



HUMAN TRAFFICKING FACT SHEET



Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation¹ or forced labor. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women.

After drug dealing, human trafficking is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry in the world today, and it is the fastest growing.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines “Severe forms of Trafficking in Persons” as:

- **Sex Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a **commercial sex act**², in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years; or
- **Labor Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to **involuntary servitude**, peonage, **debt bondage** or slavery.

In both forms, the victim is an unwilling participant due to force, fraud or coercion.

Trafficking Victims

Approximately 800,000 to 900,000 victims annually are trafficked across international borders worldwide, and between 18,000 and 20,000 of those victims are trafficked into the U.S., according to the U.S. Department of State. These estimates include women, men and children. Victims are generally trafficked into the U.S. from Asia, Central and South America, and Eastern Europe. Many victims trafficked into the United States do not speak and understand English and are therefore isolated and unable to communicate with service providers, law enforcement and others who might be able to help them.

How Victims Are Trafficked

Many victims of trafficking are forced to work in prostitution or sex entertainment. However, trafficking also takes place as labor exploitation, such as domestic servitude, sweatshop factories, or migrant agricultural work. Traffickers use force, fraud and coercion to compel women, men and children to engage in these activities.

Force involves the use of rape, beatings and confinement to control victims. Forceful violence is used especially during the early stages of victimization, known as the ‘seasoning process’, which is used to break victim’s resistance to make them easier to control.

Fraud often involves false offers of employment. For example, women and children will reply to advertisements promising jobs as waitresses, maids and dancers in other countries and are then forced into prostitution once they arrive at their destinations.

Coercion involves threats of serious harm to, or physical restraint of, any person; any scheme, plan or pattern intended to cause victims to believe that failure to perform an act would result in restraint against them; or the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process.

¹ “Exploitation” – rather than trafficking - may be a more accurate description because the crime involves making people perform labor or commercial sex against their will.

² As defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the term ‘commercial sex act’ means any sex act, on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.



Victims of trafficking are often subjected to debt-bondage, usually in the context of paying off transportation fees into the destination countries. Traffickers often threaten victims with injury or death, or the safety of the victim’s family back home. Traffickers commonly take away the victims’ travel documents and isolate them to make escape more difficult.

Victims often do not realize that it is illegal for traffickers to dictate how they have to pay off their debt. In many cases, the victims are trapped into a cycle of debt because they have to pay for all living expenses in addition to the initial transportation expenses. Fines for not meeting daily quotas of service or “bad” behavior are also used by some trafficking operations to increase debt. Most trafficked victims rarely see the money they are supposedly earning and may not even know the specific amount of their debt. Even if the victims sense that debt-bondage is unjust, it is difficult for them to find help because of language, social, and physical barriers that keep them from obtaining assistance.

Trafficking vs. Smuggling

Trafficking is not smuggling. There are several important differences between trafficking and smuggling:

Human Trafficking	Vs. Migrant Smuggling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims are coerced into trafficking. If victims do consent, that consent is rendered meaningless by the actions of the traffickers. • Ongoing exploitation of victims to generate illicit profits for the traffickers. • Trafficking need not entail the physical movement of a person (but must entail the exploitation of the person for labor or commercial sex). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrants consent to being smuggled. • Smuggling is always transnational.

Help for Victims of Trafficking

Prior to the enactment of the TVPA in October 2000, no comprehensive Federal law existed to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers. The law is comprehensive in addressing the various ways of combating trafficking, including prevention, protection and prosecution. It is intended to prevent human trafficking overseas, to increase prosecution of human traffickers in the United States, and to protect victims and provide Federal and state assistance to certain victims. Victims of human trafficking who are not U.S. citizens are eligible for a special visa and can receive benefits and services through the TVPA to the same extent as refugees. Victims of trafficking who are U.S. citizens may already be eligible for many benefits due to their citizenship.

If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the **Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at 1.888.3737.888**. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking visit **www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking**.