

NATIONAL OUTREACH SURVEY FOR TRANSPORTATION (NOST)

A REVIEW OF NOST DATA THEMATIC TOPIC OF INTEREST: BEYOND THE MISSION

Combating Human Trafficking by Listening to the Experiences,
Challenges, and Recommendations of Frontline Workers and Those
with Lived Experience



UNITEDAGAINSTSLAVERY
Freedom. Unity. Accountability.

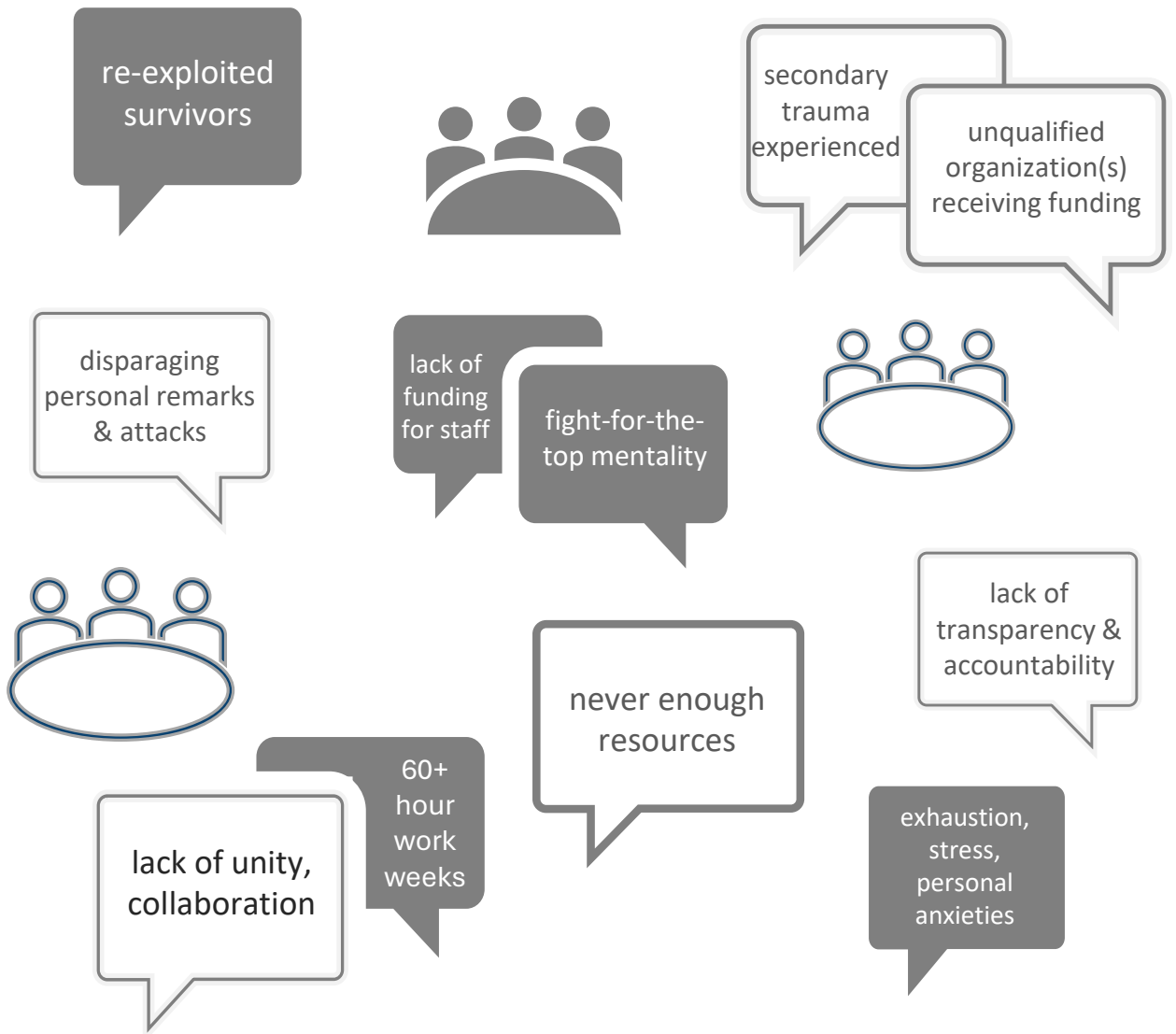
“To solve some of our greatest global challenges, we should accelerate how we use data for good. But to truly make data-driven tools that serve society, we must re-imagine the data for social impact more broadly, inclusively, and interdisciplinary.”

Data for Social Impact Report (2023)

Trigger Warning: This content discusses sensitive topics including human trafficking, trauma, violence, suicide, and related challenges that may be distressing for some individuals. Please proceed with caution and prioritize your well-being.

Let's Talk.

With all the progress in anti-trafficking work...
does any of this sound familiar?



SURVIVOR FEEDBACK FROM THE 2016 UAS PILOT STUDY REFLECTING ON SIMILAR CONVERSATIONS FROM NINE YEARS AGO

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

To Anti-Trafficking Organizations

“

Stop trying to compete with each other or judging how established groups operate. Creating new organizations without collaboration is pointless. Survivors don't fit in a box because every single individual experienced something different. Provide resources for all survivors not just those who fit a certain demographic. ”

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“

If we are a survivor of trafficking, the chances of us having a decent job that pays are bills are very slim. For you to ask us to come and speak for free means that we have to take money out of our household funds to pay for the transportation ourselves. This means, we skip a meal or two in order to share our pain and torture with you. On top of that.... usually after sharing my story, I end up taking a day off of work in order to recover, leaving me with missing a days pay, leaving me having to go to the foodbank in order to survive the month. We are not greedy, we are not trying to 'get over on you'. However, I am positive that you are not having to sacrifice to the point of needing to go to the foodbank and eating that food in order to put on your event. Please understand this. We are not getting rich off you donating money to us, you are only giving us what we are losing out of by sharing our story. ”

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“

The providers of services must be healthy, strong, and sincerely committed. This is very hard work so they must take good care of themselves daily...making sure that they are focused and emotionally, physically, and psychologically grounded enough to be the examples/leaders we need to see, hear, and model. Thank you. ”



PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“ You need to have survivor leaders involved in every step. Hire survivors with degrees, to be advocates and work for the department. Our voices are critical from sitting beside someone, to being in court, to community and stake holder awareness and training. Survivors should always be paid to speak/train/share their stories it is valuable training for all who hear and others can not get first hand account like this elsewhere. We struggle to get jobs, pay bills, stay housed, put gas in the car, etc. ”

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“ Thanks to all those of you that do what you do to help those in need. And to those that don't, it may be because of ignorance to this topic, if you educate yourself you can help survivors more. So please educate yourself and do a better job helping those who need it. ”

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“ If you have a nonprofit organization that 1) just raising awareness is not enough 2) if you do not have a survivor on your board or team your program is incomplete 3) survivors have already worked for free. Please don't ask us to share without compensation. Our rent food etc is not free. ”

PERMISSION-BASED SURVIVOR FEEDBACK

“ I want to thank all those people that had the courage to speak out and help others in their journey to recover and live a healthy and normal life despite all the negativity they endured in life. ”



FEEDBACK FROM VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS (VSP) IN THE NATIONAL OUTREACH SURVEY FOR TRANSPORTATION

“We need funding. We can’t show victims that life after exploitation can be great when we are all broke and burned out.” (QID_407)

“We are a small survivor-led organization... challenges are the battles for funding and a lack of other organizations coming together to end trafficking... many are territorial or in the field for recognition instead of helping survivors.” (QID_461)

“Less fighting for positions (at VSPs) and more serving the needs of individuals no matter where they are. Implementing required evaluations and accountability standards for anti-trafficking organizations at the federal level (to receive certain grants they need to prove they are performing annual evaluations of their programming). Resources are directed at organizations that are actually impacting the lives of survivors for the better. Greater trauma-informed training for first response to crisis situations and anti-trafficking orgs, which can include small and large entities.” (QID_614)



BEYOND THE MISSION: ADDRESSING CRITICAL GAPS IN ANTI-TRAFFICKING WORK

This paper explores the multifaceted challenges within victim service providers (VSPs) in the anti-trafficking sector. Over the past two decades, notable progress has been achieved through dedicated work, partnerships, and the development of awareness and training programs aimed at combating human trafficking globally. While these efforts have made substantial strides in supporting survivors, critical gaps remain in transparency, oversight, funding, and service provision. To sustain and expand these efforts effectively, it is essential to address these gaps with a focus on cultural competency, ensuring that the unique needs of diverse survivor populations are provided, and a continuum of care is maintained.

