

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Research and Data Subcommittee Draft Report January 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The Research and Data Subcommittee (the subcommittee) was tasked with reviewing the current state of research and data at the intersection of human trafficking and transportation, briefly addressing existing research and data gaps at this intersection, and developing recommendations for how to move forward. The subcommittee held three virtual meetings, which included guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and initial discussion points, reviewing the 2019 Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking (ACHT) Report and subsequent updates, and discussion of subcommittee member thoughts on preferred directions. Based on these directives, the subcommittee decided to work on tasks such as a literature review, gap analysis, and recommendations. The subcommittee conducted a literature review of published academic research and other formally published literature. Subcommittee members concurrently reached out to a wide range of organizations committed to preventing human trafficking, their own networks, well as through the gracious support of USDOT experts. Examples of organizations include A21, Villanova University, Airport Cooperative Research, Uber, Lyft, Verite, local and state departments, airports, and more. The subcommittee had a published scholar on the team, which was also a significant substantive resource. Interview discussions focused on the types of data and research the organizations collected and/or relied on to inform and convey the impact of their work. This is an ongoing effort.

2. BACKGROUND

Transportation industry and personnel play a critical role in preventing and addressing human trafficking. The 2019 Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking Report provides an extensive review of the resources up to that point. The work of this Subcommittee focuses on the recent research on human trafficking related to the transportation industry.

Recent Transportation Research Board (TRB)-sponsored projects produced information on human trafficking and anti-trafficking approaches for transit safety, state departments of transportation and airports (National Academies of Sciences and Medicine, 2023). These industry recommendations are supplemented by a handful of academic papers

on the topic. The reviewed work includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Most common methods are surveys and interviews of experts both from the transportation industry and from outside anti-trafficking experts, including individuals with lived experience in human trafficking (or survivors).

The 2020 Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) [Transit Security Preparedness](#) – A Synthesis of Transit Practices by the Transportation Research Board includes some questions to understand how agencies are addressing human trafficking:

- 15% of the Transit Security Preparedness Survey participants state that they experienced at least one human trafficking incident.
- 24% of the agencies had special training on human trafficking and
- 12% issued public service announcements on human trafficking
- 45% of the agencies with law enforcement, while
- 15% state that they collaborate with an ad hoc or special task force.

Airport Cooperative Research Program (ACRP) Research Report titled [Developing an Airport Program to Address Human Trafficking: A Guide](#) (2023) provides detailed information combating human trafficking geared to airports, including a how-to guide and resource list.

In the September 2022 volume of Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Kezban Yagci Sokat's study titled "[Understanding the role of transportation in combating human trafficking in California](#)" investigates this topic by conducting a survey follow-up using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The experts interviewed include diverse individuals from various positions, backgrounds, and roles from inside and outside the transportation industry. The project aims to:

- 1) assess the knowledge about current policies, trainings, public awareness initiatives, and partnerships about transportation and supply chain management among anti-trafficking practitioners; and
- 2) highlight gaps and opportunities for identifying counter-trafficking strategies, best practices, data collection, information-sharing, collaboration, and legislative and administrative changes.

Seventy-four percent of the participants state that transportation is used in trafficking operations to transport and control the victims. While the type of vehicle changes based on the type of trafficking, industry, geography, and distance, private cars and ridesharing are the most commonly used vehicles for human trafficking. Sixty-four percent of the participants state that they do not collect data pertaining to transportation in human trafficking. Experts provide a comprehensive list of directions and implications on education, training and awareness, collaboration, coordination and partnership, technology and data, survivor emphasis and policies.

Supply Chains

Another related topic is supply chains. There are various United States Department of Labor efforts on supply chains that can provide guidance on technology for tracking potential human trafficking cases. For example, administered by Verite, Supply Chain Tracing and Engagement Methodologies (STREAMS) project provides new technology for tracing by testing the clothes and dust [of whom?]. Moreover, the supply chain advancements are evolving. Potentially some of the transportation companies may also be part of this universe of technologies that may help bring awareness to transport and storage.

A second paper from Yagci Sokat focuses on forced labor and supply chain management in California (Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, December 2022). It presents general knowledge on forced labor issues in California and globally, the intersection with transportation, efforts to combat forced labor in the supply chains, and experts' suggestions on how to address forced labor. The study also supplements expert input with labor violation and transportation accessibility analysis. Labor violation and transit accessibility analysis supports the expert input for focusing on farm workers and garment industry and potential transportation accessibility solutions to address some of the vulnerabilities.

