



City and County of San Francisco
Department on the Status of Women



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Issued: December 31, 2024

2022 & 2023 Data

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This report examines the scope of human trafficking in San Francisco during the calendar year 2022 and 2023. It is the sixth report produced and the first to cover two years' worth of data.

Eighteen 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 following federal definition of human trafficking:

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 make judgment calls in such cases.

Due to data limitations, it is impossible 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 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,

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

trafficking in commercial sex industries is less common than trafficking in other industries. The data in 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.

This report follows the Polaris Project typology. Categories such as "Illicit Massage, Health & Beauty," "Bars, Strip Clubs, Cantinas," and "Illicit Activities" count as both labor and sex trafficking. Using this typology, cases recorded in these three categories are included in overall cases of sex trafficking and overall cases of labor trafficking.

Executive Summary

The Department on the Status of Women serves as the lead agency for the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking. This report continues the Taskforce's work by helping to broaden and deepen its impact. Part of this work involves updating the data published in the 2021 Report while continuing to build relationships across the wider anti-trafficking community, expanding their reach and impact.

The Department considers the following findings especially significant:

1. Reported cases are double the previous average per year.

In contrast to previous annual reports, this report includes data across two years. When adjusted for comparison, the yearly average for 2022 and 2023 is double that of previous years. Several factors may have also contributed to this rise in yearly reported cases.

For example, there has been an increase in service-provider agencies in recent years. These organizations include the San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (SFCAHT), SF Bay Area Human Trafficking Hotline, Turntable, Dignity Health Medical Safe Haven Program, and 3 Strands Global Foundation. Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, each organization has launched programming and services for survivors and victims of human trafficking in the City.

Moreover, capacity building and increased financial investments allowed organizations to expand services to survivors and victims. In the 2021 report, the Department highlighted how capacity building supported the increase in reported cases at SF Safe House. Additional support in the last year to SF Safe House, which included expanding housing to 101 Gough, has helped the organization support more survivors. Finally, Love Never Fails shared that they received more financial support in the last few years and were able to increase their various programming and support more victims and survivors of Human Trafficking.

Finally, as noted in the preface, the number of reported cases does not account for duplicate cases, which may increase the total number of reported cases. The Department seeks to explore such data limitations in the recommendation section of this report.

2. Data shows an increase in labor trafficking compared to previous years.

There has been significant progress in understanding the complexities of labor trafficking. Notably, training efforts within community organizations and law enforcement agencies have resulted in a reevaluation of approaches to identifying and addressing labor trafficking.

For example, one agency, Larkin Street Youth Services, incorporated an assessment tool that includes aspects of Labor Trafficking. This has helped distinguish reported cases of labor trafficking from sex trafficking and provide insight into labor trafficking. General awareness of labor trafficking is also bolstered

by broader workers' rights efforts by agencies, which focus on the fraud elements of trafficking, including wage theft.

3. 43% of reported cases were identified as men (43% cisgender men and .02% transgender men).

This finding differs from previous reports, which indicated that the majority of victims and survivors were women. In recent years, many advocacy organizations have shifted their efforts to addressing the trafficking of men and boys. For example, in late 2021, the State Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Action Team through the National Center for Youth Law highlighted education and training around supporting men and boys, including the screening of the documentary "Boys," which shares the stories of several male survivors, the exploitation they endured, and the subsequent narratives these experiences create.

4. Housing and financial support remain high-need areas.

The 2021 report recommended future data to consider what service gaps exist among agencies. Here, housing and financial support remain a significant barrier for survivors and victims. While SF Safe House and the Women's Housing Coalition reflect significant investments by the City and County of San Francisco, economic security that helps uplift survivors and victims from situations of trafficking remains a high need, including more housing, self-determination funds, financial support to pay medical, legal and debts incurred.

