



The intersection between homelessness and human trafficking in New York City

2024

What are the relationships between homelessness and human trafficking in New York City? This study, conducted by The Passage in partnership with NYC's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence offers an overview of both homelessness and anti-trafficking sectors, how they interact with each other and recommendations on how to combat this crime.

The Passage 
Everyone deserves a place to call home

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About The Passage

Founded in 1980 by Cardinal Basil Hume and The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, The Passage is based in the heart of Westminster in the UK. We provide practical support and a wide range of services to help transform the lives of people who are experiencing or at risk of street homelessness.

We are guided by our Vincentian values and offer our clients the resources and solutions to prevent or end their homelessness for good, including routes to employment, benefits, stable accommodation and a pioneering Human Trafficking Program.

Our vision

Our vision is of a society where homelessness no longer exists and everyone has a place to call home.

Our mission

- Prevent homelessness by intervening quickly before people reach crisis point.
- End homelessness by providing innovative and tailor-made services that act with compassion and urgency.
- Advocate for, and with those who feel they are not heard by amplifying their voice to bring about real systemic change.

Our values

- We assist people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to realise their own potential and to transform their lives.
- We act with compassion and kindness.
- We are a voice for change and justice.
- We build relationships based on trust.
- We respect each other.
- We are straightforward in all our dealings.
- We believe in practical hands-on hard work.
- We collaborate across all sections of society.

Acknowledgements

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We are also extremely grateful to the Department of Homeless Services, the Office for Temporary and Disability Assistance, Response to Human Trafficking Program, Restore, Urban Resource Institute NYC and BRC (The Bowery Residents Committee) who further contributed to our study with interviews and focus groups.

Finally, thank you to all other organizations that participated in this research

- Acacia Network Housing
- ACE Programs
- African American Planning Commission, Inc. Serenity House Family Residence
- Breaking Ground
- Care For the Homeless
- Comunilife
- Crime Victims Treatment Centre
- ENDGBV
- Family Justice Centre
- Flatbush Development Corporation
- GEMS
- HELP USA
- Henry Street Settlement
- Her Justice
- Prevention, Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH)
- Safe Horizon
- The Arab American Association of New York
- The Jewish Board
- The Salvation Army, Treasures
- Violence Intervention Program
- Volunteers of America - Greater New York

Abbreviations

CARES	Client Assistance and Rehousing Enterprise System
CoC	Continuum of Care
DCJS	Division of Criminal Justice Services
DSS	Department of Social Services
DHS	Department of Homeless Services
EHV	Emergency Housing Vouchers
GBV	Gender-based violence
HPD	NYC Department for Housing Preservation and Development
HRA	Human Resources Administration
HSS	US Department of Health and Human Services
HUD	US Department of Housing and Urban Development
ITF	Interagency Task Force
JVTA	Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015
NYC	New York City
NYS	New York State
OTDA	Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
RHTP	Response to Human Trafficking Program
RHYA	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
TIP	Trafficking in Persons report
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UN SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
US	United States
VAWA	Violence Against Women Act

Foreword

In 2017, The Passage was commissioned by the UK's first Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner [1] to produce a report into the links between homelessness and human trafficking. It is recognized that traffickers identify and exploit people experiencing homelessness, and those sleeping on the street are at greater risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. Evidence also suggests many who escape human trafficking end up as street homeless and then enter a cycle of susceptibility to being trafficked again.

Following the 2017 report, The Passage established a Human Trafficking Program and conducted monitoring and evaluation using comprehensive data from delivery, lived experience of survivors and national comparative data. Five years of evidence revealed that over 94% of survivors identified by The Passage had become homeless as a result of their exploitation by human traffickers.

Multilateral agencies including the United Nations (UN), have international instruments and binding legislation that explains how human trafficking targets the most vulnerable in society. This includes people experiencing homelessness.

In response to this, The Passage has established its services and operational practices based on the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (also known as the Palermo Protocol), the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT), and the EU Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims. These international frameworks guide our recognition and support for the survivors of this crime and inform our referrals to NGOs and authorities within the UK National Referral Mechanism [2].

Evidence from The Passage's program in London shows that human trafficking is a crime that transcends international boundaries. The survivors identified by The Passage come from diverse nationalities and their cases involve human trafficking offences committed both within and beyond the UK borders. Through collaborative working, The Passage continues to work with UK government departments to further develop the national response to human trafficking and the intersection with homelessness.

Human trafficking is a multifaceted problem that encompasses prevention, protection, and prosecution. No single organization or government can effectively combat it in isolation. Therefore, partnerships are essential. By collaborating across sectors and across nations, we can address this complex issue more comprehensively. These partnerships allow us to pool resources, share expertise, and coordinate strategies, ultimately working toward eradicating this crime.

[1] The UK created the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. This commissioner has a nationwide role in promoting best practices to prevent, detect, investigate, and prosecute human trafficking offenses. In the UK, the term "anti-slavery" encompasses a wider spectrum of exploitation, including human trafficking, servitude, and forced or compulsory labor.

[2] The National Referral Mechanism is the UK system to identify and support survivors of human trafficking.

Given that human trafficking does not respect international borders, The Passage partnered with the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, to undertake a similar exercise to those that The Passage carried out in the UK and Dublin, Ireland, to explore and identify links between homelessness and human trafficking in New York City. The recent mapping and evaluation focused on New York City and has identified clear links between homelessness and human trafficking, akin to the situation in London and Dublin.

In New York City, partnerships at a strategic level appear to be well established. For instance, the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence coordinates citywide human trafficking prevention and response efforts, and all five boroughs hold informal and formal meetings related to human trafficking. The Bronx, Staten Island, and Brooklyn have strategic Human Trafficking Task Forces that provide coordination and connection between human trafficking service providers, law enforcement, and government agencies. Notably, the Brooklyn/Kings County Human Trafficking Task Force receives federal funding to support its work and has a shelter sub-committee to discuss and identify short- and long-term housing options for survivors. These meetings across New York City are useful to provide wrap around support and coordinate all services. However, not all boroughs have housing representatives in their Human Trafficking Task Forces or meeting spaces.

The Passage's research findings inform recommendations that we hope will assist improved identification and support of trafficked victims in New York City's homelessness systems and be helpful to further develop already established partnerships.

We have produced a local report for each city (London, Dublin and New York City) that captures the findings of our mapping work and co-produced recommendations coming from that work. Moving forward, a wider report with recommendations of how to shine a light on the issue at a global level will be produced, linking in with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 (SDG 8.7) which aims to take immediate and effective measures to end human trafficking.

The work will outline international comparisons across three major global cities and will be reported to the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons as a model of good practice.

I express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to this project. Special thanks go to Jenny Travassos (project supervisor) and Dr Júlia Tomás (author). Additionally, I would like to thank Saloni Sethi (Commissioner at the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence), Melissa Paquette (Chief Legal Officer, Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence), and Edward Hill (Deputy Commissioner for Research and Evaluation) for facilitating this study. I am also grateful to Dr Amanda Eckhardt (Chief Program Officer, Urban Resource Institute) for her peer review. My thanks extend to everyone who participated in focus groups and completed questionnaires.

Mick Clarke

Chief Executive, The Passage



Executive summary

Homelessness and human trafficking are interconnected in the UK. Research carried out by The Passage in 2017 found that people experiencing homelessness are at a high risk of being exploited, and survivors of human trafficking are at risk of becoming homeless once they have broken free from the traffickers.

Since 2017, The Passage has been leading the way in the homelessness sector [3] in the UK in addressing these interlinked issues, operating the first dedicated Human Trafficking Service within a homelessness organization.

Human trafficking does not respect international borders.

To understand this increasing global issue, The Passage completed research studies to map the link between human trafficking and homelessness with other international cities: Dublin and New York City. This report presents our research and mapping in New York City and includes a set of evidence-based recommendations that aim to improve the identification and support of trafficked victims in New York City's homelessness services. These recommendations also support the further development of already established partnerships and embed good practice.

Combined with the research and mapping completed in London and Dublin, this work has enabled an international comparison across three global cities and will be reported to the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons as a model of good practice.

The objectives of this report were to:

- Understand existing knowledge and resources to tackle human trafficking within the homelessness sector.
- Explore whether homelessness organizations are identifying survivors of trafficking within their work.
- Explore existing data sets and identify areas to develop.
- Make recommendations for state and federal improvements on how homelessness organizations can respond to the issue of human trafficking more effectively.

[3] The homelessness sector encompasses all stakeholders involved in providing services for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These stakeholders include federal agencies (such as the US Department of Housing and Urban Development), State agencies (such as the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence or the Department for Homeless Services), non-profit organizations and grassroots organizations.

Current knowledge and resources

The findings from our survey indicate the following:

- There are clear signs that homelessness organizations encounter survivors of human trafficking.
- However, support seems to be inconsistent depending on the knowledge of support workers.
- While CARES, the Department for Homeless Services' (DHS) data management system, utilized by all DHS-contracted shelters, has entries on human trafficking to report if an individual is a 'suspected' or a 'confirmed' survivor, not all case management systems include entries on human trafficking and as a result data on the link between homelessness and human trafficking is inconsistent.
- Around half of the organizations' staff have not received training in human trafficking.
- There is a lack of policies and guidance within homelessness organizations and as a result survivors may not be referred to specialist organizations.

Valuable information resources are accessible, including Human Trafficking: A Handbook for Social Providers and Victim Advocates, published by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the Citywide Human Trafficking Resource Guide (Brooklyn Human Trafficking Task Force and the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence). Notably, the DHS has demonstrated a strong commitment to combating human trafficking by implementing policies that prioritize survivor safety during the housing application process. Yet, it appears that certain homelessness organizations, including survivor support centers, remain unaware of these critical resources.

Strategic partnerships appear to be well established. For example, all five NYC boroughs have either a Human Trafficking Task Force or regular human trafficking coordination meetings. Brooklyn/Kings County District Attorney has a well-established federal-funded Task Force. However, the task forces do not all include housing representatives and as such, there may be missed opportunities to identify survivors and comprehensively link systems and evidence from within the wide-ranging group of people experiencing homelessness.

Although OTDA shares many information resources in key recruitment places like in hotels and the National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework includes an array of strategies and approaches, these remain underdeveloped in practice in New York City. Indeed, within NGOs, there is a lack of prevention programs and awareness specifically targeting people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Survivors can be referred for support by law enforcement agencies but also by any established legal and social service provider via OTDA's New York State Trafficking Confirmation process. According to policy, within three working days, the survivor receives a 'Trafficking Confirmation' which allows them to access New York State benefits and services regardless of their immigration status. New York City's Right to Shelter decree supports anyone experiencing homelessness, including survivors, by providing shelter through the Department of Homeless Services (DHS).

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and trafficking also have the option to access a specialized shelter system operated by the Human Resources Administration (HRA). This smaller network of shelters is mainly designed to support families with children, who have traditionally been the primary demographic served. It offers emergency placements for a duration of up to 180 days, a limit imposed by New York State regulations [4], after which a survivor may be able to move into a specialized transitional HRA shelter or into a DHS homeless facility. Then, with the support of OTDA-funded specialist organizations and/or other NGOs, the survivor may move to independent living. DHS/HRA also provide rehousing support. The New York State Notice of Confirmation does not expire and is helpful for survivors in many ways; for example, for housing applications, application for T visas and other legal matters (i.e., compensation and court proceedings).

