UNDERSTANDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

A Comprehensive Guide to Every Form

Types | Nuances | Warning Signs | How to Report

For use in educational settings, professional training, law enforcement briefings, community outreach, and advocacy work

Federal Definition of Human Trafficking — The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000)

Human trafficking is defined as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain labor or commercial sex acts from another person. For minor victims of sex trafficking, no force, fraud, or coercion is required — the act itself constitutes trafficking under federal law.

The Three Elements: ACT (what is done) + MEANS (how it is done) + PURPOSE (why it is done). All three must be present for adult victims. For minors in sex trafficking, only the act and purpose are required.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

For educators, advocates, law enforcement, healthcare workers, and community members

This document provides a comprehensive breakdown of every recognized form of human trafficking — from the most widely known to the least discussed. Each section covers the specific type, its defining nuances and contexts, the warning signs that indicate it may be occurring, and the appropriate reporting pathways.

Human trafficking does not look the same across every context. A labor trafficker in an agricultural setting uses different tactics than one operating in a domestic service environment. A sex trafficker targeting a teenager online operates differently from one exploiting an adult in a commercial establishment. Understanding those differences is what makes identification possible — and reporting effective.

🔍 NUANCES	⚠ SPOT IT	📞 REPORT IT	🛡️ WHO IS VULNERABLE
Context that makes each type distinct — the tactics, vulnerabilities, and environments unique to that form of trafficking	Behavioral, physical, and situational signs that indicate this type of trafficking may be occurring	Who to call, what to report, and how to ensure your report reaches the right agency	The populations most frequently targeted — not to create assumptions, but to inform identification

SECTION 1: SEX TRAFFICKING

The use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts

1.1 🔴 Sex Trafficking of Adults

Adult sex trafficking occurs when a person aged 18 or older is compelled to engage in commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion. This includes street-based exploitation, escort and massage services, strip clubs, online platforms, and hotel-based operations. Unlike minor sex trafficking, prosecutors must prove force, fraud, or coercion for adult victims — making identification and prosecution more complex.

Who is most vulnerable: Women and girls ages 15–30; LGBTQ+ youth; individuals with trauma histories, substance use disorders, or housing instability; immigrants with insecure legal status

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **Traffickers often pose as romantic partners** ("loverboy" or "romeo pimp" model) — building emotional dependency before introducing exploitation
- **Debt bondage** is common: traffickers claim victims owe money for transportation, housing, clothes, or drugs and must pay it off through commercial sex
- **Victims may not self-identify** as trafficked — especially when in a relationship with the trafficker or when their basic needs are being met
- **Geographic movement** is a key tactic — moving victims between cities, hotels, and venues makes identification and escape harder
- **Online recruitment** through dating apps, social media, and classified ad sites has largely replaced street-based recruitment in many regions
- **Prior trauma** (childhood abuse, domestic violence, foster care history)

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **Hotel staff:** rooms rented in cash; multiple men visiting one room; minimal luggage; evidence of commercial activity
- **Multiple cell phones** or hotel key cards; large amounts of cash; no ID or someone else holds ID
- **Signs of physical abuse:** bruising, malnourishment, branding tattoos (names, barcodes, crown symbols)
- **Scripted, inconsistent, or rehearsed answers** to basic questions about where they live or who they are with
- **Fear, submission, or deference** to a companion — does not speak freely when that person is present
- **Presence on escort ad sites** (such as historical Backpage sites, now moved to other platforms) with indicators of youth, control, or coercion

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 (24/7, 200+ languages)
- **Local law enforcement (911)** for immediate danger; non-emergency line for tips
- **FBI:** tips.fbi.gov — federal sex trafficking crimes across state lines
- **Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force** if online recruitment is involved
- **Department of Homeland Security:** dhs.gov/blue-campaign for tips
- **When reporting:** note physical descriptions, vehicle, location, time, and any digital platforms involved

significantly increases vulnerability to recruitment		

1.2 🔴 Sex Trafficking of Minors (CSEC)

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is the sex trafficking of anyone under 18. Under federal law, NO force, fraud, or coercion is required — any minor involved in commercial sex is a trafficking victim by definition, regardless of apparent consent. Traffickers target minors because they are easier to manipulate, less likely to report, and carry harsher legal consequences for buyers.

