



What is Modern Slavery?

“Trafficking in persons,” “human trafficking,” and “modern slavery” are used as umbrella terms to refer to both sex trafficking and compelled labor. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-386), as amended (TVPA), and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (the Palermo Protocol) describe this compelled service using a number of different terms, including involuntary servitude, slavery or practices similar to slavery, debt bondage, and forced labor.

Human trafficking can include, but does not require, movement. People may be considered trafficking victims regardless of whether they were born into a state of servitude, were exploited in their home town, were transported to the exploitative situation, previously consented to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of being trafficked. At the heart of this phenomenon is the traffickers’ aim to exploit and enslave their victims and the myriad coercive and deceptive practices they use to do so.

Sex Trafficking

When an adult engages in a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion or any combination of such means, that person is a victim of trafficking. Under such circumstances, perpetrators involved in recruiting, harboring, enticing, transporting, providing, obtaining, patronizing, soliciting, or maintaining a person for that purpose are guilty of sex trafficking of an adult. Sex trafficking also may occur through a specific form of coercion whereby individuals are compelled to continue in prostitution through the use of unlawful “debt,” purportedly incurred through their transportation, recruitment, or even their “sale”—which exploiters insist they must pay off before they can be free. Even if an adult initially consents to participate in prostitution it is irrelevant: if an adult, after consenting, is subsequently held in service through psychological manipulation or physical force, he or she is a trafficking victim and should receive benefits outlined in the Palermo Protocol and applicable domestic laws.

Child Sex Trafficking

When a child (under 18 years of age) is recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, obtained, patronized, solicited, or maintained to perform a commercial sex act, proving force, fraud, or coercion is not necessary for the offense to be prosecuted as human trafficking. There are no exceptions to this rule: no cultural or socioeconomic rationalizations alter the fact that children who are exploited in prostitution are trafficking victims. The use of children in commercial sex is prohibited under U.S. law and by statute in most countries around the world. Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for children, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism, and even death.

Forced Labor

Forced labor, sometimes also referred to as labor trafficking, encompasses the range of activities—recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining—involved when a person uses force or physical threats, psychological coercion, abuse of the legal process, deception, or other coercive means to compel someone to work. Once a person’s labor is exploited by such means, the person’s prior consent to work for an employer is legally irrelevant: the employer is a trafficker and the employee a trafficking victim. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to this form of human trafficking, but individuals also may be forced into labor in their own countries. Female victims of forced or bonded labor, especially women and girls in domestic servitude, are often sexually abused or exploited as well.

Bonded Labor or Debt Bondage

One form of coercion used by traffickers in both sex trafficking and forced labor is the imposition of a bond or debt. Some workers inherit debt; for example, in South Asia it is estimated that there are millions of trafficking victims working to pay off their ancestors’ debts. Others fall victim to traffickers or recruiters who unlawfully exploit an initial debt assumed, wittingly or unwittingly, as a term of employment. Traffickers, labor agencies, recruiters, and employers in both the country of origin and the destination country can contribute to debt bondage by charging workers recruitment fees and exorbitant interest rates, making it difficult, if not impossible, to pay off the debt. Such circumstances may occur in the context of employment-based temporary work programs in which a worker’s legal status in the destination country is tied to the employer so workers fear seeking redress.

Domestic Servitude

Involuntary domestic servitude is a form of human trafficking found in distinct circumstances—work in a private residence—that create unique vulnerabilities for victims. It is a crime in which a domestic worker is not free to leave his or her employment and is abused and underpaid, if paid at all. Many domestic workers do not receive the basic benefits and protections commonly extended to other groups of workers—things as simple as a day off. Moreover, their ability to move freely is often limited, and employment in private homes increases their isolation and vulnerability. Labor officials generally do not have the authority to inspect employment conditions in private homes. Domestic workers, especially women, confront various forms of abuse, harassment, and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence. These issues, taken together, may be symptoms of a situation of domestic servitude. When the employer of a domestic worker has diplomatic status and enjoys immunity from civil and/or criminal jurisdiction, the vulnerability to domestic servitude is enhanced.

Forced Child Labor

Although children may legally engage in certain forms of work, children can also be found in slavery or slavery-like situations. Some indicators of forced labor of a child include situations in which the child appears to be in the custody of a non-family member who requires the child to perform work that financially benefits someone outside the child’s family and does not offer the child the option of leaving, such as forced begging. Anti-trafficking responses should supplement, not replace, traditional actions against child labor, such as remediation and education. When children are enslaved, their exploiters should not escape criminal punishment—something that occurs when governments use administrative responses to address cases of forced child labor.

Unlawful Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

Child soldiering is a manifestation of human trafficking when it involves the unlawful recruitment or use of children—through force, fraud, or coercion—by armed forces as combatants or other forms of labor. Perpetrators may be government armed forces, paramilitary organizations, or rebel groups. Many children are forcibly abducted to be used as combatants. Others are made to work as porters, cooks, guards, servants, messengers, or spies. Young girls may be forced to “marry” or be raped by commanders and male combatants. Both male and female child soldiers are often sexually abused or exploited by armed groups and such children are subject to the same types of devastating physical and psychological consequences associated with child sex trafficking.

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