

## Human Trafficking Remains Largely in the Shadows Across the US

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WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Darko Mihaylovich likes to tell his fellow Kentuckians that if they think human trafficking doesn't exist in the state they'd better think again.

As the director of migration and refugee services for Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Louisville, Mihaylovich knows that on any given day he or a member of the statewide human trafficking task force could run across a trafficking victim.

Since March 2008, "we have identified ... 31 victims," he told Catholic News Service. "It is happening here."

Mihaylovich knows the number of discovered victims in Kentucky is far below those in such entry points as New York, Washington, southern California, Texas and Florida. But, as he tells anyone who will listen, human trafficking exists everywhere.

Trafficking victims -- called "survivors" by advocates -- are considered modern-day slaves by law enforcement officials and outreach workers alike. For the traffickers, the motivating factor is money. For the trafficked, the dream is a better life, but it never becomes so.

Worldwide trafficking networks involve systems where individuals are recruited for an honest wage for an honest day's work as they pursue financial independence and freedom. Once in place, usually outside their home country, victims end up under the control of one individual, with their freedom restricted and their safety usually threatened.

Mihaylovich's agency is one of 98 nonprofits across the U.S. and its territories that have been subcontracted by Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to provide vital services to foreign-born trafficking victims once they are identified. Funding comes through a five-year contract with the Department of Health and Human Services worth up to \$33.9 million. The contract runs through March 2011.

Despite the contract, identifying people who are being trafficked is a difficult task, said Kristyn Peck Williams, screening and field coordinator for the MRS Office of Refugee Programs.

"It's not easy to find people," Williams said. "It's a hidden crime. People don't self-identify as being abused."

Since the contract began in April 2006 the 98 subcontractors have assisted 1,043 victims and 278 family members, including dependent children, parents of dependent children and spouses.

The subcontracted agencies provide case-management services for the victims. Social workers arrange counseling sessions, find housing, transport victims for court appearances and accompany victims through the process of becoming a U.S. citizen, Williams explained.

The agencies assist minors and adults, males and females. Statistics from Williams' office show that 97 percent of the victims are adults.

Other statistics from their work under the contract show:

-- Women and girls make up more than two-thirds of victims.

-- Slightly more than one-quarter of victims were involved in sex trafficking while two-thirds were brought to the U.S. and placed in abusive labor settings, including domestic housekeeping and child care, factory work and janitorial services. About 7 percent were involved in both sex and labor abuses.

-- Victims have been identified from 83 countries, most commonly from Southeast Asia, West Africa, Eastern Europe, Mexico and Central America.

The services offered under the contract reach only a small portion of the 14,500 to 17,500 people that the State Department estimates are trafficked into the U.S. annually. Worldwide, the United Nations and government agencies estimate that the number tops out in the hundreds of thousands.

Within the U.S., thousands more American-born girls and young women are trafficked primarily for the sex trade, showing up on the street as prostitutes or in brothels. While far lower in number, American-born boys and young men are not immune to being trafficked.

To help address trafficking concerns, many of the agencies subcontracted by MRS have joined statewide or regional task forces. While funding under the federal contract is limited to helping foreign-born victims, agencies like those run by Mihaylovich have other financial resources to help American victims.

Local law enforcement officials, the FBI and federal prosecutors also participate in most of the task forces. Such efforts allow all parties to work more closely and better understand the needs of victims, especially those involved in the sex trade, explained Roy L. Austin Jr., coordinator of the District of Columbia Human Trafficking Task Force.

"These cases are more complex than many others because you have such an enormous need for victim services," Austin told CNS. "You deal often with very reluctant victims. Those become issues you have to overcome."

Education has been a key component of the work of the task forces, said Renee Huffman, anti-trafficking project manager at Ayuda Inc. in Washington, which subcontracts with MRS for services to trafficking victims.

"There's such a huge need for education," Huffman told CNS. Ayuda offers regular training programs for the general public as well as for law enforcement officials.

Even with such efforts, the huge sums of money that traffickers make ensure that human trafficking is not about to go away any time soon.

Austin said the extent of the problem depends on the city or region of the country. In the nation's capital, with its lack of a major manufacturing base, the sex trade is the most likely place to find trafficked people. He said American teenage girls are often found to be victims working in prostitution rings. He also cited Asian-style massage parlors and brothels filled with young Central Americans as places where trafficking victims can be found.

On Maryland's Eastern Shore, people are trafficked into the region for their labor, according to Solette Magnelli, an assistant U.S. attorney in Baltimore and a member of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force. She also said some women end up in domestic servitude after being brought into the country by diplomats residing in the Maryland suburbs of Washington.

Williams of MRS said such treatment is difficult to fathom for most Americans.

"We're still in the baby steps of understanding (trafficking)," she said. "We're still developing our knowledge and responses as a country. It takes collaboration between agencies, law enforcement and good Samaritans to identify (victims)."

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Editor's Note: Several resources on both domestic and international human trafficking are available. Shared Hope International's "The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children" is available online at [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org). The U.S. State Department's annual "Trafficking in Persons Report 2009" is available online at [www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/index.htm).

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