Human Trafficking in San Francisco: 2022 & 2023

Data

Eighteen public and non-profit agencies reported human trafficking data to the Department. Human trafficking in this report refers to the definition of "severe forms of trafficking in persons" outlined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). This definition covers both sex and labor trafficking.

The eighteen agencies reported **2,501** cases of human trafficking over two years, 2022 and 2023.

Collecting two years' worth of data for this report, we expected the number of reported cases to be larger than previous annual reports. However, the number of reported cases is still above the yearly average. From 2016 to 2018, the average number of cases reported was 567 (excluding the notably low numbers reported in 2021). Therefore, the number of cases identified for this report exceeds the previous average per year. Importantly, reporting organizations did not disaggregate by year; therefore, comparability to earlier annual reports is limited.

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 worth noting 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.

This report includes data from recently established organizations serving San Francisco. Among these new organizations are Turntable (2019), 3 Strands Global Foundation (late 2021), SFCaHT SF Bay Area Human Trafficking Hotline (2022) and Dignity Health Medical Safe Haven (2023).

As new organizations are welcomed in this service area, established organizations have increased their capacity, a need highlighted by the Department in the 2021 report. For example, Love Never Fails recognized the need for more street outreach in order to provide incremental harm reduction resources and for workforce development programming that ensures survivors have access to economic sustainability.

Finally, established practices by organizations refrain from directly asking clients whether they are victims or survivors of human trafficking. Instead, they utilize assessment tools to assess the risk, force, coercion, and fraud elements of trafficking. For example, Larkin Street Youth Services uses an intake assessment that includes a series of questions related to Labor and Sex Trafficking. Based on questionnaire responses, staff at Larkin then determine whether the client is a victim or survivor of human trafficking and identify the type(s) of trafficking involved.

Agency Breakdown

Agency Name	Reported Cases of Human Trafficking Survivors
Love Never Fails	1,416
Larkin Street Youth Services	427
San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking - SF Bay Area Human Trafficking Hotline	173
SF SafeHouse	89
Huckleberry Youth Programs	73
La Casa de Las Madres	65
San Francisco Police Department – Special Victims Unit	45
San Francisco District Attorney's Office	37
Turntable	36
3 Strands Global Foundation	35
Bay Area Legal Aid	23
San Francisco Human Services Agency – Family & Children's Services	23
Asian Women's Shelter	19
Children's Advocacy Center of San Francisco (Safe & Sound and CASARC)	15
San Francisco Department of Public Health – Community Health Equity and Promotion/Newcomers Program	8
Dignity Health/UCSF Medical Safe Haven	7
Mujeres Unidas y Activas	5
Gun Moon Residence Hall	5
Total	2,501

Demographics

Age: Approximately 38% of cases involved individuals under the age of 25. Of this group, ten percent were minors, and 28% were young adults between the age of 18 and 24. Therefore, in cases where the age of individuals is known, the majority were the age of 25 or older, at 62%. Due to confidentiality concerns and reporting issues, many individuals' ages were unknown (871).

Gender: Just over half of the reported cases, 54%, were women (52% cisgender female and 2% transgender women). Notably, 43% of reported cases were men (43% cisgender men and .02% transgender men). Two percent of reported cases were identified as neither male nor female.

Race/Ethnicity: Overall, 88% of reported cases were people of color. The largest groups represented were African Americans (57%), followed by Hispanic/Latinx (18%), White (12%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (8%) across all race/ethnicity categories recorded.

It's important to note that many agencies in this dataset serve specific demographics, such as Asian Americans. This focus may skew the demographic data in this report. Expanding the network of reporting agencies could help address these concerns.

Birthplace and Type of Trafficking Cases

Birthplace: Almost three-quarters of reported cases (72%) were individuals born outside of the United States, with just over a quarter of reported victims born in the US. Twenty percent of reported cases were for individuals born in the Bay Area.

Type: Two-thirds of reported cases (66%) were identified as sex trafficking cases. Just over a third (34%) of reported cases were identified as labor trafficking cases. 177 cases were of unknown trafficking type.

