



Collaborating with Agencies Monitoring and Combating Human Trafficking: Considerations for Housing and Homelessness Service Providers

What Is Human Trafficking?

The [National Human Trafficking Resource Center](#) defines human trafficking as the exploitation of another human being purposely for free labor or commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion. Human trafficking is viewed as [modern slavery](#) and is a domestic and international problem impacting millions of people worldwide. [A21.org](#), an organization working to abolish human trafficking, states that “*Human trafficking is the abuse of children, women, and men for their bodies and labor.*” People who are trafficked experience their lives, safety, and well-being compromised. According to [InterAction](#), the largest alliance of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human trafficking victims are people who are vulnerable and marginalized, with a disproportionate number identified as Indigenous. Indigenous women and girls in particular are at severe risk of sex trafficking. In the United States, the human trafficking of [Native Americans and Alaska Natives](#) continues to be the focus of federal agencies and tribal organizations. In addition to Indigenous populations worldwide, people identified as migrants, asylees, refugees, and undocumented have higher levels of vulnerability to human trafficking. Traffickers generally seek people who experience economic hardship, are emotionally vulnerable, and lack a social safety net.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families Office on Trafficking in Persons [fact sheet](#) states, “*Traffickers disproportionately target at-risk populations including individuals who have experienced or been exposed to other forms of violence (child abuse and maltreatment, interpersonal violence and sexual assault, community and gang violence) and individuals disconnected from stable support networks (runaway and homeless youth, unaccompanied minors, persons displaced during natural disasters).*”

Victims of human trafficking can be anyone, including people from around the world or next door, people who are identified as citizens of the U.S. or noncitizens, and increasingly children. Unfortunately, people are trafficked every day in their towns, cities, across states, and internationally.

Human trafficking connected to young people also has national and global impacts. [Youth Underground](#) is an organization working to raise awareness about the global business of human trafficking through education, specifically among youth. This Swiss organization indicates that human trafficking is the second-largest criminal trade in the world and the fastest-growing illicit trade; it generates over \$150 billion per year, with approximately \$9.5 billion of that money generated in the United States. Building effective collaborations to address human trafficking nationally and globally is key to identifying and supporting the agencies, groups, and organizations working to prevent and end it, and their collective efforts to support those who are victimized.

According to the [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#), traffickers exploit certain groups of people because they do not have the support or ability to get justice for themselves. The natural vulnerability of children makes them prime targets for [child sex traffickers](#). The vulnerability of LGBTQI+ youth and young women experiencing homelessness is often the pathway to [survival sex](#), leading to people's bodies being utilized as currency to meet basic living needs such as having a place to sleep, food to eat, or other material items. The length of homelessness and the number of episodes can increase the probability of people engaging in [exchange and survival sex](#).

The overall goal is to prevent and end human trafficking in all its forms, provide information to support collaborative partnerships fighting to end the issue, and provide resources and services for victims and survivors of human trafficking who, among other things, experience housing instability and homelessness. The most effective collaborations between agencies combating human trafficking and housing and homelessness service providers will include [partnering](#) with and [engaging survivors](#) by incorporating the perspectives of people with lived experience of human trafficking and connected housing instability and homelessness.

Knowing the Forms and Signs of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking takes the form of forced labor or labor trafficking, commercial sex or sex trafficking, forced marriage, child labor, child soldiers, and bonded labor or debt bondage. The United Nations' International Day for the Abolition of Slavery "is a day of remembrance and recognition and an urgent call to action...Debt bondage, serfdom and forced labour, trafficking in persons for the purpose of exploitation—including sexual exploitation, forced marriage, child labour—and the recruitment of children in armed conflict are contemporary manifestations of slavery. All are crimes and egregious violations of human rights."

There are general human trafficking indicators and specific signs of possible labor or sex trafficking. Individuals who are trafficked can exhibit the following general signs of victimization:

- They believe that they must work against their will.
- They are unable to leave their work environment.
- They show signs that their movements are being controlled.
- They show fear or anxiety.
- They are subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family members and loved ones.
- They have injuries that appear to be the result of the application of control measures or restricted movement or freedom.
- They have a strong distrust of the authorities.
- They are not in possession of their passports, other travel documents, or identity documents, as those documents are being held by someone else.

