

21st Century Human Trafficking Facts Iowans Need to Know

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Human trafficking (HT) is a pressing global problem that continues to affect millions of people, despite widespread efforts to combat it. **To shed additional light on this pervasive issue in Iowa, here are eight key facts about human trafficking** that help to better understand why this crime occurs, how victims are recruited and exploited, and the links between human trafficking and migration, climate change and conflict.

Human Trafficking occurs in all regions of the world.

Although HT occurs everywhere, people are mainly trafficked from lower to higher income countries. Most victims, or 60%, are detected domestically, while victims of cross-border trafficking are mainly found within the same regions (18%) or in nearby regions (6%). Only 16% are detected in transnational flows and end up in distant regions. Most victims of cross-border trafficking come from Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, and from South and East Asia.

Human trafficking is a widespread crime and a lucrative business

The true extent of the crime is difficult to ascertain. While about 50,000 cases were reported to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2020 by 141 countries, as many as 50 million people globally—the equivalent of the populations of South Korea or Uganda—may be subject to various forms of exploitation. HT is one of the fastest growing crimes, along with drugs and arms trafficking, and a highly profitable business, generating an estimated \$150 billion in profits each year.

Human trafficking thrives on poverty, conflict, and climate change

HT is driven by a complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors. Conflict and persecution, poverty and political instability, lack of access to education and jobs, migration and displacement, gender inequality and discrimination, natural disasters and climate changes all create conditions that fuel HT. Traffickers capitalize on this desperation, disparity, and deficiency, targeting people who are vulnerable, marginalized or in difficult situations, including irregular or smuggled migrants and those in urgent need to work.

With nearly half of the world's population living on less than \$6.85 per person, per day, or with at least three billion people worldwide living in areas severely affected by climate change and non-climatic environmental degradation, millions of individuals have become vulnerable to exploitation.

Traffickers use everything from deception to violence to recruit and exploit their victims

Because HT is often under-reported and under-prosecuted, it is characterized by high rewards and low risks for its perpetrators who reap substantial profits with little fear of punishment. Taking advantage of the high demand for cheap labor, commercial sex or other services, criminals exploit shortcomings in legislation and its enforcement, as well as corrupt actors and weak governance, to carry out their illegal activities. They fraudulently promise a better life in a new country, exciting jobs with great benefits or use outright violence against vulnerable people to coerce them into exploitative practices, such as sexual exploitation or forced labor.

Escaping exploitation can be extremely difficult

Victims often endure inhumane conditions and find it difficult to escape from the hands of their exploiters, who utilize a range of mechanisms and manipulations to control them. Victims can be beaten, threatened and blackmailed. They can be humiliated, abused or have nowhere else to go. Their passports and other documents can be taken away. Many might not identify themselves as victims—which is often the case when they are manipulated by a partner or relative. Fear of reprisals often prevents victims from seeking help, and they are more likely to self-rescue than be rescued by authorities. While 41% of victims self-report to authorities, in only 28% of the cases does the investigation start with proactive police activity.

The most common forms of human trafficking are sexual exploitation and forced labor

HT manifests in many forms. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's Be "in the know", (UNODC) latest research shows that 38.7% of victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation, which takes place on the streets, in brothels, massage centers, hotels or bars. The victims—mainly women and girls—often experience extreme violence and abuse.

A further 38.8% are exploited for forced labor. Some people work long hours in fishing boats-often in harsh weather-cultivating corn, rice, or wheat, harvesting coffee and cocoa beans or catching fish and seafood. Around 10% are compelled to engage in illegal activities, such as pickpocketing, bag snatching, begging or drug selling. Other forms of exploitation include forced marriage, organ removal and domestic servitude.

Women are the most detected victims of human trafficking

No one is immune to HT. People of all genders, ages, backgrounds and in all regions of the world fall prey to traffickers, who resort to a variety of means to recruit and exploit their victims. Women and girls make up the majority of victims, accounting for 42% and 18%, respectively. They are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation and are three times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence than men and boys. At the same time, the number of detected male victims has increased over the last years: 23% of victims are men and 17% are boys. They are mainly trafficked for forced labor. ***In the past 15 years the number of children among identified victims of trafficking has tripled to 35%, or one-third of all victims.***

Traffickers can be anyone from members of an organized crime group to the victim's own family

UNODC's data shows that 58% of those convicted are men. At the same time, the involvement of women in this crime is higher than in other crimes and account for 40% of those convicted. Traffickers range from organized criminal groups to opportunistic individuals operating alone or in small groups. In addition to trafficking in persons, criminal organizations are frequently involved in other serious crimes, including drugs or arms trafficking, as well as corruption and the bribery of public officials. Such groups exploit more victims, often for longer periods, over greater distances and with more violence than non-organized criminals. However, traffickers can also be the victim's family members, parents, intimate partners, or acquaintances. **AAUW members be "in the know", continue to share information, pay attention to your surroundings, and report any suspicious activity.** Brochures are available from maahrens@mchsi.com

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime