Homelessness
A Cause and Consequence of Human Trafficking

The National Survivor Study (NSS), a recent research study from Polaris, surveyed 457 sex and labor trafficking survivors in the United States on their experiences before and after trafficking. The study found that homelessness and housing insecurity were both a vulnerability to and consequence of human trafficking. Policymakers can use this data to improve housing policies and programs.

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Can Lead to Trafficking:

• A majority of survivor respondents in the NSS reported facing homelessness, houselessness or housing insecurity (64%), or running away from home or the place they were living in (69%) before they were 18 years of age.
• Traffickers exploit individuals’ vulnerabilities, including homelessness or housing instability, often offering a potential victim a place to stay as a means of building trust and reliance. Homelessness and housing instability can be presumed to increase a person’s risk of being trafficked.

“While I have a job and a car, I am still technically homeless. I don’t have a bed, or furniture, or any necessities to furnish a healthy life—towels, vacuum cleaner, kitchen utensils....anything.”

1 This research brief may be cited as “Polaris (2023). Homelessness as a Cause and Consequence of Human Trafficking”.
Human Trafficking Can Lead to Homelessness and Housing Insecurity:

- 70% of survivor respondents reported that one of their top needs when they left trafficking was finding a safe place to stay.
- Other top needs included a stable living wage job (69%) and help establishing or repairing credit (31%). A lack of any of these can lead to housing instability for trafficking survivors.
- 42% of survivor respondents reported having a criminal record. Of those with a criminal record, a majority (59%) reported having issues getting housing due to their criminal record.
- Stable housing is necessary for essential recovery and reintegration steps, such as finding a job. For survivors looking to rebuild, the inability to maintain safe and secure housing can prevent them from recovering.

“I am stressed all the time. My housing is unstable and I don’t really have enough for stable housing - this is the question you are missing. Housing is so important and so expensive.”

Needs survivors reported when exiting trafficking (N=457)