Case Profile: *Mujeres Unidas Y Activas*

Our staff first interacted with this adult woman, M, at an event hosted by our organization. She opened up about her experience during a part of the event meant for "desahogo," which most directly translates to emotional release. It was at this moment that one of our staff members, who has worked with human trafficking survivors for over a decade, was able to identify her experience as a case of human trafficking. M is a Mexican woman who had arrived in the United States to live with her friend. The friend had arranged her travel to the United States as well. Once she arrived, she was forced to provide childcare for a low sum of money, much lower than he had promised. M was eventually able to leave his home and came to our organization sometime later. After immediate services were provided to her, she continued to attend events at our organization. We are proud of the fact that she is an active member and has even facilitated some workshops for other members.

We chose to profile this case because many aspects of the case also appear in other reported cases. All survivors we reported were unaware that what they had experienced was considered human trafficking. All of them had already left their trafficker by the time they interacted with our staff. Four out of five were forced to do domestic work for little to no pay. There are also differences in each case. One of the women we reported had fled her home country due to the dangers she faced as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Also, one man faced specific language barriers since he primarily spoke an indigenous language. He usually worked 12 hours a day for about \$700 a month, facing threats of calls to ICE when he complained.

It is also worth noting that our staff does not treat human trafficking survivors or victims any differently than those who are not. In fact, our staff made it a point to note that human trafficking cases are difficult to differentiate from the cases we see every day. Everyone who engages with us hopes to be heard and supported. Most of them carry incredible trauma and face abuse in one way or another. Another reason we decided to profile M is because of her growth within our organization. That is what we work to provide all those who seek services from us, human trafficking survivors or not: to find their community and to find their power.

Case Profile: *Asian Women's Shelter (AWS)*

An advocate from the Hope Center in San Francisco, another anti-trafficking services provider, referred this client to AWS as the client needed immediate emergency housing. The client migrated to this country from East Asia during her teenage years with her family. Since a young age, she has struggled with respect to her gender identity. The gender assigned at birth was male. Her family didn't understand nor did they try to understand her. As a result, she left her home. (She left home due to transphobia). While struggling with her gender identity and attempting to make a living, she fell victim to sex trafficking. For a long period, she was homeless and lost all her documents, including her permanent resident card. After working with AWS, she obtained her green card replacement card and secured permanent housing.

Recruitment, Identification, and Relationships with Traffickers

Recruitment: Among reported cases, over half (62%) were recruited within the United States, while 38% were recruited outside of the United States. Just over 10% of reported victims were recruited in the Bay Area.

Identification of Victims: Of reported cases, 36% of reported victims were identified as victims in the Bay Area, while it was unknown how or where cases were identified as human trafficking cases in about 50% of cases.

Relationships with Traffickers: Where relationships were identified, the relationship with traffickers was most commonly romantic partners (37 cases), followed by family/guardian relations (19 cases).

Services

Services provided: Overall, the two most common services for victims were food assistance and case management. This is similar to our previous reports. For those under the age of 25, case management was the most common service, followed by education and training. Services were more likely to serve individuals over the age of 25 (53%) than those under the age of 25 (47%).

In the 2021 report, the executive summary highlighted that those under the age of 25 received fewer services than those over the age of 25. While this is still reflected in this report, even with two years' worth of data, it is important to highlight several agencies filling the gap to provide services to those under the age of 25, including a case profile from Huckleberry Youth Programs. Organizations such as Larkin Street Youth Services, Turntable, and Love Never Fails have seen an increase in demand for support of transitional-age youth and minor CSEC with services such as workforce development, housing and mentoring.

Finally, due to state law requirements to respond to minors who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation, many youth are served through Child Welfare and/or Juvenile Probation, which requires agencies to follow specific protocols when addressing this population. This can cause limitations in services provided, including the type of housing they can access. For example, a system-involved youth cannot access shelter-like

settings offered through Larkin Street or Huckleberry Youth Services for more than 72 hours.

