

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • February 2025 • Vol. 23 • No. 2

FOCUS: This issue of the newsletter focuses on human trafficking and young children.

Child trafficking includes labor and sex trafficking. In the United States, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines adult and minor victims of labor trafficking as anyone subjected to "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery."

Child labor trafficking may include situations where youth are compelled to work in agriculture, restaurants, family businesses, factories, or meat packing work; construction; domestic labor in a home; or to sell products through traveling sales crews; illegal drug trade; street peddling, or begging; or hair, nail, and beauty salons.

A minor of sex trafficking is someone subjected to "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age." Examples include prostitution on the streets or in a private residence, club, hotel, spa, or massage parlor, online commercial sexual exploitation, and exotic dancing/stripping. Child sex trafficking victims may be forced to engage in sex acts by gang members, family members, or strangers for something of value, such as money, a place to stay, drugs, or transportation. This grooming often occurs online.

Child sex trafficking does not require the presence of force, fraud, or coercion. The United States is a destination country for many victims of sex trafficking globally.

A Tragic End of Childhood

Children make up about one-third of all human trafficking victims worldwide. Two out of every three child victims are girls, who are left to contend with the enduring effects of gender inequality and gender-based violence. Trafficking of children impacts every country, forcing children to abandon their education, endanger their lives, and, most tragically, rob them of what every child deserves – a future.

Although trafficking occurs all over the world, the most common forms of trafficking can differ by country. The United States is one of the most active sex trafficking countries in the world, where exploitation of trafficking victims occurs online and in cities, suburban and rural areas. Labor trafficking occurs in the United States but at lower rates than most developing countries. Children are also trafficked for forced organ removal.

Sometimes sold by a family member or an acquaintance, lured by false promises of education and a "better" life, the reality is that trafficked and exploited children are often held in slave-like conditions without enough food, shelter, or clothing and are frequently severely abused and cut off from all contact with their families. The most vulnerable children, particularly refugees and migrants, are often preyed upon, along with their hopes for an education, a better job, or a better life in a new country. Please go to the [Save the Children website](#) for more information.

Awareness

Britney was 11 when her family first sold her body for drugs.

The states with the highest rates of child trafficking include Delaware, California, Missouri, Michigan, and Texas. These are also states that have very high rates of human trafficking, where approximately 3.5 out of every 100,000 people in the state are victims of human trafficking.

Child Trafficking by Country 2024

The average age of the traffickers in federal prosecutions in 2022 was 28.5 years old. Roughly three-quarters of them were male and nearly all were U.S. citizens.

Signs of Potential Trafficking

In 2023 alone, the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) (NCMEC) received more than 18,400 reports of possible child sex trafficking. If you see or know a child who exhibits one or more of the signs below, it can potentially mean they are at risk of victimization through child sex trafficking. This list is not comprehensive.

- A child has unexplained large amounts of cash, prepaid cards, hotel keys, multiple cell phones, or apps providing various cell phone numbers
- Another person is holding the child's ID, or they do not have any ID
- Signs that the child has been coached when talking to people, letting others speak for them, or looking at others before they speak
- Tattoos or branding the child does not wish to talk about, explain, or did not choose
- Chronic homelessness, youth who are unstably housed, or children who frequently run away
- Abruptly disconnects from family and friends
- Close association with an overly controlling adult
- Regular, unexplained school absences

Child Brides

A recent United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) [report found](#) that South Asia has the world's highest number of child brides, constituting 45 percent of the total worldwide. Globally, approximately one in five girls marry in childhood. More than 290 million child brides are believed to be in South Asia currently, with 10 million more girls expected to marry by 2030, primarily due to poverty. Meanwhile, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one-sixth that among girls.

Child marriage not only limits education but also has a profound impact on mental health. Child brides are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, face domestic violence, and endure more health risks during pregnancy. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals urgently call for global action to end child marriage by 2030.

Baby Jewel was only six days old when the midwife began advertising her for sale on social media. For just the equivalent of \$440, a buyer could take Jewel home.

The Exodus Road

Child Trafficking in Conflict Zones

Nearly one-fifth of the world's children live in conflict zones.

