

22 April 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Executive Order 14013 on Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration

Dear President Biden:

In Executive Order 14013, “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration,” you called on the “APNSA, in consultation with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, and the Director of National Intelligence” to, within 180 days, “prepare and submit to the President a report on climate change and its impact on migration, including forced migration, internal displacement, and planned relocation.” Amongst other topics, the report is expected to discuss opportunities to work collaboratively with “localities to respond to migration resulting directly or indirectly from climate change.”

As mayors, we deal with the impacts of climate change and migration on a daily basis. We welcome the initiative of this report and stand ready to contribute to its development. We commend the Biden Administration for rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and reengaging in global conversations on the Global Compact for Migration. Together with the Global Compact on Refugees, these agreements provide a framework to respond consistently and collectively to the worldwide challenge of climate-related migration. American cities’ continued engagement in these agreements over the past years offers a stepping-stone for rebuilding U.S. global leadership.

We request the agencies responsible for the report to actively engage U.S. mayors and municipalities in its development process and:

- 1. Partner with localities in proactively preparing for the reception and inclusion of those who move for climate-related reasons.**

The impacts of climate change are forecasted to drive increased movement of people within countries and across borders. Global estimates vary widely, but the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that by 2050, there could be between 25 million to 1 billion people moving either within their countries or across borders for climate-related reasons. In the United States and around the world, most migrants, refugees, and displaced persons arrive and settle in cities. Local actions—above all the provision of inclusive services—determine whether people have the tools they need to thrive in their new home and enrich our societies, or face precarity and exclusion.

As the United States responds to new migrants arriving at the Southern border, the need for national and local authorities to work together and plan ahead continues to be clear. We need to address the broken link between immigration and inclusion policies, so painfully evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when the undocumented population—many of whom are essential workers—was excluded from Federal and some State relief measures, and when many more historically marginalized Americans were underserved in emergency response efforts. We welcome the Administration’s introduction of the U.S. Citizenship Act

of 2021, which includes many key provisions for promoting integration and inclusion, and hope to see Congress move it forward. We also applaud the Administration's commitment to reestablishing the Taskforce on New Americans and encourage further investments in local inclusion infrastructure by establishing a federal Office of New Americans. This national support for local efforts is vital to create the conditions for all to thrive in the United States.

We stand ready to contribute to the development of safe and regular pathways to address climate-related movements, including through the revitalization of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and through building communities that welcome all newcomers with easy access to services and support, regardless of immigration status. Through networks like [Cities for Action](#) and [Welcoming America](#), U.S. cities, towns, and counties are already organizing to support each other and increase our capacity for inclusion. Engaging with localities in the development of the report will ensure its findings and recommendations are informed by local realities, lessons learned, and best practices.

2. Apply a local lens to U.S. foreign assistance priorities.

Most people affected by climate hazards are expected to move within their own countries. The World Bank estimates that [slow onset effects like sea level rise and water shortages could force more than 143 million people](#) in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia to move within their countries by 2050, adding to rapid urbanization trends that put pressure on city infrastructure and services. Many of the cities that will absorb these populations on the move are also acutely vulnerable to climate hazards.

The 2018 assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that “[m]uch of key and emerging global climate risks are concentrated in urban areas,” and that those “risks are increasing [...] with widespread negative impacts on people (and their health, livelihoods, and assets) and on local and national economies and ecosystems.” Cities’ preparedness and resilience in the face of climate impacts—from immediate onset disasters like hurricanes and flooding to slow onset consequences like extreme heat—is essential to save lives and protect people from displacement. Yet, each year trillions of dollars in urban infrastructure investment needs go unmet.

More can and should be done to support localities in building resilience and adaptation mechanisms so they can welcome and serve those moving to their communities as well as ensure people’s decision to migrate is a matter of choice, not just survival. As we start to emerge from COVID-19 and deal with its searing impacts on our lives and livelihoods, many global mayors are working with [C40 Cities](#) to advocate to invest in a green and just recovery. They call national governments and international institutions to direct all stimulus packages, corporate aid, and recovery funds to support a low carbon just transition and to prioritize investment in sustainable, climate-resilient industries and infrastructure.

The United States can use its foreign assistance and influence in international organizations to extend support to cities in the most climate vulnerable countries and regions to help them manage urban growth, build the resilience of urban populations and systems, and invest in preventative measures and planning. American cities are working through global networks such as C40 Cities, the [Mayors Migration Council](#), and [Welcoming International](#) to share knowledge and advocate for supportive policies and access to financing for cities around the world. We stand ready to share this knowledge with the Administration.

3. Follow our lead and center people in climate policy to ensure equity and inclusion.

Credible American leadership on climate migration around the world requires that we take action here at home. Within the United States, it is estimated that up to [13 million people could be displaced from submerged coastlines](#) by the end of the century, many of whom will move towards economic centers—our cities. A national carbon neutrality plan is essential to mitigate future climate migration impacts and we welcome your pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. As we anticipate the effects of sea level rise, wildfires, higher temperatures, and extreme weather events to reshape the population distribution across the country, we need a coherent national adaptation and mitigation response framework in consultation with local leaders. This response should galvanize the efforts of all relevant departments and agencies across all levels of government to bolster and invest in the resilience of frontline communities. This should include increased resources to plan and facilitate conversations about land use changes, while preparing for scenarios such as planned relocation and retreat that preserves the will, assets, rights, and agency of those in affected communities and ensures that race, status, language, gender, and income are not reinforced as barriers to well-being.

Many localities in the United States, large and small, already have community resilience plans that recognize demographic change, equity, and climate justice as key factors in determining their success. The Biden Administration should tap into this body of knowledge to build inclusive infrastructure that creates equitable outcomes while capitalizing and harnessing the talent, innovation, and opportunities that demographic change can spur for civic, social, and economic renewal.

Cities are committing, through efforts such as the [Race to Zero](#), to reduce our carbon footprint by cutting emissions from those sectors most responsible for the climate crisis to keep global heating below the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement; to halve emissions by 2030; and to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. But we need to do much more to adapt our cities to the health and climate crises and to increase the resilience of our fundamental services.

Taking inclusive climate action is about upholding our duty toward our own communities, and we are committed to working hand-in-hand with our most marginalized populations to ensure that our climate responses consider and address their needs, reducing exposure to hazards such as heat stress, air, and water pollution, and avoiding exacerbating inequity. We welcome the [Environmental Protection Agency's directive of March 7, 2021](#) to immediately incorporate environmental justice and equity into all aspects of the agency's work.

Collaborating and cooperating at the local and national level, we can take ambitious climate action and drive toward decarbonization as an opportunity to create good jobs and healthier, more resilient cities where all our residents, including newcomers and immigrant communities, can thrive.

We invite our fellow mayors to join our request to be actively engaged in the development of climate migration policy by signing this open letter. To add your city's voice, please email climate@mayorsmigrationcouncil.org.

We are encouraged that the Biden-Harris Administration is taking up the mantle of leadership to address this important topic in a forward-looking manner. To discuss this priority request, please reach out to Vittoria Zanuso, Executive Director of the Mayors Migration Council at vzanuso@mayorsmigrationcouncil.org (cc: Head of Policy and Advocacy Maggie Powers at mpowers@mayorsmigrationcouncil.org).

CC:

Anthony Blinken, Secretary, Department of State
John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Gloria Steele, Acting Administrator, US Agency for International Development

Respectfully,

Steve Adler
Mayor of Austin, Texas

Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City, New York

Cyndy Andrus
Mayor of Bozeman, Montana

Libby Schaaf
Mayor of Oakland, California

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