



What are Immigration Challenges for Survivors of Human Trafficking?

The ideas presented below are from focus groups and interviews with survivor experts

Polaris's National Survivor Study:
Updated July 2022

What Survivor Experts Said:

Some survivors may not be aware of their rights and have difficulty obtaining employment and / or receiving services because of their **immigration status**.

*"I think that, in my case, as an illegal border crosser, people always say, 'You don't know your rights.' I didn't know, at first, they would tell me, 'If you don't do this, your family is going to suffer.' You don't know what rights migrants have, and you always cling to stay there. **You don't look for help because you don't know what kind of help there is.**"*

*"A lot of times, we need to wait [for visas to be approved]. I waited almost year and a half to know. I didn't qualify for services. I was in limbo. You are not able to work. I think that that's something that needs to change. If someone files for a type of visa, allow them to work because if you don't work, it's like, **'How long can I survive without breaking the law?' I'm putting myself in more danger.**"*

*"What do I do? **If I want help, I have to stop working, but I do not want to.** I want to continue working. It is good for me, for my mental, physical, and emotional health. I feel that I am working, and because of my work, I can bring food to my family."*

*"You hear incredible stories; I was amazed. Everybody has their own process to deal with things and overcome them. When you're there and want to work, you can't find a job. **You don't have a work permit or a legal status.** A lot of companies say, 'You don't have experience.' They don't want to give you the job."*



Survivors encounter **language barriers** when trying to find services and when receiving services or resources. They also experience communication challenges when interacting with **translators who are not trauma-informed**.

"I think a lot of times, translators are not trauma-informed, they say things that are out of context. That happened to me a lot of times. In the beginning, I was using a translator because I was ashamed of my English, and I had to say, 'No, I'm not saying that.'"

Language barriers also cause **challenges in other areas of a survivor's life** after they leave their trafficking experience.

"For me, it was hard finding a job because of the language barrier, and then we're just exposed to this world that we never knew. It was so hard because, to me, I ended up in a trafficking situation again, kind of. It was labor trafficking because I ended up working in this fast-food restaurant after I got out of my trafficking situation. Which is bad but it's -- I always think, 'Oh, it's not as bad as my trafficker.'"

Confidentiality and legal name changes, particularly after assisting with the prosecution of their traffickers, are important for survivors with T-visas due to threats to their safety.

"I would like our information to be confidential. I would like to have that in all states because I would also benefit from being able to change my name legally. That would make me feel safe."

"I so agree with the name change. I am having a hard time because I have to change my name around the people I live with. Then, because I got trafficked by a diplomat, they always look for me, trying to harm me and stuff, and to change my name is hard."



The **pathway to citizenship should be less burdensome** for survivors of human trafficking who are also immigrants.

"When you have the T visa, you are able to apply for the Green Card after four years. I think that that's a lot of time and that's putting all the weight on our shoulders. I think they have to find another way to open the path for Green Card and citizenship. In a way, to be honest, it feels like coercion. Oh, I'm going to give you this thing [citizenship] in exchange if you help me with this thing [investigation of trafficker]. It's a lot of time. We also need to expand the services and resources that we can access with a T visa, because it's very limited. It's very, very limited."

"I was asked to show more proof [of being trafficked] and I was like, 'What more proof do you want?' I showed police records that I was helping with the investigation of this thing. Literally, they asked me to show more proof. To be honest, I think that it's a policy that needs to change on immigration. Stop seeing applicants as numbers, as files, but that we are human beings, that we really need the resources and services."

"Yes, I would actually even extend that [length of stay] for the illegal survivors. They could stay even, let's say up to a year instead of a few months - a year and know that they're not going to be persecuted in any way."

"I think that the Trafficking Victim Reauthorization Act needs to be more immigrant inclusive because if your [T-Visa] case is not approved, you're just putting yourself at risk of deportation. I think it's under law that you will testify against your trafficker or your exploiter. I think that that can change. We should refine the approach because they are not considering trauma. Even with all the difficulties that we have gone through, a lot of traffickers are part of our communities. It's very hard for us to testify and also, it puts us in great danger."



What is the National Survivor Study?

The National Survivor Study (NSS) is a scientifically rigorous project that puts the lived experiences of survivors at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement to provide insight into Polaris's strategies, policies, and evaluation frameworks. In full partnership with survivors, the NSS also aims to inform the anti-trafficking movement more broadly by filling key evidence gaps that exist in the field.

Completed Activities

- Held focus group discussions with people traditionally excluded from research on human trafficking
 - e.g., survivors living in rural areas, Native American / Native Alaskan survivors, Black / African American survivors, Latinx / Hispanic survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors, immigrant survivors, male survivors, gender-diverse survivors, and Asian American & Pacific Islander survivors
- Conducted interviews with other professionals and lived-experience experts from the anti-trafficking field
- Applied survivor feedback into survey questions
- Conducted an online survey with survivors across the United States

Current Activities

- Summarize and share key findings from focus groups, interviews, and online survey data

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