

SENIOR POLICY OPERATING GROUP PUBLIC AWARENESS AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE | GUIDE FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS MATERIALS (Non- Binding)

Increasing public awareness about the risks and signs of human trafficking (also known as “trafficking in persons” or “modern slavery”) is an important piece of any anti-trafficking strategy, and to date has been a primary prevention measure used by governments and other stakeholders. Effective public awareness and outreach efforts can lead to the detection of human trafficking cases, build public support for governments and communities to take action, and ultimately help prevent human trafficking. With the dissemination of accurate and targeted information, communities will be better prepared to respond to the threat of human trafficking.

The President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) and the Senior Policy Operating Group (SPOG), which consists of senior officials designated as representatives of the PITF agencies, are dedicated to a multi-faceted response from every level of the U.S. government to ensure coordination of federal efforts to combat trafficking in persons. This coordinated response includes efforts to raise awareness and educate stakeholders to develop targeted strategies to address the factors that increase risk in their communities and prevent traffickers from committing this crime.

This guide serves as a public resource that reflects the common messaging, standard statistics, and shared guidelines on images that SPOG agencies use when creating public awareness and training materials. Members of the public are encouraged to follow this guide and incorporate it into their organization policies and practices. The SPOG would like to thank the survivor experts who lent their time and perspectives to the creation of this document.

Statistics

There are a limited number of reliable statistics related to human trafficking. All public awareness and outreach efforts should remain consistent with research and cite accurate sources. When using data or statistics, the quality and quantity of human trafficking data available are often hampered by the hidden nature of the crime, challenges in identifying individual victims, gaps in data accuracy and completeness, and significant barriers regarding the sharing of victim information among various stakeholders. For these reasons, data and statistics may not reflect the full nature or scope of the problem.

International Labour Organization

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, released [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#) in September 2017. This report estimates that, at any given time in 2016, **approximately 24.9 million people were in forced labor**. Of the approximately 24.9 million people, “16 million were in the private economy, another 4.8 million were in forced sexual exploitation, and 4.1 million were in forced labour imposed by state authorities.” The definition of forced labor used in this report is based on ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), which states in Article 2.1 that forced labor is “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”

This report also estimates that 40 million people were in “modern slavery” at any given time in 2016, but this figure includes both the estimate for forced labor and an estimate for forced marriage. Consistent with current implementation of U.S. law, it is recommended to use only the 24.9 million estimate when referring to human trafficking. While some instances of forced marriage may meet the international or U.S. legal definition of human trafficking, not all cases do. Note further that the term “modern slavery” is not defined in international or U.S. law.

National Human Trafficking Hotline

The National Human Trafficking Hotline provides [data sets](#) on the issue of human trafficking in the United States on its website. These data sets are based on aggregated information learned through phone calls, emails, online tips, and texts the hotline receives and should not be confused with prevalence studies or closed-out confirmed cases. Note that the hotline receives several types of calls in addition to those about human trafficking cases. The hotline does not verify the accuracy of information reported, but it determines on a case-by-case basis whether the information should be passed on to an appropriate local, state, or federal investigative and/or service agency equipped to investigate the tip and/or respond to the needs of the potential victim.

Annual Federal Reports

The U.S. narrative in the U.S. Department of State’s annual [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and the [Attorney General’s Annual Report to Congress on U.S. Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons Report](#) include updated federal statistics on the following:

- Number of newly opened investigations, initiated prosecutions, and secured convictions
- Number of defendants charged
- Funding to task forces and the number of new task forces
- Number of Certification Letters to foreign adults and Eligibility Letters to foreign children issued
- Funding for victim services and the number of NGOs supported and individuals served through this funding
- Number of child trafficking victims assisted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program
- Number of granted T nonimmigrant status and T nonimmigrant derivative status
- Number of issued Continued Presence and extensions of Continued Presence

Guidelines for Messaging and Images

Messages should:

- Be tailored based on the goals, audience, and method of delivery. When creating written and visual content, first determine the specific audience intended to be reached and tailor the message to meet their interests. Keep it simple by using plain language and consider translating the material in accordance with a language access plan.
- Avoid misconceptions about human trafficking.¹
- Be concise. Have a clear ask that aligns with the goals and encourages the audience to complete one simple action or step, such as calling a hotline number when suspecting a trafficking situation,² or learning more by visiting a specific website. In general, campaigns are encouraged to list the National Human Trafficking Hotline’s phone number, text line, and/or website that has a live chat option.
- Avoid language like “rescue” or “save,” as it is not strengths-based or empowering.

