

## Poverty & Human Trafficking

### Awareness

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons (TIP), is a modern-day form of slavery. It is a crime under state, federal and international law. It is currently the second largest type of criminal activity, exceeded only by the illegal drug trade.

There are two major types of human trafficking: **sex trafficking**, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age; and **labor trafficking**, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, there is an increased awareness of people being trafficked to attain body organs for transplantation.

The correlations between human trafficking and other social justice issues, such as poverty, are complex. Many people who are poor live in communities of extreme poverty where there are limited resources and few opportunities for employment. Criminals take advantage of these vulnerable people, offering them a way to escape the harsh realities of their lives. Traffickers may offer fraudulent job training or educational opportunities to the people



who are desperate enough to try anything for a better life for themselves or for their families.

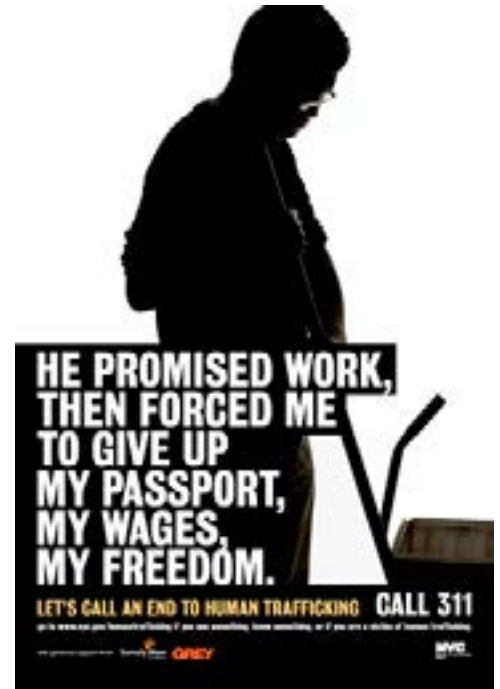
### Why Is This Happening?

Poverty is one of several factors that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking. While trafficking victims come from a range of backgrounds, including from economically privileged families, trafficking is linked inextricably with people with a lack of resources, notably job opportunities. Living in poverty is a harsh reality to escape from and people become desperate enough to enter into fraudulent employment schemes or be deceived into prostitution. Traffickers target people who have few economic opportunities and those struggling to meet basic needs.

With over 35% of the world's population living on less than \$2.00 a day, 2.5 billion children, women and men are at risk for human trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Poor parents, promised that their child will be educated, fed and treated well, may send their child, sometimes in exchange for money, with a person the parents trust. Parents may feel forced to sell one child so that the others may eat. At times, a child may be sold out of payment for a parent's debt (bonded placement), particularly in societies where it is socially acceptable for children to work. In the

United States, vulnerable people may be recruited from homeless shelters.<sup>3</sup>

Most victims of trafficking are women and girls. In those economically troubled countries where women hold low social status, families may sell a girl child in order to have money to feed the rest of the family. Other women and girls are lured into trafficking out of a desire for a better life for themselves, and in some cultures, to pay a dowry.



In the United States, pimps will recruit young, vulnerable women in shopping malls, at high school events or in clubs. The trafficker will befriend a woman, creating emotional, and drug or alcohol dependencies to trap them.<sup>4</sup>

Trafficking for sex or labor is a profitable industry. The trafficker is often part of an organized crime ring. According to the United States government, traffickers may make up to \$9.5 billion a year in the sex trafficking business.<sup>5</sup>

Ending trafficking requires addressing the demand for sex and cheap labor, which contributes to the enormous profit for the trafficker. It entails ending the poverty that makes human beings vulnerable to trafficking. Becoming educated on the root causes of poverty, including the effects of our trade agreements on workers living in other countries and the human cost behind our cheap consumer goods, will help us understand what we can do to decrease global poverty and thus the trafficking of human beings.

## Reflection

### What resources from our faith tradition reinforce and strengthen us in our work to end human trafficking?

*If any of your neighbors are reduced to such poverty that they sell themselves to you, you must not treat them as bonded workers. Their status is to be that of hired hands or resident laborers with you, and they will be subject to you only until the jubilee year. They may then leave your service with their children and return to their own ancestral property. You were all bonded workers in Egypt, and I freed you from your bondage. They must not be sold as bonded workers are sold. You are not to work them ruthlessly; you are to revere Yahweh.*

—Leviticus 25:39-43

### Additional Scripture passages:

Genesis 37:23-28 / Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15  
Acts 16:16-19, 23 / Isaiah 61: 1 / Psalm 10

### Other faith-based resources:

- "The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. ...Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person." —Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the *Twenty-First Century Slavery-The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings* International Conference, 2002
- *Addressing human trafficking remains an elusive goal if the courage to address the dark reality of consumerism feeding the exploitation of vulnerable human beings is lacking. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that it is extreme poverty which often drives those desirous of a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and the defenseless. These individuals, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, too easily become unsuspecting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity.* —Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, May 13, 2014.
- *Guadium et Spes*, Part I, Chapter II, Section 27
- Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 92nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2006
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, *Statement on Human Trafficking*, 2007
- "The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian—lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit."  
—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Actions & Resources

### Polaris Project

[www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)

This organization works on eradicating all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-3737-888 or text "BeFree" (233733).

### Brooks World Poverty Institute

[www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk)

The Brooks World Poverty Institute is a research institute dedicated to studying poverty, inequality and growth. We must understand the poverty issue before we can fix it.

### The Chronic Poverty Research Centre

[www.chronicpoverty.org](http://www.chronicpoverty.org)

This website is formed by a coalition of universities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations that are trying to educate people on the subject of chronic poverty.

### End Child Prostitution and Trafficking

[www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)

This website promotes the "Code of Conduct" which urges hospitality industry organizations to endorse it, and to train employees to recognize and safely report possible incidences of human trafficking.

### I'm Not Buying It

[www.traffick911.com/page/im-not-buying-it](http://www.traffick911.com/page/im-not-buying-it)

National campaign to raise awareness about the trafficking of children.

### Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center

[www.ipjc.org](http://www.ipjc.org)

Provides classroom webinars, prayer resources and faith based presentations on human trafficking.

### Mercy Investment Services

[www.mercyinvestmentservices.org/human-trafficking-resoures](http://www.mercyinvestmentservices.org/human-trafficking-resoures)

MIS actively works with corporations to improve their policies and identify human trafficking victims within their industries. The resources provided are intended to help you, whether you are a consumer or hotel staff member, take an active role in ending this global tragedy.

### The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

[www.netsmartzkid.org](http://www.netsmartzkid.org)

NCMEC has developed NetSmartz, a program that creates interactive, educational safety resources for children ages five to seventeen.

### Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (S.O.A.P.)

[www.free-international.org/soap.html](http://www.free-international.org/soap.html)

SOAP is an outreach that distributes thousands of bars of soap with the National Human Trafficking Hotline number and key identifying questions FREE to local motels.

### Shared Hope International

[www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org)

This international organization's mission is to eradicate sex trafficking.

### Truckers Against Trafficking

[www.truckersagainsthumantrafficking](http://www.truckersagainsthumantrafficking)

Educates, equips, empowers and mobilizes members of the trucking and travel plaza industry to combat domestic sex trafficking.

**U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.