The Department on the Status of Women has been focusing its efforts on this limitation through a pilot project funded by the California Department of Social Services that aims to create more placements and services for youth experiencing sexual exploitation. This pilot does require project partners to utilize existing regulations and licensing types meant for minors in the system.

Case Profile: Huckleberry Youth Programs

A client was referred to HART from Huckleberry House in February 2023. The client is 18 years old and attending high school. He came to Huckleberry House after his mom refused to continue to care for him because of his sexual orientation. His mom was also experiencing her challenges with being unhoused. During an assessment at Huckleberry House, the client also shared that he struggled with holding boundaries in his personal relationships and sometimes ended up doing things he did not want to do, such as trading sex for money. While working with HART, the client received linkages to community resources, including referrals to housing resources. He was successfully linked to a housing program for TAY with LYRIC. The client also received basic needs and transportation support in the form of hygiene supplies, grocery cards, and a Clipper card to ride BART and MUNI to and from school and his job. The client also received support obtaining vital documents, including his birth certificate, social security card, and driver's license. In addition to these services, the client also received counseling on setting boundaries in personal relationships. Initially, the client was using personal relationships to meet his needs. By the end of his time with HART, he had reached stability in housing, was on track to graduate from high school at the end of the school year, started a new job at the airport, and felt more confident and secure. HART was able to close out his case successfully.

Service Gaps: Our previous report recommended that data collection efforts include unmet needs identified by survivors and victims. This report's data addressed this recommendation. Service gaps included a need for more housing, including housing for transitional-age youth and financial support for basic needs, legal resources, transportation assistance, and food insecurity. Additionally, agencies highlighted the need for culturally responsive services, support groups for survivors, and relocation services.

Finally, as part of the response for minors identified as at-risk of or experiencing exploitation, several agencies highlighted the importance of appropriate placements for youth being trafficked, additional funding to support bed holds when youth leave placements, transportation assistance for youth trying to leave a dangerous situation and further training and support around CSEC protocol and policy for Family and Children Services Hotline Workers and San Francisco Police Department.

System Response

System Response: The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) opened 44 investigations into cases of human trafficking. Of these cases, four resulted in arrests, and one resulted in charges against the alleged trafficker.

Case Profile: San Francisco District Attorney

Our division's Human Trafficking advocate was assigned to work with a victim of Human Trafficking. The victim was identified in the Mission neighborhood by the San Francisco Police Department Special Victims Unit. The victim was being sex trafficked by a boyfriend/pimp in the area. The victim decided to relocate to another state where her mother resides and to create distance between her and the perpetrator. Given that the area where she relocated was relatively small and isolated, it was difficult for her to adjust. The advocate connected her to resources in the neighboring counties since there were few resources in the area where she resided. The advocate provided support with applying to the State of California Victim's Compensation Program (CalVCB), provided her funding for food and clothing since she left everything in San Francisco, and helped her try to adapt to the area by connecting her to a social worker and therapy services in the area. The victim sometimes became distant because her phone was often disconnected due to lack of payment. When the service was reconnected, advocates tried to solve the problem by providing job-hunting solutions to secure employment and training services for the victim. The victim found employment, crucial for rebuilding her life and focusing on herself.

Our division chose to highlight this case because it is unique compared to others. In his case, the victim was willing to work with the advocate, and even though there were challenges in communication due to her phone being disconnected, the victim maintained communication with the advocate and voiced her needs.

Education and Prevention

Education in Schools: Following the California education code, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) includes human trafficking and exploitation prevention education in sexual health education curricula available in middle and high schools: Healthy Me, Healthy Us (Middle School), and Be Real, Be Ready (High School). The curricula provide general information on human trafficking and trafficking in commercial sex industries. Below are the percentages of middle and high school health education teachers who reported implementing human trafficking prevention lessons during the 2022-2023 School Year:

- 30% of middle school health education teachers
- 42% of high school health education teachers

Low implementation rates are often caused by teacher shortages across the district and the reassignment of content specialists who provide professional development and technical assistance to classroom teachers.