Labor Trafficking

- They live in degraded, unsuitable places, such as in agricultural or industrial buildings.
- They have no access to their earnings and do not receive compensation for their labor/work.
- They work excessively long hours.
- They are unable to move freely.
- They are disciplined through fines.
- They are subjected to insults, abuse, threats, or violence.

Sex Trafficking

- They can be of any age, although the age may vary according to the location and the market (type of sex being sold).
- They move from one brothel to the next or work in various locations.

- They are escorted by a handler whenever they go to and return from work and other outside activities.
- They live or travel in a group, sometimes with other women who do not speak the same language.
- They have clothes that are mostly the kind typically worn for doing sex work.
- They only know how to say sex-related words in the local language or in the language of the client group.

Debt Trafficking

- They incur recruitment fees as a term for employment.
- They are working off inherited family debt; sometimes generational.
- They have fees piled on for daily work targets not met.

View the full list of signs from the Lifeboat Project.

Housing and homelessness service providers and other community partners are uniquely positioned to identify and assist trafficking victims by recognizing the various signs, asking the right questions, and connecting them to housing and other needed resources.

Human Trafficking and Homelessness

Human trafficking has implications connected to housing instability and experiences of unsheltered and sheltered homelessness—human traffickers prey on the vulnerability of youth experiencing homelessness. Among this group, LGBTQI+ youth and youth who have exited foster care have a higher risk of being trafficked. According to Human Trafficking Search, understanding the intersection between youth and human trafficking supports awareness and the opportunity to prevent human trafficking as a pathway to youth homelessness.

"An estimated 4.2 million young people (ages 13–25) experience homelessness annually, including 700,000 unaccompanied minor youth ages 13 to 17. Many of those young people will become victims of sex or labor trafficking. Research from numerous studies has found trafficking rates among youth experiencing homelessness ranging from 19 percent to 40 percent. Using the lower-end estimate of 1 in 5 youth experiencing homelessness also being trafficked for sex, labor, or both, this means that approximately 800,000 youth who experience homelessness are also survivors of trafficking. We also know that both homelessness and trafficking occur in every American community—inclusive of cities, suburbs, rural communities, and American Indian Reservations."

— Human Trafficking Search

An earlier study by Loyola University and Covenant House focusing on ten U.S. cities and the [intersection of human trafficking and homelessness](#) connected to youth provides insight into how pervasive the issue is and informs current efforts monitoring and combatting the problem. Youth in the study [Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth](#) expressed that the fear of sleeping on the streets made them vulnerable to sex and labor traffickers and survival sex, and having housing was their primary concern. The study indicated youth aging out of the foster care system were

vulnerable to traffickers and engagement in the sex trade, and most likely to experience homelessness as a result of leaving foster care. In addition, the study notes:

- 68 percent of the youth who had either been trafficked or engaged in survival sex or commercial sex had done so while experiencing homelessness.
- 19 percent of all youth interviewed had engaged in survival sex solely so that they could access housing or food.
- 41 percent of drop-in youth had engaged in the sex trade in some way at some point in their lives.
- 33 percent of youth had engaged in survival sex as either adults or minors.
- 26 percent of youth were labor trafficked.
- 27 percent of youth were sex trafficked.

People exiting human trafficking are in need of safe and stable housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continues its work to [end homelessness connected to human trafficking](#). In 2020, [a special Notice of Funding Availability \(NOFA\)](#) was offered by HUD to support specialized housing and services for victims of human trafficking. This NOFA recognizes an interagency agreement and work addressing the crime of enslavement and the resulting housing needs of victims between the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and HUD.