NYC has an extensive network of shelters, drop-in centers and housing programs that align with NYC's Right to Shelter. In 2023, a DHS policy was published that is dedicated to supporting survivors of human trafficking. Additionally, OTDA, where the Response to Human Trafficking Program sits at the State level, published comprehensive guidance in 2021 highlighting the vulnerability of certain social groups, including those experiencing homelessness. This is a strong foundation on which practice can be built upon, but evidence also suggests that housing temporarily and permanently single adults who are certified survivors of human trafficking is a challenge that needs to be tackled.

Homelessness organizations and trafficking survivor identification

The number of identifications is relatively low when compared to London. In 2021 (the latest published National Human Trafficking Hotline Report for NYS), 639 survivors of trafficking were identified in New York City. These last figures appear to be significantly lower when compared to London where in 2023, the UK government identified over 4,000 survivors of human trafficking. Based on The Passage's experience, we suggest that increased awareness and specialized training programs for shelters, mental health services and homelessness service providers could lead to an increase in identifications of survivors experiencing homelessness.

According to our survey, shelter providers lack knowledge on spotting the signs of human trafficking, particularly labor exploitation. Based on our experience at The Passage, homelessness organizations can play a key role in identifying survivors. This is the direct result of preventative projects such as raising awareness within the homeless population and specialized training for the homelessness sector. We therefore believe that rolling out these types of projects within the sector would lead to an increase of identifications including of young male victims of labor exploitation (including forced criminality) and other underrepresented groups. Furthermore, by having a human trafficking policy, these organizations could raise awareness of this issue and increase staff knowledge on the issue.

[4] N.Y. Soc. Serv. § 459-b. Emergency shelter is limited to 90 days with the possibility of two 45-day extensions for residents who continue to need emergency shelter.

Existing datasets and development areas

Consistent data collection is crucial to inform funding and program decisions. However, as indicated by our survey, data gathering practices vary across homelessness organizations, resulting in a lack of reliable information about human trafficking survivors experiencing homelessness.

Some forms of human trafficking and specific groups of trafficking survivors remain largely unreported, including survivors of forced labor and forced criminality, US citizen survivors, male survivors and survivors from the LGBTQI+ community.

Numerous factors contribute to this situation, including the scarcity of specialized services and the stigma associated with seeking assistance. The lack of visibility within homelessness services due to insufficient data leaves human trafficking survivors vulnerable and hinders the effectiveness of established support pathways.

Moreover, by not differentiating between forced labor and forced criminality, essential data is not being collected and therefore a significant percentage of survivors may be undercounted. This might be particularly important when analyzing how the homelessness sector tackles human trafficking. We also could not find any data sets that calculate how many people are experiencing homelessness because of being trafficked and how many survivors were trafficked because they were homeless.

Our conclusion is that there is an opportunity to use improved awareness and screening tools in both homelessness and human tracking services to more systematically identify victims who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Recommendations

Based on our research, The Passage proposes the following recommendations to increase the visibility of survivors who experience homelessness and therefore reduce vulnerability to human trafficking:

- 1** Training on human trafficking should be embedded in staff training throughout the homelessness sector, including State and city funded Intake Centers, Safe Havens and Drop-In Shelters as well as shelter providers that receive government funding and those that do not (NGOs). Human trafficking conceptual and vocational insights should include forms of exploitation, causes and consequences, migration, human rights and organized crime. Above all, training on human trafficking should include victim identification, support and care.

2 A user-friendly online toolkit should be created for the homelessness sector with key information. This could include OTDA's Handbook, a webinar on signs to spot and what action to take, a human trafficking policy template to be used by NGOs, a trauma-informed code of conduct to support survivors of human trafficking, a list of key questions to ask at initial screenings and a directory of services.

3 To improve data collection, human trafficking entries should be included in all case management systems used by homelessness organizations. While CARES includes entries indicating if a client is a confirmed or suspected survivor of trafficking, it should also include additional information about the individual's housing status when they were recruited by the traffickers and when they escaped the traffickers until finding support. Further research and focus are needed to examine data collection practices and how data could inform targeted interventions and policy.

4 Prevention initiatives based on the US National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework should be created with the input from people with lived experience to target specifically those experiencing unsheltered homelessness and unstable housing.

5 Research the need for systemic and legislative change around the term 'forced criminality'. The Federal Government of the US should amend the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 to include forced criminality as a form of trafficking including a legal definition of forced criminality.

6 Ensure that housing specialists are included in all five boroughs' Human Trafficking Task Forces or meeting spaces.

7 A comprehensive human trafficking policy. NYS should have a comprehensive human trafficking policy for adult, youth and family homeless shelters. This could include definitions, responsibilities, safeguarding, how to conduct an initial screening in a trauma-informed way, access to services, support pathways and pathways to exit support, prevention, recording and accountability, community safety partnerships and service standards.

The State of New York and the City of New York can play key roles in implementing the above recommendations and coordinating necessary stakeholders.

Introduction

This report presents an exploration of the intersection between homelessness and human trafficking in New York City.

The objectives for our work were to:

- Assess existing knowledge and resources related to human trafficking within the homelessness sector.
- Investigate whether homelessness organizations are recognizing trafficking survivors in their work.
- Analyze existing data sets and identify areas for improvement.
- Provide recommendations for enhancing city, state and federal responses to human trafficking within homelessness organizations.

The report begins by outlining the methodology used in the research, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study.

The background section provides a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand - homelessness and human trafficking. It further elaborates on the support pathways available for trafficking survivors.

The core of the report is dedicated to examining the intersection between homelessness and human trafficking, and the housing programs that can assist trafficking survivors. This section also includes a detailed analysis of the links between homelessness and human trafficking.

To provide a real-world perspective, case studies highlight the lived experiences of individuals affected by these issues.

The report concludes with a summary of the findings, their significance, and recommendations for future action.

For deeper insights, Annex 1 provides a detailed analysis of the survey data, while Annex 2 presents an analysis of the focus groups and interviews conducted during the research.

This report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, social workers, non-profit organizations, and anyone else interested in addressing the complex issues of homelessness and human trafficking. It aims to inspire informed action and contribute to the ongoing efforts to support the most vulnerable members of our society.

To provide clarity, the term 'victim' is used to describe an individual who is currently enduring abuse, while the term 'survivor' is used once the individual has escaped the exploitative situation and has embarked on the journey of recovery.

Methodology

A literature review was undertaken, focusing on homelessness and human trafficking in New York City, providing the foundational knowledge for this study. Subsequently, an online survey was disseminated to organizations aiding individuals affected by homelessness and human trafficking via the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence. The survey, comprised a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, aimed at capturing a snapshot of current practices, experiences, and skills in identifying, housing, and supporting survivors of human trafficking.

Further insights were gleaned through focus groups and semi-structured interviews with governmental and non-governmental agencies with city, state and federal funding as well as private entities. These discussions delved into thematic topics such as New York State-specific homelessness and welfare legislation, support pathways for survivors, information resources including training and prevention programs, partnerships, and data collection.

The Passage staff made two visits to New York. The first visit in October 2023 involved visiting shelters and drop-in centers. The second visit coincided with the Human Trafficking Awareness month (January 2024) and the NYC annual street count of unsheltered individuals. During this visit, two Passage staff volunteered to participate in NYC's annual Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) street count, providing them with firsthand experience and understanding of the conditions faced by individuals sleeping in subways and on the streets of New York City. This visit also facilitated discussions about prevention and information resources. Notably, information boards about human trafficking were observed in several locations in NYC, including at the John F. Kennedy Airport.

To illustrate this report, a case study from Restore and another from The Passage are utilized.

Limitations

Given the project's scope, the aim was not to undertake a comprehensive research study but to provide a broad overview of the issue. Interviews were conducted with city and state agencies and non-profit organizations. However, this work did not include individuals who have personally experienced human trafficking and homelessness. To gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence of human trafficking and the effectiveness of targeted interventions, further research involving this group is necessary.

It is also noteworthy that two leading organizations in NYC specializing in survivor support, participated in the survey. Their contributions, while invaluable, may have skewed the findings towards a more positive representation of general knowledge, received training, and the number of survivors identified and supported over the past two years. Without their insights, the survey results might have presented a more negative outlook on the identification and support of homeless survivors.

We acknowledge that the homelessness sector in NYC is broad and diverse, accompanying a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies. For the purpose of this report, we have focused primarily on DHS as the government agency providing housing resources to survivors in NYC.

Background

Homelessness

New York City has the second largest homeless population in America. According to NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and NYCStat [5] shelter census reports in October 2023:

- There were 90,578 people experiencing homelessness, including 32,689 children sleeping each night in New York City's main municipal shelter system.
- 23,103 single adults slept in shelters each night in October 2023.
- The number of New Yorkers sleeping each night in municipal shelters is now 72% higher than it was ten years ago. This is largely the result of an unprecedented influx of over 200,000 asylum-seekers from across the globe arriving to NYC.
- The number of homeless single adults is 106% higher than it was 10 years ago.
- The primary cause of homelessness, particularly among families, is lack of affordable housing. Other causes of homelessness include eviction, overcrowded housing, domestic violence, job loss and unsuitable housing conditions. [6]

An estimated 4,140 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness and sleeping in public spaces were identified in January 2024. [7]

NYC has an extensive shelter network with hundreds of locations and a unique Right to Shelter which was the result of a 1981 Consent Decree in the case of Callahan v. Carey. The Callahan Decree established the Right to Shelter for adult men experiencing homelessness, and the right was expanded to include adult women experiencing homelessness by Eldredge v. Koch (1983), and families with children by McCain v. Koch (1983). The Right to Shelter now mandates that the City must provide shelter to every adult and child who is eligible for services, every night.

It is important to note that age demographics are not readily available online. Yet, youth homelessness is another noticeable issue. [8] According to the National Network for Youth, a non-profit organization, one in ten young adults aged 18-25 experienced homelessness in the past year. Some subpopulations of youth face a higher risk of homelessness; these include Black, Hispanic and LGBTQI+. [9] They experience hidden forms of homelessness such as couch surfing [10] as well as sleeping in public spaces.

[5] NYCStat is New York City's reporting portal and the Citywide Performance Reporting tool.

[6] Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City - Coalition For The Homeless,

[7] HOPE NYC, 'Homeless Outreach Population Estimate, 2024 Results', available at

www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/hope/hope-2024-results.pdf.

[8] Interview of March 18, 2024, and focus group of February 24, 2024.

[9] [Youth Homelessness - National Network for Youth](#)

[10] Couch surfing is a term used when an individual moves from house to house, sleeping in whatever spare is available, often a couch or floor, generally staying a few days before moving on to the next house. It can be a result of substance abuse, conflict in home relationships, or aftermath of leaving abusive situations. The individual may turn to couch surfing as a temporary solution, staying with friends or family members while they search for permanent housing or a way to get back on their feet.