Victim-centered³ and trauma-informed⁴ messaging:

- Is empowering and hopeful.
- Avoids re-traumatization.
- Supports victims’ rights, dignity, autonomy, and self-determination.
- Uses positive framing, which can elicit a positive response from the audience and encourage action.

¹ For examples of common misconceptions, see: humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/myths-misconceptions.

² For more information about which hotline to list, see: www.state.gov/domestic-trafficking-hotlines/.

³ The victim-centered approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner. For more information, see: www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/.

⁴ A trauma-informed approach includes an understanding of the physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma on the individual, as well as on the professionals who help them. For more information, see: www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/41-using-a-trauma-informed-approach/.

- Recognizes not all victims may self-identify as such and thus should be cognizant of when to use more person-centered language that identifies them first and foremost as people rather than labeling them solely as “victims.”
- Highlights a human trafficking hotline, service program, or law enforcement reporting mechanism to demonstrate there is assistance available for trafficking victims. It is helpful to also include an option to send a text message because people may be unable to make a call or stay on the phone long enough to make a report.
- Uses brighter colors and positive images to signal that help is available for victims of trafficking.

When creating a message, engage survivors as participants in the process. When engaging survivors:

- Consult survivors throughout the development of content to ensure the message can be effective in reaching victims or potential victims and in delivering an accurate depiction of the reality of human trafficking to the broader community. When doing so, take into account survivors’ areas of expertise and strengths as well as length of time out of their trafficking situation (e.g., solicit input from labor trafficking survivors for labor trafficking campaigns). Start with survivors who are already active and established as advocates, and be sure to incorporate diverse perspectives (e.g., sex and labor trafficking, LGBTI, and U.S. citizens and foreign nationals).
- Secure written permission before featuring a survivor in any written or visual material, including discussing potential safety risks. It is a survivor’s decision to participate in any outreach, marketing, social media, or publicity efforts. Survivors should be informed in advance of how their name, photo, or story will be used, as publishing any of this information without informed consent could compromise their safety and well-being and cause re-traumatization.
- Allow survivors to shape their message in their own way by using open-ended questions (e.g., “What should this audience understand about human trafficking?”).
- Offer financial compensation to survivors as it would be made available to other subject matter experts. Through their training and technical centers, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office on Trafficking in Persons and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs may be able to provide additional guidance.
- Be clear about next steps and the projected timeline of the project and communicate any changes throughout the process. For any government-supported programs, please note survivors may not be aware of different federal restrictions or processes and should be informed of what to expect when being asked to participate.

Images should:

- Be victim-centered and promote an accurate understanding of human trafficking. Images can draw connections in the audience’s mind that are both intended and unintended. They project an understanding of what a victim may look like. If all sex trafficking campaigns depict child victims, for instance, audiences may not realize that adults can be victims of sex trafficking.

- Be tailored to the demographics of the target audience to ensure the message is relatable. Images should have backgrounds/scenes that can be easily recognized, such as a city skyline or key landmark.
- Represent the diverse spectrum of human trafficking victims – individuals of all races, ethnicities, ages, and genders.
- Show examples of what someone in the general public might encounter and encourage an appropriate reporting mechanism, such as the National Human Trafficking Hotline. It is important to encourage the general public to get help rather than take independent action.
- Highlight the ways traffickers recruit victims. For example, consider showcasing social media or cell phones as tools used by traffickers.

Avoid images that:

- Display physical abuse. These types of images can be dehumanizing or objectifying and depict victims merely as objects of violence. They can also be re-traumatizing to audience members who may be victims of crime.
- Reinforce misconceptions about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a complex crime that takes many forms. Images that only rely on the most violent examples, like those depicting victims of trafficking in chains, behind bars, or in handcuffs, can promote the common misperception that victims of trafficking must be physically restrained and ignore other forms of force, fraud, and coercion that can be used for exploitation.
- Sensationalize the issue for shock value to draw the audience’s attention. Examples of these types of images include scantily clad women on the street, highly dramatic kidnapping scenes, or children sobbing.
- Depict survivors without their informed consent.
- Fail to comply with stock photo terms of use, if relevant.