Who is most vulnerable: Youth in foster care or group homes; runaway and homeless youth; LGBTQ+ youth rejected by families; youth with absent or abusive parents; children of parents who are trafficking victims themselves

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **The consent defense does not exist** for minor victims — a minor cannot legally consent to commercial sex under any circumstances • **Familial trafficking** is a significant and underreported subset — a parent, guardian, or relative is the trafficker • **Online recruitment** through Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Kik, Discord, and gaming platforms is now the primary entry point • **"Finsta" (fake Instagram) accounts** are commonly used by traffickers to communicate with and recruit minors • **School-based recruitment:** traffickers or their recruiters target youth at schools, bus stops, and after-school locations • **Foster care and group home youth** are disproportionately targeted — up to 85% of commercially exploited children in some regions have child welfare system involvement	• **Minor with older 'boyfriend' or 'manager'** who controls their communication, money, and movements • **Unexplained gifts, money, phones, or hotel keys** a minor cannot account for • **Truancy, school withdrawal, or sudden behavioral changes** — secretiveness, aggression, or sexual knowledge beyond their age • **Branding tattoos** — a trafficker's name or symbol on a minor's body • **Evidence of hotel stays** without a parent: key cards, receipts, or social media posts • **Minor found with condoms, large amounts of cash, or multiple prepaid phones** • **Online posts** that appear sexualized, solicit attention from adults, or reference a 'sponsor'	• **NCMEC CyberTipline:** CyberTipline.org | 1-800-843-5678 — for online exploitation of minors • **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **Local law enforcement:** any tip involving a minor should be reported immediately • **FBI Child Exploitation Task Force:** tips.fbi.gov • **State child protective services (CPS)** — required reporters must file a CPS report as well as a trafficking tip • **Do NOT investigate yourself** — report and let trained professionals respond

• **Runaway and homeless youth** are prime targets — traffickers offer food, shelter, and belonging before exploitation begins		

1.3 🔴 Online Sex Trafficking & Sextortion

Online sex trafficking uses digital platforms — social media, gaming environments, dating apps, and messaging services — to recruit, groom, control, and exploit victims. Sextortion is a specific and rapidly growing subset in which traffickers or predators obtain sexual images through manipulation or coercion, then use those images as leverage to demand money, more images, or in-person sexual acts.

Who is most vulnerable: Teen boys ages 14–17 (fastest-growing sextortion target); girls of all ages; adults on dating apps; individuals with social isolation or mental health vulnerabilities

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **Platforms used:** Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Discord, Roblox, Fortnite, Omegle, Telegram, WhatsApp, and dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, and MeetMe • **Grooming cycle:** attention → trust → isolation → sexual content → coercion → exploitation — can happen in days or weeks • **Sextortion targets both boys and girls** but boys ages 14–17 are the fastest-growing demographic • **AI-generated deepfakes** are now used to create fake sexual images using real people's faces — reported at a 6,345% increase from 2024 to 2025 • **International criminal networks** operate sextortion as a business model — often originating in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe • **Trafficking connection:** victims of sextortion are sometimes coerced into in-person commercial sex	• **A child is secretive about online communications** and panics or becomes distressed when asked about their devices • **Unexpected contact** from strangers on gaming or social platforms who quickly become 'close friends' • **Evidence of a sexual image** being shared without consent or used as blackmail • **Requests for money, gift cards, or cryptocurrency** from someone the person has never met in person • **Sudden withdrawal, shame, anxiety, or self-harm** following online interactions • **Adult male online contacts** who claim to be peers, offer gifts, or escalate to sexual topics quickly	• **NCMEC CyberTipline:** CyberTipline.org — report CSAM or sextortion immediately • **FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3):** ic3.gov • **Platform reporting tools:** use in-app reporting on Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Discord simultaneously with hotline reports • **Do not delete evidence** — screenshots of the account, conversation, and demands preserve the case • **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **Thorn:** thorn.org/survivor-resources — specific resources for sextortion victims

to pay off traffickers' demands		

SECTION 2: LABOR TRAFFICKING

The use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person to perform labor or services

2.1 🟠 Agricultural & Farm Labor Trafficking

Agricultural labor trafficking is one of the most prevalent and least reported forms of labor trafficking in the United States. Victims — primarily immigrant workers from Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia — are recruited with false promises of fair wages and legal employment, then subjected to debt bondage, document confiscation, physical confinement, and threats of deportation.