Global

[The role of the transport sector in facilitating and preventing trafficking in persons along high-volume transport corridors in sub-Saharan Africa](#) (Green et al) investigates the role of the transportation sector in facilitating and preventing human trafficking in Tanzania and Uganda through a quantitative survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey has input from 1,548 vehicle operators and community members while semi-structured interviews has 55 participants from key informants including regulatory officials, driver trainers, transport associations, civil society organizations (CSOs), and survivors. The survey questions include knowledge of and attitudes towards human trafficking; respondents' views on the scale of human trafficking and trends, including the impact of COVID-19; personal involvement in trafficking; understanding of risk and sanctions; knowledge of victim identification and support; the role played by traffic police and border officials in tackling human trafficking; and recommendations for policy and practice. Trucks are cited as the most involved vehicle type for human trafficking in both countries. In Uganda, 37% vehicle operators disclose that they were asked to transport victims of human trafficking. This study also shows the limited knowledge of human trafficking within border communities; and low confidence in the capacity of regulatory officials to address human trafficking.

Launched in 2017, the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) is the first global data hub on human trafficking, which amalgamates data from counter-trafficking organizations around the world. Among the many valuable data points, CTDC also provides information on the international human trafficking journey through official border controls. Labor exploitation victims are much more likely to pass through official border control points compared to sexual exploitation victims. For example, among official border crossings involving trafficking, 83% are comprised of victims of labor exploitation, while only 15% correspond to sexual exploitation.

Since 2019, there have been multiple efforts globally to address forced labor in supply chains. There are multiple import bans globally, including Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. How these developments impact the transport side of supply chains and involvement of transportation to combat human trafficking can also be valuable for research and data. For example, whether it can be extended for service.

COVID-19 along with all other sectors also impacted the exploitation in supply chains. There were discussions about the truck drivers being exploited to ensure the supply chain service levels. A study about the impact of COVID-19 would be valuable.

3. ANALYSIS

The exact scope of data and research on human trafficking is difficult to ascertain. As an enterprise, trafficking flourishes within illicit markets and in the shadows of our economies, of our journalistic coverage of society, of our academic research, and of our criminal justice systems, making it inherently difficult to collect comprehensive, consistent, and accurate data regarding the crime or to measure it with precision.

There is, nonetheless, varied collections of data related to the intersection of human trafficking and the transportation sector. While it is important to track cases and reports of human trafficking, the lack of a centralized reporting system that allows for the synthesis of data from various sources, including the transportation industry, creates obstacles to improved data collection. Data collection, analysis, and information-sharing are critical to assist the overall transportation industry better understand the scope and depth of human trafficking creating stronger efforts to combat the crime.

For instance, statistics collected by the National Human Trafficking Hotline – <https://polarisproject.org/resources/us-national-human-trafficking-hotline-statistics/> – include information on recruitment location, including bus, rail, and air traffic transportation modes and location (including transportation hubs) but are not easily accessible through the Bureau of Justice Statistics annual reports on Human Trafficking Data Collection Activities –

https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/list?series_filter=Human%20Trafficking%20Data%20Collection%20Activities.

Currently, the primary source of data collection for human trafficking is voluntary reports from victims, friends and families of victims, witnesses, and social service providers. Transportation employees play an important role in reporting Human Trafficking. Employees should be instructed to contact local authorities when there is an immediate threat of harm, and to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) when potential victims are not in immediate danger. Victims should also be encouraged to call the NHTH when they feel they can safely report their situation. When calling the hotline, having a template or standard outline for reporting may ensure the correct data is given to improve research.

In addition, United Against Slavery's highly anticipated forthcoming 2021 [National Outreach Survey for Transportation](#) (NOST), which is being funded through a U.S. DOT Human Trafficking Impact Award is expected to shed light from frontline workers and those with lived experiences about their experiences, challenges and recommendations. NOST provides a data and research collaborative model for combating human trafficking. The study is expected to be released in the very near future.