Human trafficking

In the US, the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) has defined human trafficking as follows:

‘(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

(B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.’ [11]

A victim does not need to be physically transported from one location to another for the crime to fall within these definitions. The term ‘forced labor’ may include domestic servitude, in which the trafficker requires a victim to perform housework in private residences, and forced criminality, when a person is coerced or deceived into committing crimes such as theft or drug trafficking operations.

According to the latest annual report from National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2021 [12]:

- 404 cases were identified in NYC involving 639 survivors.
- The predominant form of exploitation was sex trafficking (310 cases).
- 37 cases involved forced labor, of which 10 involved domestic work.
- 20 cases involved sex and labor trafficking.
- There were no cases involving forced criminality.
- Most survivors were foreign nationals (71), adults (260) and females (316).

TVPA laid the groundwork for the three-P’s approach to combat human trafficking: Protection, Prevention, and Prosecution. In 2009, the US State Department expanded this framework by introducing a fourth pillar, ‘Partnership’.

Protection

The law has been reauthorized several times with amendments to enhance support to survivors. It provides various forms of support and protection such as immigration relief by enabling foreign national survivors to be eligible for federally funded or administered health and other benefits and services, regardless of their immigration status. It also creates immigration protections, including protection from removal for survivors of trafficking (the T visa).

[11] [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#), Section 103

[12] [New York | National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)

In February 2024, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2023[1] was passed by the House of Representatives. The Reauthorization would expand anti-trafficking programs such as the Frederick Douglass Human Trafficking Prevention Education Grants, Survivors' Employment, Housing and Education programs, and Housing Assistance Grants. It would also add forced organ harvesting as part of the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports. This Reauthorization received input from people with lived experience of trafficking, highlighting the importance of survivors' engagement in policy making.

Prevention

The National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework contains 8 strategies and 32 approaches that can prevent human trafficking and its recurrence while promptly identifying and reducing harm caused by human trafficking. Based on a public health approach from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention [14], the guiding principles of the National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework [15] are as follows:

Levels of prevention		
Primary prevention Prevents violence before it occurs	Secondary prevention Provides an immediate response to violence after it occurs	Tertiary prevention Provides long-term, ongoing support after violence occurs
<p>Involves programs, strategies, and interventions designed to reduce factors that put people at risk.</p> <p>Encourages protective factors that buffer people from violence, such as providing education on healthy relationships, building awareness of personal risk factors, providing peer support, promoting access to critical services, or addressing laws and policies that maintain economic and social inequities.</p>	<p>Addresses short-term consequences/effects and focuses on the immediate needs of people who have experienced human trafficking, such as connection to safe and responsive emergency services, health and mental healthcare, and housing.</p> <p>Strategies often include universal or selected screening for human trafficking.</p>	<p>Establishes accessible, effective, long-term responses, including supportive services such as long-term housing, job training, legal advocacy, therapeutic counselling, and other services to prevent victimization and mitigate long-term psychological and emotional effects.</p>

[13] [H.R.6552 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022](#)

[14] [Principles of Prevention Guide](#)

[15] [HHS Human Trafficking Prevention Framework](#)

The TVPA also established the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons which coordinates with foreign governments to address trafficking issues. This office is responsible for publishing the TIP report annually, describing and ranking the efforts of countries to combat human trafficking. The TIP Report is the US Government's main diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking. The TVPA is the first comprehensive federal law to address human trafficking in the US and is recognized as a model for other countries to follow.

Prosecution

The TVPA sharpened the capacity of federal prosecutors to bring human traffickers to justice for their crimes by adding new criminal provisions prohibiting forced labor, trafficking with respect to labor, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor, and sex trafficking of children by force, fraud, or coercion; by criminalizing attempts to engage in these activities; by mandating that traffickers pay restitution to their victims, and providing for forfeiture; and by strengthening penalties for existing trafficking crimes.

According to the Federal Human Trafficking Institute [16], in 2021, there were 8 new criminal human trafficking cases filed in federal courts in New York. Out of these, 22 defendants were convicted. All new defendants were charged with sex trafficking, and none were charged with forced labor. New York federal courts ordered 6 out of 22 convicted criminal human trafficking defendants to pay restitution to their victims, following a trend of decline of restitution in recent years.

Partnership

This recognizes the importance of collaboration in combating human trafficking. Partnerships can exist between federal, state, local, and international law enforcement, government agencies, and (NGOs) who assist victims of human trafficking and advocate to bring an end to human trafficking. These partnerships bring together diverse perspectives and leverage community resources to address this multifaceted issue. For instance, adequate survivor support requires effective partnerships between State agencies, local government structures and service providers (housing, mental health, health, education, access to work) not only immediately after identification, but also throughout the survivor's recovery process. These partnerships are crucial in providing a comprehensive response to human trafficking, from prevention to protection and recovery.

[16] [New York - Human Trafficking Institute](#)

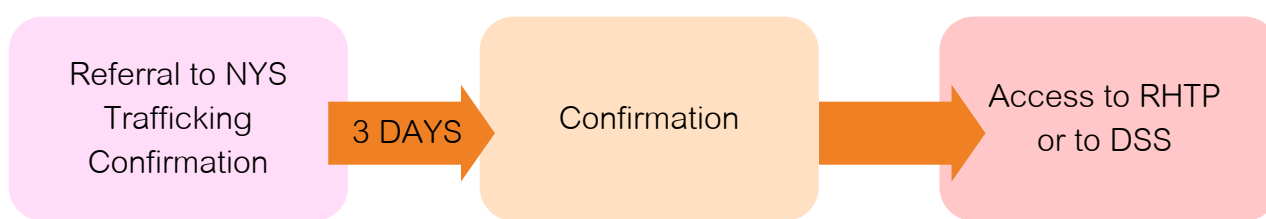
Support pathways

Since 2016, any established legal or social service provider (including registered non-profit organizations), in addition to law enforcement agencies, can make a referral to the New York State Victim Confirmation process. Previously, only law enforcement agencies could refer survivors for confirmation. Since 2021, a system to report online was created allowing the electronic submission of referrals. Up to that point, the only method to send a referral was via fax.

The two agencies in charge of victim confirmation are the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). The two agencies chair the Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking.

This process is completed in three business days so that survivors can access services in a timely manner. Survivors confirmed through the referral process may access state programs and other services to help them meet their needs.

The survivor's support journey in a flowchart is as follows:



Through OTDA, New York State funds the Response to Human Trafficking Program (RHTP), which provides case management and referral services to New York State-confirmed trafficking survivors. The OTDA has contracts with NGOs to provide services to survivors of human trafficking. NYC has many organizations that can provide support services to human trafficking survivors. Three of the larger organizations serving survivors are Restore NYC, Safe Horizon and Sanctuary for Families. These organizations offer programs of housing, economic empowerment, counselling and case management.

Once a referral meets the criteria for a survivor of human trafficking, three individual letters may be sent to their corresponding parties:

- 1) A confirmation letter for the survivor is sent to the referral source, which then provides it to the survivor.
- 2) The referral source receives a second letter notifying them of the confirmation and with instructions on how to assist the survivor, either by referring them to RHTP or to the local Department of Social Services (where DHS sits).
- 3) If the survivor is eligible for assistance through their social services district [17], a third letter is sent to the Human Trafficking Liaison in the county where they are located.

[17] A social services district is a division of NYS that provides or administers publicly funded social services and cash assistance programs. There are fifty-eight social services districts in the state. The five boroughs of NYC comprise one district, and the other fifty-seven districts correspond to the counties outside of NYC.

Federal certification [18]

The TVPA outlines the federal certification process, which allows foreign national adult survivors of trafficking to access federally funded benefits. This process is overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and its family of agencies. The federal certification letter allows foreign nationals to access benefits and resources to the same extent as a refugee. Federal certification requires cooperation from law enforcement. US citizens and people with immigration status do not need to be certified as survivors to access such benefits and services. It is important to note that local and state law enforcement (district attorneys) are distinct from federal law enforcement (i.e., FBI). These entities, according to one interviewee, do not work collaboratively together, except where there are task forces established through the Department of Justice, like in Brooklyn.

The OTDA published a 'Handbook for Social Service Providers and Victim Advocates' in 2021 which is available on OTDA's website [19]. The 23-page guidance includes information on how to identify survivors, providing trauma-informed care and how to navigate the State's referral process. It also offers information about RHTF, the New York State Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking, and important contacts to assist survivors.

New York City Support Pathways

The City of New York offers multiple pathways for survivors of trafficking to access resources and services with or without state or federal certification. Survivors can call the City's local domestic violence and crime victim support hotline to receive free and confidential information, referrals, and potential connections to emergency housing. Survivors with access to a computer can search for resources and services using the City's NYC Hope website. Survivors can also visit or call one of the City's five Family Justice Centers operated by the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence in each of New York City's five boroughs. At any Family Justice Center, survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, including survivors of human trafficking, can connect with organizations that provide case management, economic empowerment, counseling, civil and criminal legal assistance, and housing assistance. Survivors can access the hotline and family justice centers regardless of language, income, gender identity, or immigration status.

[18] [Certification for Adult Victims of Human Trafficking](#)

[19] [Human Trafficking Handbook](#)

The intersection between homelessness and human trafficking

In 2007, NYS Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking (ITF) was created under the Social Services Law [20]. The Task Force recommends interagency protocols and best practice for training and outreach. These protocols are for service providers and the law enforcement community to gather data on the number of victims, produce data on the law's effectiveness, evaluate methods to increase public awareness about trafficking and make recommendations. Reports are published annually [21].

Housing programs that assist trafficking survivors

NYC has a complex network of housing options and protections in place that can be used to support trafficking survivors. For example, housing under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) [22], which protects people regardless of their sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, who have experienced domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and/or stalking from being denied assistance and from being evicted from government-subsidized housing. [23] The survivor has access to emergency transfer and does not have to be married, related to, or living with the perpetrator to be protected under VAWA. The immigration status of the survivor does not impact the survivor's rights to VAWA housing protections.[24]

Another federally funded housing program, arguably the most useful to house trafficking survivors, is the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program. CoC is a comprehensive approach to housing that assists families or individuals experiencing homelessness by providing housing and/or services needed to help them move into housing, with the goal of long-term stability.

[20] [New York Social Services Law Article 10-D – Services For Victims of Human Trafficking](#)

[21] [Publications - NY DCJS](#)

[22] <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ386/pdf/PLAW-106publ386>

[23] [34 U.S.C. 12491](#)

[24] [Violence Against Women Act / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)

CoC includes:

- The Shelter Plus Care program, which provides project-based rental assistance and supportive services through long term contracts with owners of private apartments; and
- The Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy for Homeless program, which provides project-based rental assistance and supportive services through long-term contracts with owners of private units. [25]
- Funding to local jurisdictions, including New York City, to plan and coordinate responses to homelessness at the local level.
- In short, the CoC Program aims at promoting community-wide planning and strategic use of resources, improving data collection and monitoring, which allows each community to tailor its programs within their local area. Applicants consist of non-profit organizations, State and local government, and local housing agencies.