Who is most vulnerable: Undocumented immigrants and visa-dependent workers; monolingual Spanish, Haitian Creole, or indigenous language speakers; individuals with no local support network; workers who paid recruitment fees before arriving

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **Debt bondage is the primary control mechanism:** workers are charged for transportation, housing, food, and equipment — debt that grows faster than wages and can never be repaid
- **Document confiscation:** passports, visas, and ID are taken upon arrival, making escape and identification nearly impossible
- **Geographic isolation** is inherent to the crime — farms are remote, workers have no transportation, and language barriers prevent help-seeking
- **H-2A visa holders** (legal guest workers) are particularly vulnerable — tied to a specific employer and deportable if they leave
- **Crew leader exploitation:** labor traffickers often present as legitimate crew leaders or labor contractors who bridge the gap between workers and farm owners
- **Seasonal movement** across states mirrors trafficking movement

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **Workers living on-site in overcrowded, substandard conditions** controlled by their employer
- **Workers who cannot speak freely** when a supervisor or crew leader is present
- **Workers who appear malnourished, injured, or working while visibly ill** without medical access
- **Workers who report wages being withheld, excessive deductions, or receiving less than promised**
- **Workers who did not know their destination or employer before arriving**
- **Workers who are afraid to leave** or say their documents are being held by someone else

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division:** dol.gov/agencies/whd — for labor violations and trafficking
- **Department of Justice Civil Rights Division:** justice.gov/crt
- **ICE Homeland Security Investigations:** 1-866-347-2423 for immigration-related trafficking
- **Legal Aid organizations** in agricultural states (Florida, California, Texas, Georgia, North Carolina) have dedicated farmworker programs
- **Do not alert the employer** when reporting — do so confidentially through the hotline or law enforcement

patterns — making it harder to track and prosecute		

2.2 🟠 Domestic Servitude Trafficking

Domestic servitude occurs when individuals are compelled to perform household labor — cleaning, childcare, cooking, and elder care — through force, fraud, or coercion. It is among the most hidden forms of trafficking because it occurs entirely within private homes, making detection by outsiders extremely difficult.

Who is most vulnerable: Foreign nationals brought on domestic worker visas (A-3, G-5); undocumented immigrants; children brought from other countries for 'educational opportunity'; individuals with no local community or language access

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **Diplomatic immunity exploitation:** foreign diplomats have trafficked domestic workers into the United States using their status to avoid prosecution — a documented and ongoing pattern • **Cultural and family trafficking:** in some cultures, domestic servitude of children (particularly girls) is framed as a cultural practice — including the West African 'confiage' or 'placement' systems • **Isolation is near-total:** victims may never leave the home without supervision, have no phone, and speak no English • **Victims are often known to their trafficker before trafficking begins** — recruited from the same country of origin, village, or family network • **The home itself becomes a prison** — no locks on the door matter when a person has no money, no documents, no language access, and no knowledge of where they are • **Child domestic workers** are an underrecognized subset — brought from	• **A household worker who is never seen without their employer** and cannot speak independently • **A worker who appears to sleep in a utility room, garage, or on the floor** without personal space • **A worker with no days off, no personal time, and no ability to leave the home freely** • **A worker whose employer answers all questions on their behalf** • **Signs of physical abuse, malnourishment, or exhaustion** • **Neighbors noticing a worker outside but always accompanied or supervised**	• **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking:** state.gov/j/tip — for diplomatic immunity cases • **Department of Homeland Security:** dhs.gov/blue-campaign • **Local law enforcement** for immediate safety concerns • **Local legal aid** for immigration status, documentation, and civil legal support • **Note:** Diplomatic immunity cases require State Department involvement — do not delay reporting assuming prosecution is impossible

other countries or regions under the guise of educational opportunity		

2.3 🟠 Restaurant, Food Service & Hospitality Labor Trafficking

Labor trafficking in restaurants, hotels, and hospitality settings is pervasive and underreported. Workers are recruited — often from China, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe — with promises of legal employment, fair wages, and sponsored immigration, then subjected to debt bondage, wage theft, and threats.

Who is most vulnerable: Undocumented workers from China, Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Central America; workers who paid smuggling fees; individuals on expired or dependent visas; workers in isolated geographic areas

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **The restaurant industry** is particularly vulnerable because of its cash-based economy, high turnover, and normalized exploitation of undocumented workers
- **Smuggling debt** is the primary control mechanism — workers pay $20,000–$80,000 to be smuggled and must work off the debt in exploitative conditions before earning real wages
- **Recruitment fraud** is common: promises of $15–$20/hour turn into unpaid 'training periods' or wages withheld entirely until debt is paid
- **Workers are housed collectively** by the employer, creating total economic and physical dependence
- **Chinese restaurant trafficking networks** have been prosecuted in multiple U.S. cities — workers moved between restaurants across state lines
- **Hotel trafficking** includes both labor exploitation (housekeeping, kitchen, maintenance) and sex trafficking occurring within the property

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **Workers who appear to live at or near the workplace** without their own housing
- **Workers who are paid significantly below minimum wage** or whose tips are confiscated
- **Workers who appear exhausted, working 16+ hour shifts** without days off
- **Workers who cannot speak freely** in front of management or ownership
- **Workers who report their debt to a recruiter or smuggler** that must be repaid through labor
- **Hotel staff:** noting rooms with restricted access, delivery of supplies in bulk, or workers working under unusual conditions

