



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY




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Human trafficking is the crime of using force, fraud, or coercion to compel someone to work or to engage in commercial sex. Prosecuting human traffickers is part of a holistic approach to combating this pervasive form of exploitation. The Human Trafficking Institute’s (HTI) annual Federal Human Trafficking Report (“the Report”) provides the only exhaustive review of human trafficking prosecutions in U.S. federal courts. The Report presents data from both sex trafficking and forced labor prosecutions and supplements its analysis with information from civil human trafficking lawsuits.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which made human trafficking a federal crime, this year’s edition of the Report also highlights data and trends spanning two decades of anti-trafficking enforcement in the United States.

**ONLINE SOLICITATION** has dwarfed other tactics used by traffickers to solicit buyers of commercial sex for over a decade, appearing as the primary form of solicitation in **OVER TWICE AS MANY** criminal cases as any other method each year since 2008.



The **DOMESTIC SERVICES INDUSTRY** is the most frequent source of federal forced labor prosecutions. **HALF** of all **FORCED LABOR** prosecutions alleged that traffickers compelled victims to perform domestic services like housekeeping, cooking, childcare, and other forms of labor within a household.

## 20-YEAR Trends



The number of human trafficking convictions each year has steadily increased over time. A total of **3,169 DEFENDANTS** have been convicted in human trafficking cases since 2000.

**NUMBERS AT A GLANCE:**

**2,093**  
ACTIVE HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROSECUTIONS

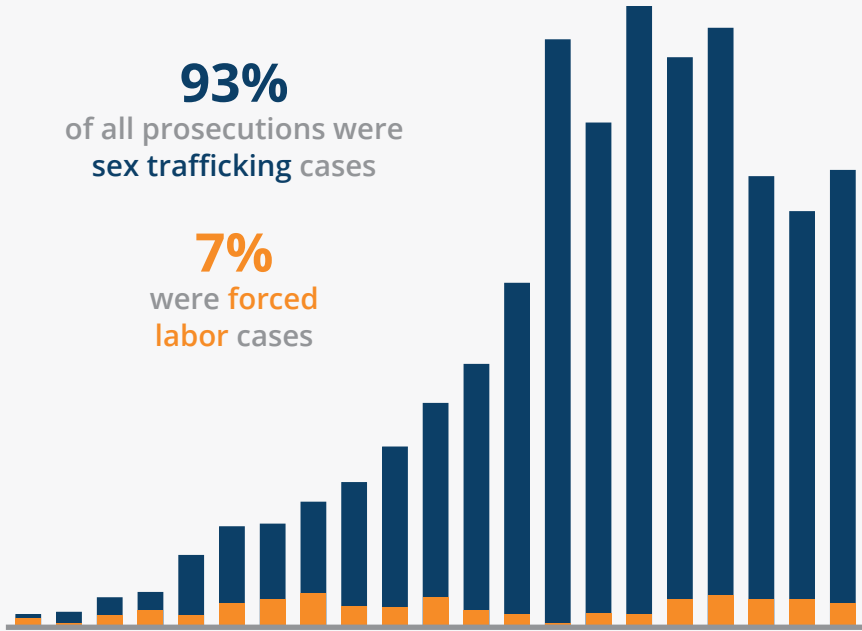
**4,132**  
ACTIVE DEFENDANTS

**4,824**  
VICTIMS IN ACTIVE PROSECUTIONS

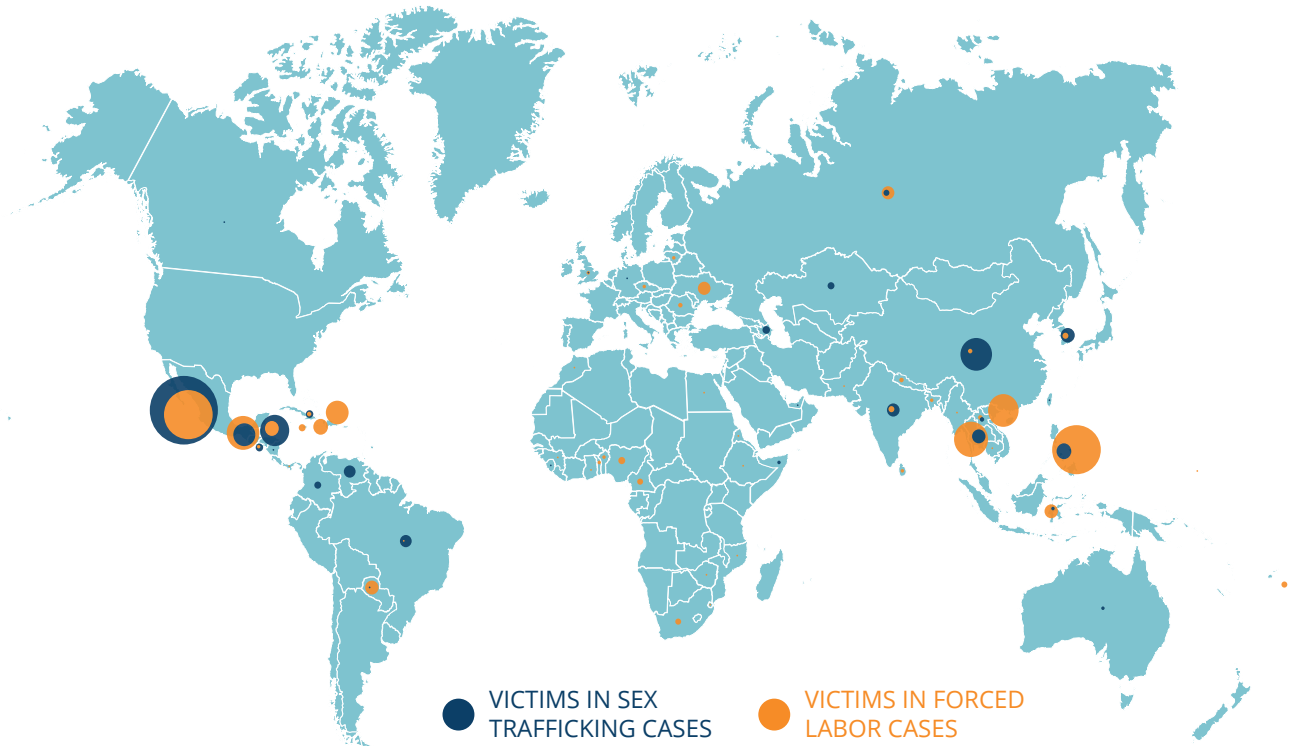
Prosecutors filed more **SEX TRAFFICKING PROSECUTIONS** in 2020 than all **FORCED LABOR PROSECUTIONS** filed in the two decades since the enactment of the TVPA. Whereas there has been a steady increase in sex trafficking prosecutions since 2000, the number of forced labor prosecutions has remained low.