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Under the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 [26], four categories of homelessness were created and are implemented by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to establish eligibility for the CoC program and for Emergency Solutions Grants housing and shelter programs. Important to note that Category 4, as outlined under the Act, specifically addresses homeless status for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. [27]

In addition, in 2020, HUD awarded a limited number of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) to the New York City Housing Authority and the New York City HPD. This program helped families and individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, and it included support to those fleeing or attempting to flee human trafficking. [28]

Participants of EHV live in housing of their choosing while paying approximately 30% of their monthly income on rent. The remaining rent amount is paid directly to the landlord by the Public Housing Authority. The EHV program provided a significant opportunity for Public Housing Authorities, CoC, and Victim Service Providers to develop collaborative partnerships and strategies that address the needs of vulnerable populations.

[25] [Other Rental Subsidy Programs](#)

[26] [Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act](#)

[27] [Fleeing DV - Debbie Fox](#)

[28] [EHV Program](#)

NYC DHS also offers Homeless Intake Shelters (that offer services to help avoid homelessness and provide temporary shelter as a last resort); Drop-In Centers (that offer services to help the transition off the street including hot meals and clothing, showers and laundry facilities, counselling, and case management services); and 'Safe Havens and stabilization bed programs' (small scale and more personalized services for those experiencing chronic homelessness). Importantly, immigration status does not inhibit access to these services.

According to one interviewee[1], it is important to note that the majority of State and City shelters do not operate from a Housing First approach, which has contributed to many barriers for those trafficked to secure short-term housing. As a result, many anti-trafficking advocates do not refer to DHS, but rather alternative programs like rapid re-housing through HUD or safe spaces led by non-profits with other forms of funding.

Lastly, a new Safe Shelter Act to provide more singles with housing in the NYC shelter system was introduced in 2024 and as of June passed the New York State Assembly and Senate. This Act can support single survivors of human trafficking who seek shelter to have greater access to domestic violence shelters, with nonprofits being reimbursed for any payment differential for housing a single in a room intended for double occupancy.

Homelessness and human trafficking

The intersection between homelessness and human trafficking has been widely recognized at executive and legislative levels. For instance, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) of 2015 amended the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) by declaring youth who are victims of severe forms of human trafficking are eligible for support services under the RHYA. [30] RHYA programs, administered by the US Department of Health and Human Services, prevent trafficking, identify survivors, and provide services to run away, homeless, and disconnected youth.

In 2024, HUD published a study on survivors' housing needs to assess the availability and accessibility of housing and services to trafficking survivors who experience homelessness or housing instability. Their principal finding highlights the need for increased resources, the need for increased training and the need for technical assistance to housing and service providers to better integrate trafficking-focused providers into the mainstream housing and homeless system. [31]

The OTDA Human Trafficking Handbook cited above acknowledges that not only runaway youth experiencing homelessness but also any 'individual experiencing homelessness and housing instability' are targeted by traffickers. [32]

[29] [Interview of February 12, 2024](#)

[30] [Federal Law | National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)

[31] [Housing Needs of Survivors of Human Trafficking Study, p iii](#)

[32] [Human Trafficking Handbook, p3](#)

Other organizations recognize the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness to deception and coercion for the purpose of exploitation such as the Human Trafficking Courts [33], which state that street recruitment is one of the predominant methods of recruitment in NYC after false job opportunities and online grooming.

The Passage survey also shows that many organizations in the homelessness sector are familiar with the topic: 38% reported having a moderate knowledge while 34% stated they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’. Only 8% reported not having any knowledge about human trafficking.

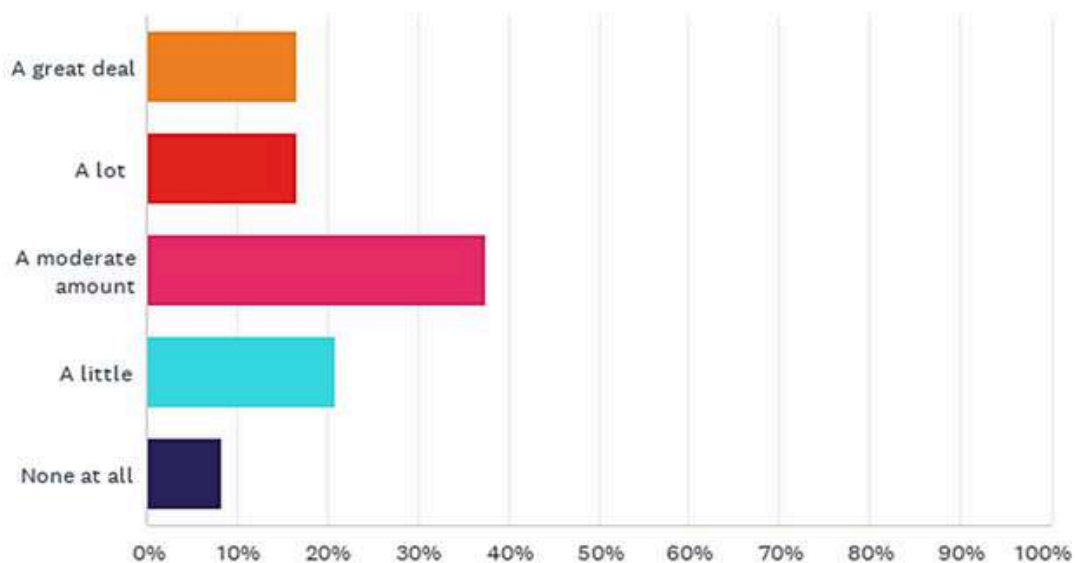


Figure 1: The Passage survey data – Knowledge about human trafficking

Regarding emergency shelter and sanctuary placement, the application and eligibility process is determined according to State and Federal regulations. This process has several steps, which may include an investigation of previous addresses. However, investigation of addresses where persecution or trafficking may have occurred could jeopardize the survivor's safety. This safety concern may lead such individuals to avoid shelter entry and may expose them to greater harm.

To tackle this issue, NYC DHS issued a policy in March 2023 [34] entitled ‘Intake Process for Asylum-Seekers, Asylees, and Victims of Human Trafficking’.

The aim is to identify and to provide emergency accommodation in the safest way possible and the policy includes a list of key questions to ask as well as OTDA Handbook.

[33] [New York Human Trafficking – Statistics, Facts, Shelters Search](#)

[34] [Shelter intake process for asylum seekers and victims of trafficking](#)

The questions DHS is now required to ask are the following:

- 1) 'Have you been pressured to perform a job or sex act you did not want to through lies, violence, or threats of violence?
- 2) Have you been put in a position of owing money to another person who provided you with transportation, a place to stay, money, or something else you needed? Has that person ever demanded that you perform work or sex acts by using violence or threats in order to repay that debt?
- 3) Have you been forced to hand over your identification and/or travel documents to a person not involved in law enforcement?
- 4) Have you been forced to work, perform sex acts for someone, or spend time with someone who does not let you contact your family, spend time with your friends, or go where you want when you want?
- 5) If any of the circumstances described in the above questions occurred at any prior addresses, do you feel unsafe if those addresses are investigated?' [35]

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, they are eligible for services in New York State that will assist with shelter, food, medical care, protection and legal assistance.

If the person does not have immigration status, they may also be eligible for help from the federal government with adjusting their immigration status (T visa). This policy paper makes it clear that no information is shared with federal immigration officials if the service user does not consent to it.

DHS uses a data recording system called CARES (Client Assistance and Rehousing Enterprise System) [41], which now includes two entries indicating if the person may be or is a confirmed victim. CARES is used by all homelessness organizations under contract with DHS in NYC. However, according to The Passage survey, the internal databases of most homelessness NGOs', which operate independently of DHS, do not reflect CARES and do not have entries on human trafficking.

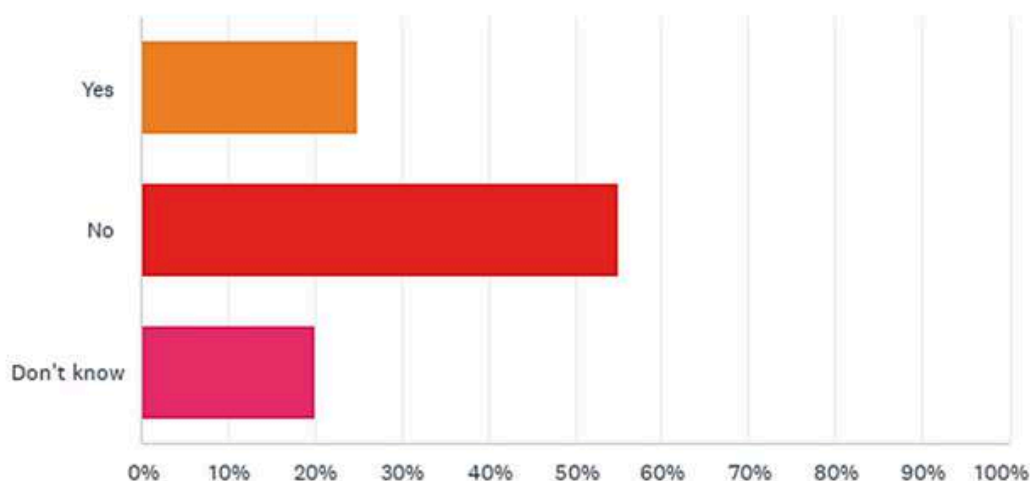


Figure 2: The Passage survey data – Case management systems with entries on human trafficking

[35] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

Moreover, some respondents who agreed to be interviewed stated that the survivors they identify are not certified survivors of human trafficking and as a result they are not counted by CARES nor in State annual reports. [36] Data gathering and monitoring evaluation of dedicated programs also appear to be inconsistent. [37]

Following the publication of the policy 'Intake Process for Asylum-Seekers, Asylees, and Victims of Human Trafficking' further training on human trafficking was delivered to all DHS Divisions [38]. However, this DHS procedure is focused specifically on the steps to be taken at intake facilities to identify survivors of trafficking as early as possible in the process. Our survey shows that only 58% of shelter providers have received training on the subject. [39] This may be because providers do not operate DHS intake facilities.

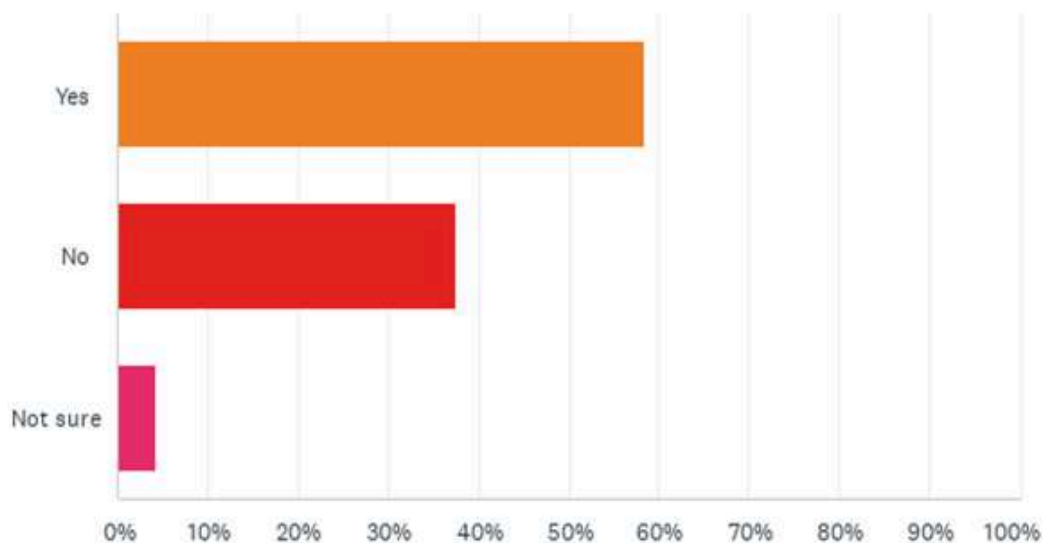


Figure 3: The Passage survey data – Human trafficking training received

The Passage survey shows that female adults are the most represented gender, the most represented age is 18-30 years old, and the predominant form of exploitation identified is sex trafficking. This is different to our findings in London which indicate that the majority of survivors are adult males subjected to forced labor. This suggests that there may be under counting in some trafficking situations, particularly as there is still a prevalent idea that human trafficking only involves the sexual exploitation of women and girls [40].

