



U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Human Trafficking

In 2000, Congress signed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act into law, representing the beginning of a large-scale, coordinated effort by the United States government to fight human trafficking.

A decade later, human trafficking remains prevalent. According to the most recent figures available (Source: United Nations, International Labor Organization):

- There are at least 12.3 million enslaved adults and children around the world "at any given time."
- Of these, at least 1.39 million are victims of commercial sexual servitude, both internationally and within national borders. More than half, 56 percent, of all forced labor victims are women and girls.

What Is Human Trafficking?

Although the legal definition of human trafficking is complex, the simple meaning of it is not. It occurs when a person is induced by force, fraud or coercion to:

- Work under the total or near-total control of another person or organization (slavery or involuntary servitude)
- Forced to pay off a loan by working instead of paying money, for an agreed-upon or unclear period of time (debt bondage) or even without an agreement as to the timeframe (peonage)
- Perform a sex act for money or anything of value (if under 18, force, fraud or coercion is not required)

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, although many people think of the sex trade when they think of human trafficking, this crime also occurs in such labor situations as:

- Domestic servitude
- Labor in a prison-like factory
- Migrant agricultural work.

In addition, with respect to labor situations, the initial agreement to travel or to perform work does not mean that the employer is later allowed to restrict a victim's freedom or use force or threats to obtain repayment.

Human trafficking and human smuggling are sometimes, but not always, linked, because not all individuals who are smuggled are trafficked, and movement is not required for trafficking to occur.

"Force, Fraud or Coercion"

These terms include any situation where an individual is forced to do something against their will, or where they are tricked into doing something by someone who is lying to them or suppressing the truth. According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *force* can be active and physical or indirect and psychological (including threats). This term includes:

- Coercion
- Compulsion
- Constraint
- Restraint

Coercion refers to behaviors including:

- Threats of harm or physical restraint
- Trying to get a person to believe that if they don't do something, it will result in serious harm or physical restraint of themselves or someone else
- The abuse (or threatened abuse) of law or the legal process

Fraud refers to intentionally distorting the truth in order to get someone else (who relies on that version of the truth) to surrender a legal right or give up something valuable that belongs to them.

A Complex Crime

Human trafficking entangles victims in a nearly impenetrable web, for a number of reasons:

The victim may not realize that he or she is imprisoned, because coercion is psychological (it may not be physical)

- Victims are typically impoverished and financially dependent on their captors
- Often the crime takes place in plain view-e.g. in a restaurant, worksite, or private home-and is not immediately apparent to observers
- Victims can be exploited for labor, sex, or both, particularly in private homes.

Signs of Human Trafficking

It is sometimes said that human trafficking is an "invisible crime," because its signs are not always obvious to the untrained eye. However, there are some indicators that may serve as a tip-off, particularly when they appear in combination. Suspect that something is amiss if an individual:

- Lacks identification documents or travel documents
- Lives and works in the same place
- Lacks freedom of movement
- Seems to be restricted from socializing, attending religious services or contacting family
- Seems to have been deprived of basic life necessities, such as food, water, sleep or medical care
- Shows signs of having been abused or physically assaulted. Such signs range from the more obvious, such as broken bones, to the more subtle, such as branding or tattooing
- Seems submissive or fearful in the presence of others
- Seems not to control his or her schedule

- Seems to lack concrete short- or long-term plans
- Seems to lack knowledge about the place where he or she lives
- Appears to date much older, abusive or controlling men.

A Government Partnership

Four executive agencies of the U.S. government, along with state and local law enforcement organizations, work together as well as with nonprofit organizations to combat human trafficking. The primary U.S. executive agencies include:

- Department of Homeland Security , of which U.S. Customs and Border Protection , U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement , and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services are component agencies
- State Department
- Department of Justice
- Department of Health and Human Services

Initiatives

- [Blue Lightning](#)
- [No Te Enganes](#)
- [Blue Campaign](#)

DHS Activities Combating Human Trafficking

The Department of Homeland Security and its component agencies have been raising awareness for the past several years about the issue of human trafficking. Most recently, DHS announced an aggressive effort to protect victims and prosecute traffickers, in line with the TVPA's focus on three key goals:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Prosecution

Currently, the Department is focusing on the first of the three goals above, by sponsoring heavily advertised public awareness campaigns about human trafficking created by CBP and its sister agency, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and making potential victims aware that they are in danger, and that the government offers resources to provide them with asylum and other forms of assistance.

Actions CBP Is Taking To Enforce TVPA

With more than 42,000 frontline CBP officers and Border Patrol agents protecting nearly 7,000 miles of land border and 328 ports of entry—including official crossings by land, air, and sea—CBP is uniquely situated to deter and disrupt human trafficking. Currently, the agency is:

1. **Identifying** potential victims as they seek to enter the U.S.
2. **Directing** potential victims to U.S. agencies providing legal protection and assistance, through printed materials with educational information and telephone numbers where help can be obtained
3. **Raising awareness among the American public** of this often-invisible, yet pervasive crime, through public service announcements

4. **Raising awareness internationally among potential border-crossers** before they fall into the hands of traffickers, in countries where this crime is pervasive and where border smuggling frequently involves human trafficking
5. **Helping the public to report** suspected cases of human trafficking
6. **Identifying imports produced by forced labor and stopping them** from entering the country
7. **Dedicating an office** specifically to combating human trafficking
8. **Partnering with other law enforcement agencies** to identify and support victims, such as by educating legal counsel to detect signs of victimization, to disrupt the crime itself and to prosecute human traffickers
9. **Partnering** with non-governmental organizations to provide information about government assistance to potential victims
10. **Participating in the development of best practices for law enforcement efforts** within the U.S. and internationally.

Training is Key

Within the agency, CBP has implemented comprehensive training for its frontline personnel with more forthcoming. Through its local field and sector offices, CBP is instructing them to recognize potential instances of human trafficking and to take appropriate actions when encountering human trafficking victims.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is a heinous international crime, and as the State Department notes in its most recent report on the subject, it is unfortunately flourishing due to current global financial issues. With global demand for labor decreasing, impoverished workers find themselves taking greater risks than before in order to survive. The result: "a recipe for greater forced labor of migrant workers and commercial sexual exploitation of women in prostitution."

To Report Human Trafficking

If you suspect a case of human trafficking, call **1-866-347-2423** to report it.

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