

What is human trafficking?



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“My parents died when I was five. A woman I met on the street took me home and made me work in her house. When I was 15, she sent me to England to work as a domestic worker. On the first day in England, a man came, raped me and beat me – I was terrified. He forced me to have sex with lots of different men he brought to the house. It was horrible.”

Human trafficking involves recruitment, harbouring or transporting people into a situation of exploitation through the use of violence, deception or coercion and forced to work against their will.

In other words, trafficking is a process of enslaving people, coercing them into a situation with no way out, and exploiting them.

People can be trafficked for many different forms of exploitation such as forced prostitution, [forced labour](#), forced begging, [forced criminality](#), [domestic servitude](#), [forced marriage](#), and forced organ removal.

Contrary to a common misconception, people don't necessarily have to be transported across borders for trafficking to take place. In fact, transporting or moving the victim doesn't necessarily define trafficking.

When children are trafficked, no violence or coercion needs to be involved. Simply bringing them into exploitative conditions constitutes trafficking.



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Trafficking for sexual exploitation gets much attention. However, the majority of people are trafficked into labour exploitation.

Many people who fall victim of trafficking want to escape poverty, improve their lives, and support their families. Often they get an offer of a well-paid job abroad or in another region. Often they borrow money from their traffickers in advance to pay for arranging the job, travel and accommodation.

When they arrive they find that the work they applied for does not exist, or the conditions are completely different. But it's too late, their documents are often taken away and they are forced to work until their debt is paid off.

Smuggling or trafficking?

People often confuse human trafficking and people smuggling. People smuggling is the illegal movement of people across international borders for a fee. On arrival, the smuggled person is free.

Human trafficking is different. The trafficker is moving a person for exploitation. There is no need to cross an international border. Human trafficking occurs at a national level, or even within one community.

Human trafficking in numbers

- 51% of identified victims of trafficking are women, 28% children and 21% men
- 72% people exploited in the sex industry are women
- 63% of identified traffickers were men and 37% women
- 43% of victims are trafficked domestically within national borders

(Estimates by [The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#))



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