the disaster (5/ Erikson, Tse and Wilgoren 2005)

- BUT: More people are moving toward harm than away from it

## Net Domestic Migration, 2023



Notes: Natural population change is the difference between births and deaths.  
Source: Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies tabulations of US Census Bureau, Vintage 2023 Population Estimates.

General outline taken from  
<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/natural-hazards>

# Rapid versus Slow Migration

## Fast onset

- Set in motion by disaster
- Chaotic and largely unplanned by households
- Receiving communities: Disaster response, social services

## Slow onset

- Family risk and resources calculation
- Thresholds are unclear
- Receiving communities: Proactive planning for growth



Rescue of family impacted by Hurricane Harvey flooding, 2017. Image Credit: FEMA





# Who gets to go?

- Households with the **flexibility** to choose relocation and the **means** to afford real estate are likely to move
- High risk of '**trapped** populations' without the means to leave even as quality of life declines
- Huge justice issues!



# The Wildcard – Property Insurance

- No homeowner's insurance = no new mortgages, frozen real estate market, property values drop 15 – 35%<sup>6</sup>, harming residents, affordable housing and towns
- North Carolina: Insurers propose a 42% average increase in premiums this year<sup>7</sup>
- Insurers are leaving high-risk areas/states

6/ McKinsey Global Institute  
7/ NC Dept of Insurance

*The Atlantic*

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## Are You Sure Your House Is Worth That Much?

Climate risk is still not being priced into American homeownership.

By Zoë Schlanger

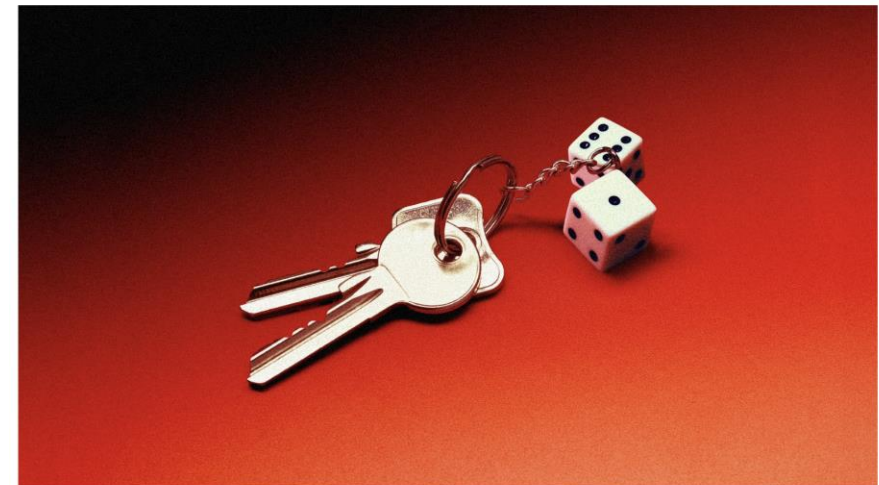


Illustration by Matteo Giuseppe Pani. Source: Getty.

# Where will they go?

Climate Haven – No place is without risk

## Generally

Most movement will be within the metro area – people stay local for jobs and family

Some estimates suggest 25 million people living in likely receiving areas will experience CM pressure<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to untangle climate migration from other drivers, particularly **social** and **economic**.



