

Human Trafficking Trends *in* 2020

An analysis of data from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline

In a year when everything from crime to commerce saw dramatic shifts, reports of human trafficking were most notable in 2020 for their consistency. Or, to put it another way, human trafficking appears to be pandemic-proof. That is one of three major categories of findings in Polaris’s analysis of data gathered over the calendar year 2020 from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline.

THE NUMBERS

Situations of trafficking identified: **10,583**

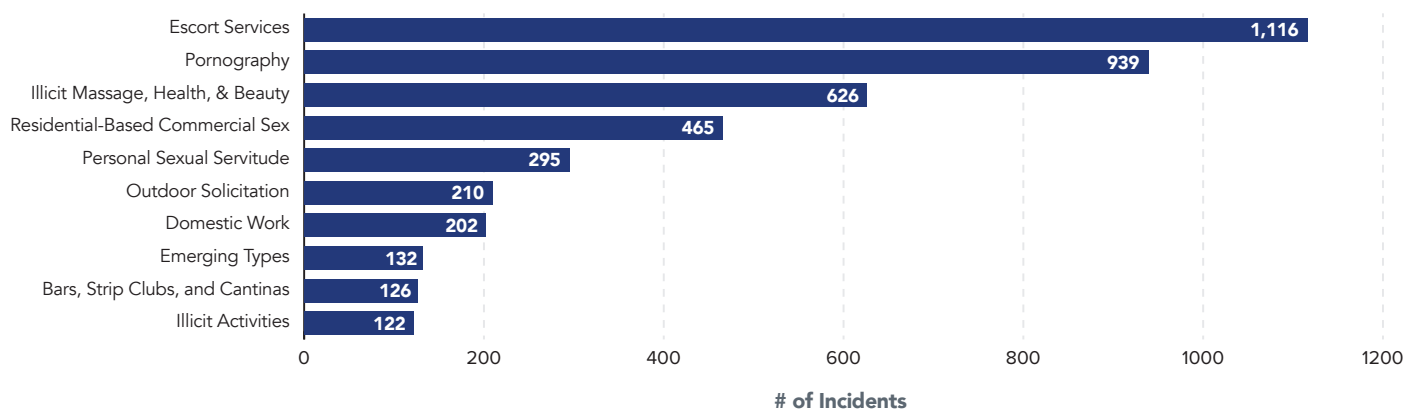
Sex	7,648
Labor	1,052
Sex & Labor	334
Other/Not Specified	1,549

Victims of trafficking identified: **16,658**

Sex	10,836
Labor	3,583
Sex & Labor	631
Other/Not Specified	1,634

Top types

These types are as defined in Polaris’s report: [Typology of Modern Slavery: Defining Sex and Labor Trafficking in the United States](#)



Polaris is leading a data-driven social justice movement to build a world where the powerful cannot exploit the vulnerable for profit. We are working on solutions that mirror the scale of the problem – 25 million people worldwide deprived of the freedom to choose how they live and work. For more than a decade, Polaris has assisted thousands of victims and survivors through the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline, helped ensure countless traffickers were held accountable and built the largest known U.S. data set on actual trafficking experiences. With the guidance of survivors, we use that data to improve the way human trafficking is identified, how victims and survivors are assisted, and how communities, businesses and governments can prevent human trafficking by transforming the underlying inequities and oppressions that make it possible.



KEY FINDINGS

Human trafficking is profoundly adaptable.

Shut down one venue and traffickers will find a new one. Wherever there are vulnerable people and communities, there will be someone who finds a way to exploit them.



Online recruitment increased a significant 22%

During the lockdowns, as the proportion of victims from common recruitment sites such as strip clubs (-46%), foster homes (-70%) and schools (-38%) went down drastically, the Internet was reported as the top recruitment location for all forms of trafficking.



Most notably, the analysis found a significant increase in the proportion of potential victims for whom Facebook and Instagram were the sites for recruitment into trafficking (120%)

125% increase in reports of recruitment on Facebook over the previous year

95% increase in reports of recruitment on Instagram over the previous year.

Human trafficking is highly personal.

Despite the explosion of concern - some of it fueled by misinformation - about complex child sex trafficking schemes and kidnappings, data shows victims usually know and trust their traffickers.

Recruitment by family members and intimate partners was highly reported for all forms of trafficking. While this is the case year over year, it was particularly pronounced in 2020.



In 2020, among all forms of trafficking whose recruitment relationships were known (4,142), the proportion of victims recruited by a family member or caregiver increased significantly - **from 21% of all victims in 2019 to 31% in 2020 - a 47% increase.**



In addition, the proportion recruited by intimate partners jumped 21% **from 22% in 2019 to 27% in 2020.**

Recruitment by family members and intimate partners was particularly noteworthy in sex trafficking situations. In 2020, situations of sex trafficking or sex and labor trafficking combined, of the 2,448 victims whose recruitment was known,



42% were brought into trafficking by a member of their own families



39% were recruited via an intimate partner or a marriage proposition



In labor trafficking situations, by contrast, of the 1,572 victims whose recruitment was known,



the vast majority - **69%** - were recruited by a potential or current employer;



15% were recruited into trafficking by a member of their own family and



5% by an intimate partner or marriage proposition

Friends and family who know something about the victim and the situations are also the most likely to be the way they are connected to help.



Interaction with friends and family has been the top reported access point from 2018 - 2020. In 2020, friends and family were the **access point for help for 40% of identified victims** (4,098).

This is the case with all types of trafficking and suggests the importance of people with proximity to victims and context in identifying and supporting survivors.

Trafficking does not happen in a vacuum.

Virtually everyone who ends up in a trafficking situation has a clear and identifiable vulnerability that a trafficker preyed upon. These vulnerabilities show up in roughly the same proportions every year - including the year the pandemic began and lockdowns were at their peak. This data points to massive failings in a range of systems - from the macro - like criminal justice and economic inequity, to the specific, like foster care, immigration, health and housing.

Top 5 Risk Factors/Vulnerabilities - Sex

Substance Use Concern

Runaway/Homeless Youth

Unstable Housing

Mental Health Concern

Recent Migration/Relocation

Top 5 Risk Factors/Vulnerabilities - Labor

Recent Migration/Relocation

Self-Reported Economic Hardship

Unstable Housing

Criminal Record/Criminal History

Substance Use Concern

If you or anyone you know is being pressured to exchange sex for money or something of value; or is being threatened or otherwise forced to work against your will, help is available:



CALL 1-888-373-7888



TEXT BEFREE 233733

This data should not be mistaken for the prevalence of human trafficking in North America over a given year. The data only reflects contacts with the Trafficking Hotline, which Polaris operates in cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Trafficking Hotline exists first and foremost to serve victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking. Information is gathered only to the extent that it is necessary to provide that service. Because each situation is unique, so to are the questions answered and answers recorded. It is impossible to know how many other situations of trafficking or exploitation are occurring that are never reported, nor does that Trafficking Hotline know the outcome of these situations or if they ultimately meet the legal definition of trafficking.

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