

Environmental Refugees and Human Trafficking

September 2017

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U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery. Visit [http:// www.sistersagainsttrafficking.org](http://www.sistersagainsttrafficking.org) to learn more.

Following recent climate disasters, Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and the earthquake in Mexico, members of the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking believed it would be helpful to share a module entitled “Human Trafficking and Environmental Refugees” for reflection and discussion. The module can be found at

<http://www.sistersagainsttrafficking.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/USCSAHT-HT-and-Environmental-Refugees-module.pdf>

A brief excerpt from the module states: “In June 2014, the number of refugees worldwide exceeded 50 million children, women and men. Half of these refugees are children, many travelling alone or in groups. Millions of these refugees are people displaced because of environmental disasters. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that in the coming years millions of people will be forced to relocate due to effects of climate change, including shoreline erosion, coastal flooding or disruption of normal farming practices. Today analysts predict that this crisis in the making will affect 150-200 million men, women and children by 2050, or roughly one in every 45 persons on earth...

Women and children are especially vulnerable during any forced displacement, and they are at risk for gender-based violence and human trafficking. Many children are separated from their families during an environmental disaster. According to the UNHCR, children alone represent more than half of the people of concern. These children, unaccompanied by any adult or caregiver, are targets for traffickers. Two months after Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, aid agencies warned that up to two million children were at risk of abuse or trafficking.

After Superstorm Sandy, the state of New Jersey allotted more than \$1.5 million to bolster human trafficking prevention and treatment services for homeless youth. Unfortunately, the areas of the world that are most affected by disasters related to climate change are the least likely to have the resources to protect their citizens.”

Sources for the module’s content are:

United Nations Woman Watch

[www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women and Climate Change Factsheet.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf)

United Nations Environmental Program Handbook for Protection on Internally Displaced Persons

www.unhcr.org/4c2355229.pdf

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Trafficking Risks for Refugees

digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=humtraffconf3

A second resource was provided in early September by Polaris Project (www.polarisproject.org). The article follows.

Natural Disasters and the Increased Risk for Human Trafficking

September 1, 2017

Brandon Bouchard, Director of Media Relations - Polaris Project

While every human trafficking victim is different, a common thread they share is the presence of a vulnerability that traffickers exploit. Those types of vulnerabilities are rampant in the aftermath of natural disasters. Homelessness is one of the top risk factors reported by survivors to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and we often learn that survivors were recruited by traffickers near shelters or centers helping people in need.

In fact, one of the largest labor trafficking cases in United States history resulted from human trafficking that occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. You can read more about that case from the Southern Poverty Law Center [here](#).

As people throughout the United States continue to deal with the horrific hardships stemming from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, it is critical that a response to potential human trafficking is part of long-term recovery efforts. Local service providers and the organizations in the fight against human trafficking throughout Texas, Louisiana, and Florida need help more than ever as they provide aid to people affected by these natural disasters.

Below are a few organizations partnered with the National Human Trafficking Hotline that we encourage you to donate to, and you can search for more in the Human Trafficking Referral Directory.

- YMCA of Greater Houston
- Houston Area Women's Center
- United Against Human Trafficking
- Freedom Place
- Kristi House
- International Rescue Committee (IRC) - Miami
- Catholic Charities - Diocese of Palm Beach
- More Too Life
- Selah Freedom

To learn more about the impact climate change is having on human trafficking throughout the world, read this important report from our friends at the International Organization for Migration: ***The Climate Change-Human Trafficking Nexus*** at:

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mecc_infosheet_climate_change_nexus.pdf

Excerpts from this document note: “Climate change increases the risk of natural disasters and places a strain on livelihoods; it exacerbates poverty and can potentially cause situations of conflict and instability. These conditions, when combined with a mismatch between demand for labour and supply and the proliferation of unscrupulous recruitment agencies, increase high-risk behaviours and other negative coping strategies among affected populations. This may include resorting to migrant smugglers, which in turn makes them vulnerable to trafficking in persons (TiP) and associated forms of exploitation and abuse. The impact of climate change, however, is rarely considered as a potential contributor to human trafficking in global discussions or national level policy frameworks,¹ and the nexus remains relatively underexplored.” (p. 3)

“These incidents of human trafficking in the wake of sudden- and slow-onset disasters demonstrate the necessity of a planned response to address this cross-cutting issue. In general, there needs to be an acknowledgement that human trafficking can be an unintended but direct consequence when migration occurs in the absence of government support and management, after disasters or in the face of slow-onset events.” (p. 9)