Building Effective Collaborations

The [DOJ Office for Victim Services \(OVS\)](#) acknowledges the impossibility that a single agency or organization could have a comprehensive response to the full impact of human trafficking nationally and globally. Understanding that traffickers range from opportunistic individuals to sophisticated criminal organizations with multijurisdictional scope, the response must be coordinated, multi-disciplined, and grounded in collaborative problem-solving. Intentional and mutual partnership and collaboration can bring human trafficking to an end. Housing and homelessness service providers working in partnership with agencies working to prevent and end human trafficking offer the greatest strength in preventing and fighting human trafficking and supporting those victimized.

HUD continues to encourage communities to work with organizations serving human trafficking victims and survivors to explore and meet housing challenges. The DOJ [Office of Victims and Crime](#), the HHS [Office on Trafficking In Persons](#), and HUD have joined efforts to effectively address the needs of trafficking survivors. Among its resources, OVS provides a [fact sheet](#) that can serve as an introductory tool to assist housing and homelessness service providers in their collaborations with various agencies addressing the problem.

This presents a model and opportunity for effective collaboration within agencies and between service providers, law enforcement, educational institutions, healthcare providers, human and immigrant services, youth-serving organizations, judges, underserved children and youth, runaways, people experiencing homelessness, and the wider community. [Safe Housing Partnerships](#), a community organization that focuses on providing supportive services and housing for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, serves as an example of what can be done when communities and agencies connect to address the issue together.

“Addressing survivors’ housing needs requires meaningful, sustained partnerships between domestic violence and sexual assault organizations and homelessness and housing providers...We can meet shared goals when we work collaboratively to ensure that local programs, systems, institutions, and laws and

policies are responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities at the intersections of domestic and sexual violence and housing.”

— [Safe Housing Partnership Case Studies](#)

Race and Human Trafficking

There is an intersection between racism and human trafficking that points to the historical exploitation and disregard of the humanity and oppression of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Law Review article [The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking](#) brings focus to how widespread the practice of child sex trafficking is based on race. The sexual exploitation of people during slavery and colonization is foundational to present cultural beliefs of the availability and use of BIPOC adults and children as property for commercial sex trafficking and personal exploitation. According to the article, *“Race intersects with other forms of subordination including gender, class, and age to push people of color disproportionately into prostitution and keep them trapped in the commercial sex industry.”*

Human trafficking is considered a [racial justice issue](#) due to the disproportionate trafficking of BIPOC children, although BIPOC adults are also severely impacted. The United Nations states that *“Trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights. Every year, thousands of men, women, and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Almost every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit, or destination for victims.”* The [United Nations World Day Against Trafficking In Persons](#) observation brings attention to the problem and worldwide collaborative effort to support advocacy to educate on, prevent, and end human trafficking around the world. An important element in addressing race and ethnicity in human trafficking is the intentional [inclusion of diverse voices](#) to lift racial equity considerations in framing, identifying, preventing, and ending human trafficking.

Community Assessment and Assets

Human trafficking happens in communities. It will take the actions of community members and collaborators, particularly agencies monitoring and combatting human trafficking, law enforcement, and housing and homeless service providers working together to improve anti-trafficking efforts that will lead to preventing and ending human trafficking. The 2022 U.S. State Department’s [Trafficking In Persons Report](#) emphasizes the importance of engaging survivors of human trafficking “to listen to, learn from, and lift the voices of those with lived experience.” Assessing [community preparedness](#) and identifying community assets and resources to stop victimization and support survivors of human trafficking is key.

The U.S State Department report provides guidance for agencies, housing and homelessness service providers, and community partners to collaborate and engage with victims and survivors of human trafficking. The following questions for consideration are adapted from the report:

- **Victim-centered approach:** Does the community place crime victims’ priorities, needs, and interests at the center of their work with the victim; provide nonjudgmental assistance, with an emphasis on self-determination, and assist victims in making informed choices; ensure the restoration of victims’ feelings of safety and security are a priority; and safeguard against policies and practices that may inadvertently re-traumatize victims? Do current approaches incorporate a trauma-informed, survivor-informed, and culturally competent approach?

