
CAN TWO NEGATIVES MAKE A POSITIVE? CLIMATE MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN MICHIGAN

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Climate migration, or the movement of people due to environmental factors such as climate change, is becoming an increasingly pressing issue globally. The possibility that climate change might make the state of Michigan a more attractive place for people to live has gained public traction and attracted significant media attention in the past few years. According to a report by the World Bank, Michigan is one of the top ten US states that may

experience significant in-migration due to climate change by 2050. The report suggests that Michigan's temperate climate, freshwater resources, and agricultural potential could make it an attractive destination for climate migrants. With this large migration comes many new challenges. MSU Professor Daniel Ahlquist argues, "The story of climate migration...is not simply about the movements of people. Because both

climate change and migration occur within a dynamic and highly unequal social, political, and economic landscape” (“Climate and Human Migration”, 2019). However, while this potential migration presents some challenges, it may also be an opportunity for positive community development.

Compared to other regions in the US that are experiencing climate-related challenges such as drought, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise, Michigan may be perceived as a more favorable place to live due to its abundant natural resources and projected climate amenities. These resources and amenities include freshwater, forests, and cooler temperatures, which could be increasingly valued in a warmer world. Along with this, an increasing number of data points including a study by the University of Georgia support the claim that the Upper Midwest, specifically Michigan, may see an influx of climate migrants due to its cooler temperatures, which could provide relief from heat waves and droughts in other regions. The study also notes that the Upper Midwest has a relatively low risk of natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires, which could make it a more stable place to live. However, it is important to note that climate

migration is a novel, complex, and multi-faceted issue, and its emergence and effects are uncertain. The potential for climate migrants to move to Michigan will depend on a variety of factors, including future climate impacts, economic conditions, and social and political factors. With all of this in mind, it is becoming increasingly accepted that Michigan will see a large influx of residents in the coming years, in a migration pattern that has already begun taking its course.

Due to a variety of factors, the majority of climate migrants are considered racial and ethnic minorities. This large influx of a new, diverse population of people will greatly reshape the demographics of Michigan. Such drastic change may be concerning to some. However, it is important to keep in mind that this new population of residents has an unprecedented potential to create many opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and community revitalization.

To take advantage of these new opportunities on the horizon, local communities in Michigan must proactively prepare and plan for potential climate migration today. This involves identifying the needs and desires of incoming residents and

ensuring that infrastructure, housing, and social services are in place to accommodate them. For example, investing in green infrastructure, such as parks and greenways, can help improve the livability of communities and attract new residents. The CCED is already working with numerous community partners to produce research, sponsor programs, and promote new knowledge surrounding affordable housing solutions. These efforts must be concentrated in the coming years, to ensure that migration does not exacerbate existing housing affordability issues. If we can successfully create affordable housing options, then we can integrate new residents into the local economy, and job force much more effectively.

Climate migration can also provide an opportunity to address existing inequalities and climate vulnerabilities within communities. By involving and listening to the perspectives of both current and potential residents, local governments can identify and address the root causes of these issues. One of the main principles of community development at CCED includes the promotion of active and representative citizen participation. The CCED believes that through this active participation, community members can meaningfully influence decisions that affect their situation. This same

principle can be applied to climate migration planning. Such active and representative citizen participation can lead to more equitable and sustainable community development in a time such as this.

Climate migration can present both challenges and opportunities for local community development in Michigan. While the emergence and character of such migration are still uncertain, it is essential that communities prepare and plan for potential climate migration in a proactive and equitable manner. The CCED and many of our community partners have already laid the foundation for more sustainable planning practices. We must continue such efforts, and further invest in future programs that support the needs of the current and incoming residents of Michigan. By doing so, Michigan can take advantage of potential opportunities and address existing challenges to create more just and sustainable communities.

