

GUIDANCE NOTE

The Role of Faith Actors in Responding to Climate- Induced Migration



Why faith matters in responding to climate change and migration

Faith actors are well recognized as first responders and trusted partners for communities that face forced migration due to climate change and related events. They mobilize material support (food, shelter, medical treatment) while delivering important psychosocial and spiritual care to those affected, often doing so before, during and after migration. Unfortunately, their actions and contributions can remain invisible in policy circles and among funding streams which leaves them under-sourced and excluded from adaptation and resilience planning.

Across South Asia, East Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, JLI and Christian Aid's [Evidence Review on Faith and Climate Migration](#) showed that faith actors are distinct in the sense that they also acknowledge intangible losses (such as the disintegration of community, social trust and support systems, loss of sacred land and cultural practices tied to them) are rarely documented in mainstream research, which is vital for culturally sensitive and more effective humanitarian and emergency responses. Their activities promote resilience beyond what state services can offer, especially in areas where governments have little presence. Recognizing and elevating faith actors can strengthen sustainable responses due to their moral authority and local legitimacy.



This guidance note is aimed at policymakers, humanitarian and development practitioners, researchers and faith-based actors at national and subnational levels, as well as multilateral partners who design, fund and implement climate migration and adaptation responses, providing practical faith-sensitive recommendations.

Introduction and Description of the Research Process

This research explored how faith and climate migration intersect, focusing on the real experiences of communities and faith organisations which are areas that are frequently overlooked in formal studies. It combined a review of over 100 academic and practitioner sources with listening sessions that gathered insights from more than 50 faith leaders, community members, and experts across three regions. These sessions sparked discussion about ethical issues, cultural loss, and future priorities for research and policy.

Limitations in the research include a focus on English-language and online sources, which may miss important local or non-digital perspectives and smaller initiatives.

Barriers to faith-sensitive climate migration

Participants in the dialogues highlighted how faith actors are frequently excluded from national adaptation plans and policy discussions, as well as from humanitarian clusters and high level climate forums. This limits their access to decision making processes and resources, undercutting opportunities for them to fully contribute to response strategies.

- ➔ **Limited budgets and a lack of dedicated resources**, among other financial constraints were also listed as a common barrier, including a lack of resources and access to monitoring, evaluation, documentation or advocacy. Due to this reason, innovative practices are unsystematized or underrecognized.
- ➔ There is little coordination between and across denominations and religious traditions. This **fragmented and inconsistent approach** limits interfaith collaboration which limits potential impact and the likelihood of mutual learning, reach and impact.
- ➔ Due to a **lack of documentation** in formal reports many potentially beneficial interventions, particularly those of a psychosocial nature, such as rituals and ceremonies, render them invisible to policy-makers and practitioners in other regions. These are central to community resilience.





Region-specific findings

Latin America and the Caribbean

In this region, faith actors act as first responders and long-term advocates for migrants rights. Religious spaces provide emergency shelter, food distribution, and psychosocial support during and after extreme weather events. Faith leaders frame environmental stewardship and the promotion of community resilience as a moral imperative. With a comparatively advanced legal ecosystem faith based perspectives remain under studied and underrepresented in many formal policy debates. Participants in the LAC listening Dialogues called for investment in capacity building for narrative capture, a regional learning hub to house case studies, toolkits and policy briefs, and strengthened interfaith networks. Attendees also highlighted the importance and uniqueness of indigenous and afro latino perspectives regarding climate change.

East Africa

Across the region religious congregations are often the first line of support for pastoralist and agro pastoralist communities when facing drought, floods and conflicts. Religious communities also facilitate communal rituals that strengthen social cohesion and enable collective healing during and after climate change related events. Participants in the listening dialogues expressed that religious actors' efforts are constrained by resource shortage and exclusion from adaptation planning. There is also a lack of formal platforms for multi-denominational coordination. Therefore, participants spoke about the need to establish interfaith councils for climate adaptation, the co-developing of documentation tools and the formal recognition of faith representatives in policy forums.

South Asia

Religious narratives in this region shape how communities interpret and respond to climate change and migration caused by it. Mosques, for example, issue relief directives and coordinate shelters, which is a clear example of the intersection between spiritual care, psychosocial support and material assistance. Dialogue participants recommended giving climate science training to religious leaders and the development of tools to document tangible and intangible aid and spiritual practices.



Recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based actors, international NGOs, donors and policy-makers, researchers and knowledge institutions; and national and sub-national government bodies

- ➔ Faith actors **can reframe climate migration and effective interventions** through sacred narratives, which can be an effective way to increase engagement across recipient communities, and increase the impact of non-religious interventions.
- ➔ Religious leaders and communities of faith can also **leverage their moral authority and local trust** to advocate for rights-based protections and more inclusive policy reform. This type of advocacy should recognize the needs and voices of minority groups as well as that of those who are more disadvantaged or vulnerable.
- ➔ **Develop tools** that help identify the full spectrum of faith-based support, which includes the entire range of ways faith actors contribute to people's well-being: material aid (food, cash, shelter) and basic services (health, education, referrals), as well as psychosocial and spiritual care, community mobilization and social networks, and technical assistance, mediation and local governance roles, and public advocacy or representation. These should be simple, culturally sensitive, standardized, and easy to use, so as to enable faith actors to record their material assistance and advocacy efforts.
- ➔ The humanitarian and aid sectors can work with communities of faith to **identify and adapt rituals and practices** that encourage collective wellbeing. It is important to acknowledge intangible losses.
- ➔ **Convene multi-religious and cross-sector partnerships** to encourage shared learning and co-created solutions.
- ➔ The co-creation of programs and research agendas must **include faith communities as equal partners**, not simply as beneficiaries or service providers.



Want the full story?



Scan the QR code to explore the complete evidence review on faith and climate migration.



This publication is part of a collaboration between **Christian Aid** and the **Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI)**. We would like to extend our gratitude to all interviewees, individuals, and organizations who contributed to this work, providing valuable insights and resources that helped shape this research.

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