Another set of valuable research and data is from the USDOT's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Human Trafficking Awareness and Public Safety Initiative award recipient information. One of the cooperative agreements led by PACT works on developing educational and public awareness campaign materials for transit systems. As part of this project, the PACT team collects various data sets from different transit organizations and tweets. So, too, one of the Innovations in Transit Public Safety Grants, administered by Valley Transit Authority, aims to investigate the data coming out of their VTA alerts app.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Emphasize transportation mode in reporting: Transportation information should be collected through the NHTH and be readily available in national human trafficking statistics. The person on the answering end should have a standard list of questions for the person calling – a set of questions for victims self-reporting and a set of questions for non-victims.

One central database: To improve data, research and information sharing, public and private entities in the transportation industry should have a single location to report human trafficking crimes and data. Adopting one central database hosted by DOT or DHS will ensure the data collection is reported out annually from all organizations

combating Human Trafficking. Organizations should be mandated to file or transfer data to this central database twice per year. There should be a standard form for reporting information. This may also help in reducing double reporting of the same person.

Recognition: Provide recognition as an incentive for public and private companies to sign the [Transportation Leaders Against Human Trafficking \(TLAHT\)](#) pledge and have a statement of anti-slavery or anti-Human Trafficking on their web site as a policy. Encourage businesses to recognize employees with rewards/incentives to report suspicions of Human Trafficking (and other crimes) – this could be monetary or a highlight in the company newsletter. Create awareness of successful campaigns that are yielding results, similar to Truckers Against Trafficking Harriet Tubman Award.

Create Task Forces: While some state and local governments have task forces, by mandating at least a state-wide task force for Human Trafficking in all states, this will create more awareness and may increase data sharing and reporting to improve research.

Support legislation: The state task forces referenced above can serve to advise state legislatures on areas of need and proposed language and can serve as an oversight entity to ensure effectiveness. Legislation requiring steps such as (but not limited to) signs or distress buttons in restrooms, awareness messaging in public areas, training for employees of all levels on reporting Human Trafficking and awareness and creating special awareness during the month of January.

- Reporting and tracking legislation can provide a roadmap for other states and decision makers looking to leverage the transportation industry to combat human trafficking. For example, Minnesota Statutes section 299A.785 requires collection of the following:
 1. Data on trafficking-related offenses and trafficking victims.
 2. Information on trafficking routes and patterns as well as methods of transportation.
 3. Information on the social factors, including pornography, that contribute to and foster trafficking.
- H.R. 2601: National Human Trafficking Hotline Enhancement Act – introduced in 2023, the proposed bill would require entities that contract with the National Human Trafficking Hotline to cooperate with State and local law enforcement agencies when receiving tips via the Hotline

Use technology: Using emerging technology – with appropriate personal privacy protections – can help combat Human Trafficking in the transportation industry. As technology continues to drive mobility, there will be opportunities to put new tools in the

hands of frontline workers and victims. Much is made of the use of transportation modes to aid in the trafficking of victims as a mechanisms for escape or exit for victims, if they have the information, resources, and opportunities to do so. The industry should examine how barriers to transportation can keep victims from freedom and look for mechanisms (access to digital fares, etc.) to help them escape.

Measure the effectiveness of programs: Because funding is so limited to address these serious challenges, data collection should also include analysis of the effectiveness of training, awareness campaigns and outreach. Did it change anyone's behavior or observations? (see US DOT funded projects below)

5. REFERENCES

Reference Sources

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. Transit Security Preparedness. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
<https://doi.org/10.17226/25764>.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023) ACRP Report 249: Developing an Airport Program to Address Human Trafficking: A Guide. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26911>

Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (a United Nations International Organization for Migration initiative) Type of Border Crossings Victims of Trafficking Make [Victims of trafficking on the road | CTDC \(ctdatacollaborative.org\)](https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org)

Yagci Sokat, K. (2022b) Addressing Forced Labor in Supply Chains in California
Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 16C, 100735
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198222001336>

Yagci Sokat, K. (2022a) Understanding the Role of Transportation in Human Trafficking in California
Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 15, 100673
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2022.100673>

McDonald, G. G., Costello, C., Bone, J., Cabral, R. B., Farabee, V., Hochberg, T., Kroodsmas, D., Mangin, T., Meng, K. C., & Zahn, O. (2020). Satellites can reveal global extent of forced labor in the world's fishing fleet. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2016238117>

