

News Release



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Low-Income Women Lack Housing Options Five Years After Katrina

Poor women more vulnerable during crises and remain “in limbo” after

WASHINGTON –Fact sheets released today by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research show that women of color remained, returned, or moved to New Orleans in low numbers relative to white women in the five years since Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of the city. There are also fewer single mothers, and especially single mothers living in poverty, today than before Katrina struck. Part of the reason lies in the fact that most public housing, much of which remained structurally sound after the storm, was demolished and is only gradually being replaced, often with mixed-income developments. The lack of housing options in New Orleans highlights the value of involving women and the poor in planning and reconstruction efforts following disasters.

IWPR’s first fact sheet, “Women in New Orleans: Race, Poverty, and Hurricane Katrina,” analyzes the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data for the New Orleans MSA to look at how the city has changed with respect to its women and girls, especially those in poverty, as it has rebuilt. In particular, poverty rates among African American women and girls are lower in 2008 (23 percent) than in 2000 (36.6 percent). While the share of non-Hispanic white women and girls in the population rose, from 43.1 to 51.6 percent, and that of Hispanic women and girls from 5.3 to 6.8 percent, that of non-Hispanic black women and girls dropped, from 47.2 to 37.3 percent.

New Orleans was evacuated in 2005 and much of its housing lost. In the years since, public housing in New Orleans has become much less available—housing, in the past, that especially helped poor women and their children. IWPR’s second fact sheet, “Mounting Losses: Women and Public Housing After Hurricane Katrina,” shows that five years after disasters emptied New Orleans, market rates for renting private apartments have risen; nearly all of the old public apartments have been removed while the new remain under construction; and many former residents of public housing are still displaced. For previous tenants of New Orleans public housing, most of whom were low-income African American women and their children, public housing and other options of housing support in New Orleans have been transformed. For example, in the redesign of the housing development of BW Cooper, 1,550 public housing units that existed prior to Katrina are to be replaced with 740 units of mixed-income housing.

Multiple factors account for women’s increased vulnerability during a disaster, including disproportionate levels of poverty. IWPR’s third fact sheet, “Women, Disasters, and Hurricane Katrina,” shows that women and girls of the Gulf Coast region not only suffered during the crisis in 2005, but have continued to do so in the years since with, for example, higher rates of exposure to violence.

Dr. Jane Henrici, IWPR Study Director, states “We’ve spoken with more than 200 women in our current study. Many are settled, either in new cities or back in New Orleans. But many others are still ‘in limbo’ and struggling—they can’t afford the new rents in New Orleans, and are looking for jobs as well as homes. Women need to become a central part of the planning processes for disaster recovery, including housing planning in all cities—to help keep the most vulnerable out of ‘limbo,’ especially as new crises occur.”

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, IWPR began research along the Gulf Coast to learn how women were affected, and how post-disaster conditions for women and their families might be improved. A new IWPR report, based on interviews conducted in Baton Rouge, Houston, and New Orleans with women who were residents of New Orleans public housing at the time Hurricane Katrina hit, will be released in 2011. IWPR’s earlier reports released in 2005, 2006, and 2008 can be found at IWPR’s website, www.iwpr.org.

View the Fact Sheets released today here:

- [Women in New Orleans: Race, Poverty, and Hurricane Katrina](#)
- [Mounting Losses: Women and Public Housing after Hurricane Katrina](#)
- [Women, Disasters, and Hurricane Katrina](#)

IWPR’s research on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through a grant to the Social Science Research Council.

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women and their families, promote public dialogue, and strengthen communities and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR’s work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women’s studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.