Because child trafficking is often linked with lucrative criminal activity and corruption, it is hard to estimate how many children suffer. Still, trafficking and exploitation is an increasing risk as more children around the world live in conflict. According to [Save the Children](#), 426 million children today live in conflict zones around the globe. That is nearly one-fifth of the world's children. Many of them are being enslaved, trafficked, abused and exploited. Many more are living in limbo, without official immigration status or access to education and health care. Living amidst conflict increases children's exposure to grave human rights violations, which include child trafficking and gender-based violence.

Kazakhstan

The [United Nations reports](#) babies are being sold for up to \$4,500 in Kazakhstan. The government is cracking down on traffickers with a new law adopted in July 2024. To fight against the trafficking of newborns, the new legislation facilitates criminal prosecution for such crimes as kidnapping, illegal deprivation of liberty, human trafficking, involvement in prostitution, and more. In 2023, 19 cases of trade in newborns were registered in the country, for which more than 15 people were brought to justice, according to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Internal Affairs. As of July 2024, six cases of trade in newborns had been registered, with the ministry reporting prices for each child ranging from \$200 to \$4,500.

Baby Trafficking in China

A woman gynecologist and obstetrician was arrested in November 2023 with six others working for a hospital in China over alleged involvement in a baby-trafficking ring linked to a hospital in one of the province's biggest cities, [according to The Guardian](#). The doctor would sell the birth certificate, and then the hospital would follow the "normal" registration process for new babies. The doctor is also accused of brokering the sale of babies and facilitating surrogacy arrangements, which are illegal in China. It is not clear how many babies are believed to have been trafficked through the hospital.

In September 2023, a woman in Guizhou province was sentenced to death after being found guilty of abducting and trafficking 11 children in the 1990s.

Kenya Baby Trafficking

In September 2023, a Kenyan hospital employee who was caught by the BBC selling a baby on the black market was convicted of child trafficking. The employee accepted \$2,500 to sell the baby boy to an undercover reporter while the infant was still under the care of the hospital. An Africa Eye reporter initially approached the employee posing as a potential buyer after hearing from a source that the senior clinical social worker was involved in illegal child trafficking from the government-run hospital. The undercover reporter told the employee that she had trouble conceiving a child, and he then agreed to sell her the baby boy.

A former employee of the hospital revealed that he was aware of 12 children under the care of the hospital who went missing in just two months. Driven by a cultural stigma surrounding infertility and a legal adoption process that is cumbersome, the demand for infants and children remains high in Kenya.

Africa Eye also filmed traffickers arranging the purchase and sale of babies in illegal street clinics and the theft and sale of babies and young children from vulnerable, homeless mothers living on the city's streets.

There are few reliable statistics on the extent of child trafficking in Kenya. The most vulnerable children are still those being raised by the poorest families, according to [Missing Child Kenya](#), which operates a toll-free line for people to report abductions.

Vulnerable Populations

All children are vulnerable to exploitation while online, which is the primary way children and teens are groomed. Some young people are more vulnerable to being trafficked than others, and often, one risk factor overlaps with and amplifies others.

According to the United States Department of Education Manual: Human Trafficking in American Schools, vulnerable groups of students tend to share histories of poverty, family instability, physical and sexual abuse, and trauma. Racial and ethnic minority students are more vulnerable to trafficking partly because they are more likely to experience poverty and its associated effects.

Beyond these broad demographic groups, other subpopulations of youth are at elevated risk of being trafficked, including:

- Runaway youth
- Those who drop out of school
- Young people who are or were in the child welfare system
- Young people who are or have been in the juvenile justice system
- Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities or differences
- Those who identify as LGBTQ+
- Unaccompanied migrant youth

Peer-to-Peer Human Trafficking Recruitment

Peer-to-peer recruitment occurs when a youth recruits other youth for trafficking or exploitation purposes. Traffickers commonly use youth who are being exploited to recruit other youth because they have easy access to peers and can more easily form close relationships with peers.

Youth may be recruited by their peers in schools, group homes, residential treatment facilities, homeless services settings, substance use services settings, on the street, online, or in other situations. Youth of any gender, race/ethnicity, cultural identity, or community may participate in peer-to-peer recruitment.

Why would a young person become involved in recruiting other youth for trafficking?

