EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Latino Face of Human Trafficking and Exploitation in The United States

Polaris

About this report

In 2017, Polaris released its seminal report, The Typology of Modern Slavery, which for the first time identified and described 25 distinct types of sex and labor trafficking occurring in the United States at that time. The data the report was based upon was gleaned from a decade of operating the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline. While data from the Trafficking Hotline cannot be taken as a reflection of prevalence, it can give a good sense of trends and patterns, painting a very clear picture of who is being trafficked and exploited in the United States. In doing so, it gives communities, service providers, educators, law enforcement and others in the anti-trafficking ecosystem a valuable tool to help formulate targeted prevention and intervention strategies.

Among the key takeaways of the original Typology report was that immigrants are extremely vulnerable to both sex and labor trafficking, in part as a direct result of their migration.

In particular, while anyone can fall prey to traffickers, the data shows that an incredibly high number of people who come to this country from Latin America and the Caribbean are being exploited in this way.[1]

The most egregious figures come from the agriculture sector, where 76 percent of the likely victims were immigrants and nearly half of all likely victims - immigrant and not - were from Mexico.[2]

The fact of this should not come as a surprise. Human trafficking does not happen in a vaccuum, but rather is one of the many, tragic results of other societal ills and inequities - oppression, discrimination, poverty, endemic corruption - to name but a few.

Those same factors are the major drivers of immigration. A significant percentage of people who migrate to the United States, legally and otherwise, do so because they are facing danger or economic desperation in their home countries.

Those vulnerabilities come with them across the border, making the threat of being deported an extremely powerful weapon for traffickers.

Nonetheless, the fact that victims and survivors reported to the Trafficking Hotline are so frequently from these specific regions should be a jolting wake-up call. As this country continues to debate and indeed dramatically reshape longstanding immigration and refugee policies and procedures, it is vital that we have full transparency into how such changes affect human trafficking now and in the future.

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1   The U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline identified around 31,000 individuals with unknown immigration status. This is about two thirds of the total number of individuals in trafficking situations reported to the Trafficking Hotline from 2015 to 2018.

2   This references statistics of those individuals whose immigration status is known.

Hence this project: [La cara latina de la trata y la explotación en Estados Unidos - The Latino Face of Human Trafficking and Exploitation in the United States](#). The data set in this report spans two more years worth of data than were available in the original [Typology](#) publication. Additionally, this report deepens the analysis in the original [Typology](#) by looking more closely at the nationalities of victims in each type of trafficking.

In doing so, we hope to better understand and isolate the factors that lead to sex and labor trafficking of migrants and refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean, and to share that information with policymakers and others in positions to make change.

Among those changes must be a substantial reexamination and ultimately, overhaul of the current system of temporary work visas provided to overseas workers to fill jobs that U.S. businesses claim they are not able to fill with the workforce already available to them in the United States. As this analysis shows, a substantial number of likely trafficking victims and survivors from Latin America and the Caribbean are not, as stereotypes would have it, here without legal documentation. As detailed in a [2018 Polaris report](#), immigrants who come to the United States on legal, temporary work visas make up a significant portion of cases learned about through the Trafficking Hotline. Revamping that system could help substantially reduce trafficking of immigrants who play by the rules, provide an invaluable labor force to the U.S. economy, and yet are virtually set up for victimization nonetheless.

About the data

Polaris's data set cannot be seen as a definitive look at the prevalence of human trafficking in the United States. The Trafficking Hotline exists to support victims and survivors. Data collection is secondary. That means that the same information is not collected as a result of every contact and this may skew figures in one direction or another. For example, we only record the visa status of those who were asked about it and chose to answer. In many cases, this information was not requested because it was not relevant to the needs of the person in the situation or the person contacting the Trafficking Hotline, or it was unknown by that person.

Additionally, data must be seen in light of the fact that certain groups are more likely to have received information about the existence of the Trafficking Hotline prior to entering the United States if they came here through official channels. This is particularly relevant in the analysis of migrant victims of labor trafficking because a substantial portion of them arrived in the United States on legal temporary visas and received statutorily required information about trafficking and contacting the Trafficking Hotline.

Finally, it can not be said enough that human trafficking of all types and involving victims of all demographic groups is a still a substantially under-reported crime. What we learn about through the Trafficking Hotline is likely only a miniscule sliver of what is really happening around the country.

