

## **PS 3.3**

**MOVING FUTURES: MIGRATION, LABOR, AND THE HEALTH OF A CHANGING  
PLANET**

## | BACKGROUND

Currently, the United Nations estimates there are about 304 million international migrants in the world, which equates to 3.7 per cent of the global population. But increasing numbers of people are being displaced, within and out of their country of origin, because of conflict, violence, political or economic instability as well as climate change and other disasters. In 2024, there were 123 million people forcibly displaced globally, including 73 million internally displaced people. (UN DESA, 2024; IOM World Migration Report, 2024)

Global health in the 21st century will be transformed by these evolving and expanding challenges with migrants deeply intertwined at multiple levels. Migrant labor is essential to the functioning of economies, particularly in sectors like agriculture, construction, domestic work, and healthcare. However, migrant workers often face exploitative conditions: informal contracts, lack of legal protections, unsafe workplaces, and exclusion from labor rights and benefits. These vulnerabilities are heightened for irregular or undocumented migrants, who may accept hazardous jobs due to limited options. Current geopolitical dynamics raise additional concerns and challenges for global migration, particularly for the health and wellbeing of migrants.

Globally, there is increasing demand for international migrants to support long-term care, including the outmigration of health personnel to developing countries, exacerbating the health labor shortage in developing countries.

Climate change is also altering migration patterns. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and droughts are already displacing communities, particularly in the Global South. As traditional livelihoods become unsustainable, people are pushed to urban centers or across borders in search of work. These climate migrants often end up in precarious labor markets, further compounding their exposure to health risks and economic exploitation.

Health outcomes for migrants are shaped by a complex interplay of social, environmental, and political factors. Upon arrival in host countries, migrants may face barriers such as language differences, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare services. Even when services are available, fear of deportation, cultural misunderstandings, and financial constraints often deter migrants from seeking care. Occupational health is a critical concern. Migrant workers are frequently employed in high-risk industries with little protection—resulting in elevated rates of injury, chronic illness, and mental health disorders.

### References:

- IOM-UN Migration. World Migration Report, 2024. ISBN (PDF) **978-92-9268-598-0**
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), International Migration and Sustainable Development. December 2024
- Editorial. The uncertain future of migrant and refugee health. *Lancet*. Vol 405:2103. June 14, 2025. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2825%2901245-0>
- Severoni S, Marotta C, Borghi J. Universal health coverage in the context of migration and displacement: a cosmopolitan perspective. *Lancet*. June 16, 2025, 1-3. DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667(25)00117-3
- WHO on refugee and migrant health: [https://www.who.int/health-topics/refugee-and-migrant-health#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/refugee-and-migrant-health#tab=tab_1)
- UNHCR on forced displacement: [https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics#\\_ftn1](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics#_ftn1)
- World Bank report on climate change and migration: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/2c9150df-52c3-58ed-9075-d78ea56c3267>
- WHO global action plan on promoting the health of refugees and migrants, 2019-2030: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240093928>
- Health Policy Watch report: <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/who-to-shrink-its-geneva-headquarters-down-to-just-four-divisions-with-health-systems-a-key-pillar/>

## | OBJECTIVES

This parallel session will seek to identify actionable steps to address the manifold challenges related to global migration, labor, and health, including:

- Expanding universal health coverage to include undocumented and cross-border migrants.
- Ensuring occupational and environmental health protections for migrant workers in high-risk sectors.

- Integrating migration and displacement into national climate adaptation strategies.
- Strengthening transnational legal frameworks that uphold migrant rights and health access.
- Understanding how ageing populations shape the demand for female migrant caregivers.
- Supporting community-based organizing and data sovereignty efforts led by migrants.



Moderator

**Kelly Perry**

*PhD Student*

Duke University  
United States of America

I am a Thai American researcher, writer, & advocate from Chiang Mai, Thailand & currently based in Durham, NC, USA. A PhD student at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, I tackle environmental health inequities associated with disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and pollutants—particularly in the context of climate change and extreme heat events. I aim to quantify the adverse mental and physical health impacts of exposure to harmful pollutants particularly in disenfranchised, vulnerable communities to inform public health communication, disaster preparedness & response strategies, and environmental health policy. I conduct research that integrates principles of environmental justice and health equity to develop and evaluate interventions to prevent widening climate-related disease disparities and address socio-ecological drivers of inequity and/or disease distribution, especially in the face of proliferating health crises due to climate change and systems-level inequities.

I have worked in Thailand, Morocco, South Africa, & the US, & am grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues & organizations across Asia, the Pacific, & sub-Saharan Africa. I have served as an inaugural Brown University Information Futures Lab fellow working to center citizen science in climate & air pollution action, a 2022 Emerging Voices for Global Health (EV4GH) fellow, a member of the Wedu (women's leadership development nonprofit) Board of Directors, & an adjunct faculty at UNC Chapel Hill.

As a Climate Justice fellow with the Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice and Health (CEEJH) at the University of Maryland School of Public Health, I work to use my community scientist "hat" to identify solutions rooted in environmental & climate justice in my communities.

I hold an MPH from UNC Chapel Hill & a BA (triple major in Neuroscience, Creative Writing, & Public Health) from Vanderbilt University.