Hill Margo, Anderson Matthew B., King Idella Human trafficking as a racialized economy and the exploitation of indigenous socio-spatial (im)mobility in North America *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities* 42022 <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2022.884195>

Green, C., Clark, S., Kioko, J., Mwai, E., Odhiambo, J., Rettie, N., van der Weijde, K. (2023). The role of the transport sector in facilitating and preventing trafficking in persons along high volume transport corridors in sub-Saharan Africa, *Journal of Transport & Health*, Volume 30, 101607, ISSN 2214-1405, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2023.101607>

Yagci Sokat, K., Auguste, M., Wigle, C., Baglin, C. (2024) Forced Labor and Transportation: Multi- disciplinary Perspectives, *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 23C, 100999 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2023.100999>

List of Funded Studies and Projects

DOT Combating Human Trafficking in Transportation Impact Award

2023 Awardees

Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking and the American Association of Port Authorities

For their “Awareness Campaign to Help Prevent Human Trafficking in the Maritime Industry” – [#NotAlone](https://www.bestalliance.org/aboutnotalone) – proposal to conduct the first national, multilingual countertrafficking public awareness campaign for port authorities to raise awareness among port employees and seafarers.

<https://www.bestalliance.org/aboutnotalone>

Houston Airports

For its “Together We Will #EndHumanTrafficking” proposal to build on its comprehensive counter-trafficking approach by expanding community awareness ahead of major travel periods and holidays, expanding employee training to comprise human trafficking survivor voices, and providing financial support to local advocacy groups.

<https://www.fly2houston.com/newsroom/releases/incentivizing-innovation-houstonairports-receives-2023-combating-human>

Two Bowling Green State University Faculty members

For their “Higher Education on the Awareness Highway to End Human Trafficking” proposal to develop a counter-trafficking awareness toolkit as a resource guide for

college and university faculty to create survivor-informed and evidence-based community impact projects for their students at transportation sites including transit, airports, trains, and highway rest areas.

2022 Awardees

Port of Seattle

For its Airports United Against Human Trafficking proposal to convene a national steering committee of up to 20 diverse airports and scale the Port's comprehensive counter-trafficking approach into an awareness toolkit for use by airports nationwide.

Trinity Metro

For its Stop Human Trafficking Campaign proposal to implement counter-trafficking training for Dallas Fort Worth area transit workers and first responders, raise awareness among the traveling public, and train over 40 local governments in the region.

Colorado Human Trafficking Council

For its This is Human Trafficking proposal to conduct a state-wide campaign to raise awareness through gas stations and convenience stores that serve the trucking industry and general public along the main arteries of I-70 and I-25.

<https://sites.google.com/state.co.us/human-trafficking-council/home>

2021 Awardees

The A21 Campaign

For its Can You See Me? Roadside Billboard Initiative proposal to expand its public awareness campaign of 1,000 counter-trafficking billboards in 46 cities across the U.S.

<https://www.a21.org/content/human-trafficking/gqe0rc>

U.S. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development For

its Combating Silence: Increasing Awareness to Louisiana Human Trafficking proposal to reach up to 5.3 million road users.

Busing on the Lookout (a program of Truckers Against Trafficking)

For its Capturing Innovation to Build Public Transit's Capacity to Combat Human Trafficking proposal to engage up to 72 transit agencies to increase human trafficking training, partnerships, awareness, and reporting among transit agencies throughout the country.

<https://truckersagainstrafficking.org/bus-training/>

2020 Awardees

United Against Slavery

For its National Outreach Survey for Transportation Sectors proposal to conduct a survey of transportation stakeholders, human trafficking survivors, and providers across all modes of transportation.

<https://www.unitedagainstsavery.org/impact-award-team>

Busing on the Lookout (a program of Truckers Against Trafficking)

For its Creating Local Partnerships to End Human Trafficking: Bus & Casino Coalition Builds proposal to target human trafficking loopholes that exist between buses and casinos.

<https://truckersagainsttrafficking.org/bus-training/>

ArtWorks for Freedom

For its Airports to Freedom proposal to install a multimedia counter-trafficking educational kiosk in up to nine airports to educate and engage the aviation industry and traveling public.

<https://artworksforfreedom.org/>