Also worth noting: Prior to 2015, Polaris tracked individual situations of human trafficking but did not record details about individual people victimized within those situations and so did not include those numbers in the original [Typology](#). Particularly in labor trafficking, where there are frequently more than one victim in each trafficking situation, we felt that this did not represent the full picture of human trafficking as accurately as possible. To improve our data set, in 2015 we began to keep track of individuals, as well as situations or "cases" of human trafficking learned about through the Trafficking Hotline. With the addition of four years of individual victimization data, we believe we now have an even clearer picture of how trafficking operates in the United States and who it impacts the most.

For a more detailed look in Spanish at the typology of human trafficking in the United States affecting immigrant victims and survivors, please see [this link](#). For more information please contact: Rafael Flores - rflores@polarisproject.org

Findings Overview

Polaris analyzed over 51,000 likely cases of human trafficking - inclusive of sex and labor trafficking - and over 12,000 cases of labor exploitation[3] learned about through operation of the Trafficking Hotline from December 2007 through December 2018.

From 2015 to 2018, Polaris collected and analyzed information about nearly 48,000 potential victims of sex and labor trafficking. Available evidence suggests that the patterns in the individual victim data for 2015 to 2018 are not unique to this time frame and in fact, would be largely mirrored by victim numbers for the entire data set starting in 2007.

[3] "Labor trafficking occurs when an employer compels or deceives a worker into providing involuntary labor. The employer often uses violence, threats, manipulation of debt, blackmail, or fraud to compel victims to work. Typically, such work takes place in abusive conditions, such as an unsafe work environment, long hours without breaks, or work without pay. Labor exploitation occurs when employers profit from the illegal treatment of their workers, but do not exert the level of control that characterizes labor trafficking." (http://www.stopvaw.org/labor_trafficking_and_forced_labor_exploitation_2)

[4] The Trafficking Hotline exists to support victims and survivors. Data collection is secondary, and information about likely victims' immigration status is not relevant to the provision of services requested. For the purposes of this report immigration status refers to whether likely victims were U.S. citizens, legal permanent resident, or foreign nationals.

Between 2015 and 2018:

• Of the nearly 48,000 likely victims of sex and labor trafficking who were reported to the Trafficking Hotline, information about immigration status was collected for about 36 percent (17,000 likely victims). That means the immigration status of 64 percent is unknown.

• Of the 17,000 likely victims whose immigration status was recorded, approximately 8,800 (52 percent) were not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents.

• 3,700 individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean were reported to the Trafficking Hotline, comprising 22 percent of all victims about whom immigration status was provided.

• There is an average of 5.4 likely victims per situation of human trafficking in the agriculture industry. This is compared to an average of 1.4 likely victims per situation in all forms of trafficking.

Other key findings:

• 77 percent of immigrant victims from Latin America and the Caribbean were trafficked in labor situations.

• The primary type of trafficking reported to involve Latin American and Caribbean victims was agriculture (35 percent of Latin American and Caribbean victims)
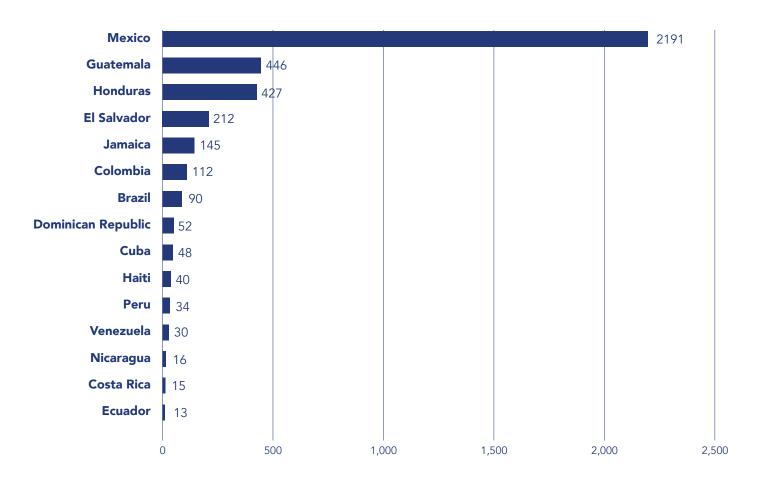
• The vast majority of Latin American and Caribbean victims were from Mexico (58 percent), followed by Guatemala (12 percent) and Honduras (seven percent)

The chart below show the types of sex and labor trafficking in which victims from Latin America and the Caribbean were victimized for the period between 2015 - 2018.