There are many factors and complex dynamics that lead youth to recruit their peers in human trafficking situations. Some factors that may contribute to peers recruiting peers include threats from the trafficker, not understanding that they are being exploited, or better treatment from the trafficker. It is important to remember that the youth recruiting their peer is also a victim of human trafficking and exploitation.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center offers the following potential indicators of peer-to-peer recruitment:

- Extreme “us” versus “them” interactions
- Flaunting expensive possessions around peers
- Encouraging a peer to run away or go absent without official leave from a program
- Befriending and grooming a peer who is more vulnerable in some way, i.e. much younger, developmental or other disability, mental health or substance use concerns, lack of support network
- Exerting status or dominance over a peer
- Glamorizing the commercial sex industry, drug trafficking, or gang involvement to peers
- Telling peers that they know ways to make easy money or offering lucrative and easy job opportunities
- Pushing a peer to talk to or meet with someone they know outside the program

The scenario that played out in Episode 4 of NBC's program Found where a teenage Tony helped lure his younger friend Matthew to a sex trafficker is not far from the real-world tactics used by traffickers to establish legitimacy and trust.

Child on Child Sexual Abuse

Children can abuse other children, and teens can abuse other teens. Abuse can happen both inside and outside of a setting, face-to-face and online. The CDC defines peer-on-peer abuse as any harmful physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse or coercive control between children. This includes sexual acts between minors, such as physical sex acts, touching, viewing, or sharing pornography, sexting, filming, or photography of a sexual nature.

Peer-to-peer abuse can also include bullying, which is defined as any unwanted, repeated aggressive behavior by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners. Bullying can involve an observed or perceived power imbalance and may include verbal and physical abuse, systematic social exclusion, name-calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love, and threatening.

Schools are supposed to be safe environments for children and the community to come together to pursue education and character development. However, there is a very dark secret taking place in schools today. Child-on-child harmful sexual behavior is an increasingly prevalent problem in our nation's schools and schools throughout the world.

One [study](#) in Great Britain found a sharp increase in reports of abuse by those under 18 years to the police, including an 81% rise in reports of incidents on school premises. [Data](#) from police forces in England and Wales between 2019 and 2022 suggested a 40% increase in reports of sexual assaults and rapes where both the alleged victim and perpetrator were under 18. There was a 33% increase in rape reports and a 26% increase in reports where the allegation was against a child aged under 10. Moreover, at least 2,700 recorded incidents took place on school property in 2022 alone. Organizations working with children play an essential role in preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse.

According to a [study done by the Associated Press](#), the sexual violence that occurs in schools in the United States is often mischaracterized as bullying, hazing, or consensual behavior. This mischaracterization can lead to a lack of appropriate response and support for the victims. It occurs anywhere students are left unsupervised: buses, bathrooms, hallways, and locker rooms.

No type of school was immune, whether in an upper-class suburb, an inner-city neighborhood, or a blue-collar farm town. The abuses ranged from rape and sodomy to forced oral sex and fondling.

Meanwhile, the National Center's Report on Sexual Exploitation published [Out of the Shadows: Confronting the Rise on Child-on-Child Harmful Sexual Behavior](#) found that for every adult-on-child sexual attack reported on school property, there were seven assaults by students in the United States. This report looked at data from several countries.

In the case of child-on-child sexual abuse, young children who have not matured sexually are incapable of knowing about specific sex acts without an external source, so children who initiate or solicit overtly sexual acts with other children either have been sexually victimized beforehand by an adult or another child or they have been exposed to sexually explicit material. About one-third to one-half of children with problematic sexual behaviors have no history of sexual abuse themselves. In many instances, the perpetrating child has been exposed to pornography or repeatedly witnessed the sexual activity of adults at a very young age, and this can also be considered a form of child sexual abuse.

In many cases, a child or adolescent may have no intent to cause any harm to another child, and they act merely on a passing impulse. However, this act may still result in harm to the other child and is a form of child-on-child sexual abuse.

Finally, children who have experienced an unwanted sexual approach may not understand that this act was a crime against them. As with any form of abuse, child-on-child abuse can result in significant, long-lasting trauma, isolation, physical harm, and poor mental health.