Improvements to training and awareness programs delivered to NGOs could impact the under-representation of certain groups in the data captured and improve service delivery to those groups.

[36] Interview of February 12, 2024

[37] Interview of February 12, 2024

[38] Focus group of January 22, 2024

[39] This was also confirmed at the interview of March 18, 2024

[40] Interview of 12 February 2024.

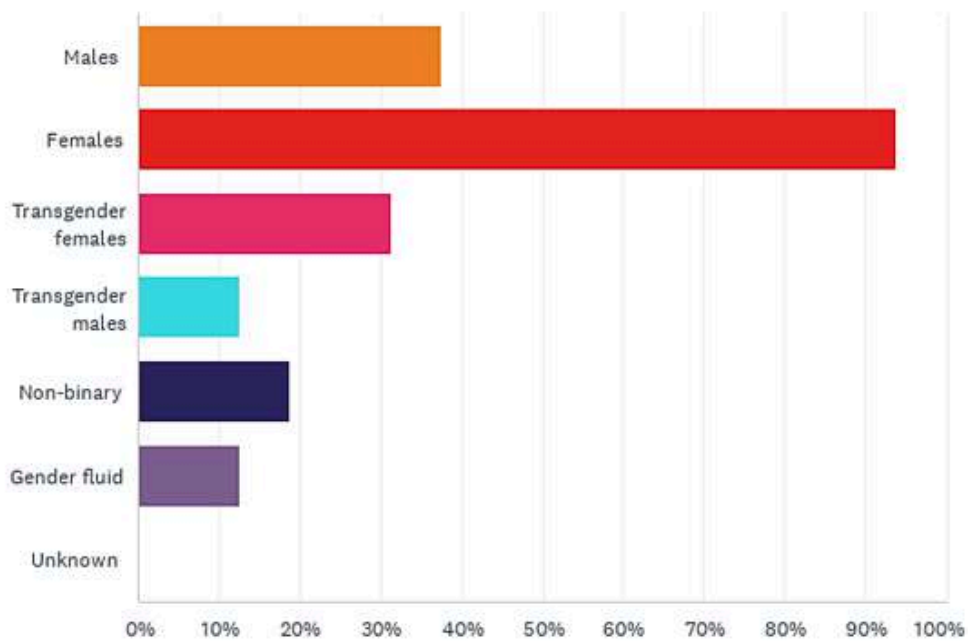


Figure 4: The Passage survey data – Survivors' gender

Regarding their age, it is worth noting that one organization supported survivors over 65 years old and 4 organizations supported minors (under 18 years old).

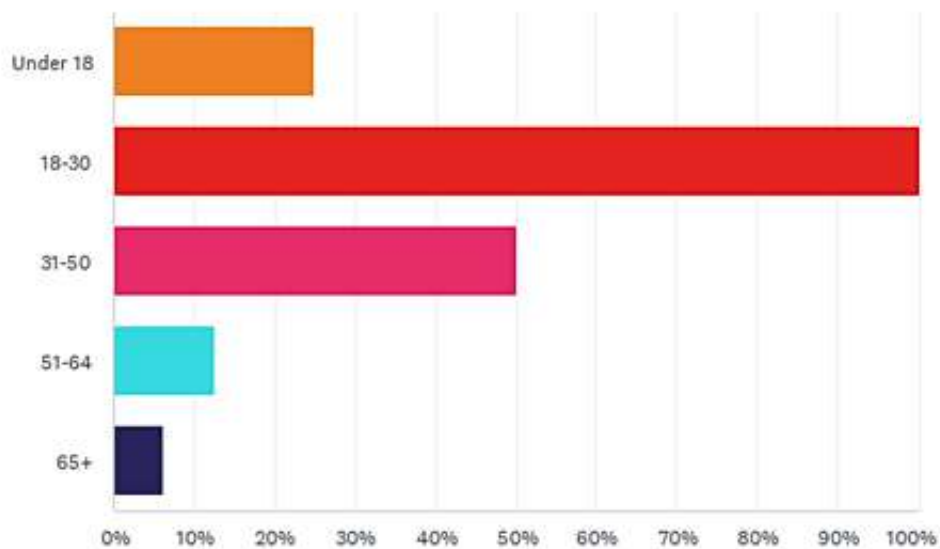


Figure 5: The Passage survey data – Survivors' age

As regards to the type of trafficking, all 16 organizations supported survivors of sex trafficking while 6 organizations also supported survivors of labor exploitation.

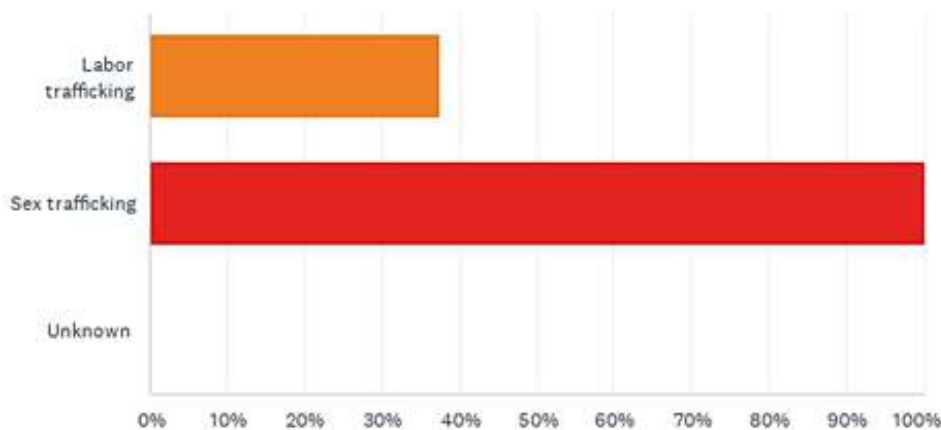


Figure 6: The Passage survey data – Predominant forms of trafficking

This brings into focus the level of general awareness and the process of identifying survivors of labor trafficking, particularly when contrasted with other large cities with similar demographics. For example, in London, 4,242 survivors were identified in 2023. The majority of these were adult males who had been subjected to forced labor, while nearly half (43%) of the identified survivors were minors coerced or manipulated into forced criminality. [41]

This suggests that there may be a lack of identifications in NYC, particularly within non-profit homelessness services providers. This may be because there is still a prevalent idea of human trafficking only involving sexual exploitation of women and girls [42] who are non-US citizens. Evidence suggests there is a considerable undercounting of certain trafficking situations, namely regarding US male citizens for forced labor. [43]

In the US, forced criminality is currently not recognized as a specific form of exploitation within human trafficking [44]. According to the American Bar Association, ‘children engaged in forced criminality are frequently misidentified as perpetrators instead of victims of crime’, and ‘there is a lack of consistency in training, policies and implementation of anti-trafficking laws as they relate to forced criminality, including the principle of non-punishment’ for crimes they were forced to commit. [45]

[41] [HTF London Modern Slavery Leads Report 21-22](#)

[42] Interview of 12 February 2024

[43] [An Exploratory Study of Labor Trafficking Among U.S. Citizen Victims](#)

[44] This was already recognized in 2014 by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons which stated: ‘Many victims of trafficking remain undetected among those who have committed crimes because of a lack of proper victim identification and screening.’ [The Use of Forced Criminality: Victims Hidden behind the Crime](#)

[45] [Perpetrators or Victims? The U.S. Response to the Forced Criminality of Children](#)

New York University was awarded funds by the National Institute of Justice [46] in 2023 to conduct a study to understand the scope of forced criminality in the US. This demonstrates that the issue has been noticed and is now being further investigated.

There appears to be a lack of understanding or recognition of forced criminality as a form of human trafficking could potentially affect the recognition of survivors, particularly among young individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

There are other gaps in trafficking survivor support. In NYC, there is a lack of individual shelter spaces for single adult survivors. As one interviewee explained, the number of single adult survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence has increased in the past years while the number of single shelter units for this cohort has remained flat. [47]

A briefing written by a coalition of shelter providers describes the challenges:

‘Faced with this situation, many single adult survivors of domestic and gender-based violence are returning to unsafe situations or being pushed into the homeless shelter system, which is not built to meet their needs and contributes to system wide strain, onto the street or back into a dangerous and abusive environment. The impact of lack of space for single adult survivors disproportionately impacts members of already-marginalized communities, such as LBGTQIA+ and older adult survivors.’ [48]

Currently, no government-funded shelters exist exclusively for survivors of human trafficking. [49] But action is being taken to address this gap. For instance, a new state Bill directing NYC DSS to provide a residential program, exclusively for survivors of human trafficking was introduced in 2023 and is currently in the Committee Assembly for approval. [50]

[46] [Understanding the Scope and Nature of Forced Criminality in the US | National Institute of Justice](#)

[47] Interview of February 12, 2024.

[48] Urban Resource Institute, ‘Support Memo: Single Differential A.2583 (Hevesi)/S.15 (Gounardes)’, provided by an interviewee on February 12, 2024. The A.2583 (Hevesi)/S.15 (Gounardes) bill aims to expand capacity for single adults by ensuring fair reimbursement for domestic violence shelters.

[49] Focus group of January 24, 2024, and interviews of February 12, 2024, and March 18, 2024.

[50] [NY State Senate Bill 2023-S391](#)

Finally, it is worth noting that NYS and NYC do not have a human trafficking policy for adult and family homeless shelters. [51] This is also confirmed in our survey. When asked if their organizations had internal policies and guidance on human trafficking, 35% responded negatively, while 25% did not know.