Victims by Type of Trafficking

Type of Trafficking	Victims
Agriculture	1334
Domestic Work	335
Construction	195
Restaurants	168
Escort Services	144
Landscaping	125
Bars, Strip Clubs, & Cantinas	106
Illicit Activities	105
Residential Commercial Sex	93
Hotels & Hospitality	80
Commercial Cleaning Services	73
Personal Sexual Servitude	63
Factories & Manufacturing	55
Recreational Facilities	45
Forestry & Logging	41
Illicit Massage, Health, & Beauty	21
Carnivals	14
Arts & Entertainment	13
Health Care	11
Pornography	11
Health & Beauty Services	8
Traveling Sales Crews	6
Outdoor Solicitation	4
Peddling & Begging	4

The chart below shows the countries of origin of identified immigrant victims of labor trafficking and/or labor exploitation between 2015 and 2018.

Countries of origin of likely victims from Latin America and The Caribbean

Country	Victims
Mexico	2191
Guatemala	446
Honduras	427
El Salvador	212
Jamaica	145
Colombia	112
Brazil	90
Dominican Republic	52
Cuba	48
Haiti	40
Peru	34
Venezuela	30
Nicaragua	16
Costa Rica	15
Ecuador	13

* Chart only includes countries with more than ten potential victims reported.

Top Five Types of Trafficking Targeting People from Latin America

01 Agriculture

Of the 25 types of human trafficking in the United States, agriculture has the dubious distinction of being the industry with the largest number of reported immigrant victims. Over the time period studied, the Trafficking Hotline learned of 2,678 individuals who were likely victims of human trafficking in agriculture or animal husbandry. Of these:

● Over 2,000 people - (76 percent) - were immigrants

● Individuals from Mexico specifically constitute 46 percent of both immigrant and non-immigrant likely victims of this type of trafficking (of those whose immigration status was known).

This figure is greater than the percentage of Mexican natives in the agricultural manual labor workforce overall, which was 57 percent according to published data.
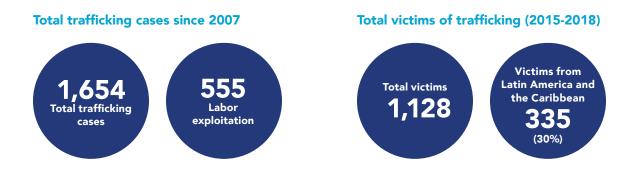
That discrepancy may well be a result of the entrenched cross-border recruitment system in this industry. In many cases, U.S. agricultural producers rely on Mexican recruiters to find their workforce and provide little or no oversight to that process. In such cases it is common for farm owners to pay recruiters or middlemen, rather than the workers directly. Along with the ever-present threats of deportation and confiscation of documents, this system makes migrant farm workers from Mexico extremely vulnerable to trafficking. This vulnerability is present regardless of immigration status as workers who come here legally on temporary H-2A and H-2B work visas are subject to deportation if they leave the employ of the specific sponsoring business.

Total trafficking cases since 2007

712
Total trafficking cases

1,965
Labor exploitation

Total victims of trafficking (2015-2018)

Total victims
2,678

Victims from Latin America and the Caribbean
1,334
(50%)

02 Domestic Work

Diplomatic personnel and employees of certain international organizations are allowed to hire domestic workers from overseas and bring them to the United States on certain kinds of temporary visas. The work involved might include child care, cooking, cleaning and taking care of older adults or other family members. Because these workers virtually always live in their employers' homes, they often are extremely isolated from the outside world. Along with language barriers, this isolation leaves them extremely vulnerable to trafficking since few outsiders are in a position to notice if, for example, if the worker is required to labor 15 hours a day or to sleep in a closet, for example.

In this type of labor trafficking, the Hotline managed by Polaris reports at least 228 individuals that had legal status, being the most common ones visas, B-1, J-1, G-5, and A-3. Cases have also been recorded in which employers committed fraud by bringing domestic workers to the United States on visas that are supposed to be used for tourists, fiancés, or students, such as B-2, K-1, and F1. Of the total of 803 foreign nationals identified, 251 were undocumented.
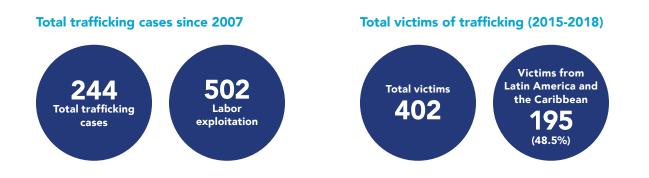
The majority of victims arriving in the United States in this type of trafficking are from Mexico, followed by the Philippines, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Colombia. Through the data, Polaris has been able to identify victims from 94 different countries in this trafficking type.

