



IOWA INITIATIVE

A PUBLICATION OF AAUW-IOWA
VOLUME 105 NUMBER 3
September 2024

Co-President’s Letter

Kim Folkers, AAUW Iowa Co-President

One of the things I have appreciated most about being involved with AAUW over the past 35 years is the clarity of our AAUW mission: Advancing Gender Equity for Women and Girls. Our AAUW values further frame how we carry out our work together. We strive to be: Nonpartisan. Fact-based. Principled. Inclusive and Intersectional. Lofty aspirations perhaps, but they have given me a sense of grounding and orientation as we plan and carry out our work at the branch and state level.

However, our mission and values are at a critical inflection point—possibly the most critical in my lifetime. Many of the gains women have made are being questioned, attacked, and in some cases, reversed. Rights that seemed unquestionable just a year or two ago, are being taken away. In the face of this, AAUW is working hard to fight for equity for women and girls while also making good on our value of striving to be non-partisan. While this may sometimes seem difficult to negotiate, I have good news. The majority of these issues are not partisan issues—they are women’s issues!



Over the years, AAUW Iowa has undertaken many initiatives, supporting local branches and their projects, and bringing attention to statewide issues and opportunities for advocacy. These challenging times are no exception! As you have seen in newsletters, meetings, and conferences, and will continue to see in the coming months, we are working on crucial issues

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like period poverty; reproductive rights and access to reproductive health care; access to accurate, fact-checked information; get out the vote efforts, support for public education; paycheck equity; and balanced representation in leadership. Some of this work is taking place in the form of branch projects, some of it is being moved forward through state taskforces and committees. All of it is making an impact on furthering our mission: advancing gender equity for women and girls.

As we move closer to the 2024 election in November, AAUW Iowa is doubling down on making sure that you have the tools you need to make important decisions based on accurate information. Be sure to check out our updated state website and the many resources available there. Here are two helpful links to start with: <https://aauw-ia.aauw.net/archives/interesting-links/> and <https://cedarfalls-ia.aauw.net/files/2024/08/Fact-Checking-Lists-Sources-2024.pdf>.

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On October 2, AAUW Iowa will host a presentation on combating misinformation by Matt Sinovic and Katy Siddall from Progress Iowa using Zoom. Watch your emails for a Zoom link from us as we get closer to that date.



21st Century Human Trafficking Facts Iowans Need to Know

Mary Ann Ahrens, Chair, ad hoc AAUW Iowa Human Trafficking Prevention Committee

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 they 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 latest research from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 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.

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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



The 2024 Election

Diane Kearns, AAUW Iowa Public Policy Director

The 2024 election will have a major impact on diversity and equity in education, women’s economic security and access to reproductive and civil rights for all women.

There are many ways AAUW members can get involved in the elections and help educate voters:

- Sponsor issue or candidate forums. This is a great way to partner with other nonpartisan community organizations.
- Host a “Ballot & Brunch” for people to find out how to register to vote, find their polling locations, and get information on absentee voting.
- Have volunteers gather signatures on petitions for ballot measures.
- Recruit college students to vote early and then work at the polls.
- Distribute AAUW fact sheets on gender equity issues such as reproductive rights, pay equity, or the Equal Rights Amendment.
- Organize volunteers to participate in non-partisan phone banking or writing postcards to voters.

- Engage the media through letters to the editor, radio call-in shows, and social media to encourage voter turnout.

Everyone should research the voting records of candidates for re-election with regard to our Public Policy Priority issues. **STAY INFORMED AND VOTE!**



Are Your Information Sources Accurate?

Karen Agee, 2024 Get Out the Vote Chair for AAUW of Iowa

In this election season, members of AAUW of Iowa are thinking about our key policy issues, including reproductive freedom, gun safety, and funding for public education. We are leading or participating in candidate forums, writing letters to candidates and representatives, and exploring the really important ethical considerations of these social issues.

As well-educated citizens, we want to avoid falling into a media silo—attending only to messages that confirm our own thinking and stoke outrage against other perspectives. We also want to make certain the ideas we communicate are based on accurate information and represent diverse perspectives.

AAUW of Iowa has planned a Zoom event to discuss how to take action against misinformation. See the box on the right. Also, as we work to get out the vote (GOTV) in Iowa, let's share resources that will help us identify and evaluate misinformation. Co-president Pat Higby suggests a good guide from Planned Parenthood on finding accurate information online: <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/blog/how-to-help-your-teen-find-accurate-sexual-health-information-online>

One of my favorite resources is Maureen White's compilation of fact-checking options. She updates this clear and informative 4-page handout as needed and posts it on the Cedar Falls-Waterloo Branch website, on the public policy page. Here is the 2024 version: cedarfalls-ia.aauw.net/files/2024/08/Fact-Checking-Lists-Sources-2024.pdf Please spend some time with this valuable resource. (And THANK YOU to Maureen for letting us share it across Iowa.)

Join Us for a Zoom Meeting on Combating Misinformation

AAUW Iowa will host a program on combating misinformation presented by Matt Sinovic, Executive Director with Progress Iowa, and Katy Siddall, Progress Iowa Messaging Director. Mark your calendars for October 2 at 7:30 pm. Progress Iowa will provide the zoom link, and AAUW Iowa will send out the zoom link closer to that date. Meanwhile, follow this link for the [Progress Iowa Disinfo Toolkit](#).



Project 2025 Presentation

The Des Moines branch hosted a presentation on Project 2025 by Jillian Gaeta on August 27 using Zoom. It was well

attended by members of several AAUW branches and friends. Project 2025 is a plan for conservative presidency that is a product of a think tank sponsored by the Heritage



Jillian Gaeta

Foundation. The meeting was recorded and is on the AAUW Iowa website. You may find it here:

[LINK TO RECORDING OF PROJECT 2025 PRESENTATION](#).

Women's Equality Day in Linn County

The Cedar Rapids branch of AAUW worked with the League of Women Voters and the Women's Equality Coalition of Linn County to celebrate Women's Equality Day on August 26 at the Hiawatha Community Center. A panel of local medical and dental service providers discussed health services for women.