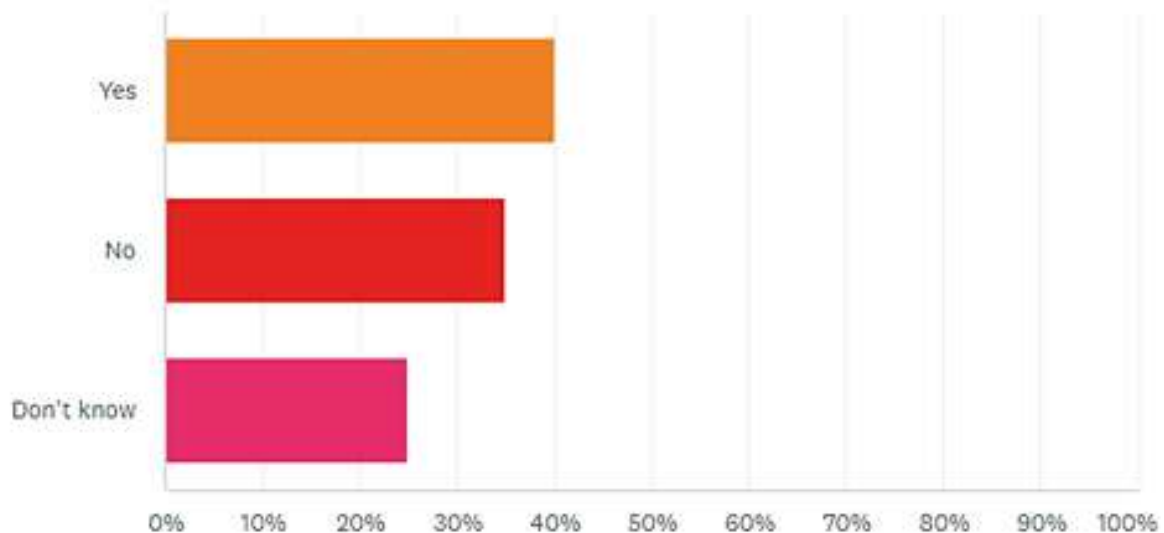


Figure 7: The Passage survey data – Policies and guidance

Consequently, only 40% of respondents have referred survivors to specialist support and only 10% have reported the cases to the police. Policies and procedures are key to support survivors navigating the complex network of programs available to them. They are also crucial to support frontline workers to address survivors' needs.

[51] Interview of March 12, 2024.

Case studies

Lola's story - Restore

Lola (not her real name), a survivor of human trafficking, was introduced to Restore's transitional housing program through a legal partner organization.

When doing a general intake, which includes assessing homelessness history, Lola disclosed that she had been experiencing on and off homelessness for 4 years.

She explained she often went back to her trafficker due to insecure housing and finding it difficult to find affordable housing. Embracing her identity as a transgender woman, Lola was affected by past traumas, which she gradually shared in private one-to-one sessions with the director of housing when she felt emotionally prepared.

Upon acceptance into Restore's transitional home program, designed to span twelve to eighteen months, Lola actively participated in her journey towards independent living, expressing her strong desire to seek independent accommodation in a community of her choosing.

Over a dedicated eight months in the transitional home, Lola worked with the rapid re-housing services provided by Restore. Her perseverance and collaboration with the support team led to a significant milestone, and she secured a one-bedroom apartment in her preferred community.

By the time Lola reached this pivotal point, she had also secured full-time employment, a testament to her determination and personal growth. As she stepped into her newly rented apartment, she not only carried the keys to her own space but also the pride of furnishing it with her hard-earned resources.

Lola's remarkable journey from survival to independence highlights the transformative impact of comprehensive support and the resilience of the human spirit.

George's story – The Passage

George, a UK national, was 55 years old when he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

He became homeless when he was 18 and never took any medication to manage his condition, which meant he was particularly vulnerable to abuse.

A family approached him when he was sleeping in public spaces in London and offered him food, shelter and small jobs in private houses and on farms. George was exploited for decades at the hands of the family who avoided detection by moving across different locations in England. He suffered serious psychological and physical abuse because of his mental health. One day, he developed a serious injury while working which led to the family abandoning him in a parking lot because he was unable to work.

Experiencing unsheltered homelessness again, he sought help from The Passage where he was immediately identified as a victim of human trafficking. He was assessed by a nurse at our Resource Centre and diagnosed with psychosis, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and depression. He also had physical scarring caused by the abuse he had suffered.

The Passage provided emergency accommodation and addressed all primary needs such as food, toiletries and clothes. A multi-agency case conference was held the next day with all frontline staff involved (support worker, mental health worker, nurse) and the Homeless Department of our local government (Westminster City Council).

At the case conference, it was agreed the Council would refer George to the UK Government-funded support system for trafficking survivors. The nurse gathered enough information confirming the long-term physical abuse he had suffered while the mental health worker confirmed George was suffering from PTSD and complex trauma due to his exploitative experience.

George entered the Government support program and was relocated to a safe house where he could recover from his traumatic experiences.

Several months later, in a follow up call, George informed The Passage that he had secured part-time employment and after months of stable medication he now seemed like a different man: calm, happy and hopeful.

Conclusion/Significance of findings

New York State has a very comprehensive survivor support pathway in place if the individual has a confirmation certificate. In addition, excellent resources are available, such as Human Trafficking: A Handbook for Social Providers and Victim Advocates. NYC DHS showed a clear commitment to combat human trafficking by implementing a strategy to ensure the survivor's safety and New York City has many service providers who can assist survivors. However, some homelessness organizations, including survivor support centers, do not appear to be aware of this.

Data collection is key for funding and program decisions. The inconsistency in data collection regarding human trafficking survivors who are experiencing homelessness contributes to their marginalization. Moreover, by not differentiating between forced labor and forced criminality, essential data is not being collected and therefore a significant percentage of survivors may be undercounted. This might be particularly important when analyzing how the homelessness sector tackles human trafficking.

Shelter providers lack knowledge on spotting the signs of human trafficking, particularly labor exploitation and forced criminality. Based on our experience at The Passage, homelessness organizations can play a key role in identifying survivors. This is the direct result of preventative projects such as raising awareness within the homeless population and specialized training for the homelessness sector. We therefore believe that rolling out these types of projects within the sector would lead to an increase of identifications including of young male victims of labor exploitation (including forced criminality) and other underrepresented groups. Furthermore, by having a human trafficking policy, these organizations could raise awareness of this issue and increase staff knowledge on the issue.

Finally, housing single adults who are certified survivors of human trafficking is a challenge that needs to be tackled. On a positive note, many shelter providers are currently lobbying and advocating for practical solutions such as increasing availability of family units at the same price as a single unit.

Recommendations

Based on our research, The Passage proposes the following recommendations to increase the visibility of survivors who experience homelessness and therefore reduce vulnerability to human trafficking:

- 1** Training on human trafficking should be embedded in staff training throughout the homelessness sector, including State and city funded Intake Centers, Safe Havens and Drop-In Shelters as well as shelter providers that receive government funding and those that do not (NGOs). Human trafficking conceptual and vocational insights should include forms of exploitation, causes and consequences, migration, human rights and organized crime. Above all, training on human trafficking should include victim identification, support and care.
- 2** A user-friendly online toolkit should be created for the homelessness sector with key information. This could include OTDA's Handbook, a webinar on signs to spot and what action to take, a human trafficking policy template to be used by NGOs, a trauma-informed code of conduct to support survivors of human trafficking, a list of key questions to ask at initial screenings and a directory of services.
- 3** To Improve data collection, human trafficking entries should be included in all case management systems used by homelessness organizations with information about the individual's housing status when they were recruited by the traffickers and when they escaped the traffickers until finding support. Further research and focus are needed to examine data collection practices and how data could inform targeted interventions and policy.
- 4** Prevention initiatives based on the US National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework should be created with the input from people with lived experience to target specifically those experiencing unsheltered homelessness and unstable housing.
- 5** Research the need for systemic and legislative change around the term 'forced criminality'. The Federal Government of the US should amend the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 to include forced criminality as a form of trafficking including a legal definition of forced criminality.

6

Ensure that housing specialists are included in all five boroughs' Human Trafficking Task Forces or meeting spaces.

7

A comprehensive human trafficking policy. NYS should have a comprehensive human trafficking policy for adult, youth and family homeless shelters. This could include definitions, responsibilities, safeguarding, how to conduct an initial screening in a trauma-informed way, access to services, support pathways and pathways to exit support, prevention, recording and accountability, community safety partnerships and service standards.

The State of New York and the City of New York can play key roles in implementing the above recommendations and coordinating necessary stakeholders.

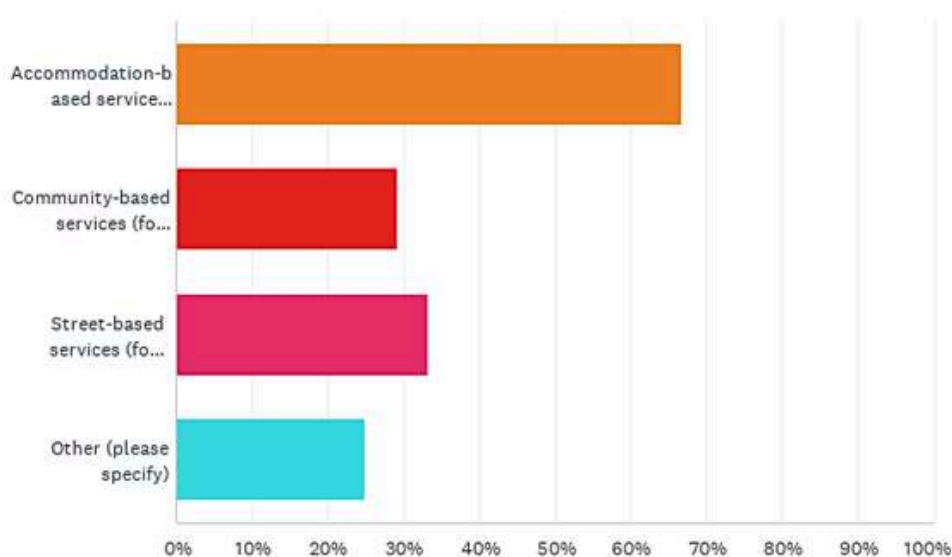
Annex 1 - Survey data analysis

There were 26 responses to the survey from 22 different organizations. It is important to note that 3 respondents work at two specialized human trafficking organizations.

Of these, 43% are in Manhattan, 24% are in Brooklyn, 19% are in Bronx, 9% are in Queens and 5% are in Staten Island. Half of the organizations (50%) reported being partly state funded while 46% are entirely state funded.

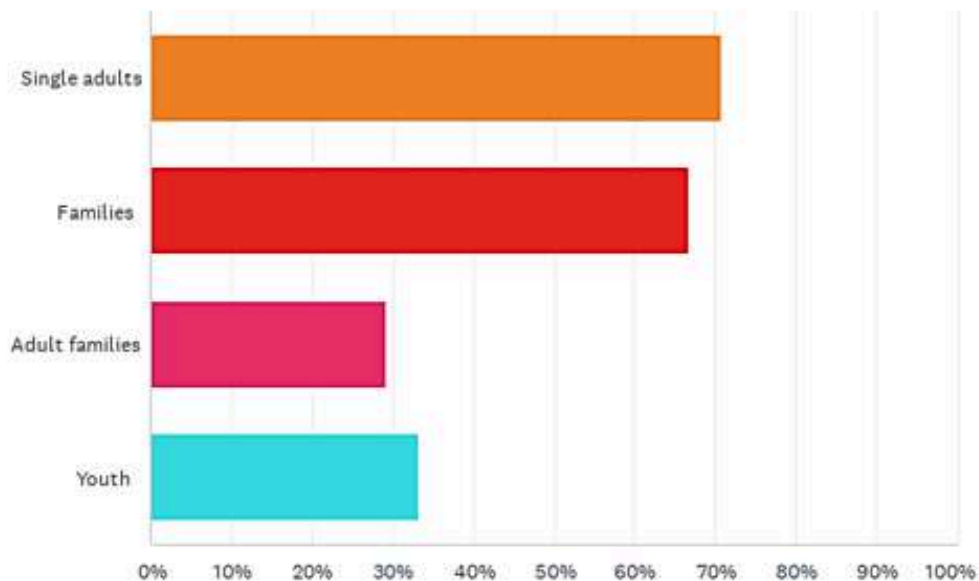
Most organizations (67%) provide accommodation-based services such as shelters and short-term supported housing projects. Other services provided by the respondent organizations include community-based services (29%) such as homeless prevention services, day centers, floating support/in reach/outreach; and street-based services (33%) such as street outreach and food banks. Some respondents (25%) also stated providing legal services, health services, signposting, and therapy.

