HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Issued: March 15, 2023

2021 Data

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This report examines the scope of human trafficking in San Francisco during the calendar year 2021. It is the fifth report produced and the fourth report to cover an entire year's worth of data.

Eight agencies provided data about trafficked persons and alleged traffickers. Definitions of survivors/victims of human trafficking and traffickers can vary widely, and agencies contributing data to this report may have a range of experience levels in identifying human trafficking survivors. The Department asked agencies to use the federal definition of human trafficking shown below.

A. Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age, (22 USC § 7102; 8 CFR § 214.11(a)); and"

B. Labor trafficking 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 purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (22 USC § 7102).

Whether an adult has been trafficked under this federal definition, especially in cases of fraud or coercion, may be unclear, and agencies must make a judgment call in such cases.

Due to limitations in the data, it is not possible to know if multiple agencies are reporting on the same person. For example, take Person A, who was born in and recruited from Malaysia and trafficked in the healthcare industry in San Francisco. Person A might go to Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach for legal services, Asian Women's Shelter for housing, and the Newcomers Health Program for healthcare services. If all three agencies knew that Person A was a survivor of trafficking, they would all include Person A in their reports, but there is no way for the Department to know that Person A was reported three times. It would appear that there were three people from Malaysia and three people trafficked in the healthcare industry. In this example, that duplication would impact our data analysis because Malaysia is not a common country of origin in our dataset, and the healthcare industry is not common in our dataset either.

The numbers in this report must be considered in the context described above. The Department also recognizes that the fact that multiple agencies and people are making the identification is a weakness since, in a traditional research study, a small group of people trained under a specific protocol or screening tool would be making identification and plans to work towards potential solutions.

It is also important to examine bias in what groups of people and industries are thought to be involved in trafficking. According to a study by the International Labor Organization (ILO)[1], using a combined methodology of drawing from a variety of data sources, trafficking in commercial sex industries is less common than trafficking in other industries. The data in

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[1] International Labor Organization. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage. 2021.

this report concerning the type of trafficking must be viewed with this potential bias in mind. In our data, trafficking in commercial sex industries was reported to be more common than trafficking in other industries. There are several possible reasons why our numbers and the international estimates differ—such as media attention on exploitation in the commercial sex industries, over-policing of the commercial sex industries, and underreporting of labor violations. This report does not address this discrepancy.

Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several barriers created for agencies that provided data to past reports, such as increased staffing turnover and the capacity for organizations to provide services to survivors. For example, the Newcomers program, as part of the Department of Public Health, was deactivated during the emergency shelter-in-place due to COVID assignments. These barriers led to a decrease in the number of agencies which provided data for this report.

Executive Summary

The Department proudly serves as the lead agency for the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking. Having been paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, the Department on the Status of Women reignited the Taskforce by hosting a series of discussions according to organizational type, focus and subject matter expertise to help shape how it could make the greatest and most meaningful impact. This discussion included a need to update the data last published in the 2019 Report, continue and build those relationships in the broader anti-trafficking community and expand its reach and impact.

As part of this update, the Department found the following key findings. DOSW finds these points of particular interest and will continue to investigate them when considering policy recommendations:

1. **Those under 25 received fewer services than those over 25.**
    We generally understand that younger victims are more vulnerable and require more assistance than adult victims. Because of this, it is concerning that our data shows most services are going to adults and, therefore, are not serving the most vulnerable parts of the population.

2. **One-third of trafficking cases were born outside the US.**
    While most victims were born domestically, over one-third of cases were foreign-born individuals. The high proportion of foreign-born individuals in this area highlights the diversity of needs for survivors, ranging from food assistance to immigration or language access needs.

3. **Capacity building is an essential function in identifying cases.**
    Our data shows the importance of building capacity for organizations as a critical function of not just servicing victims but identifying them. One organization increased the number of cases they handled by a factor of 10 since 2017, primarily due to their increased funding and ability to increase their capacity and avoid turning survivors away.

4. **While reported cases are down, this appears to be due to fewer agencies reporting.**
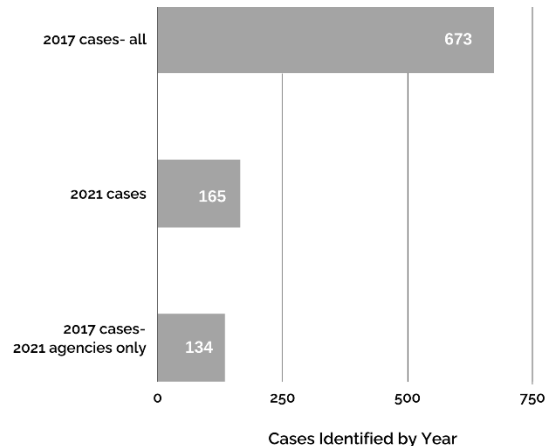   This year, we identified only 165 cases of human trafficking, a significant decrease from our previous report. However, this report had far fewer agencies contributing data, and by matching agencies to previous data collection cycles, we can see that we found an increase in cases from the same agencies.