Child Labor in the United States

In October 2024, the Economic Policy Institute, a leading think tank on labor issues; the Child Labor Coalition, a network of organizations working to end child labor; and Governing for Impact, a research and advocacy group, released [Proposals for the United States Department of Labor](#) on Child Labor in the United States.

Injury rates among children less than 18 years old have doubled between 2011 and 2020 due to children working in hazardous conditions, especially in agriculture, and working at night, many times unsupervised, with little sleep. Child labor violations across the board quadrupled between 2015 and 2022. Hazard occupation violations for child workers more than doubled during the same period. Despite this, industry-aligned groups, like those behind Project 2025, are vying to weaken existing protection standards for children in the workforce, which will only encourage further exploitation. In over 30 states in the U.S., legislators have been steadily weakening child labor protections, citing labor shortages and limiting the liability of the employer when a child is injured. And it risks leading to a slide towards modern slavery for some of the most vulnerable people in the world: children.

The report emphasizes the federal government's crucial role in protecting child workers. It argues that the rising rates of child labor violations, injuries, and chronic school absenteeism should motivate the incoming administration to adopt the report's recommendations. Instead of reducing protections, as has been happening at the state level in many states, the report advocates for the federal government to expand protections and enforcement across the country. The report also highlights that the rollbacks at the state level often conflict with federal law, further underscoring the need for federal action.

The authors provide a blueprint for stronger workplace laws for children. Underlining the current rise in injuries of children on the job and child labor violations, the authors stress that it has never been more urgent to strengthen, not weaken, child labor protections. The report provides a roadmap for revised federal regulations. Some of the report's recommendations include expanded protections for child workers in hazardous agricultural jobs. Something that hasn't happened in nearly 60 years. Additionally, working overnight shifts for 16-17-year-olds in a non-agricultural setting should be declared "particularly hazardous." Requirements for rest breaks and days off should be stepped up.

Take action

In addition to policy changes, the report advocates for additional funding and personnel for the U.S. Department of Labor to enable it to enforce and address child labor issues adequately.

At a time when large numbers of unaccompanied vulnerable minors are crossing the border into the U.S., Freedom United is calling for all child workers to be protected from exploitation. Add your voice and [sign their petition](#) to say NO to child labor law rollbacks.

Maria was trafficked for sex when she was 9 years old by a local gang in her hometown that was run by a judge. This was her life for two years before law enforcement intervened. When a raid occurred, Maria, now 11, was clutching onto a teddy bear. She was dressed much older than her age, wearing makeup and high heels that she struggled to walk in.

According to the [2023 Trafficking in Persons](#) report traffickers exploit Kenyan children in labor trafficking in domestic service, agriculture, fishing, cattle herding, street vending, and forced begging. Reports indicate criminals and gang members may exploit children in forced criminal activity, including as drug couriers.

Child Labor Globally

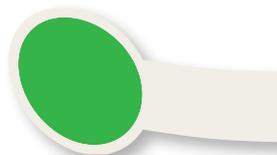
In many of the world's poorest countries, more than 20 percent of children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labor, both paid and unpaid. Much of this work is hazardous activities that may compromise their physical, mental, social, and educational development and are otherwise considered detrimental to their health and development.

Three main international conventions guide the issue of child labor:

- the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment;
- ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child;
- and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

These conventions frame the concept of child labor and form the basis for child labor legislation enacted by signatory countries. Please click [here](#) to access UNICEF child labor statistics in each country, including the percentage of children (aged 5-17) engaged in child labor.

Action



Children for Sale: Texas' Trafficked Kids

In this [YouTube video](#), a reporter follows the heart-breaking search of one mother looking for her daughter Kristen, who was trafficked into prostitution when she was just 15 years old. There are more reported cases of child sex trafficking in Houston, Texas than any other city in the United States.

Across Texas it's estimated there are at least 80,000 children and young people forced into the industry in recent years, usually by people they know. The problem has become so bad that Texas has made buying sex a felony, punishable by at least 6 months in prison.

Be Your Kid's Safety Net

Kids today face very difficult challenges.

There is a whole new landscape where a child's relationship with technology and normal sexual development overlap, with a whole new set of experiences online.

Please click [here](#) to access resources for parents on child safety online from THORN.