Q7 Type of services you provide (tick all that apply)



Most organizations support single adults (71%) and families (67%). 33% also support young people and 29% also support adult families.

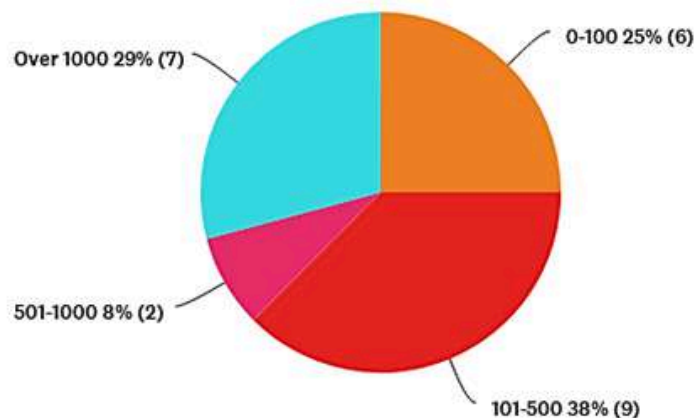
Q5 Categories of service users you support (tick all that apply)



Most organizations support women (88%), men (83%), young adults (75%) and the LGBTQI+ community (75%). 46% of organizations also support children.

Most organizations support hundreds of service users annually: 29% of respondents support over 1000 service users, while 38% support between 101 and 500 services users. A quarter of respondents support less than 100 service users annually.

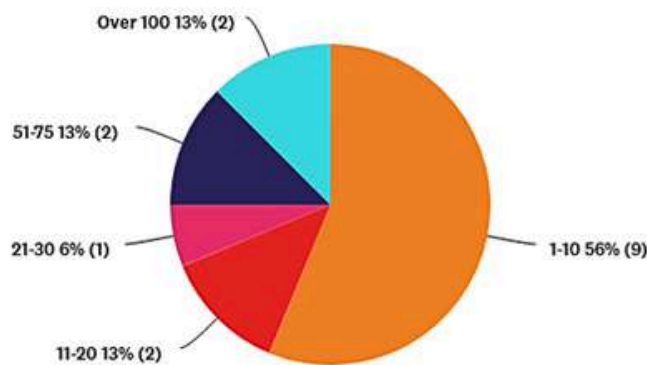
Q9 What is the average number of service users you support annually?



In comparison, when asked how many survivors of human trafficking they have supported in the last two years, 10 respondents (38%) skipped the question because they have not identified any survivor. This clearly shows that more must be done regarding training on the indicators of human trafficking and how to identify survivors who are homeless.

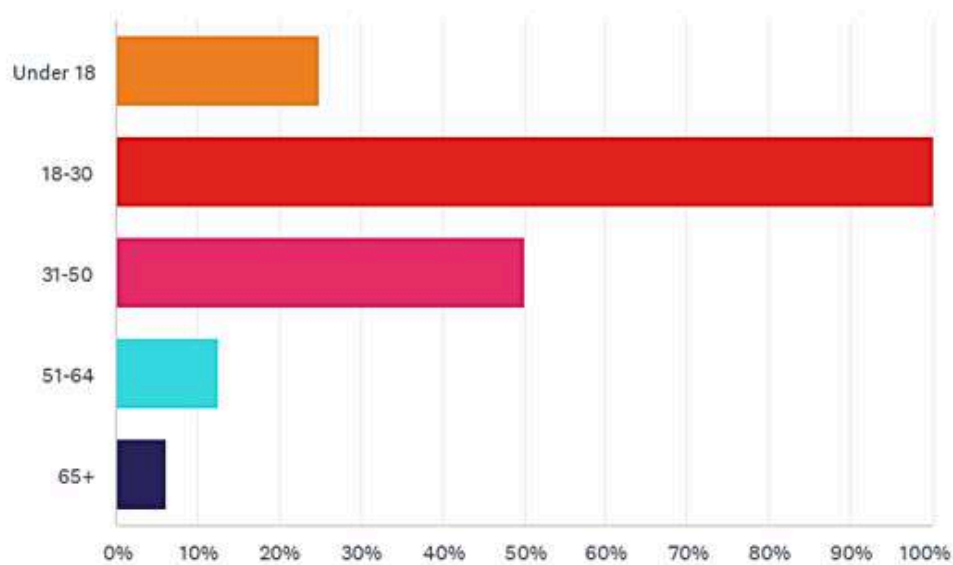
Out of the 16 respondents to the questions related to survivor support, the majority (56%) stated having supported 1 to 10 survivors. 2 organizations (13%) stated having supported over 100 survivors in the past two years. It is worth noting that the two major organizations that support survivors in NYC, Restore and Safe Horizons also completed this survey. We suspected therefore that these are the ones supporting hundreds of survivors.

Q11 How many survivors have you supported over the last two years?



Regarding their age, it is worth noting that one organization supported survivors of over 65 years old and 4 organizations supported minors (under 18 years old).

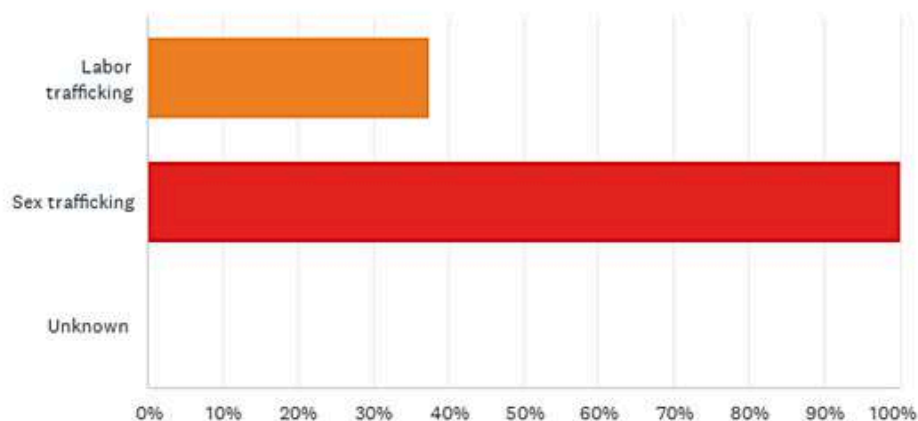
Q13 What was their age? (Tick all that apply)



When asked about the nationalities of survivors supported, one organization reported having identified 87 countries of origin. According to other respondents, the predominant ethnicities were Hispanic and African American.

As regard to the type of trafficking, all 16 organizations supported survivors of sex trafficking while 6 organizations also supported survivors of labor exploitation. This raises the question about general awareness and the identification of survivors of labor trafficking.

Q15 What types of trafficking have the survivors you worked with experienced? (Tick all that apply)

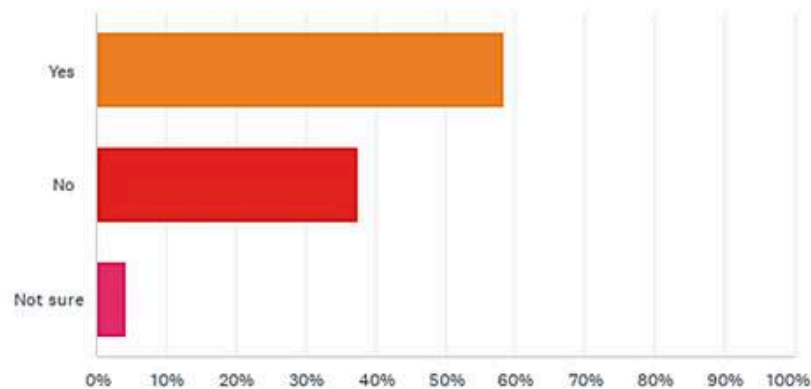


Apart from sex work, other forms of exploitation include domestic work, work in the care sector, in hospitality, in construction, in beauty salons, in agriculture and in factories such as meat processing.

When asked if they were aware of any instances where individuals have been approached for purposes like unpaid labor or sexual exploitation in or around shelters or services for homeless people, 100% of respondents stated they had no knowledge of such instances.

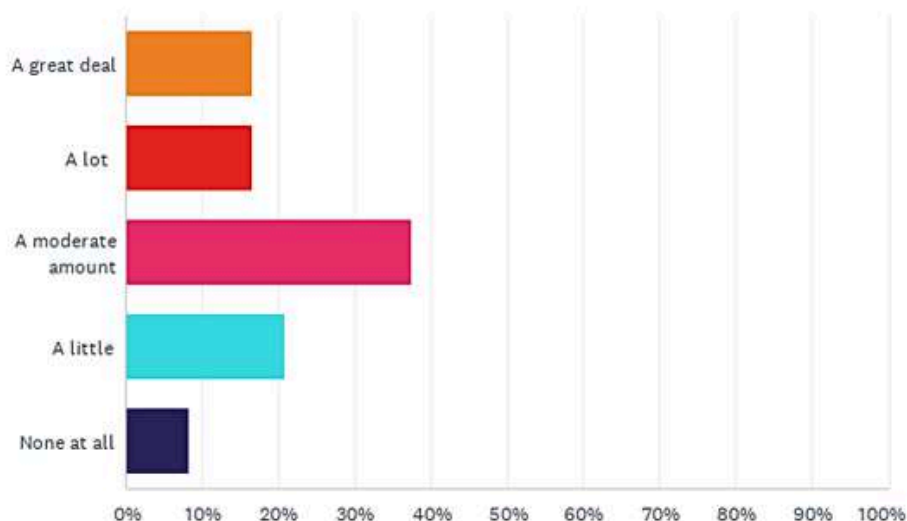
When analyzing knowledge about trafficking, 58% of respondents stated they personally had received specialized training.

Q1 Have you ever received any training or education about human trafficking?