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division:** 1-866-487-9243 — wage theft and labor violations
- **EEOC:** eeoc.gov — for workplace discrimination and coercion cases
- **ICE HSI Tip Line:** 1-866-347-2423
- **Local restaurant worker advocacy organizations** in major cities often have hotlines for labor trafficking reports
- **Document what you observe** — hours worked, wages paid, living conditions, who controls communication

2.4 🟠 Construction & Landscaping Labor Trafficking

Construction and landscaping labor trafficking affects primarily male immigrant workers who are recruited — often in their home countries — with promises of legal employment, then subjected to extreme wage theft, debt bondage, and physical coercion once they arrive in the United States.

Who is most vulnerable: Male immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia; day laborers; workers with H-2B visas or expired visas; workers recruited post-disaster

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **Male victims are chronically under identified** in trafficking systems designed primarily to detect female sex trafficking victims
- **Day labor exploitation:** traffickers recruit from day labor sites, promise legitimate employment, and deliver workers to subcontractors who exploit them
- **Construction companies operating as fronts** for labor trafficking operations have been prosecuted in Florida, Texas, California, and the Carolinas
- **Seasonal and post-disaster vulnerability:** following hurricanes and natural disasters, traffickers recruit workers with promises of cleanup and rebuilding contracts — exploiting both workers and federal disaster relief funds
- **False H-2B visa sponsorship:** traffickers promise legal guest worker visas but charge enormous fees, leave workers undocumented, or confiscate documents upon arrival
- **Workers are moved across job sites and states** to prevent community connection and identification

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **Workers living in vans, trailers, or employer-controlled housing** at or near job sites
- **Workers who appear injured and have not received medical care** — construction injuries untreated due to fear of employer retaliation
- **Workers who are paid in cash but report wages being withheld** or deducted for fees they did not agree to
- **Workers who cannot name their employer or contractor** — only know a crew leader
- **Workers who appear disoriented about their location** or how long they have been in the area
- **Large groups of workers transported together** in employer-controlled vehicles to and from job sites

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division:** dol.gov/agencies/whd
- **FEMA Fraud Hotline** (for post-disaster trafficking): 1-800-323-8603
- **OSHA:** 1-800-321-OSHA for workplace safety violations connected to trafficking
- **Local legal aid and worker centers** — many cities have worker centers specifically for day laborers
- **State attorneys general** construction fraud units in FL, TX, CA, and NC have prosecuted these cases

2.5 🟠 Nail Salon, Massage Parlor & Beauty Industry Trafficking

Nail salons, massage businesses, and beauty establishments are documented sites of both labor and sex trafficking. Workers — primarily Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean women — are recruited internationally or domestically with promises of legal work, housing, and income, then subjected to debt bondage, wage theft, and in many cases, sexual exploitation as well.

Who is most vulnerable: Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean immigrant women; workers on expired or sponsored visas; individuals with high debt from overseas recruitment; workers in industries with limited regulatory oversight

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **The 2019 New York Times investigation** found rampant wage theft and labor exploitation across the nail salon industry in New York — workers earning $30/day or paying to work
- **Massage parlors** are a common front for sex trafficking — 'happy ending' services are a well-documented commercial sex trafficking operation in both urban and suburban settings
- **Licensing fraud:** workers are recruited to obtain cosmetology or massage licenses, then the licenses are confiscated and used to operate businesses the workers cannot leave
- **Geographic concentration:** Vietnamese nail salon networks and Korean spa networks are heavily concentrated in specific metropolitan areas, enabling large-scale operations
- **Isolation is enforced through language** — workers speak limited English, live in employer-controlled housing, and have no contact with the broader community
- **Trafficking within massage franchises** has

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **Workers who live at or directly above the salon or spa** and are never seen leaving independently
- **Workers who appear to be available at all hours** — spas open past midnight are a significant indicator of commercial sex trafficking
- **Workers who cannot communicate independently** and defer entirely to a manager
- **Businesses with blacked-out windows, cameras at entrances, buzzed entry systems, and mattresses in back rooms**
- **Reviews or online ads** indicating sexual services are available beyond stated services
- **Workers who appear fearful, malnourished, or emotionally withdrawn**

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Local law enforcement vice units** — massage parlor trafficking is frequently investigated by local vice/special victims units
- **FBI:** tips.fbi.gov for operations crossing state lines
- **State cosmetology and massage licensing boards** — report unlicensed operations or license fraud
- **Department of Labor:** for wage theft and labor violations
- **Polaris Project's Massage Parlor Initiative** has resources and reporting tools: polarisproject.org

been documented — the 2020 federal case involving Orchids of Asia Day Spa in Florida brought national attention to this model		

2.6 🟠 Traveling Sales Crew Trafficking

Traveling sales crews exploit victims — often American citizens — by recruiting them for door-to-door sales jobs with promises of travel, income, and adventure. Victims are transported across states in vans, controlled through debt, isolation, and substance dependency, and subjected to dangerous working conditions with little or no pay.

