

# Stop Trafficking!

## Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: The focus of this month's newsletter is the nexus of climate change and human trafficking.

Human traffickers always target the vulnerabilities in people, and worldwide, no group of people is more vulnerable than people who need to flee their homes due to climate disasters.

The 2024 [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) reported a 25 percent increase between 2022 and 2019, as more children are exploited and forced labor cases spike due to vulnerabilities brought about by conflict over water and land resources and poverty, in part due to climate change.

The risk of human trafficking is rising as one of the direct consequences of climate change, resulting in forced displacement of populations, especially communities that rely on economic systems still predominantly based on agricultural and livestock-based livelihoods. However, the contribution of climate disasters and environmental change to human trafficking, even in wealthy, developed countries like the United States, is an underappreciated security-related consequence of climate change.

We must recognize climate change and the degradation of natural resources as contributors to human trafficking.



## Human Trafficking and Environmental Degradation

Not only do climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters increase people's vulnerability to human trafficking, but many of the industries that rely on forced or child labor are significant contributors to climate change and environmental degradation, creating a cycle of harm. Though small in absolute numbers, labor trafficking victims contribute disproportionately to ecological destruction and carbon emissions. [Kevin Bales](#), et.al. have made the point that if human trafficking were a country, it would be the third largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> after China and the United States.

These industries include:

- illegal extractive mining, mainly artisanal and small-scale mining, which can cause extensive water and soil contamination with toxic chemicals;
- logging, which can lead to deforestation and significant biodiversity loss; deforestation is the second largest contributor to climate change;

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# Awareness

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- unlawful fishing, which can displace species, disrupt food webs, and deplete vulnerable populations, leading to ecosystem collapse;
- agriculture and cattle ranching;
- construction, especially brick kilns.

Dangerous working conditions often characterize these industries, and their operations may occur in remote or isolated areas where monitoring and law enforcement are limited. The reliance of these sectors on informal markets, exploitative working conditions, and seasonal work, combined with poor regulation and tracking, creates inherently risky conditions for workers. People who had to leave their homelands because of environmental degradation driven by these industries have ended up working in the same sectors under exploitative conditions.

*By 2050, the World Bank estimates that more than **143 million people** will have been forced from their homes in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America because of climate change*

## Types of Climate Events

There are two types of climate events, both intensified by climate change:

- slow-onset (droughts, sea-level rise, ocean acidification) that build gradually over years or decades,
- sudden-onset (hurricanes, extreme heatwaves, floods) that happen suddenly, impacting communities and causing immediate displacement.

Both sudden- and slow-onset climate-related disasters reduce self-sufficiency and increase food and water insecurity, escalating high-risk migration and creating opportunities for traffickers. Individuals already in vulnerable positions, particularly women, children, and individuals and communities that are historically marginalized based on race, ethnicity, or religion, face the most severe risks due to pre-existing inequalities and discriminatory social norms. People have more time to plan and save for migration related to slow-onset events than those forced to migrate due to sudden-onset events. Often, the decision to leave slow-onset events is economically motivated and is often not reported, and may lead to people choosing unsafe migration, increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

The number and severity of sudden-onset extreme weather events have increased over the past 20 years, and significantly more people worldwide have been internally displaced by these weather events than by conflict or violence. Even though government responses tend to be more comprehensive in the case of sudden-onset events, displaced people are very vulnerable to trafficking.

People who are suddenly displaced often do not have documentation, which may have been lost or destroyed by the weather disaster. When having to leave their country, climate refugees are not protected by international refugee laws, also leaving them vulnerable to trafficking. Moreover, past disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and typhoons in the Philippines have shown that traffickers are quick to move in and operate in places hosting many people who are displaced by the disaster, such as emergency shelters.

## Disaster Relief

Disaster relief strategies often prioritize immediate needs during sudden-onset disasters. Existing guidelines recommend incorporating trafficking awareness into disaster planning to protect vulnerable populations during recovery.

Recovery efforts in the aftermath of a disaster can inadvertently create opportunities for trafficking by increasing demand for cheap labor and sexual exploitation. For example, after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, a lack of local workers led to relaxed labor laws and worker protections, which facilitated the recruitment of migrant workers through international schemes later deemed to be human trafficking. Over 500 migrant workers from India were victims of forced labor. This case was successfully prosecuted, with the victims awarded \$14 million. Given this heightened vulnerability for human trafficking, Louisiana has created a post-disaster awareness toolkit to warn people of recruitment tactics geared toward sex and labor trafficking.

There have also been reports of increased demand for sex trafficking driven by the influx of security and aid organizations in the aftermath of disasters, highlighting a need for targeted prevention measures during recovery phases.

## Advocacy



### Family disruptions and gender-based violence

Family breakdowns or other disruptions to family structure significantly increase vulnerability to human trafficking and are often worsened by climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters.

Examples of disruptions common in the aftermath of a disaster include family homelessness, divorce, abuse, abandonment, substance misuse, and the death of a parent. Some of these commonly occur following migration from rural to urban areas. Still, they can also be a key driver of human trafficking in itself, highlighting the fact that families themselves sometimes facilitate trafficking, especially of children.

Domestic violence makes women and children particularly vulnerable to trafficking, as the lack of viable alternatives may push them into situations involving significant risks when they attempt to change or escape their circumstances. Some may use a disaster to escape physical or sexual abuse at home, again making them vulnerable to becoming a victim of trafficking.

