What Is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is modern-day slavery and involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit a person for labor or commercial sex. Any minor, that is anyone under the age of 18, who is induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of human trafficking according to U.S. law, regardless of whether there is force, fraud, or coercion.¹

- Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked in countries around the world – including the United States. Many of these victims are lured with false promises of financial or emotional security; and they are forced or coerced into commercial sex (prostitution), domestic servitude, or other types of forced labor.

- Increasingly, criminal organizations such as gangs are luring children from local schools into commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking.

Human trafficking is different from human smuggling.

Human smuggling involves bringing (or attempting to bring) a person into a country in violation of immigration or other laws. Human trafficking is the exploitation of a person for sex or labor. Human trafficking does not require movement or transport across borders – the exploitation is what makes the person a victim.

Did You Know?

- Each year, as many as 100,000–300,000 American children are at risk of being trafficked for commercial sex in the United States.

- The average age a girl enters the commercial sex trade is 12–14 years old. For boys, it’s even younger – just 11–13 years old.

Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Who Are the Victims? Who Is at Risk?

Victims of trafficking can be any age, race, gender, or nationality, including U.S. citizens.

- Trafficking victims can be men or women, boys or girls, U.S. citizens or foreign nationals. Human trafficking can involve school-age youths, particularly those made vulnerable by unstable family situations, or who have little or no social support. The children at risk are not just high school students – studies show that the average age a child is trafficked into the commercial sex trade is between 11 and 14 years old.

- Traffickers may target young victims through social media websites, telephone chat-lines, and after-school programs, on the streets, at shopping malls, in clubs, or through other students who are used by the traffickers to recruit other victims. In fact, a person can be trafficked without ever leaving his or her hometown.

- Child trafficking can take a variety of forms, including commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution) or forced labor. Those who recruit minors for the purpose of commercial sex are violating U.S. anti-trafficking laws, even if no force, fraud, or coercion was involved.