

**STOP THE TRAFFIK**

PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE BOUGHT & SOLD



# Labor Exploitation in the Bay Area

*Trends in San Francisco, Oakland & San Jose*



2018

**STOP THE TRAFFIK**

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# Labor Exploitation in the Bay Area

Every country, regardless of its level of economic development, is affected by human trafficking and modern slavery. The International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2016 estimated that there are around 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide, 24.9% in labor exploitation and 15.4 forced marriage<sup>1</sup>.

In 2016, in the U.S., 75% of certified foreign victims of trafficking were victims of labor exploitation. More than half of these were men. A similar statistic applies to certified child trafficking victims, as 73% were victims of labor exploitation<sup>2</sup>.

In labor exploitation, perpetrators trick people with false promises of a better life, well-paid jobs, education, and comfortable accommodation. In reality victims are forced to work long hours for little or no pay and live in squalid, overcrowded conditions.

## Forms of Exploitation

Exploitation takes place in different forms in San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose. These include: the fishing industry, construction, restaurants, fruit vendors, janitorial services, and domestic servitude. Most of these can be seen across the Bay Area.

Exploitation in the **Fishing industry** is prevalent in **San Francisco** and **San Jose**. Traffickers recruit victims from other countries, refusing to let them off boats, often physically abusing those who complain or try to escape. Victims are afraid of leaving the fishing boats, as they do not have visas that would allow them to be on U.S. soil. These individuals are extremely vulnerable to abuse, and unaware of their legal rights.

**Construction** is one the main hidden industries in which labor exploitation takes place. This is seen predominantly in **Oakland** and **San Francisco**, although it can also be found in **San Jose**, often in sub-contracted projects such as big condos or rebranding of hotels. Victims are vulnerable to exploitation as they travel from other countries after being promised work, and they are unaware of their rights. Traffickers often coerce victims by only paying part of their salaries, forcing them into working more hours, and housing them in terrible conditions with barely any food.

Exploitation in **Restaurants** can be found in **San Jose**, **Oakland**, and **San Francisco**. Some restaurants take advantage of individuals that arrive in the Bay Area on their own accord, without actively planning on trafficking victims from abroad. Most victims travel because of connections with friends and family who are already in the area. They can be deceived into being smuggled into the country and they are left by traffickers with a debt. Victims work for little to no pay, and in some cases they are led to believe that traffickers are doing them a favor by providing jobs and

sometimes housing. In different cases, victims have their passports confiscated and are coerced to follow the traffickers' wishes. These vulnerable individuals are unaware of their legal rights, and tend to be working out of customers' sight – for example operating dishwashers, doing janitorial services, or working as sous-chefs.

**Fruit and Ice-cream** vendors can also be victims of exploitation. Reports suggested that victims can be found in **San Jose**. These individuals are coerced into working illegally on behalf of traffickers, and if not identified as victims they can face problems with the law. Reports from **San Jose** further highlighted exploitation in illicit **Health and Beauty** services, such as **Nail Salons** and **Massage Parlors**. Massage Parlors are peculiar as they can be hotspots for labor exploitation as well as sexual exploitation.

In **Oakland, San Jose, and San Francisco Domestic Servitude** is another common type of exploitation. Victims are of multiple nationalities, and they are unable to leave the house in which they are exploited. They receive no wages for cooking, cleaning, and childminding duties. This type of exploitation is hard to spot, as victims are hidden from the public. More specific reports about **San Francisco** have highlighted **Hotels** as an industry in which some victims are exploited as cleaners.

Human trafficking occurs across the Bay Area in different industries. The information presented in this report is a combination of insights from local agencies and data from STOP THE TRAFFIK. This does not exclude the possibility of these forms of exploitation happening in all three cities, or other locales.

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## Recruitment & Control

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Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, however, there are factors which make people more vulnerable to exploitation. Some of these are listed below:

- Socio-economic or family circumstances
- False sense of obligation to social connections, often in cultural context
- Psychological or physical condition
- Age
- Legal status
- Prior victimization\*

\*Reports in **Oakland** suggest that over 70% of victims have experienced previous abuse.

Traffickers can use a variety of methods to control their victims, some of these include:

- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse
- Confiscation of identity documents

- Social isolation and restricted movement
- Debt bondage and financial dependence
- Threats of violence to themselves and their family members
- Fear of being reported to authorities and enforcement

## Spot the Signs of Labor Exploitation

- Do workers show signs of psychological or physical abuse? Do they appear frightened, withdrawn or confused?
- Do workers have restricted movement on leaving or entering the premises? Are they always accompanied?
- Are workers forced to stay in accommodation provided by the employer? Is the accommodation overcrowded?
- Do you see a lot of workers leaving the same house in the morning, and then returning together in the evening?
- Are workers forced to give incorrect information or claim to not know personal details?
- Is the employer or somebody other than the worker holding the employee's passport and legal documents?
- Do workers lack the necessary protective equipment or suitable clothing? Have they received basic training?
- Is there a group of workers of a similar nationality/age/gender who have a representative by whom they appear 'coached'?
- When they withdraw money do they immediately give it to someone else?

## References

<sup>1</sup>International Labor Organization (ILO) (2017). *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage*. Geneva, September 2017.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of State (2017). *Trafficking in Persons Report: the United States of America*. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271309.htm> [last accessed 11.04.18].

HEAT Watch <http://www.heatwatch.org/>

Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition (BAATC) <http://www.baatc.org/>

Human Thread Foundation <https://humanthreadfoundation.org/>

Social Harmony <http://www.socialharmony.co>

South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking <https://southbayendtrafficking.org/>

Tri-Valley Haven <http://www.trivalleyhaven.org/>

A range of other local agencies have contributed to this report.

This report is a result of information sharing between STOP THE TRAFFIK and local agencies in the Bay Area, including law enforcement, local government and NGOs. For more information about the CfILP visit [www.stophetraffik.org](http://www.stophetraffik.org)