Human Trafficking in San Francisco: 2021 Data

Data

In 2021, eight public and non-profit agencies reported data to DOSW on human trafficking. Human trafficking in this report refers to the definition of "severe forms of trafficking in persons" set forth in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). This definition covers both sex and labor trafficking.

The eight reporting agencies identified 165 cases of human trafficking. While this is significantly lower than the number of cases identified in previous years (673 in 2017, for example), this reporting cycle had fewer agencies participating. Comparing total identified cases across years using the same eight agencies, we saw a moderate increase in the number of identified cases, about 23%.

2017 cases- all 673
2021 cases 165
2017 cases- 2021 agencies only 134

0   250   500   750

Cases Identified by Year

To protect the confidentiality of survivors, agencies provided aggregated anonymous case counts, which means the same individuals could be counted by multiple agencies and be represented in our data multiple times. Because of this, it is important to note that these data are potentially duplicated across agencies. Past iterations of this report documented the potential severity of this duplication issue; while this report could not replicate that analysis, it is safe to assume this issue is still prevalent in the data.

Demographics

Age: Roughly 88% of cases were individuals under 25. Of this, 49% were minors, and 39% were youth between 18 and 24.

Gender: Almost all of the reported cases, 94%, were women (84% cisgender and 10% transgender). About 5% of reported cases were for cisgender men, and only one reported case of a transgender male individual (<1%).

Race: Overall, 72% of reported cases were individuals who were people of color. The largest group was African Americans, followed by Hispanic/Latinx and White/Caucasian.

It should be noted that many of the agencies who reported data intentionally focused on specific demographics of individuals, such as Asian Americans. This means the policies of the included agencies bias our demographic data. A more robust network of reporting agencies would alleviate these concerns.

Capacity Building

Capacity: Some agencies substantially increased the number of cases they identified since 2017. For example, our grantee Safe House increased from 5 reported cases in 2017 to 51 cases in 2021. This was partially due to an increase in funding and capacity building at Safe House, which led to a new program for rapid rehousing of those experiencing homelessness and sexual exploitation.

Location and Type of Trafficking Cases

Birthplace: Two-thirds of reported cases (66%) were individuals born in the United States, with one-third of reported victims born outside the US. 21% of reported cases were for individuals born in the Bay Area.

Type: The vast majority of reported cases (91%) were sex trafficking cases, compared to 9% of reported cases being labor trafficking cases.

33% were born outside of the U.S.

Services

Services provided: Case management and food assistance were the two most common services offered to victims. On average, adults received more services than those under 25.

System Response

System Response: SFPD opened 51 investigations into cases of human trafficking. Of these cases, 11 resulted in arrests, and 9 resulted in charges being brought against the alleged trafficker (all 9 cases are still pending).

Human Trafficking in San Francisco

Recommendations

DOSW and the Mayor's Taskforce will focus on three recommendations:

1. **Reigniting the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking**
   This data update highlights the need to rebuild our network of anti-trafficking organizations and for the centralizing presence and organization of the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking. Without these coordinating efforts around data collection, our report only has one-third of the cases than were previously captured.

   However, when accounting for the loss of reporting agencies, DOSW found an uptick in cases, suggesting an undercounting of the trafficking in San Francisco by a substantial margin.

   The Mayor's Taskforce was also valuable in tracking what data was collected and tabulated. The lack of coordination from DOSW's previous leadership was a concern raised by multiple agencies during this data collection effort. Reinvigorating the Taskforce and its focus on working with outside agencies to collect the correct data will improve how much data is received as well as the quality of that data.

2. **Building Out Capacity in Community-Based Organizations**
   This report highlights the importance of capacity building in providing services to victims and identifying cases of human trafficking. By increasing funding to critical organizations, we not only provide more services to victims but lower our undercounting of cases leading to a better understanding of the size, scope and context of human trafficking occurring in San Francisco.

3. **Looking into Service Gaps**
   Our data collection efforts focus on what services are presently being provided to victims of human trafficking. While this information is essential, we cannot understand the gaps between what services are being provided and what services are needed. Accordingly, DOSW suggests shifting our data collection efforts towards what services victims need. Such an approach would allow us to understand what needs are going unaddressed and allow for policy suggestions to match these underlying issues and service gaps.

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