Who is most vulnerable: American youth ages 16–25; individuals recently aged out of foster care; people experiencing homelessness; individuals in crisis or leaving abusive situations

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **Victims are primarily domestic U.S. citizens** — unlike most labor trafficking, this form targets American youth, including those in crisis or transitioning out of foster care • **Recruitment targets people in vulnerable situations:** bus stations, homeless shelters, Craigslist, and social media are common recruitment venues • **Debt bondage mechanics:** victims are charged for food, lodging, transportation, and supplies — debt accumulates quickly and justifies withholding wages • **Substance use is a deliberate control tool** — crew managers introduce drugs or alcohol to create dependency and compliance • **Victims are moved constantly** — working different cities, states, and neighborhoods prevents community connection and makes escape difficult	• **Young people traveling in groups in vans** with out-of-state plates, selling door-to-door without permits • **Individuals who appear disoriented, exhausted, or uncomfortable** when asked about their employer or living situation • **Young people who cannot name their employer** beyond a first name or nickname • **Individuals who report living in hotels or motels** with coworkers, supervised by a manager • **Individuals who become nervous** when a companion approaches during conversation • **Young people who appear to be under the influence** or express a desire to leave but say they cannot	• **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **Local law enforcement** — many traveling crew operations can be reported to city or county police • **State attorneys general consumer protection divisions** — sales without permits is an additional violation • **FBI:** for multi-state operations • **Document the van plate number, company name on materials sold, and crew manager descriptions** when reporting

• **Products sold** include magazines, cleaning supplies, and candy — legitimate products, illegitimate employment conditions		

SECTION 3: SPECIALIZED & EMERGING FORMS OF TRAFFICKING

Less commonly identified but equally serious — often overlooked in training and awareness efforts

3.1 🟣 Familial Trafficking

Familial trafficking occurs when a parent, guardian, sibling, romantic partner, or extended family member is the trafficker. It is one of the most underreported and misunderstood forms of trafficking because victims are less likely to self-identify, more likely to protect the trafficker, and more likely to be disbelieved when they do report.

Who is most vulnerable: Children of parents with substance use disorders, poverty, or histories of abuse; children in foster care or group homes; individuals in intimate partner relationships with controlling partners; adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **Parents or guardians trafficking their own children** for money, drugs, housing, or other resources — documented in cases across every state
- **Intimate partner trafficking:** a romantic partner (boyfriend, husband, girlfriend) who controls a person's commercial sexual activity, labor, or both
- **Extended family networks:** grandparents, aunts/uncles, or cousins acting as primary traffickers — particularly documented in CSEC (child sex trafficking) cases
- **Cultural and generational normalization:** some victims have been trafficked since childhood and have no reference point for what a non-exploitative relationship looks like
- **Child welfare systems are frequently involved** with families before familial trafficking is identified — case workers who know the family may be best positioned to detect it

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **A child or adult expressing love for, loyalty to, or protectiveness of a person suspected of trafficking them**
- **A parent who controls all of a child's interactions** with teachers, doctors, or other adults and answers all questions on the child's behalf
- **A romantic partner who manages all of a person's income, phone, and social contacts**
- **A child with unexplained money, gifts, or absences** whose parent cannot explain or seems unconcerned
- **Patterns of abuse, neglect, and exploitation in the same family** across generations
- **A survivor who refers to their trafficker as 'my boyfriend,' 'my mom,' or 'my family'**

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **Child Protective Services (CPS)** — mandatory reporters must report suspected child trafficking to CPS immediately
- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Local law enforcement** — intimate partner trafficking can also be reported as domestic violence with trafficking enhancements
- **NCMEC:** for child victims — 1-800-843-5678
- **Be aware:** victims may deny trafficking or recant — report based on indicators, not victim confirmation alone

• **Trauma bonding** makes victim cooperation with prosecution extremely difficult — victims may recant, refuse to testify, or protect the trafficker even after removal		

3.2 🟣 Gang-Controlled Sex Trafficking

Gang-controlled sex trafficking occurs when organized street gangs or criminal organizations control victims — primarily girls and young women — for commercial sexual exploitation. Gangs have increasingly moved into sex trafficking as a more profitable and lower-risk criminal enterprise than drug sales.

