



**THE TRUTH BEHIND HUMAN TRAFFICKING:
DEBUNKING 10 COMMON MYTHS**



INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is an extremely complex and destructive industry. It is the third largest international crime (behind illegal drugs and arms trafficking), and the International Labour Organization estimates that it generates annual profits of \$150 billion worldwide.

Here are 10 of the most common misconceptions concerning human trafficking:

MYTH

All victims are either women or children.

TRUTH

The reality is that **anyone** can fall victim to human trafficking. Although it is true that women and children are the most susceptible due to their gender and age, men living in adverse or poor circumstances can also be targeted. Traffickers prey on the vulnerable, often with promises of a better life that can include, but are not limited to, a well-paying job, help furthering an education, or any number of opportunities that offer a way out of a desperate situation. A few of the most common risk factors for trafficking include the following: a prior history of abuse or sexual violence, generational trauma, poverty, unemployment, unstable living situations, or homelessness.

The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons notes there are “considerable regional differences in the sex and age profiles of detected trafficking victims.” For example, in West Africa, most of the victims are children, both boys and girls; while in South Asia, victims are equally reported to be men, women, and children. In addition, in Central Asia, a larger share of adult men is detected compared to other regions, while in Central America and the Caribbean, more girls are recorded.



Share of detected victims of trafficking worldwide, by age group and sex (2022 or most recent). Source: UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024.



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2

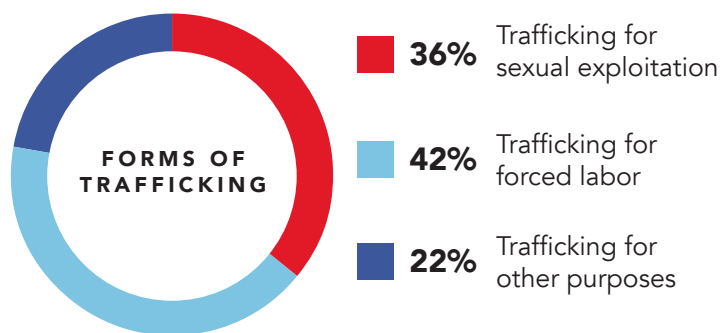
MYTH

All trafficking is sex trafficking.

TRUTH

Although sex trafficking is a common form of trafficking, it is not the only type of human trafficking. Forced labor is another type of trafficking where victims are found working in legitimate and illegitimate labor industries, including sweatshops, massage parlors, farms, restaurants, hotels, and domestic service, to name only a few. Human trafficking for organ harvesting and human sacrifice also exists in various parts of the world.

It's important to recognize that all forms of human trafficking are a crime against an individual's most basic human rights and individual freedoms. The horrific physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual consequences felt by a person who is trafficked are immeasurable.



Share of forms of exploitation among detected trafficking victims, 2022 (or most recent). Source: UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024.

Each stage of the trafficking process can involve physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and violence; deprivation and torture; the forced use of substances; manipulation; economic exploitation; and abusive working and living conditions. One of the things that differentiates the consequences of trafficking from the effects of singular traumatic events is that trafficking usually involves prolonged and repeated trauma.

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3

MYTH

We know the number of slaves in the world.

TRUTH

Trafficking is a global issue, and its networks can be vast and formidable to investigate. Conversely, trafficking networks can also be loosely connected and small in nature. The United Nations reports that there are around 50 million modern-day slaves in the world. However, the reality is that due to the hidden nature of human trafficking, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of people victimized by this horrible industry. Concrete statistics prove to be elusive, and reports can only give us a rough estimate of how many lives have been exploited by this crime.



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4

MYTH

Human trafficking only happens in developing countries.

TRUTH

Every country in the world is affected by human trafficking as a point of origin, transit, or destination for victims—or sometimes a combination of all three. Trafficking often occurs from less developed countries to more developed countries, where people are rendered vulnerable to trafficking by virtue of poverty, conflict, or other desperate conditions.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Europe is the destination for trafficking victims from the widest range of countries, while victims from Asia are trafficked to the widest range of destinations around the globe. In addition, the Americas are prominent both as points of origin and destination for victims of human trafficking.

