



## Migration and Refugee Service

### Office of Migration Policy and Public Affairs

3211 4th Street NE • Washington, D.C. 20017-1194 • (p) 202-541- 3352 • (f) 202-541-3399

Website: [www.usccb.org/mrs](http://www.usccb.org/mrs)

## Human Trafficking in the United States

*I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way.*

-- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

**Background:** The United States is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children. Both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor, including domestic servitude. Trafficking in the U.S. occurs in both legal and illicit industries, including escort services, brothels, strip clubs, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, health and elder care, and domestic service. The top countries of origin of federally identified victims in 2013 were the United States, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand, Honduras, Guatemala, India and El Salvador.<sup>1</sup> Particularly vulnerable U.S. citizen populations include foster care, runaway, and homeless youth, Native American women and girls, and U.S. citizen children of migrant farm workers. Foreign nationals who have entered the United States both with and without legal status have been identified as trafficking victims and have come from a variety of industries and situations. These include participants in visa programs for temporary workers, third-country nationals providing services for U.S. defense contracts in Afghanistan, and visa holders employed as domestic workers in households of foreign diplomatic mission personnel.

**The U.S. Government Response:** The United States federal government has been a leader in addressing human trafficking at the national level. Through the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA)<sup>2</sup>, (and subsequent reauthorizations in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013) the U.S. has developed a legal mechanism for implementing trafficking prevention mechanisms, law enforcement and legal protections, and victim support services. For identification and prosecution purposes, the U.S. federal government uses the definition of severe forms of trafficking in persons found in the TVPA:

- **Sex trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act 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

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Trafficking In Persons Report 2014, United States Department of State, USA profile, at 397 (June 2014) available at

[http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm\\_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R)

<sup>2</sup> Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386

- **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.<sup>3</sup>

Federal trafficking offenses are investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) Human Trafficking Unit. Federal human trafficking cases are prosecuted by the Department of Justice (DOJ) U.S. Attorney's Office, and two specialized DOJ units: the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, which oversees prosecutions involving labor trafficking and sex trafficking of adults, and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, which specializes in prosecuting child sexual exploitation offenses. In FY 2013, DOJ convicted a total of 174 traffickers in cases involving forced labor, sex trafficking of adults, and commercial sexual exploitation of children.<sup>4</sup>

**U.S. Catholic Bishop's Response to Human Trafficking** The Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico have specifically spoken out on the issue of human trafficking, calling upon their governments to work together to apprehend traffickers and destroy trafficking networks. In 2003 the Bishops, in their joint pastoral statement *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, state that "both governments must vigilantly seek to end trafficking in human persons. . . . Together, both governments should more effectively share information on trafficking operations and should engage in joint action to apprehend and prosecute traffickers."<sup>5</sup>

The Catholic bishops of the United States affirmed their commitment to end this abominable practice: "The Catholic Church . . . in the United States stands ready to work with our government to end this scourge. We cannot rest until trafficking in human persons is eliminated from the globe."<sup>6</sup>

The U.S. Catholic bishop's recently stated in testimony of their anti-trafficking work and commitment to the U.S. anti-trafficking efforts; "In our mission to eradicate modern day slavery and minister to the survivors, we [the Bishops] have consistently served survivors and helped them to rehabilitate, grounding our service to this vulnerable population in the article of faith that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore are imbued with fundamental dignity."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> 22 U.S.C. § 7102(9)

<sup>4</sup> United States Trafficking In Persons Report 2014, United States Department of State, USA profile, at 398 (June 2014) available at

[http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm\\_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/?utm_source=NEW+RESOURCE:+Trafficking+in+Persons+R)

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (Washington DC: USCCB 2003), no. 91.

<sup>6</sup> On Human Trafficking, Statement by the Committee of Migration, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007 available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/upload/OnHumanTrafficking.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Testimony of Nathalie Lummert, Director of Special Programs for Migration and Refugee Services at USCCB, before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations in hearing entitled *Effective Accountability: Tier Rankings in the Fight Against Human Trafficking* April 29, 2014 available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/upload/Trafficking-TIP-Report-Testimony-FINALAP.pdf>

**USCCB's Role in Combatting Human Trafficking in the U.S.** The USCCB has condemned human trafficking and has made the elimination of trafficking a priority. Their efforts to this end include (1) awareness-raising and outreach, (2) protection and provision of services to trafficking survivors, and (3) public advocacy. By virtue of its organizational structure and geographical reach the U.S. Catholic Church has assumed a strong leadership position and played a critical role in the American anti-trafficking movement.

USCCB and its partner organizations, particularly Catholic Charities, have provided support services to both adult and child victims of trafficking, including health and mental health services, employment assistance, English-language training, counseling, housing and other material assistance needs. From 2005-2011, the USCCB and its partners provided intensive case management services to victims of trafficking, assisting more than 2,232 survivors of trafficking and over 500 of their family members. The USCCB continues to work with a national network of refugee foster care programs to provide a new life for child survivors of human trafficking and frequently provides consultation regarding potential child trafficking for the Department of Health and Human Services.

The USCCB currently assists the federal government comply with the requirements of the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act by helping to screen all children crossing the border as potential trafficking victims. The USCCB has taught informational sessions on the identification and screening of trafficking victims to Border Patrol and Customs and Border Patrol officers. The trafficking information sessions have helped increase knowledge and awareness about trafficking among our law enforcement personnel and are a stellar example of government and Church collaboration.

The USCCB works on public advocacy initiatives related to ending human trafficking and modern slavery. Part of this effort is driven by the Catholic Coalition against Human Trafficking (CCOAH), which consists of about twenty Catholic organizations which convene quarterly and work together on advocacy and public outreach. In recent years, USCCB has supported legislative and advocacy initiatives to help promote transparent and slavery-free supply chains as well as efforts to eliminate illegal foreign labor recruitment fees which can place individuals in situations of debt bondage.

**For more information contact:** Contact Ashley Feasley, Policy Advisor, Migration and Refugee Services, (202)541-3207, [AFeasley@usccb.org](mailto:AFeasley@usccb.org) .