



To better understand the nexus between human trafficking and disasters, researchers from RTI International conducted a series of interviews with disaster responders and social service providers. These interviews explored local experiences and knowledge about the intersection of human trafficking and hurricanes.

This document is a compilation of findings, interview quotes, emergent practices from Louisiana respondents and promising practices identified in the literature at large. This sheet focuses on key takeaways about human trafficking prevention in the wake of natural disasters.



WORKER PROTECTION

"We had several labor trafficking cases [after Ida]... they weren't getting paid, and they didn't have any recourse because they had been threatened that they would get deported."

The workers who help with rebuilding a community after a storm, known as resilience force workers, are highly vulnerable to labor exploitation after disasters. In Louisiana, these workers often are from Central America and South America but are generally employed by Louisianians, Texans, and Americans from other states. Wage theft, withholding passports, threatening deportation, violence, and non-payment were just a few examples of the abuse that practitioners had seen after Hurricanes Laura and Ida.

Ideas for the future: Engage with resilience workers by providing "know-your-rights" training; Partner with agencies already engaging with workers to learn more about worker rights and needs; Consider policy changes to that support workers' rights and worker safety in disaster resilience work.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Many people do not realize that human trafficking can happen after a natural disaster. To address this gap, practitioners in this study named **community outreach and awareness activities as a critical step to prevent trafficking.** Although anyone can experience trafficking, vulnerable populations are at a greater risk and may need extra considerations or resources during outreach activities.

Ideas for the future: Integrate language accessibility into any outreach activities; Offer free trainings at churches, community centers, and on social media to reach a variety of audiences.

Promising Practice: Check out the [Louisiana Human Trafficking and Natural Disaster Outreach Toolkit](#) for resources to share with your community members.



LESSONS FROM THE PAST

"The lesson learned is, to beforehand, do my homework. Study the data. Study the community... it can help you out a lot as far as with the problem solving and in helping assist those communities."

Many practitioners shared lessons they had learned from past storms, such as Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita, that helped them improve their response during more recent hurricanes. This practice of reflecting on past storms and applying lessons learned to update policies, procedures, practices, and laws is critical to effectively responding to human trafficking following a natural disaster. Being flexible and utilizing survivor-centered approaches were just a few of the lessons practitioners shared that they had incorporated into their response for Laura and Ida.

Ideas for the future: Host a convening to share lessons learned and document the changes that are needed to improve trafficking response following future disasters; Engage with impacted community members and survivors to learn what they believe worked well and needs improvement in the future.



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FOSTER COLLABORATION

"Build those relationships way before any [disasters] happen. Because if that is done, then you can do a lot of work during the difficult times."

Multi-disciplinary collaboration to respond to trafficking is especially important in post-disaster contexts. Interviewees noted that the rate at which their multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) reconvened following a disaster had a major impact on their ability to respond to suspected trafficking cases.

Ideas for the future: Assign dedicated personnel at your organization to investigate and respond to trafficking cases in the post storm context; Sign and implement Memoranda of Understanding for human trafficking MDTs; Build and strengthen cross-disciplinary partnerships of organizations that may come into contact with victims of human trafficking.



UPDATING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Policies and procedures are tools to assist organizations to maintain efforts in difficult conditions such as post-disaster settings. While flexibility and adaptability were identified as critical components of success, many respondents noted that preparation in terms of formal policies and procedures were necessary to maintain anti-trafficking efforts in disaster contexts.

Ideas for the future: Review existing policies and protocols; Update disaster policies and procedures to ensure specific anti-trafficking efforts can be resumed immediately following a disaster.



INCREASING HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY

"All of the hotels are damaged. All of the apartment complex are heavily damaged. So those are no longer housing options."

Louisiana's natural disasters often impact housing resources after a storm. Damage and destruction of existing structures, coupled with a high number of resilience force workers entering the housing market, housing instability becomes a critical vulnerability for community members. Traffickers may try to take advantage of impacted community members seeking shelter.

Ideas for the future: Consider policy changes to regulate rent prices after a storm; Regulate and inspect employer-operated housing for resilience workforce members; train congregate shelter staff to spot the signs of human trafficking.