**93%**  
of all prosecutions were sex trafficking cases

**7%**  
were forced labor cases



The impact of human trafficking in the United States is far-reaching, affecting people of all ages and genders, regardless of whether they are U.S. citizens or foreign national victims. Foreign nationals came from **59 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES** of origin, the majority in the Western Hemisphere.



## NUMBERS AT A GLANCE:

579

ACTIVE HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING  
PROSECUTIONS

94%  
SEX TRAFFICKING  
CASES

+

6%  
FORCED LABOR  
CASES

1,007

ACTIVE DEFENDANTS

1,499

VICTIMS IN ACTIVE  
PROSECUTIONS

200

ACTIVE CIVIL HUMAN  
TRAFFICKING LAWSUITS

91  
SEX TRAFFICKING  
CASES

+

109  
FORCED LABOR  
CASES

## KEY TAKEAWAYS *from 2020*



Self-reporting by a victim was the most common way that a case was reported to law enforcement in 2020. **OVER ONE-THIRD** of case referrals that resulted in a prosecution involved a victim who contacted law enforcement for assistance, either directly or through the support of a non-profit or hotline. Moreover, **88%** of the new human trafficking cases in 2020 involved multi-agency collaboration in the investigation of the case.

Many human traffickers **OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY** of large-scale “trafficking rings,” instead exploiting vulnerable individuals with whom they have a personal connection. **ONLY 5%** of active sex trafficking cases involved exploitation directed by gangs or more formal organized crime groups. Instead, most cases involved individual traffickers acting as “pimps,” operating without direction from or connection to a larger criminal network, even exploiting victims within their own families.

Prosecutors filed more human trafficking cases in 2020 than in 2019, but charged fewer defendants. The number of cases filed in 2020 **INCREASED 11%** to 165 following two years of decline. In contrast, the number of defendants charged dropped to 257, **DOWN 8%** from 2019.

The internet is a major platform for traffickers to recruit sex trafficking victims and solicit buyers of commercial sex. In 2020, 59% of **ONLINE VICTIM RECRUITMENT** in active sex trafficking cases occurred on **FACEBOOK**.

59%



In 2020, federal courts convicted the lowest number of defendants in human trafficking cases since 2012. In 2020, **163 DEFENDANTS** were **CONVICTED**—an **89% CONVICTION RATE**. This is a 51% decline in convicted defendants from 2019.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKERS** were more likely to control their victims using nonphysical methods of coercion. **FIFTY-NINE PERCENT** of the coercive tactics traffickers used were **NONPHYSICAL** (e.g., threats, fraud, or withholding pay or immigration documents) compared to just **41%** that were **PHYSICAL** (e.g., violence, restraint, medical).

Human trafficking does not necessarily involve cross-border movement. In fact, fewer than half of active sex trafficking cases involved schemes spanning more than one state. Moreover, of foreign national victims, **17%** were not trafficked across the border into the United States; rather, they were exploited abroad or after entering the country.

2020 saw the **HIGHEST AVERAGE SENTENCE** imposed in human trafficking cases since the enactment of the TVPA. On average, federal courts sentenced defendants convicted in human trafficking cases to **13 YEARS** in prison.

### MANDATORY RESTITUTION ORDERED IN 2020

2020 marked only the **THIRD TIME** since the TVPA's enactment that mandatory restitution rates were at or above 50%. When looking exclusively at defendants convicted of a crime that triggered mandatory restitution, federal courts ordered victim restitution **50% OF THE TIME**. One-hundred percent of forced labor defendants were ordered to pay mandatory restitution, compared to only 47% of sex trafficking defendants.

### VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

3% MEN



3% BOYS



44% WOMEN



50% GIRLS



Girls below the age of 18 are the most likely to be named as victims in human trafficking prosecutions. Prosecutors named 1,499 victims in federal human trafficking prosecutions in 2020, **53%** of whom were **CHILDREN**. Half of identified victims were girls, 3% were boys, 44% were women, and 3% were men. At least one woman and one boy victim self-identified as LGBTQ.

**ABOUT THE DATA:** The Report's findings are not a prevalence estimate of human trafficking in the United States but instead serve as an objective summary of what the federal criminal justice system has done to address trafficking. The Report does not capture data from state prosecutions, state civil suits, or human trafficking that is not prosecuted.