

## Human Trafficking in the United States

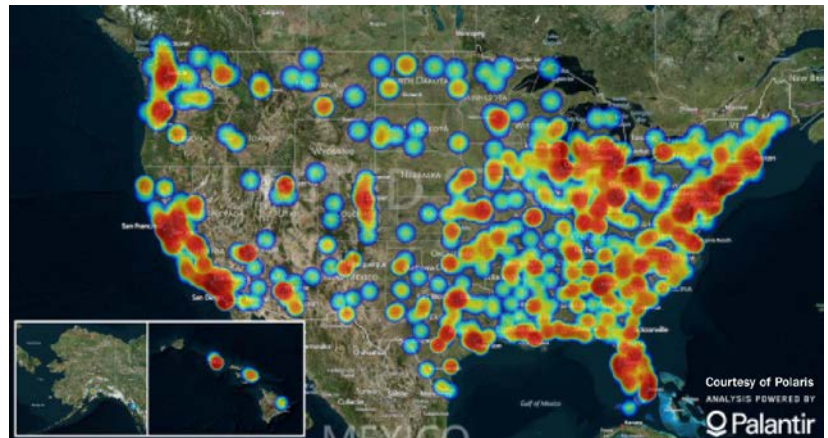
### Who are the victims? Where do they come from?

Human trafficking affects every country in the world. Many are trafficked within their native country. Many are trafficked across borders. In the United States, there's a tendency to view human trafficking only as an international or transnational crime. But human trafficking is also a domestic problem. The United States is both a source and destination country for trafficking, and U.S. citizens can be perpetrators or victims. Some traffickers use their personal, family, and business connections abroad to bring victims into the United States or other countries through various recruitment schemes. Trafficking victims come from all walks of life and every country in the world—their circumstances are as diverse as the many forms of trafficking they may suffer, but they all share the common elements of exploitation via force, fraud, or coercion.

### Who are the traffickers?

Traffickers—whether they enslave domestic workers, recruit and exploit slave laborers in corporate supply chains, or force people into prostitution—are motivated by massive earnings. Between sex and labor trafficking, the industry generates an estimated \$150 billion per year in profits.

Yet despite an estimated 20.9 million victims globally, the Department of State reported only



**Location of Potential Human Trafficking Cases in the U.S.**

This map only reflects cases where the location of the potential trafficking was known. Some cases may involve more than one location (Map generated by Palantir, Courtesy of Polaris)

4,443 convictions of traffickers worldwide in 2014. Sadly, this is not surprising, given the low investment to address this crime—governments and non-governmental organizations only spend an estimated \$124 million combined annually on combating human trafficking worldwide.

Human traffickers operate in a wide variety of contexts. Small- and large-scale sex trafficking and prostitution rings ensnare the most vulnerable among us, including minors. In private homes, individuals and families keep victims as domestic servants. Small businesses coerce laborers into working for little or no pay. Large multinational companies, sometimes without their full knowledge, operate with slave labor in their production supply chains.

Trafficking can also occur in federal procurement and contracts, and can be perpetrated by prime contractors, subcontractors, and their employees. In 2015, amendments to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and Defense Acquisition

Regulations System (DFARS) increased the level of scrutiny top-level federal contractors must place on the lower tiers of their supply chains to ensure slave labor is not being used.

Traffickers will continue to operate with relative impunity and make substantial profits unless we can begin to increase their accountability. Put plainly, it will take a real investment in resources—including funds—to combat this fundamental violation of human rights.

### **What puts certain people at risk of becoming victims?**

Large-scale poverty and instability can play a major role in a country's labor force being vulnerable to human trafficking. Domestically, poverty, youth, and being in an abusive environment are some of the risk factors that can make someone a vulnerable target to human traffickers. Sex trafficking is increasingly a major gang activity, and it's also a growing component of the adult entertainment and sex industries.

For foreign victims of trafficking, high levels of political and civil unrest, state persecution, lack of economic opportunity at home, gender inequality, and widespread displacement can make women, minority groups, and poor people vulnerable to victimization. Weak public justice systems and corruption impede arrests and prosecutions of traffickers, drastically impacting the deterrent effect that law enforcement and criminal accountability should have.

But it's not just people fleeing desperate situations that are vulnerable to trafficking. Many victims are pursuing promising job opportunities. In some contexts, such as multi-tiered supply chains, low-level suppliers use "guest worker" visa programs to bring in workers from neighboring countries. Guest worker programs often have no safeguards to protect or monitor workers once they arrive, and some countries don't allow these workers to effectively unionize. Immigration policies that restrict the employment options of migrant workers also severely hurt their ability to bargain. This disadvantage is compounded by language barriers and lack of knowledge about their rights and the culture around them. ■