EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human trafficking is the crime of using force, fraud, or coercion to compel someone to work or to engage in commercial sex. Prosecuting human traffickers is part of a holistic approach to combating this pervasive form of exploitation. The Human Trafficking Institute’s (HTI) annual Federal Human Trafficking Report (“the Report”) provides the only exhaustive review of human trafficking prosecutions in U.S. federal courts. The Report presents data from both sex trafficking and forced labor prosecutions and supplements its analysis with information from civil human trafficking lawsuits.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which made human trafficking a federal crime, this year’s edition of the Report also highlights data and trends spanning two decades of anti-trafficking enforcement in the United States.

20-YEAR Trends

Prosecutors filed more SEX TRAFFICKING PROSECUTIONS in 2020 than all FORCED LABOR PROSECUTIONS filed in the two decades since the enactment of the TVPA. Whereas there has been a steady increase in sex trafficking prosecutions since 2000, the number of forced labor prosecutions has remained low.

ONLINE SOLICITATION has dwarfed other tactics used by traffickers to solicit buyers of commercial sex for over a decade, appearing as the primary form of solicitation in OVER TWICE AS MANY criminal cases as any other method each year since 2008.

The DOMESTIC SERVICES INDUSTRY is the most frequent source of federal forced labor prosecutions. HALF of all FORCED LABOR prosecutions alleged that traffickers compelled victims to perform domestic services like housekeeping, cooking, childcare, and other forms of labor within a household.

The number of human trafficking convictions each year has steadily increased over time. A total of 3,169 DEFENDANTS have been convicted in human trafficking cases since 2000.

The impact of human trafficking in the United States is far-reaching, affecting people of all ages and genders, regardless of whether they are U.S. citizens or foreign national victims. Foreign nationals came from 59 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES of origin, the majority in the Western Hemisphere.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE DATA:

The Report’s findings are not a prevalence estimate of human trafficking in the United States but instead serve as an objective summary of what the federal criminal justice system has done to address trafficking. The Report does not capture data from state prosecutions, state civil suits, or human trafficking that is not prosecuted.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

from 2020

In 2020, federal courts convicted the lowest number of defendants in human trafficking cases since 2012. In 2020, 163 DEFENDANTS were CONVICTED—an 89% CONVICTION RATE. This is a 51% decline in convicted defendants from 2019.

Many human traffickers OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY of large-scale “trafficking rings,” instead exploiting vulnerable individuals with whom they have a personal connection. ONLY 5% of active sex trafficking cases involved exploitation directed by gangs or more formal organized crime groups. Instead, most cases involved individual traffickers acting as “pimps,” operating without direction from or connection to a larger criminal network, even exploiting victims within their own families.

Prosecutors filed more human trafficking cases in 2020 than in 2019, but charged fewer defendants. The number of cases filed in 2020 INCREASED 11% to 165 following two years of decline. In contrast, the number of defendants charged dropped to 257, DOWN 8% from 2019.

The internet is a major platform for traffickers to recruit sex trafficking victims and solicit buyers of commercial sex. In 2020, 59% of VICTIM RECRUITMENT in active sex trafficking cases occurred on FACEBOOK.

In 2020, federal courts convicted the lowest number of defendants in human trafficking cases since 2012. In 2020, 163 DEFENDANTS were CONVICTED—an 89% CONVICTION RATE. This is a 51% decline in convicted defendants from 2019.

HUMAN TRAFFICKERS were more likely to control their victims using nonphysical methods of coercion. FIFTY-NINE PERCENT of the coercive tactics traffickers used were NONPHYSICAL (e.g., threats, fraud, or withholding pay or immigration documents) compared to just 41% that were PHYSICAL (e.g., violence, restraint, medical).

59% of the coercive tactics traffickers used were NONPHYSICAL (e.g., threats, fraud, or withholding pay or immigration documents) compared to just 41% that were PHYSICAL (e.g., violence, restraint, medical).

2020 saw the HIGHEST AVERAGE SENTENCE imposed in human trafficking cases since the enactment of the TVPA. On average, federal courts sentenced defendants convicted in human trafficking cases to 13 YEARS in prison.

Girls below the age of 18 are the most likely to be named as victims in human trafficking prosecutions. Prosecutors named 1,499 victims in federal human trafficking prosecutions in 2020, 53% of whom were CHILDREN. Half of identified victims were girls, 3% were boys, 44% were women, and 3% were men. At least one woman and one boy victim self-identified as LGBTQ.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE:

579 ACTIVE HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROSECUTIONS

94% SEX TRAFFICKING CASES

6% FORCED LABOR CASES

1,007 ACTIVE DEFENDANTS

1,499 VICTIMS IN ACTIVE PROSECUTIONS

200 ACTIVE CIVIL HUMAN TRAFFICKING LAWSUITS

91 SEX TRAFFICKING CASES

109 FORCED LABOR CASES

Mandatory restitution was ordered in 2020 50% OF THE TIME. One-hundred percent of forced labor defendants were ordered to pay mandatory restitution, compared to only 47% of sex trafficking defendants.

Victim Demographics

Girls below the age of 18 are the most likely to be named as victims in human trafficking prosecutions. Prosecutors named 1,499 victims in federal human trafficking prosecutions in 2020, 53% of whom were CHILDREN. Half of identified victims were girls, 3% were boys, 44% were women, and 3% were men. At least one woman and one boy victim self-identified as LGBTQ.

ABOUT THE DATA: The Report’s findings are not a prevalence estimate of human trafficking in the United States but instead serve as an objective summary of what the federal criminal justice system has done to address trafficking. The Report does not capture data from state prosecutions, state civil suits, or human trafficking that is not prosecuted.

HUMAN TRAFFICKERS were more likely to control their victims using nonphysical methods of coercion. FIFTY-NINE PERCENT of the coercive tactics traffickers used were NONPHYSICAL (e.g., threats, fraud, or withholding pay or immigration documents) compared to just 41% that were PHYSICAL (e.g., violence, restraint, medical).