Who is most vulnerable: Girls and young women ages 12–25 in urban areas with active gang presence; youth with older romantic partners; youth with absent or incarcerated parents

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **Gang recruitment mirrors romance trafficking** — girls are recruited by attractive young men who are gang members, given gifts, introduced to the 'lifestyle,' and then exploited once emotional dependency is established • **Branding:** gang-affiliated traffickers frequently tattoo or brand victims with gang symbols, their name, or ownership marks • **Violence as a control tool** is more explicit in gang trafficking than in romance trafficking — threats of violence against the victim and their family are common • **Multi-victim operations:** gangs may traffic several girls simultaneously, housing them together and enforcing competition and quota systems • **Interstate movement** is common — gang networks move victims between cities to avoid law enforcement identification	• **A young woman who has taken on gang-affiliated clothing, symbols, or tattoos** without prior connection to gangs • **A young woman who refers to gang members as 'family' or 'my people'** and shows fear or deference to a specific male • **Evidence of gang branding or tattoos** in unusual locations (neck, chest, above the hairline) • **A minor or young adult who has moved out of her home and into a group residence** controlled by a male • **Involvement in commercial sex** and gang-affiliated activity simultaneously • **Sudden access to money, jewelry, or clothes** that cannot be explained by legitimate income	• **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **FBI Violent Gang Task Force:** tips.fbi.gov — gangs trafficking across state lines • **Local law enforcement special victims or anti-gang units** • **NCMEC** for minor victims: 1-800-843-5678 • **Anti-gang diversion programs** in major cities often have survivor-centered trafficking components

• **Victim identification is complicated** because victims may see themselves as affiliated with the gang, not exploited by it		

3.3 🟣 Forced Marriage & Trafficking

Forced marriage is recognized under federal law as a form of human trafficking when it involves force, fraud, or coercion and results in labor or sexual exploitation. It occurs across multiple cultural contexts in the United States and is significantly underreported due to cultural stigma, immigration fears, and family pressure.

Who is most vulnerable: Girls and women from South Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and East African diaspora communities; girls under 18 in states with marriage exceptions; women on spouse-dependent visas

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **Child marriage is legal in 37 U.S. states** with judicial or parental exceptions — a legal loophole traffickers exploit
- **Bride trafficking:** women and girls from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Eastern Europe are recruited with promises of a good life in America, then forced into marriage and domestic servitude
- **Dowry-related coercion:** in some communities, a bride's family pays a dowry, creating transactional pressure that can escalate into exploitation
- **Marriage as a trafficking mechanism:** forced marriage can be used to facilitate other forms of trafficking — a husband may then traffic his wife into commercial sex or labor
- **Immigration control through marriage:** traffickers use marriage to control a foreign national's immigration status, threatening deportation or revocation of visa sponsorship as a control mechanism
- **Cultural pressure and honor-based violence** prevent victims from seeking help — family members may actively

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **A young woman or girl who is suddenly withdrawn from school** to prepare for marriage or following marriage
- **A woman who appears to have no independent access** to finances, transportation, or communication
- **Signs of physical abuse** or extreme deference to a spouse or in-laws in public
- **A woman who expresses fear of returning home** or fear of her husband or his family
- **Community or faith leaders** who are approached by a young woman or girl seeking to leave a marriage
- **A girl under 18** who is married — this should always prompt a trafficking assessment

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Unchained At Last** (forced marriage organization): unchainedatlast.org | (908) 481-HOPE
- **Local domestic violence organizations** — most forced marriage cases involve DV dynamics
- **Department of State:** for international forced marriage cases involving U.S. citizens abroad
- **Legal aid organizations** for immigration, divorce, and protective order support

	assist in keeping the victim in the marriage		

3.4 🟣 Organ Trafficking

Organ trafficking involves the recruitment, transport, or receipt of persons for the purpose of organ removal, typically a kidney. It operates at the intersection of extreme poverty, medical desperation, and organized crime, and is documented in the United States primarily as a transnational crime connecting donors in developing countries to recipients in the U.S. and Europe.