Love Justice International has piloted transit monitoring across dozens of locations worldwide. To date (as of January 2026), our teams have intercepted over 100,000 people to prevent trafficking.



MYTH

Traffickers are always strangers to the victims.

TRUTH

The sad truth is that a trafficker is often someone the victim knows. The exploiters of human trafficking include a wide range of criminals and criminal enterprises that organize, implement, and profit from the trafficking of human beings.

Often the traffickers and their victims share the same nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background, allowing the traffickers to better understand and exploit the vulnerabilities of their victims. Traffickers can be family members, intimate partners, acquaintances, and strangers.

Ultimately, traffickers exist because human trafficking is perceived as being highly lucra-

tive. There are two primary factors that drive human traffickers: high profits and low risk. This powerful combination is driving the explosive spread of human trafficking, making it one of the most profitable criminal industries in the world.

In addition, it's important to note that in many countries, there is a hierarchy of human value. These different systems around the world (e.g., caste systems in Asia) have various ways of determining who is valuable and who is not in society. Selling someone becomes a viable financial opportunity for an individual who has grown up in a society that doesn't value that particular type of person.



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*Sabina's Voice:
Breaking the Silence
of Human Trafficking*

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MYTH

Human trafficking often looks like the movies, where someone is kidnapped and brought to another country to be exploited.

TRUTH

Most human traffickers play psychological games to deceive, defraud, manipulate, or threaten victims into providing exploitative labor or commercial sex. While physical coercion or abduction can play a role, most often victims are tricked through lies and promises of a better life.

Former Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov, states, “[Human trafficking] thrives in situations where the rule of law is weak and people lack opportunities. Humanitarian crises and conflicts create an environment in which traffickers easily prey upon the vulnerable.”

For most of us, it can be difficult to comprehend the overwhelming desperation of poverty that afflicts millions of people, making them even more vulnerable to deception. It’s important to understand that although cultural norms and values differ worldwide, the need to be loved and to provide for one’s family as well as the overall drive to live one’s best life are inherent to us all.

Traffickers exploit these hopes by preying on the vulnerabilities that many people already face. They offer false promises through marriage, a better income, an education, or simply a chance to experience new and exciting opportunities.



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*A Stranger in Her Inbox:
How One Message Nearly
Changed Everything*

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MYTH

Human trafficking victims are held against their will by some sort of physical restraint, and they will always attempt to seek help when in public.

TRUTH

While some traffickers physically hold the people they exploit, it is more common for them to use psychological means of control. Fear, trauma, drug addiction, threats against families, and a lack of options due to poverty and homelessness can all prevent victims from seeking help.

Some methods that traffickers use to trap and control their victims include the following:

1. Isolating them from family, friends, and the public by limiting interactions with outsiders
2. Manipulating them with false promises of love and marriage
3. Confiscating their passports or other identification documents
4. Threatening to shame them by exposing humiliating circumstances to their families
5. Enslaving them through debt bondage and enormous financial obligations—
increasing their debt and/or controlling their money
6. Threatening imprisonment or deportation if they contact authorities
7. Warning them that the police cannot be trusted to help them

Because victims are forced or coerced through threats or violence, they may fear retribution from traffickers, including physical harm being done to their families. Additionally, due to the severe trauma of trafficking, victims do not always self-identify, and they may not realize that they have rights.



STORY

*Ruli: A Young Girl
Looking for Love*

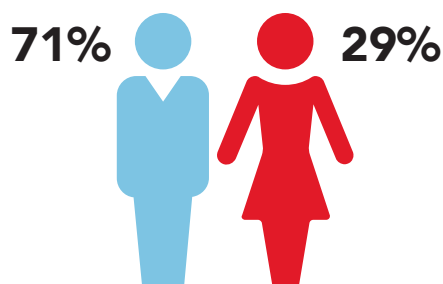
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8

MYTH

Human traffickers are always men.

TRUTH



Share of persons prosecuted for trafficking in persons, by sex (2022 or most recent). Source: UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024.

With regard to trafficking, many people may be surprised to learn that females comprise a large share of convicted offenders compared with other crimes. In fact, UNODC reporting shows that nearly 3 in 10 people prosecuted for trafficking are female.

