



Migration and Refugee Services

Office of Refugee Programs

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How to Identify a Trafficked Person

- 1. Why and how did the person come to this country?** Many trafficking victims are smuggled into the U.S. or come on legitimate visas with the promise of a good job. Women are often promised jobs in the restaurant industry, in domestic service, or as a dancer or model, while men may come with the promise of factory or agricultural labor. Once here, they may be forced to do different work and/or work off their travel “debt.” Internal trafficking is also a crime, *i.e.* the person does not need to have crossed an international border to be a victim of trafficking.
- 2. How was the person recruited?** Many trafficking victims are recruited by acquaintances or people of their own ethnic group who offer “success stories” in the U.S. The terms of their contract before departure are vague and they are surprised to find that they owe exorbitant debts for their travel, lodging, food, etc. Some come through fraudulent mail-order bride or matchmaking services with offers of marriage.
- 3. Does the person have identification papers?** Many trafficking victims have their immigration and identity documents, such as passports and/or return plane tickets, seized upon arrival in the U.S. by their traffickers or employers. The original papers may have been legitimate or fraudulently provided by the traffickers.
- 4. Does the person owe money to their employer?** The person may have been promised a job with good pay but found instead that they must first work off their travel debt. While doing so, they are charged exorbitant fees for rent, food, and clothes leading them into a cycle of debt to their employer.
- 5. Does the person get paid a fair wage?** How many hours a day/week do they work? Do they receive compensation for their work or does it go directly to the employer?
- 6. Where does the person live? Is their freedom restricted in any way?** Although many people receive unjustly low wages, victims of trafficking have their freedom restricted as well. They may be forced to live in the same place where they work. They may not be allowed to leave the premises and/or they may have been frightened into staying inside due to their immigration status and lack of documents (if the employer is holding them).
- 7. Has the person been threatened in any way to prevent him/her from leaving?** In addition to physical harm, the person may be subject to psychological intimidation and/or coercion through threats to family members if they try to leave.

Remember, it does not matter how the person entered the U.S., whether they initially consented to being brought here for a job, or whether their current employment activity is illegal (such as prostitution). If at anytime they were deceived or coerced into forced labor or are being held against their will in some sort of debt bondage or peonage, they are a victim of trafficking. Any child under the age of 18 who is induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of trafficking, as a minor cannot consent.

**For more information, contact the
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