Who is most vulnerable: Individuals in extreme poverty in developing countries; U.S.-based individuals experiencing financial desperation; undocumented immigrants; individuals recruited through deceptive medical or employment offers

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT	⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT	📞 HOW TO REPORT IT
• **'Transplant tourism'** is the primary model: wealthy recipients travel to other countries (or arrange for organs to be sourced internationally) to bypass waiting lists • **Donors are recruited in poverty-stricken regions** with promises of payment that rarely materialize in full — or are paid far less than promised after surgery • **Medical infrastructure complicity:** organ trafficking requires medical personnel — surgeons, nurses, and hospital administrators who look the other way or actively participate • **Domestic cases:** organ trafficking has been prosecuted in New York, New Jersey, and other states — involving U.S.-based brokers connecting donors and recipients • **Victims often do not identify as trafficked** — they believed they were making a voluntary economic decision • **Long-term health consequences** are severe	• **A person with an unexplained surgical scar** consistent with organ removal who cannot explain the procedure • **A person who traveled internationally** for a surgery they are vague about and returned in poor health • **Medical professionals who encounter patients** with organ removal scars and no corresponding medical history in the U.S. • **Individuals who report being paid for a kidney or other organ** — or being pressured into donating • **Online solicitations** offering large payments for organ donations — these are frequently trafficking recruitment tools	• **FBI:** tips.fbi.gov — organ trafficking is a federal crime under the National Organ Transplant Act • **Department of Justice:** justice.gov for transnational organ trafficking cases • **Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General:** oig.hhs.gov • **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888 • **Medical professionals** are encouraged to report through their hospital ethics committees and simultaneously to law enforcement

— donors frequently receive inadequate post-surgical care and suffer lifelong complications		

3.5 🟣 Labor Trafficking of Persons with Disabilities

People with intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities are trafficked for labor at significantly underreported rates. Traffickers exploit guardianship systems, group homes, sheltered workshops, and residential facilities to coerce individuals with disabilities into unpaid or minimally paid work.

Who is most vulnerable: Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; individuals living in group homes or residential facilities; individuals under legal guardianship; people with communication disabilities

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **The Henry's Turkey Service case** (Iowa, 2013) exposed decades of labor trafficking in a sheltered workshop — men with intellectual disabilities worked for $65/month under physically abusive conditions
- **Guardianship exploitation:** a legal guardian — family member, facility, or court-appointed — controls all finances, communications, and movement, creating total dependency
- **Sheltered workshops** operating below minimum wage under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act have been identified as sites of exploitation — federal policy is actively debated
- **Group home trafficking:** residential facility staff or other residents may exploit individuals with disabilities for labor or sexual acts
- **Communication barriers:** non-verbal individuals, those with limited communication capacity, or those who have been told their accounts will not be believed are significantly harder to identify
- **Victims may not understand** that what is happening to them is wrong or illegal

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **An individual with a disability who works extensively** but has no money, no possessions, and cannot explain where their income goes
- **A residential facility resident** who appears fearful of staff, cannot speak freely, or shows signs of physical abuse
- **An individual whose guardian cannot account for their wages or benefits**
- **A person with a disability who is working in conditions** that appear dangerous, unsanitary, or coercive
- **Complaints from a person with a disability that are dismissed** by family, caregivers, or facility staff

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Department of Justice Disability Rights Section:** justice.gov/crt/disability-rights-section
- **State Adult Protective Services (APS)** — file an APS report for adults with disabilities in exploitative situations
- **State Protection and Advocacy organizations** (mandated in every state) — find yours at acl.gov
- **Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division:** for wage theft and labor violations: dol.gov/agencies/whd

3.6 🟣 Child Labor Trafficking (Non-Sexual)

Non-sexual child labor trafficking involves compelling minors to perform labor through force, fraud, or coercion. While distinct from CSEC, it is equally serious — and was brought into sharp national focus by a 2023 New York Times investigation revealing that tens of thousands of migrant children are working illegally in U.S. factories, meatpacking plants, restaurants, and construction sites.

Who is most vulnerable: Unaccompanied migrant children ages 12–17; children whose sponsors are unknown or unrelated adults; children in communities with large undocumented immigrant populations; children working night shifts in industrial settings

🔍 NUANCES & CONTEXT

- **The 2023 NYT investigation** revealed that migrant children — many from Guatemala — were working in dangerous U.S. facilities producing products for major American brands, often without parental supervision
- **Unaccompanied migrant children** released from federal custody to sponsors have been placed in work situations that constitute trafficking
- **'Sponsors' may be traffickers** — adults who receive migrant children from HHS under the guise of family reunification but immediately put children to work to recover their smuggling debt
- **Nighttime shifts in factories** are commonly worked by minors who attend school during the day — a detail that masks their exploitation from educators
- **Industries documented:** poultry processing, roof shingles manufacturing, cereal production, meatpacking, agricultural work, restaurants, and construction
- **Federal law violations are layered:** child labor laws, trafficking statutes,

⚠ HOW TO SPOT IT

- **A minor who is chronically exhausted or falling asleep in school** — particularly if they started recently and have no known employment
- **A minor who cannot account for where they live or who their guardian is**
- **Educators or school counselors who notice** a student working full-time hours but cannot identify who supervises them
- **Injuries on a minor** consistent with industrial or construction work
- **A minor who appears to be paying off a debt** or sending money to someone they describe as a sponsor or coyote

