



PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING DURING DISASTERS

Context: The Bhote Koshi flash flood (26 August 2026) has displaced thousands of people across Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Gorkha and downstream districts. Rasuwa and Banke are established source districts for trafficking; Rupandehi is a known source/transit district on the India border; and Kathmandu remains the central transit hub where victims are gathered before onward movement. Disasters strip away livelihoods, documents, shelter and family supervision, the exact conditions traffickers look for. After Nepal's 2015 earthquakes, Nepal's National Human Rights Commission recorded a 15% rise in interceptions of people identified as "vulnerable" to trafficking in the three months following the quakes. NHRC's own Trafficking in Persons national report separately recorded 6,100 women and children trafficked in FY2015–16 (98% women), with a further 13,600 identified as vulnerable.

WHY RISK SPIKES AFTER A DISASTER

Poverty & lost livelihood - Families who lose homes, land, livestock or daily-wage work face sudden desperation, making cash advances, fake jobs or marriage offers hard to refuse.

Broken safety nets - Relief camps and displacement break normal community supervision. Children get separated; women travel alone; strangers move freely as 'aid workers'.

Weak local oversight - Police and local authorities are stretched thin on rescue and relief, so recruiters and agents operate with little scrutiny at exactly this time.

TRAFFICKER TACTICS – WHAT TO WATCH FOR

1. The Livelihood / Job Trap	2. The Love / Marriage Trap	3. The Aid / Shelter Trap
- Local agents (often known to the family) offer instant paid work in Kathmandu, India or the Gulf - Promise free travel, no documents needed, immediate cash advance to the family - Target daily-wage workers, newly landless farmers, unemployed youth	"Online romance via social media, love-bomb with gifts and attention - Promise marriage or a better life across the border, then isolate victim from family - Mainly targets girls/women aged 15–25 in flood-hit or remote areas	- Pose as NGO staff, donors or 'boarding school' recruiters offering free care for children - Offer to "temporarily" foster orphaned or separated children in Kathmandu homes - Prey on parents who cannot currently feed or shelter their children

HIGHEST-RISK GROUPS & HUMAN COST

Most at risk: unaccompanied/separated children, adolescent girls, women heading households, families who lost all assets, undocumented survivors, and anyone actively searching for quick income or shelter in a relief camp.

Impact if it happens: forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, organ removal and debt bondage, plus severe, lasting **Psychological trauma:** PTSD, depression, Stockholm syndrome, broken family trust, and social stigma that often stops survivors from ever reporting.

DO'S & DONTs FOR FAMILIES AND SURVIVORS

DO	DON'T
- Verify any job/travel offer with the Ward Office or a registered manpower agency before anyone leaves - Keep family members' photos, IDs and phone numbers written down and shared with a relative - Register every child, especially unaccompanied ones, at the camp help desk immediately - Apply for available relief cash, food and rebuilding support through official government/NGO channels first - Report any stranger offering money, jobs, marriage or 'free schooling' to camp staff or police at once	- Don't let anyone travel with an unregistered agent, or without telling family/camp officials where and with whom - Don't hand over children to unknown 'sponsors', online contacts or unregistered children's homes - Don't accept cash advances or gifts tied to a job or marriage offer made in the middle of a crisis - Don't share personal details, location or travel plans with new online contacts - Don't assume a familiar face (neighbour, relative, local youth) cannot be a recruiter

ACTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS ON THE GROUND

- **Screen at entry:** register every individual/family at camps and shelters, flag unaccompanied minors and lone women for immediate protection follow-up.
- **Watch the perimeter:** note unfamiliar vehicles, agents or 'recruiters' approaching survivors near camps, relief queues or bus stops; report to camp security/police.
- **Run daily 10-minute briefings:** use simple local-language messaging on trafficker tactics (job, love, aid traps) during food/relief distribution, when attention is highest.
- **Link to services, not offers:** connect families directly to verified social welfare schemes, cash relief and registered livelihood programs so no informal 'helper' fills that gap.
- **Protect referral information:** keep the nearest Child Helpline, Women's Helpline and police contacts visibly posted at every camp and repeated verbally each day.
- **Care for survivors without judgment:** if a case surfaces, prioritise safety and confidentiality, avoid public exposure, and refer to trained counsellors - psychological harm is compounded by shame and disbelief.

Nepal Helplines — Police 100 | Child Helpline (CWIN) 1098 | Women's Helpline 1145 | Ambulance 102

Sources: The New Humanitarian — ["Preying on disaster: How human trafficking has spiked in quake-shattered Nepal"](#); Bridging Freedom — ["Love Bombing & Human Trafficking"](#) The New Humanitarian — [NHRC-sourced 15% rise in interceptions](#); [New Spotlight Nepal \(2017\) — NHRC Trafficking in Persons report: 6,100 trafficked, 13,600 vulnerable FY2015-16](#); Center for Disaster Philanthropy — ["Trafficking a Secondary Disaster in Nepal"](#);