Sweat & Toil App

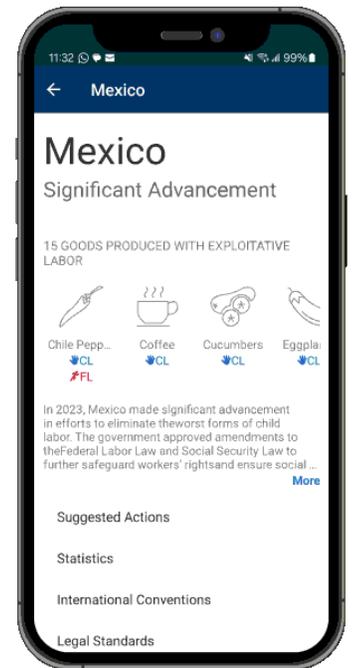
Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking Around the World

Concerted efforts by governments, workers, and employers to curtail child labor have resulted in a reduction of nearly 86 million children engaged in child labor since 2000. However, there are still far too many children in exploitative work.

Sweat & Toil: Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking Around the World is a comprehensive resource developed by ILAB documenting child labor and forced labor worldwide. Data and research in this app are taken from ILAB's three flagship reports: [Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#), [List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#), and [List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor](#). This app fits these three information-packed reports the size of a phone book in the palm of your hand. Seven things you can do with this app are:

1. Check countries' efforts to eliminate child labor;
2. Find child labor data;
3. Browse goods produced with child labor or forced labor;
4. Review laws, ratifications, and enforcement efforts;
5. See what governments can do to end child labor;
6. Browse USDOL's projects to combat child labor and, forced labor, and
7. Explore visualizations of USDOL's child labor and forced labor data.

The updated app includes new child labor data from 131 countries included in the [2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor \(TDA Report\)](#), 204 goods from 82 countries in the [2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#).



The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) offers an [online child sex trafficking training](#) that is free. This resource includes three modules and builds a comprehensive foundation on the issue of child sex trafficking for all audiences, including law enforcement, child welfare and concerned citizens.



In an impoverished area in the Philippines, a midwife helped poor young women give birth at her clinic. Many women who are living below the poverty line and cannot afford to raise a child are making the difficult decision to sell their babies. Many of the women were uncertain about how they would be able to care for the baby at home. The midwife would convince the woman to entrust the baby to her care, take the baby, and then sell the infant on Facebook to willing buyers, no questions asked. Please click [here](#) to view this YouTube video.

What If?

The “What If?” Game by Darkness to Light is a great way to help kids think about possible situations they may face in school. Thinking through these situations with your children ahead of time increases their agency and empowers them to safely respond. Technology, social media, and advances in AI are all part of your child’s current reality and can appear scary and moving way too fast. With the “What If?” Game, we can shift from a fear-based anxiety-inducing focus, to one where we have open communication and strengthen our relationship with children.

Child Labor, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking

For more than 25 years, ILAB's Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking through the United States Department of Labor has been a world leader in the fight to eradicate labor exploitation across the globe. Learn more by clicking [here](#).

The Children Trapped in Bangladesh's Brothel Village

Daulatdia is an entire village in Bangladesh dedicated to prostitution. Every day, 1,600 trafficked, enslaved, and abandoned women and girls sell themselves for £2 a time. Amid the trade, 300 children live, many of whom were born in the village. Some will be groomed to be the future of the business, like their mothers and grandmothers. With education and support, a few may find their way out. Please click [here](#) to view this 12 minute YouTube video.

Peer-on-Peer Abuse: Rates, Resources and Prevention

Peer-on-peer abuse is a difficult topic, and one we must address head on. [Darkness to Light](#) hosted an Honest Conversation webinar with three leading experts in prevention to unpack this complex issue, share insights, and empower adults with the tools they need to navigate it effectively.

Statistics Shared

- More than 70% (70-77%) of children who are sexually abused are abused by a peer (Gewirtz-Meydan, & Finklehor, 2020).
- When looking at peer-on-peer sexual assault, incidents occurred most commonly at schools (44%) (Young et al., 2009).
- The rate of recidivism, or the juvenile reoffending, is very low – between 5% and 14% and most do not become adults who abuse. (National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth)

Please click [here](#) to view this informative webinar.



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