📞 HOW TO REPORT IT

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-373-7888
- **Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division (Child Labor Division):** dol.gov/agencies/whd | 1-866-487-9243
- **Department of Health and Human Services:** for unaccompanied minor cases: acf.hhs.gov
- **NCMEC:** 1-800-843-5678 for missing or exploited children
- **Local law enforcement** and school social workers should coordinate on identification and reporting
- **State child labor enforcement agencies** — many states have their own child labor inspection divisions

immigration laws, and OSHA violations are all implicated		

SECTION 4: QUICK REFERENCE — ALL TYPES AT A GLANCE

TYPE	CONTROL METHOD	PRIMARY WARNING SIGNS	REPORT TO
Sex Trafficking — Adults	Romance, debt bondage, violence	Scripted answers, controlled by another, signs of abuse, multiple phones	NHTH · FBI · Local LE
Sex Trafficking — Minors (CSEC)	Grooming, gifts, threats	Older 'boyfriend,' unexplained money, tattoos, truancy	NCMEC · NHTH · CPS · FBI
Online Sex Trafficking / Sextortion	Image-based coercion, blackmail	Secrecy about devices, sudden distress, requests for gift cards	NCMEC · IC3 · Platform reports
Agricultural Labor Trafficking	Debt bondage, document confiscation	Cannot speak freely, malnourished, working while ill, no ID	NHTH · DOL · ICE HSI
Domestic Servitude	Isolation, document confiscation, immigration threats	Never alone, no days off, sleeping in utility space	NHTH · State Dept · Local LE
Restaurant / Hospitality Trafficking	Debt bondage, housing control	Living at workplace, wages withheld, working 16+ hours	NHTH · DOL · FBI
Construction / Landscaping Trafficking	Debt bondage, isolation	Living on job site, cannot name employer, untreated injuries	NHTH · DOL · OSHA
Nail Salon / Massage Trafficking	Debt bondage, language isolation	Never leaves, always supervised, open at all hours	NHTH · Local Vice · DOL
Traveling Sales Crew	Debt, substance dependency, mobility	Young, disoriented, living in van/motel, cannot name employer	NHTH · Local LE · FBI
Familial Trafficking	Family control, trauma bonding	Protects trafficker, controlled communication, unexplained money	CPS · NHTH · Local LE
Gang-Controlled Sex Trafficking	Violence, threats, branding	Gang affiliation, tattoos, group housing with males	FBI · Local LE · NHTH
Forced Marriage	Immigration control, family pressure, honor violence	Withdrawn from school, no independent access, fear of spouse	NHTH · Local DV org · Legal Aid
Organ Trafficking	Financial coercion, medical fraud	Unexplained scar, traveled for vague surgery, paid for organ	FBI · DOJ · HHS OIG
Labor Trafficking — Persons w/ Disabilities	Guardianship, institutional control	No money despite working, fearful of caregivers, no autonomy	APS · DOJ · P&A orgs · NHTH
Child Labor Trafficking	Debt bondage, sponsor control	Chronically exhausted student, industrial injuries, unknown guardian	DOL · NHTH · NCMEC · Local LE

REPORTING RESOURCES — NATIONAL CONTACTS

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT	BEST FOR
National Human Trafficking Hotline	1-888-373-7888 | Text HELP to 233733 | 24/7 | 200+ languages	All types of trafficking — first point of contact for any tip or survivor
NCMEC CyberTipline	CyberTipline.org | 1-800-843-5678	Online exploitation and CSAM involving minors; sextortion
FBI Tips	tips.fbi.gov	Federal sex and labor trafficking cases; online crimes; multi-state operations
ICE Homeland Security Investigations	1-866-347-2423	Immigration-connected trafficking; agricultural, domestic, and labor trafficking
Department of Labor — Wage & Hour	1-866-487-9243 | dol.gov/agencies/whd	Labor trafficking; wage theft; child labor violations
OSHA	1-800-321-6742 | osha.gov	Unsafe working conditions connected to labor trafficking
State Adult Protective Services (APS)	Varies by state — find yours at acl.gov	Adults with disabilities; elder trafficking; domestic servitude
Child Protective Services (CPS)	Varies by state — dial 311 or 911 for immediate risk	Child victims of all forms of trafficking; familial trafficking
Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3)	ic3.gov	Online sextortion, digital trafficking, fraud-based recruitment
Department of State — TIP Office	state.gov/j/tip | (202) 312-9639	International trafficking; diplomatic immunity cases; forced marriage

Human trafficking does not look the same everywhere.

The more you understand its forms, the more people you can protect.