All district employees are required annually to complete an online mandated reporter training. This training includes information on commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), human trafficking, and reporting requirements.

Additional Training: The San Francisco Police Department's Special Victims Unit held ten training sessions in 2022 and 2023, with 250 participants. Sessions included Victimology and Ethics of Human Trafficking and Wellness for Officers serving the population. Service provider agencies held 23 training sessions with 280 participants. Among the types of training provided were:

- Advanced Engagement Skills for Working with CSEC Youth
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT) Training
- Cool Aunt Series - Sex Trafficking Prevention for Teens
- Human Trafficking Advocate Training
- Human Trafficking Awareness for Businesses

Finally, the San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (SFCaHT) holds an annual conference for professionals in the Fall that many agencies in San Francisco attend. In 2022, SFCaHT addressed the complexities of human trafficking, which included race and gender issues, the nexus between labor and sex trafficking, medical institutions in identification and survivor assistance, organ trafficking, efforts towards ratification of critical international treaties in fighting human trafficking, evolution in law enforcement assistance and protection of survivors, supporting human trafficking survivors with disabilities, institutionalized forms of human trafficking and protecting survivors of transnational and interstate trafficking.

In 2023, the conference addressed the pursuit of justice in anti-trafficking work. It included sessions on drug trafficking, unfair labor practices and labor trafficking, street outreach and services to children, individuality of justice, international practices in delivering justice to survivors, healthcare justice for survivors, utilizing technology and data tracing in fighting human trafficking, reintegration and empowerment of survivors, child labor trafficking, justice in international trafficking and mental health assistance for child survivors.

Recommendations

DOSW will focus on three recommendations:

1. Uplifting the Budget and Legislative Analyst (BLA) Recommendations

The Board of Supervisors Budget and Legislative Analyst released a policy analysis report on October 30, 2024, recommending policy options on anti-human trafficking initiatives within the City and County of San Francisco. Those recommendations included the following:

- The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) should consider increasing dedicated staff for human trafficking cases, establishing human trafficking protocols modeled after those in neighboring counties, continue providing

continuous specialized training for officers and monitoring the impact of new protocols and training.

- The San Francisco District Attorney's Office should strengthen the collaboration with SFPD through joint training sessions, regular case reviews and coordinated taskforces.
- The new Office of Victim and Witness Rights (OVWR) should reignite and administer the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking, develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the Taskforce, co-locate anti-trafficking services, improve data reporting and request additional staff support to manage this scope of work.
- The Department on the Status of Women should support the transition of the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking to OVWR as well as work on developing a sustainability plan for the long-term viability of anti-trafficking programs, including the SF SOL Collaborative, which is set to expire in 2025.
- The Department of Public Health (DPH) should evaluate healthcare provider training and the massage program in collaboration with the Environmental Health Branch, Community Health Equity & Promotion and the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking.
- The Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) should develop labor trafficking protocols and engage in interagency coordination through the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking.

More information can be found in the report here:

<https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/BLA.HumanTrafficking.103024.pdf>

2. Address Duplication of Data

Based on the recommendations made by the BLA, the Department on the Status of Women would like to collaborate with the Mayor's Office of Victim and Witness Rights to figure out how we can address duplication of data in reported numbers.

3. Invest in Economic Security – More Housing and Financial Support

Trafficking survivors often face financial struggles as they seek immediate and long-term independence from their trafficking context. As such, survivors benefit from specialized resources that can help them pay debts incurred while trafficked or, relatedly, pay legal or medical fees that will allow them financial stability and security. While organizations are providing this service, those doing this work are in need of more resources to continue to grow their services to meet the demand of supporting survivors with economic independence.