



International Association of Justice Watch is a non-governmental association, founded in Tehran on January 2012, by the collaboration of advocates from academia, teachers, lawyers and other social activists for promotion and protection of social justice. «Justice for All» is what we are committed to by aggregating individual resources and mobilizing collective action.

Justice Watch successfully attained the consultative status of the UN ECOSOC (2019) as it had already won the same position in UNISPAL (2013). To raise awareness and disembed the social structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate injustice, we depend on human capital and community development. 1500 university professors and experts in social and natural sciences, pedagogues and technical engineers are currently collaborating in our national and international projects.

Human Trafficking in the United States

Despite notable progress in the realm of human rights, human trafficking continues to pose a significant challenge within the United States. Annually, thousands of vulnerable individuals—including women, children, and undocumented migrants—become targets of sophisticated organized networks that exploit them for a range of grievous purposes, including sexual exploitation and forced labor. This report draws on a wealth of official statistics and credible resources to meticulously examine the extensive reach of this heinous issue. It also underscores the critical shortcomings of current preventive measures and protective policies in the United States, illustrating how inadequacies in enforcement and support systems contribute to the ongoing struggle against this modern-day slavery.

In this report, we will examine the issue of human trafficking in the United States.

1. According to international studies, it is estimated that over one million people in the United States are victims of human trafficking. This equates to approximately 3.3 victims per 1,000 people. This figure includes individuals living in modern slavery in the U.S., such as those subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labor, and domestic servitude. Traffickers usually target vulnerable groups such as immigrants, the homeless, and children. These victims are often lured with promises of better job opportunities, a better life, or marriage. Many of these individuals remain trapped in a cycle of exploitation due to a lack of awareness of their rights, the absence of an appropriate support network in the U.S., and fear of reporting to authorities. According to the organization Hope for Justice, modern slavery and human trafficking in the U.S. are complicated by cultural diversity and geographic location. Open borders and advanced trafficking networks also contribute to the spread of this problem¹.

2. Human trafficking is one of the major and underreported issues in the United States. The National Human Trafficking Hotline in the U.S. received over 51,667 calls in 2021, leading to the identification of 16,554 trafficking victims. Since its establishment, the hotline has identified over 100,891 human trafficking cases and approximately 197,000 victims. Reports from the hotline indicate that most victims are recruited through the internet or direct contact with traffickers, a trend that has intensified with the rise of social media in recent years. However, it is important to note that these alarming figures represent only a fraction of the real scale of this issue in the U.S., as many cases remain hidden².

3. Until the year 2000, human trafficking was not classified as a criminal offense in the United States. It wasn't until the enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) under the administration of President Bill Clinton, supported by the U.S. Congress, that the gravity of this human rights violation was formally recognized and made a federal crime. Despite this legal progress, the effectiveness of the law in combating human trafficking has been limited, and the issue persists as a serious and complex challenge across the nation. Factors such as economic vulnerability, lack of awareness, and insufficient resources for enforcement and victim support continue to fuel this ongoing crisis, highlighting the need for stronger legal frameworks and comprehensive strategies to address and eradicate human trafficking in the United States.³

4. Studies indicate that annually, between 15,000 to 50,000 women and children are trafficked into the U.S. from abroad. These figures primarily include victims trafficked from Latin America,

¹ <https://hopeforjustice.org/news/more-than-1-million-human-trafficking-victims-in-usa-new-study>

² <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en>

³ <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/human-trafficking>

Asia, and Africa. Women and children account for about 70% of all trafficking victims, mostly exploited for sexual purposes. Trafficking women and children often involve complex organized networks using methods such as document forgery, threats, or violence to control victims. These victims are typically held and exploited in hidden locations such as private homes, nightclubs, and hotels. A large portion of this trafficking occurs through the southern borders of the U.S., where traffickers exploit border security weaknesses. Victims are usually transported under inhumane and dangerous conditions and are kept in secret by traffickers after entering the U.S.⁴

5. Many individuals under the legal working age in the U.S. are children who are trafficking victims. The U.S. is the only United Nations member country that has never ratified the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the past two years alone, over 250,000 unaccompanied children have entered the U.S., making them highly vulnerable to exploitative employers. Reported child labor violations in the U.S. have increased by 88% over the past five years. These children not only work in prohibited industries but are also exposed to hazardous chemicals, putting them at serious risk. Trafficked migrant children often work in dangerous jobs that explicitly violate child labor laws, such as in factories producing products for brands like Cheetos and Fruit of the Loom. These workers are part of a new economy of exploitation. Hearthside Food Solutions, one of the largest food contractors in the U.S., produces and packages products for well-known snack and cereal brands. The company's factory is filled with underage workers trafficked through the southern border, who now work late hours on dangerous machines, in violation of labor laws⁵.

6. As with any other crisis in the U.S., racial minorities such as Latinos, who also face economic hardships, are among the primary victims. Reports indicate that Latinos constitute about one-third of trafficking victims in the U.S. Additionally, U.S. Department of Justice statistics show that nearly 62% of sex trafficking victims in the U.S. are African Americans. More detailed statistics reveal that 52% or more than half of arrested teenage prostitutes in the U.S. are African American teenagers⁶.

7. According to data from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, major U.S. cities such as Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York have the highest number of reported human trafficking cases. Several factors contribute to this, including large populations, ethnic diversity, and geographic locations⁷.

