

Evacuation and Return -

Crisis Mobility in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina

(submitted for the EFMSV - Environment, Forced Migration & Social Vulnerability - International Conference Oct 9th - 11th 2008, Bonn/Germany)

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Abstract: In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States of America. A major population centre, the New Orleans Metropolitan area, was affected and submerged by flood in the wake of the hurricane. Not all citizens evacuated before landfall. All remaining citizens had to be evacuated in the aftermath of the storm. For some, migration due to Katrina was temporary. Until today, not all have returned, and their migration may become permanent. This migration is based on mobility in evacuation and return. Both evacuation and return are subject to planning for emergency management and the process of recovery. Who is or is not mobile in disaster and why? Mobility prior, during, and after a disaster serves as an indicator for social vulnerability in connection to failure of institutional planning, response, and recovery. In order to investigate these questions, the author conducted a questionnaire survey among survivors who have or have not returned to the Lower Ninth Ward, a district of New Orleans. During a site visit between May and July 2007, survivors in both New Orleans and Houston were interviewed. A selection of results is featured in this paper. The intent is to show how planning for evacuation and recovery influence social vulnerability and indicate a deeply rooted connection between social vulnerability and governmental funding mechanisms. These shed light on the fact that vulnerability and its causes need to be taken into account in emergency management planning in order to prevent an increase of vulnerability after disaster and under the pending threat of future disasters. The author intends to illustrate his subject in the context of "Temporary and permanent migration due to environmental drivers".

Key Words: KATRINA; NEW ORLEANS; SOCIAL VULNERABILITY; EVACUATION; RECOVERY; BLOCK GRANTS.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005, severely affecting the Gulf Coast of the U.S.A. and causing "the largest displacement of people in the United States since the Dust Bowl" (LRA 2006: 20). As result, New Orleans, a major metropolitan centre in the state of Louisiana, was flooded. Not all inhabitants of the city had left prior to landfall; yet due to the flooding, all remaining citizens had to be evacuated in the aftermath of the storm. To this day, not all former citizens have returned to New Orleans.¹

¹ In April 2008 the number of households in New Orleans receiving postal service reached 71.5 percent of pre-Katrina levels (GNOCDC 2008).