*Montpelier, VT  
(Source: PBS, 2023)*

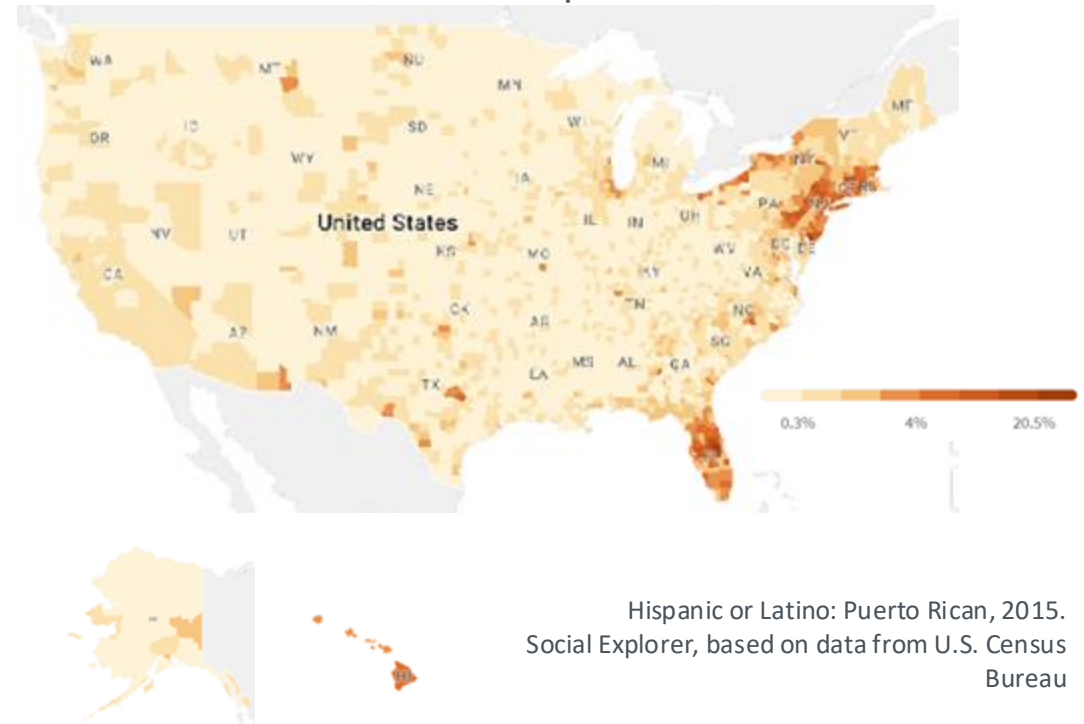
# They go where they know....

People relocate to places with relationships, whether personal or along existing cultural and economic migration pathways



Image credit: Holyoke Lends a Free Hand, 2009

Total Population, Puerto Rican



Hispanic or Latino: Puerto Rican, 2015.  
Social Explorer, based on data from U.S. Census  
Bureau



# Receiving Community Challenges and Needs

## Housing

- Availability, affordability, out of harm's way

## Infrastructure

- Enough resilient transportation, pipes, technology in the right places
- Social services, schools, ....

## Socioeconomic

- Preventing gentrification and displacement
- Welcoming newcomers: social connections and integration

## Coordination

- Across sectors, agencies, regional jurisdictions

*The folks who are coming... from places [...] that have such high prices for real estate, were able to come in with **cash**... That's made quite a bit of difference when it comes to **competing with the locals who are doing financing**.*

*Broker, Grand Isle County, VT*

# Thinking Beyond Disaster Response



Chico CA after the Camp Fire in Paradise CA, 2018. Image Credit: Los Angeles Times

The current conversation about receiving climate migrants is almost exclusively about disaster response

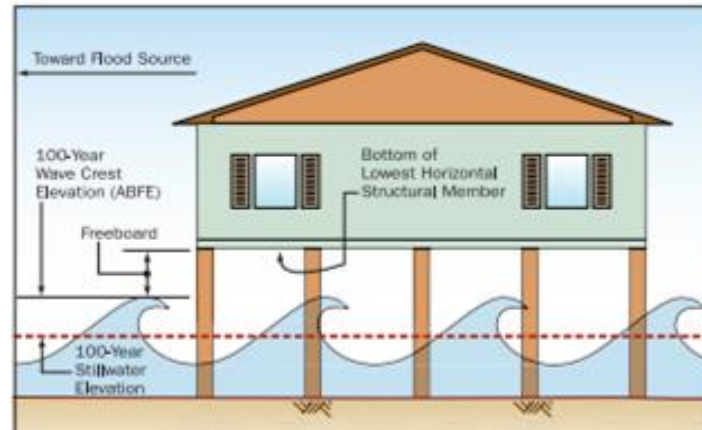
It also needs to be about long-term planning

# Improved Communities Now Means Better Places with CM

- Housing access and affordability
- Resilient and sufficient infrastructure
- Disaster response plans
- Regional planning



Source: Cape Cod Times



Source: US FEMA

Source: Seattle Water Utilities



# Consider Retreat as a First, not Last, Option

- ❑ Resilience requires land
- ❑ Proactive planning to use high-risk land for adaptation/resilience
- ❑ Protects inland properties, planful change for those at risk
- ❑ Complicated! Justice Issues! Necessary!



# Some concluding thoughts



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# Thank you!

## Download the Report



### Insights for Receiving Communities in Planning Equitable and Positive Outcomes Under Climate Migration: Expert Convening Results

Working Paper WP24EI1

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