*The most pertinent factors contributing to people's vulnerability to human trafficking in the context of climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters are the loss of livelihoods. Other factors that are often exacerbated by climate change and that increase vulnerability to human trafficking include disruptions in education and negative health impacts.*

# Advocacy

## Child Marriage and Climate Change

According to the [International Organization for Migration](#), climate change exacerbates household income losses, especially in rural agricultural communities, which may influence child marriage practices. In some contexts, one adaptation strategy in the face of these income shocks is child marriage, particularly of girls. This not only reduces household expenditure, as the bride will move into the groom's household, but can also bring in money when the groom's family pays a bride price.

Furthermore, climate change and the loss of resources often disrupt education, especially for girls, thus affecting an important protective factor against child marriage.

Child marriage might also be adopted as a strategy to prevent sexual violence or trafficking in the aftermath of disasters, as parents are concerned about the risks to unmarried girls, including in emergency shelters. Female-headed households and households with a high number of daughters are found to be particularly vulnerable to child marriage in response to environmental shocks.

In countries where a dowry is common, the relationship differs slightly. For example, in Bangladesh, families of young men seek partners to secure a dowry that can help them cope with climate-related income shocks, such as droughts or floods. Families of girls may, among other reasons, seek marriages for their daughters to reduce costs related to education and avoid facing higher dowry payments associated with older girls and women, or avoid dowry payments altogether.

### Data from Girls Not Brides

indicate that by 2025, climate change will have caused at least 12.5 million girls in 30 low-and lower-middle-income countries to leave school.

“And again, if you have boys and girls who have completed Junior Secondary School and there is no money to continue, you can give the girl to marry and take the cows and the things and sell them and use the money to take care of the boys in school.”

[Girls Not Brides](#)

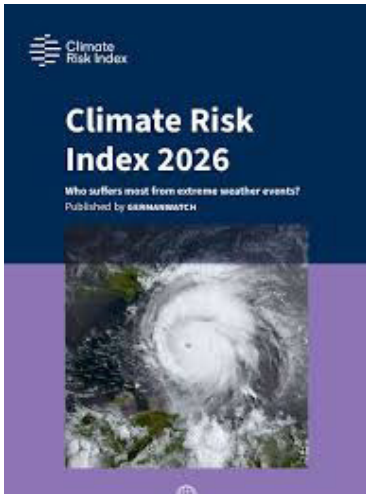
## Action

Low-income countries suffer most from the impacts of climate-induced disasters. Low-income countries also find it hardest to recover from the loss and damage caused by devastating floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones, and rising sea levels – leaving many millions of people worldwide trapped in situations where they are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking.

<https://www.antislavery.org/what-we-do/climate-change/>



Please click [here](#) to view this YouTube video from Anti-slavery International on climate change and human trafficking: a case study.



The Climate Risk Index (CRI), published by Germanwatch, ranks countries by the human and economic toll of extreme weather. The latest edition highlights increasing losses and the urgent need for stronger climate resilience and action.

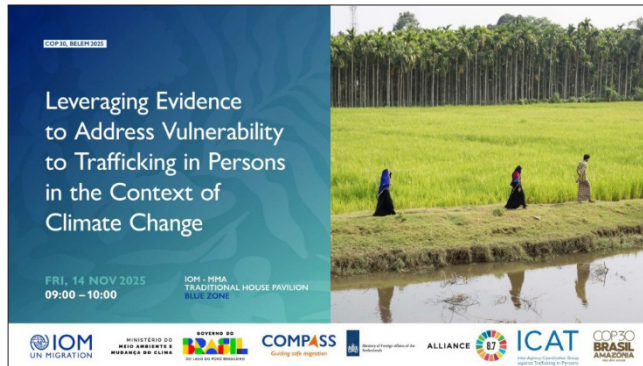
The Climate Risk Index (CRI), published since 2006, is one of the longest-running annual climate impact-related indices. The CRI analyses the extent to which climate-related extreme weather events affect countries. In doing so, it measures the consequences of realized risks on countries.

The Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2026 reveals that between 1995-2024, over 9,700 extreme weather events caused more than 830,000 deaths and \$4.5 trillion in economic losses, with the Philippines, Japan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and Pakistan as the most climate-threatened nations due to cyclones, floods, and sea-level rise.

## COP 30 Side Event

### *Leveraging Evidence to Address Human Trafficking Risks amid Changing Climate*

The International Organization on Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the Alliance 8.7 Migration Action Group and the Inter-



Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons, hosted a side event at COP 30 in 2025 on [“Leveraging Evidence to Address Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Climate Change”](#). The report provides an analysis of evidence on the links between human mobility and vulnerability to trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters. The available evidence shows there is emerging consensus that climate impacts increase vulnerability to human trafficking, and that many of the sectors that utilize forced labor and other forms of exploitation are also significant contributors to environmental degradation and climate change.

Communities that depend on the natural environment for their income are particularly vulnerable to suffering income shocks stemming from climate impacts. Also, forced and child labor have been identified in the supply chains of renewable energy products, used in the context of the green transition, such as lithium batteries and solar panels.

International policy frameworks that address climate-induced displacement and migration, protecting climate-displaced persons, particularly youth, children, and highly vulnerable groups, include:

- the [Global Compact on Migration](#),
- the [Global Compact on Refugees](#), and
- the [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#).



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