Total trafficking cases since 2007

1,654
Total trafficking cases

555
Labor exploitation

Total victims of trafficking (2015-2018)

Total victims
1,128

Victims from Latin America and the Caribbean
335
(30%)

03 Construction

Victims of labor trafficking may be forced to work in the construction industry, usually within small contracting businesses completing tasks such as roofing, carpentry, welding, electrical work, and masonry on both large commercial construction sites as well as in private homes. Employers may misclassify workers as independent contractors, thus limiting their access to worker protections and benefits.

Because of the complicated nature of the labor supply chain and the roles of direct employers, recruiters, contractors, and smugglers, in many cases victims are unable to identify who is responsible for their

exploitation. Workers can enter their exploitative situations through formal job offers and misrepresented visa contracts. In some cases, workers may be charged illegal and exorbitant recruitment fees, which may be a method of control to keep workers in abusive situations. Recruitment may also begin through an abusive migration journey or through word-of-mouth referrals. The majority of labor trafficking survivors in construction are men from Mexico and the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala), most of whom have H-2B visas or are undocumented.

Hotline data also shows that victims are kept in their trafficking situation through threats of deportation and threats to blacklist the worker from future U.S. jobs if he leaves or reports his situation. Survivors have also reported experiencing verbal abuse, harassment, and denial of necessities such as water and safety equipment.

Total trafficking cases since 2007

244
Total trafficking cases

502
Labor exploitation

Total victims of trafficking (2015-2018)

Total victims
402

Victims from Latin America and the Caribbean
195
(48.5%)

04 Restaurants

The fourth most prevalent type of trafficking identified in Polaris's data set in terms of the number of victims from Latin America and the Caribbean is forced labor in restaurants and food service businesses. Migrants from all over the world arrive in the United States with promises of decent work, but end up hidden in restaurant kitchens and virtually disconnected from the outside world. Traffickers often take advantage of language barriers between workers and employers.
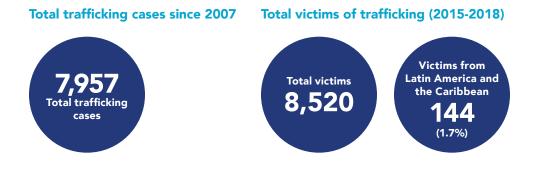
Within this type of trafficking, approximately 26 percent of victims come from Latin America, but it should also be noted that a large number of victims also come from throughout Asia.

Total trafficking cases since 2007

672
Total trafficking cases

1,448
Labor exploitation

Total victims of trafficking (2015-2018)

Total victims
625

Victims from Latin America and the Caribbean
168
(27%)

05 Escort Services

Escort Services is a broad term used widely in the commercial sex trade, referring to commercial sex acts that primarily occur at a temporary indoor location. The operations are often described as "outcall," where traffickers deliver victims to a buyer's hotel room or residence for "private parties," or as "in-call," where potential buyers cycle in and out of a hotel room where the trafficker has confined the victim for extended stays.

Victims may be tricked into a situation through fraudulent job offers, such as fake modeling contracts. Traffickers may also recruit victims by pretending to have a romantic interest in the victim or falsely promising that they can provide shelter, financial support, or other benefits. Extreme physical and sexual violence, often accompanied by weapons, is common, as is coercion in the form of unmanageable quotas, debts, threats of harm or police involvement, excessive monitoring, gang intimidation, social isolation, and constant surveillance. Traffickers often condition victims to believe they are the only ones who care for them, manipulating an attachment bond that makes the decision to leave the trafficker extremely difficult.

Total trafficking cases since 2007

7,957
Total trafficking cases

Total victims of trafficking (2015-2018)

Total victims
8,520

Victims from Latin America and the Caribbean
144
(1.7%)

For more information and to view/download the full report in Spanish visit:

https://polarisproject.org/resources/
the-latino-face-of-human-trafficking-and-exploitation-in-the-united-states/

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