



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

### **Federal law defines a “severe form of trafficking in persons” as:**

Sex Trafficking: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act which is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; 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.

## WHAT IS NOT HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking is often conflated with other crimes, such as smuggling or prostitution. Smuggling is a voluntary agreement to be moved across a border illegally. Once the border is crossed, the relationship ends, and the person being moved is not forced to provide any labor or services, or forced to engage in any sex acts. Smuggling may be an element of human trafficking when, for example, a smuggler suddenly increases the fees and forces the person being moved to work off this new “debt.” Similarly, consensual adult sex workers are voluntarily engaging in commercial sex. Absent force, fraud, or coercion, adult sex workers are not human trafficking victims. Under federal law, any minor (under 18) engaged in commercial sex is a victim. However, many states continue to also arrest these minors on prostitution charges.

## WHO ARE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking impacts people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, and nationalities. This includes men, boys, older persons, and US citizens. However, people are made disproportionately vulnerable to trafficking by discrimination (especially against LGBTQ youth), disability, unlawful immigration status, poverty, and prior abuse (including child abuse and sexual assault). People are trafficked in a variety of sectors, including domestic work, agriculture, restaurants, manufacturing, the sex trade, and construction, among many others.

## HOW DO HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS COME TO THE US?

US citizens are trafficked every day without ever crossing a border. Many foreign-born survivors come to the US on visas for workers, visitors, or cultural purposes. In these cases, their visa sponsor or employer is often a trafficker. Once the workers are in the US, traffickers refuse to comply with the agreed-upon wages and living conditions, usually take the workers’ passports, and often will not allow workers to communicate with family and friends. Survivors might not understand the immigration system, and traffickers will threaten deportation or harm to them or family members.

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### HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING EVERY YEAR?

Data on the prevalence of human trafficking is limited and unreliable, due to the hidden nature of the crime. Currently, the most reliable data comes from government sources. This includes the investigation and prosecution data in the **Trafficking in Persons Report** from the **US State Department** and grant data (reporting the number of identified survivors served by grantees) from the **Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime** and the **Department of Health and Human Services Office on Trafficking in Persons**.

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### HOW DO YOU PREVENT TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking prevention must address the systemic issues that make a person vulnerable. Examples include stronger worker protections, a strong social safety net, strong enforcement of civil rights protections, and a compassionate and fair immigration system. Generally, efforts focused on ending demand for commercial sex are ineffective and dangerous. These efforts make it harder for consensual sex workers to screen clients, work collaboratively, and report abuse and exploitation to law enforcement. Decriminalization would allow sex workers to build trust and partnership with law enforcement and focus investigation resources on those who commit crimes of abuse and exploitation.

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### WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ANTI-TRAFFICKING?

The human rights-based approach recognizes that human trafficking is a violation of the survivor's human rights and that trafficking thrives where human rights are not protected. Under this approach, services are designed to respect and support the full autonomy of survivors. Human rights-based prevention focuses on the root causes that create vulnerability, such as poverty, homelessness, weak worker protections, and discrimination.

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### WHAT ARE JOURNALISTIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPORTING ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Imagery: Visuals such as chains, bound women, or young children paint an inaccurate picture of human trafficking and can lead to distorted public perception. Instead, focus on imagery that highlights sectors where trafficking is most prevalent, features an under-identified population, or portrays survivors in empowering ways.

Terminology: Use caution when describing human trafficking and survivors. Words such as "rescue" and "saved" are demeaning to survivors and strip them of all agency. Similarly, take care not to conflate sex trafficking and prostitution.

A Focus on the Individual Person: Working with survivors is a skill, and each person should be treated as an individual. For more information on ethical standards for working with survivors, contact the **National Survivor Network** ([nationalsurvivornetwork.org](http://nationalsurvivornetwork.org)).