- **Survivor-informed approach:** Are programs, policies, interventions, or products designed, implemented, and evaluated with intentional leadership, expertise, and input from a diverse community of survivors to ensure that the program, policy, intervention, or product accurately represents their needs, interests, and perceptions?
- **Trauma-informed approach:** Do community members—namely victim, housing, and homelessness service providers—know and recognize signs of trauma in human trafficking survivors? Are the signs of trauma recognized in the professionals who help and respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings and seek to actively resist re-traumatization? Does the community approach include an understanding of the vulnerabilities and experiences of trauma survivors, including the prevalence and physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma? Does the community approach place priority on restoring the survivor’s feelings of safety, choice, and control? Are programs, services, agencies, and the community trauma-informed?
- **Culturally competent approach:** How is cultural and linguistic competence exhibited in community members’ and collaborators’ behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals to enable effective work in cross-cultural situations? How are the integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups embraced? Do community members and collaborators have the capacity to function effectively as individuals and as organizations within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by human trafficking survivors and their communities?

Resources:

- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: [National Human Trafficking Resource Center](#)
- [A21](#)
- InterAction’s [Indigenous People: Human Trafficking’s Overlooked Casualties](#)
- DOJ: article on [Human Trafficking \(Including Sex Trafficking\) of American Indians and Alaska Natives](#)
- Administration for Children and Families Office on Trafficking in Persons: [Human Trafficking fact sheet](#)
- [Youth Underground](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)
- [Child sex trafficking: It’s probably not what you think it is](#)
- [Exchanging Sex for Survival](#)
- [Exchange and Survival Sex, Dating Apps, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Among Homeless Youth in Los Angeles](#)
- [Partnering With Survivors](#)
- U.S. Department of State: [Engaging Survivors of Human Trafficking](#)
- U.S. Department of State: [What is Modern Slavery?](#)
- [Debt Bondage in Human Trafficking](#)

- United Nations: [International Day for the Abolition of Slavery](#)
- [The Lifeboat Project: Know the Signs](#)
- U.S. Department of State: [Identify and Assist a Trafficking Victim](#)
- National Alliance to End Homelessness: [The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Homelessness](#)
- Human Trafficking Search: [The Intersection Between Youth Homelessness and Human Trafficking](#)
- [Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth](#)
- HUD Exchange: [Human Trafficking and Homelessness](#)
- HUD Exchange: [Now Open: FY 2020 NOFA for Housing Assistance for Victims of Human Trafficking](#)
- DOJ: [Building Effective Collaborations To Address Human Trafficking](#)
- OVC: [Faces of Human Trafficking](#)
- DOJ: [Human Trafficking](#)
- Administration for Children and Families Office on Trafficking in Persons: [Updated Toolkit: Building Survivor-Informed Organizations](#)
- Administration for Children and Families [Office on Trafficking in Persons](#)
- DOJ: [An Introduction to Human Trafficking in the United States](#)
- Safe Housing Partnerships: [Understanding the Intersections](#)
- Safe Housing Partnerships: [Case Studies for Building Successful Partnerships](#)
- UCLA Law Review: The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking
- LOVE 146: [Let's Talk About Race and Human Trafficking](#)
- United Nations: [World Day Against Trafficking in Persons](#)
- United Way: [The Role Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Plays in Combatting Human Trafficking](#)
- U.S. Department of State: [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)
- National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center: [Human Trafficking Community Readiness Guide](#)

Community Examples:

- [Safe Housing Partnerships](#)
- [The Lifeboat Project](#)
- [Blue Heart Campaign Against Human Trafficking](#)
- [San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking](#)
- [National Survivor Study](#)

Videos:

- [Working With Continuums of Care—Human Trafficking](#)
- [Love Listens—Quick Resources for Parents to Keep Your Child Safe](#)
- [Policy Issues Human Trafficking](#)

- [Freedom Network USA—Culturally Responsive Housing Programs](#)

Training and Development Materials:

- [Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center](#)
- [Practical Guide—Survivor Informed Services](#)
- [Building A Human Trafficking Program Resource Guide](#)
- [Survivor Toolkits](#)
- [Advocate Toolkit](#)
- [The Freedom Network Training Institute](#)
- [Human Trafficking Community Readiness Guide](#)