The United Nations notes that women are recruited into this line of work because they often have limited education and scarce job opportunities—except, of course, in the sex industry and trafficking business.

In sex-trafficking operations, females are often used to transport, manage, and handle the victims and also to find places to set up operations, like brothels, clubs, and massage parlors. A recent report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime notes that women frequently play the role of recruiter because victims are more likely to trust them, and traffickers know to exploit that trust.



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The Face of a Trafficker*

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MYTH

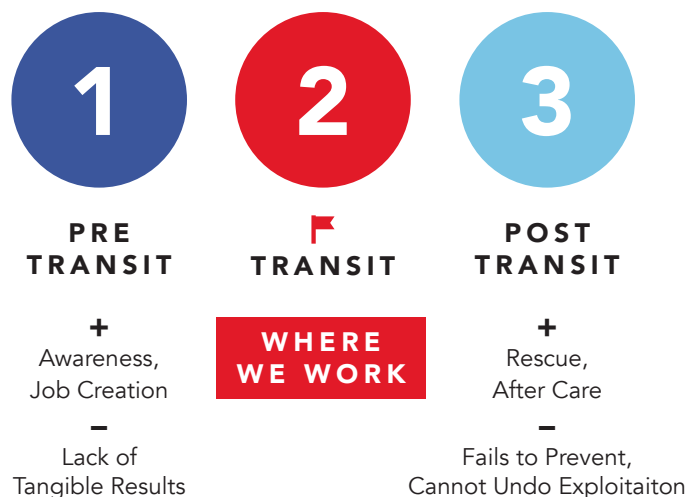
Trafficking is essentially a crime that must involve some form of travel across state or national borders.

TRUTH

Evidence of human trafficking exists when illegitimate means of control are used to force or manipulate a person into slavery.

At Love Justice, we focus on identifying and assisting potential victims of trafficking while they are in the process of being trafficked but before they reach the destination where they may be abused.

We “intercept” someone when we have good reason to believe that they are in the process of being trafficked or at high risk of being trafficked.



This model aims to attack trafficking at the most strategic moment—while it is occurring but before potential victims have been exploited or enslaved. Transit monitoring is, as far as we know, the world’s only tangible human trafficking prevention model.

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*Our Strategy to
Stop Human
Trafficking*

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10

MYTH

Most human trafficking is in the US, and it's best to focus our efforts here.

TRUTH

Although no one really knows how much human trafficking happens around the world, the information that is available suggests that the prevalence of human trafficking in the US is relatively low (the Global Slavery Index ranks the US #123 out of 160 in prevalence per 1,000 people), and the government response to it quite strong (ranked #2 in the world). These factors make it much harder to make the same impact in the US as in the places with more human trafficking and less robust government responses. As of January 2026, it costs Love Justice International an average of \$112 (including overhead) to intercept one person and prevent them from being trafficked.

If we can make a similar impact with our dollars in the United States, we should, but if we recognize that all people are equally valuable (a core

tenet of the US Declaration of Independence and the Christian faith), it's clearly best to focus our efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

Some widely shared sources have cited statistics about missing children as evidence of widespread human trafficking in the United States, such as one viral post that notes that 365,348 children went missing in 2020. But that number represents the total reported missing children, not the active cases. Only 8% of those cases were still active at the end of the year, and only a fraction of those cases are likely to be human trafficking. Even one child being trafficked is too many, since each is as precious in God's sight (and therefore in fact) as the person each of us loves most, but that is all the more reason to make the greatest impact we can with our resources!



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Learn more about our impact around the world.

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A photograph of a train at a station platform. The train is silver with a red stripe. The platform has a wooden roof and a large clock. A sign with the number 4 is visible. The text "CONCLUSION" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

CONCLUSION

To date, Love Justice International has intercepted over 100,000 individuals to prevent them from being trafficked. Our success of empowering and impacting lives with freedom and hope across the globe is a direct result of people like you who have joined us in this crucial fight. Visit [here](https://lovejustice.ngo) to learn more about our work and to find out how you can get involved.

LEARN MORE AT [LOVEJUSTICE.NGO](https://lovejustice.ngo)



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