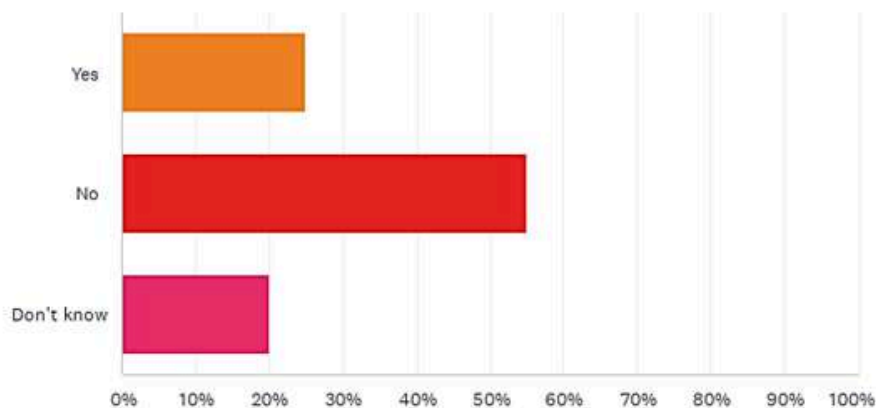
Accordingly, 38% of all 26 respondents reported having a moderate knowledge while 34% stated they knew 'a lot' or 'a great deal'. Only 8% reported not having any knowledge about human trafficking.

Q2 How familiar do you feel with this topic?



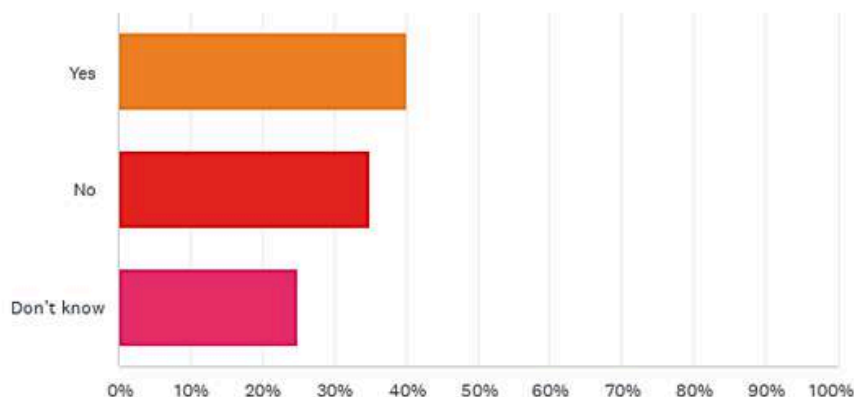
Regarding case management systems, 95% of respondents reported having a case management system. However, only 25% stated the system included entries on human trafficking.

Q19 Do you have any entries on human trafficking in your case management system/internal database?



When asked if their organizations had internal policies and guidance on human trafficking, 40% of respondents confirmed they had, 35% responded negatively, while 25% did not know. Consequently, only 40% of respondents have referred survivors to specialist support organizations and only 10% have reported the cases to the police. However, some organizations (35% of respondents) run projects specifically focused on human trafficking such as workshops, peer support and training, non-residential GBV services in the community and assistance to T visa immigration cases.

Q21 Does your organization have internal guidance, policies or procedures on working with survivors of trafficking?



Finally, survey respondents were asked what support they would like for their organizations around working with survivors of human trafficking.

Most respondents referred to specialized training, workshops and resources to better identify and support potential victims. Other support requested included trauma-informed training, flexible funding, assistance with T visas and support groups. One respondent mentioned the need for specialized housing.

Overall, the findings from the survey indicate the following:

- There are obvious signs that homelessness organizations encounter survivors of human trafficking.
- However, support seems to be inconsistent depending on the knowledge of support workers.
- Not all case management systems include entries on human trafficking and as a result data on the link between homelessness and human trafficking is inconsistent.
- Around half of the organizations' staff have not received training in human trafficking.
- There is a lack of internal policies and guidance within homelessness organizations and as a result survivors may not to be referred to specialist organizations.

Annex 2 - Focus Groups and interviews analysis

Focus group and interview participants come from State agencies including departments from the homelessness and anti-trafficking sectors, but also State funded NGOs that provide specialized trafficking services and non-profit organizations that provide homelessness services and shelters.

Knowledge about trafficking

State agencies and State-funded NGOs specialized in domestic violence, human trafficking and youth homelessness are well equipped and trained. For instance, the DHS published a human trafficking policy in March 2023 and OTDA published a handbook for social service providers in 2021. Both publications were followed by training for all staff. However, training delivery did not include reaching out to shelters' staff. As a result, many shelter providers have only a basic understanding of human trafficking and they have not received specialized training. Some NGOs were not aware of the OTDA handbook. According to one State agency, the problem with training delivery to all their shelters is that there is a fast staff turnover.

'There is a need for training.'

General myths are still prevalent. Many participants reflected on human trafficking as mainly being about foreign national women and girls being sexually exploited. Trafficking survivors are often housed in domestic violence shelters if they are female. Males can access homelessness shelters. According to one participant, there is a need for more awareness about male victims and about labor exploitation. Another participant stated:

'Human trafficking knowledge is still in its infant stages and myths still prevail.'

As one participant simply put it, although State funded shelter providers have access to more information resources, non-profit organizations in the homelessness sector need more resources and are not trained enough.

Vulnerability to exploitation

All participants agreed that people experiencing homelessness were particularly vulnerable to exploitation, grooming, deception and coercion. Indeed, all confirmed that survivors have been identified in shelters. By implementing a human trafficking policy, the DHS recognized this intersection and the OTDA works collaboratively with shelter providers. The OTDA handbook includes homelessness in the list of vulnerable populations.

Some participants highlighted how young people experiencing homelessness often have survival sex in exchange of accommodation or substances, while another participant stated that exploitation is quite often linked to substance misuse.

One participant confirmed they have supported survivors who experienced unsheltered homelessness when escaping from their traffickers. They have also supported survivors who are in male, female and family shelters. According to this participant, this last cohort is seriously at risk of re-trafficking and sometimes they even prefer to go back to their traffickers because trafficking resources are much better than the complex homelessness support system.

Another participant mentioned one client who had been recruited at the shelter.

Identification and data recording

State funded Take-In Centers and shelters' initial assessments include questions on human trafficking such as 'Has someone forced you to do something against your will?'; or 'Does someone have your identification documents?'. It was agreed that the DHS does a good job at initial screenings.

However, the shelter providers that are not funded by the State reported that they do not have these questions in their assessments. As a result, State funded service and shelter providers have identified survivors and the other organizations think they had identified survivors but were unsure. These cases were not reported to the Human Trafficking Confirmation process and are therefore unaccounted for.

One participant stated that identification is more based on opinion and professional experience than on knowledge of human trafficking.

All shelters in NYC use CARES (NYC homelessness data management system) which has 2 entries on human trafficking to report if the person is a 'suspected' or a 'confirmed' survivor. However, some shelter providers were not aware of these entries. Shelters also have their own case management systems, but according to the participants working in shelters, their systems do not include information on human trafficking.

'Lots of survivors experiencing homelessness go under the radar.'

A participant working in a shelter provision service explained that because they do not have any specific anti-trafficking program, they do not include trafficking questions at the initial screening. However, they provide housing for survivors when specialized anti-trafficking organizations refer their clients to them. Their housing programs include emergency accommodation for up to six months and transitional housing for up to two years. This data is included in the data systems of anti-trafficking organizations. One State agency agreed there is a need to reach out to non-profit organizations and increase their engagement in training and support pathways.

Providing support

Following intake, single adults experiencing homelessness are assigned to an assessment shelter bed where medical examinations, psychosocial summaries, and other evaluations are conducted in order to determine the most appropriate shelter placement for clients. During this time, investigations are carried out by DHS. If the person is suspected of being a victim of trafficking, a referral to the Human Trafficking Confirmation process is made and the person is placed in a DHS shelter.

According to anti-trafficking service providers, emergency housing is part of their crisis intervention program. This consists of a placement in a hotel for around a week or a placement in a domestic violence shelter. There are also other housing programs funded by the Department of Justice, which include trauma-informed, person-centered support to achieve economic independence and stable housing. OTDA funds anti-trafficking organizations to deliver a support program to survivors who are certified by the State.

It is important to note that according to all participants, there are no specialized human trafficking safe and confidential shelters in NYC and there is a lack of transitional spaces for single adults. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding on the long-term impact of human trafficking on one's life, health and mental health and the potential consequences of those experiences such as homelessness, substance misuse or sex work.

According to one participant who works in a non-profit shelter provider, when a survivor is identified, they signpost to other organizations for health and mental health support, but they do not necessarily reach out to organizations that are specialized on human trafficking. They do not inform OTDA nor DHS.

Non-profit homelessness organizations do not have internal policies or guidance to identify and support trafficking survivors, but they have general safeguarding and gender-based violence protocols. A toolkit with contacts, a list of indicators, questions to ask at initial assessments and a webinar would be very useful. According to one participant:

'Policies need to address the intersectionality between trafficking, other types of violence such as domestic violence, and homelessness to inform our assessments and innovative approaches. Understanding this intersectionality would also allow us to access more resources.'

The role of the migrant sector

There was a consensus that most survivors are undocumented foreign nationals. The evidence that the migrant sector plays a crucial role in combatting human trafficking is reflected on the fact that the DHS creation of their human trafficking policy was due to an increase of migrants claiming shelter and an increase of reports of suspected trafficking. In addition, the NYS Response to Human Trafficking Program sits within NYS OTDA's Bureau of Refugee Services because it was initially linked to immigrant services.

US nationals

Only one anti-trafficking organization has seen a huge increase in US nationals identified as victims. According to this participant, the component of mental health is more evident than with foreign nationals. With foreign nationals, their focus is "now" and how to get immigration status, which makes them more resilient to trauma. However, there is no research into this.

Collaborative working

Each borough in NYC has a Human Trafficking Task Force which can provide a very fast-paced crisis case management function. Anti-trafficking organizations are included in NYC Human Trafficking Task Forces and at least Brooklyn Task Force has a shelter sub-committee to arrange suitable accommodation for survivors.

According to one participant, these meetings are very helpful to provide wrap around support and coordinate all services. However, not all boroughs have housing representatives in their Human Trafficking Task Forces.

At State level, there is the State Coalition Against Human Trafficking which holds strategic multi-agency meetings and roundtables. There is also an Inter-State Anti-Trafficking Task Force that meets quarterly to work separately on each "P" of the TVPA. However, according to another participant, State agencies lack partnerships with mental health services and agencies.

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The Passage Modern Slavery Service

The Passage is the first and only organisation in the homelessness sector to recruit a dedicated Anti-Slavery Team, providing support to survivors of modern slavery who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Westminster.

We offer holistic support including primary services, signposting to First Responders, respite accommodation (if suitable), health and mental health support and care until the survivor receives government support within the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract. To support other charities and local authorities to create their own Modern Slavery Support Service, we have created a Modern Slavery Toolkit.

Since launching our Modern Slavery Service in 2018, over 200 survivors have been identified and supported, with 33% entering UK's victim support programme, 53% accessing temporary or permanent accommodation and 11% being assisted to return to their country of origin.

For more information, please read our latest Modern Slavery Service Report at: www.passage.org.uk/get-informed/modern-slavery-and-homelessness/#reports



To speak with The Passage's Modern Slavery Support Service, please contact:
modernslavery@passage.org.uk.

To view and download The Passage's online Modern Slavery Toolkit please visit:
www.passage.org.uk/get-informed/modern-slavery-and-homelessness/toolkit/

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