



Guidance for All Disaster Responses Regarding Immigrants & Refugees

When asking about vulnerable populations in the wake of disaster, remember to include immigrant communities, in addition to the elderly, disabled, etc. The vulnerabilities of immigrant populations are obviously different from the others listed and can vary depending on their time in the U.S. and life experience. Some important considerations are:

- Level of English language proficiency
- Lack of familiarity with emergency resources and systems
- A reluctance to approach governmental offices or officers due to concerns about immigration status, including possible prior negative interactions with US immigration officials or stories from family and friends.
- prior negative interactions with corrupt and/or abusive government officials in their places of origin;
- Fear of making some kind of mistake that would worsen their situation due to lack of understanding of US culture and role of government and non-governmental agencies in disaster response.
- Cultural practices and taboos that may be unfamiliar to responders
- The new catastrophic event (natural or human-caused disaster) on top of earlier traumatic experiences may surface new trauma responses in individuals.

Positive interaction with immigrant populations can be slowed by the necessity of establishing a relationship of trust. Some ways of easing this potential hurdle are:

- Ascertain who in the faith community already has a relationship with the immigrant community, and work with and through that entity
- Ascertain who in the immigrant community is trusted as an intermediary or as a “wise elder” to serve as the primary contact with outside entities
- Develop a clear understanding of local resources, both public and private, for assistance to immigrants

Disaster responders who interact with immigrant communities are likely to hear at least some of the stories of those immigrants. Often these stories will include emotionally traumatic elements. It would be valuable for both team leads and care buddies to be aware of the power or secondary and tertiary emotional trauma. This has implications for daily debriefings and post-deployment debriefings.

NRT members may request technical support from PDA/Migration Accompaniment Ministries staff members if questions arise during or after the deployment related to immigrants and refugees. Their contact information is as follows:

- **Rev. Emily Wilkes, Mission Specialist for Domestic Refugee Ministries**
emily.wilkes@pcusa.org | (502) 381-4657



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- **Susan Krehbiel, Associate for Migration Accompaniment Ministries**
susan.krehbiel@pcusa.org | (502) 565-6148

There are also several resources on the NRT Quiet Page under the Migration Accompaniment Section. These documents are not for sharing outside the NRT without prior approval to ensure that information is not misinterpreted.

PDA staff or a member of the Migration Accompaniment Team may contact you after the deployment for a debriefing.