8. Estimates indicate that human traffickers in the United States generate over \$9.5 billion in annual revenue. Recent statistics also show that over 9,000 illicit massage parlors in the U.S. are involved in human trafficking-related activities, earning approximately \$2.5 billion annually. These figures reflect an illegal industry in the U.S. that thrives by exploiting vulnerable individuals for sexual purposes, forced labor, or work under inhumane conditions. This revenue comes from various sectors, including sexual exploitation, which accounts for about 60% of total human trafficking revenue, and forced labor in industries such as agriculture, construction, domestic services, and sweatshops. These victims often receive little or no pay.⁸

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_trafficking_in_the_United_States

⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200509140102/https://www.childrightscampaign.org/what-is-the-crc/>

⁶ <https://www.endslaverynow.org/act/action-library/understand-how-human-trafficking-affects-communities-of-color>

⁷ <https://www.darivoa.com/a/nyc-human-trafficking-/7730616.html>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_trafficking

9. The U.S.-Mexico border is one of the primary entry points for trafficking victims into the U.S. According to international reports, over 70% of victims trafficked into the U.S. cross through the Mexican border. This border, with a length of 3,145 kilometers and security weaknesses in many areas, creates an ideal environment for traffickers. Human traffickers, known as "coyotes," often target vulnerable migrants. These individuals, especially women and children, are willing to take risks for illegal border crossings due to poverty, domestic violence, or lack of job opportunities in their home countries. Traffickers exploit this need and force them into human trafficking instead of legal entry. In many cases, victims suffer physical and sexual violence and, upon entering the U.S., are trapped in sexual exploitation or forced labor. They often refrain from reporting due to forged documents and fear of legal authorities⁹.

10. The COVID-19 pandemic, like in many parts of the world, has had a profound impact on human trafficking in the United States. Although official trafficking reports declined during the pandemic lockdowns, there was a significant increase in identified cases after the restrictions were lifted. According to the United Nations, trafficking cases in 2022 were about 25% higher than in 2019 (pre-pandemic). This increase occurred for various reasons. First, the pandemic placed economic pressure on many families in the U.S., pushing more individuals towards illegal jobs or accepting suspicious offers. Second, extensive internet use during the quarantine created opportunities for traffickers to recruit new victims through social media and online sites. Another factor contributing to the increase in trafficking was the lack of oversight and law enforcement during the pandemic. Law enforcement agencies and support organizations faced severe restrictions, creating more opportunities for traffickers. Many victims, especially women and children, were subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labor in the U.S. during this period¹⁰.

Recommendations:

Human trafficking is one of the most serious human rights violations globally, and it exists in a critical form in the United States. This phenomenon, with its complex economic, social, and political dimensions, requires comprehensive and coordinated approaches at both national and international levels. Thus, the International Association of Justice Watch recommends the following:

1. The United Nations has a vital role in urging its member states, particularly influential nations like the United States, to harmonize their national legislation with established international agreements, such as the Palermo Protocol on human trafficking. By fostering a cohesive and binding legal framework, countries can significantly enhance their capabilities to effectively identify and prosecute human traffickers. This cohesive approach will also streamline the process of providing comprehensive support and resources for victims of trafficking, ensuring they receive the necessary assistance for recovery and reintegration into society. Establishing these legal standards globally will not only strengthen enforcement measures but also promote a collaborative effort to combat this pressing humanitarian crisis.

2. Human trafficking represents a significant transnational challenge that necessitates collaborative efforts across national borders. To effectively combat this complex issue, the

⁹ https://amber-ic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AATTAP-Publication-Formatted_ASU-STIR_Sex-_Trafficking-U.S.-Borders_Victim_Characteristics.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/human-trafficking-rises-sharply-after-dropping-during-pandemic-un-says-2024-12-11/>

United Nations should take the initiative to create dedicated platforms aimed at facilitating the exchange of vital information, sharing best practices, and pooling resources among various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and members of the private sector.

Such platforms could serve as vital hubs for training and education, providing essential tools and knowledge to identify and disrupt trafficking networks more efficiently. By promoting inter-country collaboration, these platforms can enhance the capabilities of law enforcement and social services, enabling them to identify victims more swiftly and take decisive action against traffickers. Furthermore, the sharing of case studies and successful intervention strategies can empower countries to adopt more effective policies and approaches tailored to their unique contexts, thereby strengthening the global fight against human trafficking.

3. The United Nations should emphasize the importance of creating support and rehabilitation centers for trafficking victims in the United States. These centers should provide services such as psychological, legal, and educational support to help victims reintegrate into society.

4. Adequate financial resources are essential for effectively combating human trafficking. The United Nations should encourage member states like the United States to allocate more funding to this area and support anti-trafficking programs.

5. The United Nations should expand educational programs on identifying and preventing human trafficking. These trainings should include vulnerable groups, law enforcement, social service workers, and even the general public.

6. Eradicating poverty, gender inequality, unemployment, and domestic violence, as factors that put individuals at risk of trafficking, should be prioritized. The United Nations can strengthen sustainable development programs in countries to reduce the social roots of this problem.

7. The United Nations should urge governments and major corporations in the United States to ensure transparency in their supply chains and guarantee that no exploitation or forced labor exists in their production processes.

8. Using advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics can help identify trafficking networks and victims. The United Nations can support projects to develop and deploy these technologies globally.

9. Addressing trafficking cases requires legal expertise. The United Nations can encourage member states like the United States to establish specialized courts and train judges and lawyers in this field.

10. Media and journalists play a crucial role in exposing trafficking networks. The United Nations should provide mechanisms to support whistleblowers, journalists, and activists who risk their lives to combat trafficking.

11. Creating a global system under the United Nations' supervision for collecting and analyzing data on human trafficking can address gaps in monitoring and policymaking. This system can provide up-to-date and accurate reports on the state of trafficking.

12. The United Nations should strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations, community groups, and local leaders in combating human trafficking. These organizations can

act as effective bridges between victims, governments, and international bodies.