Despite significant legislative advancements and dedicated activism, victim service providers continue to encounter persistent challenges that impact their ability to support labor and sex trafficking survivors effectively, many times creating communities with duplicated efforts. Underfunding and operational constraints hinder the ability of victim service providers to operate effectively. **The absence of standardized oversight, particularly for nonprofits that are not subject to state-mandated compliance frameworks, such as those regulating domestic violence shelters, can lead to significant disparities in accountability and service quality.**

These issues are further compounded by philanthropy models imposing stringent administrative expense limits, often restricting them to less than 10%. Such limitations create unsustainable conditions, forcing organizations to meet high service demands with inadequate resources to sustain their operations.

An alarming concern highlighted in this paper and discussed in private and public conversations is the risk of re-exploitation that some survivors face within the very systems meant to protect them. This re-exploitation can occur in various capacities, including economic, emotional, and physical contexts, often due to inadequate transparency and lack of rigorous operational guidelines. Additionally, the personal toll on leaders and activists within this sector is exceedingly high, with many experiencing burnout, secondary trauma, and significant stress due to the intense demands of their roles and the critical nature of their work.

United Against Slavery (UAS) has conducted frontline research, collecting data from service providers and survivors. The findings reveal deep insights into the ongoing challenges and offer recommendations for the next decade. The data highlights the urgent need for structured approaches to enhance funding strategies and improve operational capabilities within the sector. **Among 33 participating VSPs on the NOST, 90% said there should be greater transparency regarding their day-to-day activities (QID_494).** This paper incorporates data from UAS studies to substantiate discussions on these challenges and supports the proposed recommendations for advancing anti-trafficking efforts. For full details on the methodology used in the National Outreach Survey, please visit the UAS [website](#).

Key challenges in anti-trafficking efforts are highlighted but do not cover all critical gaps. Human trafficking is a complex, evolving issue that requires ongoing research and adaptable strategies. Addressing this crisis demands a dynamic approach that evolves with emerging challenges. Ensuring survivors have access to well-resourced, transparent service frameworks is crucial for their long-term recovery. While identifying obstacles, this paper also acknowledges the significant achievements of Lived Experience Experts and allies. The anti-trafficking movement needs a more structured, supported strategy for sustained progress, including data-driven decisions, consistent funding, strengthened oversight, and a unified care framework. Achieving these goals requires philanthropy models focused on long-term organizational success. **A small sample of 39 victim service providers identified the following existing challenges (QID_345). This data coincides with data collected from more than 300 VSPs and advocates in the UAS 2016 Pilot Study. 36 of those VSPs provided the greatest contributors towards those challenges (QID_346).**

Do any of the following challenges exist in the anti-trafficking movement?
Select all that apply.

Division among leaders 59%
Division between survivors and allies 69%
Lack of accountability 64%
Lack of best practices 62%
Lack of collaboration 62%
Lack of common legislative initiatives 44%
Lack of communication among stakeholders 56%
Lack of funding 69%
Lack of policies and procedures 44%
Lack of resources 72%
Lack of long-distance travel resources 59%
Lack of survivors in leadership positions 74%
Lack of transparency 49%
Little to no salaries available 56%
No consequences for corruption, conflicts of interest, etc. 59%
Outdated statistics 54%
None of the above 3%

What do you think are the greatest contributors to the challenges you selected? Select all that apply.

Broken trust 47%
Competitiveness for funding 75%
Competitiveness for qualified staff 39%
Duplication of efforts 50%
“Fight-for-the-top” syndrome 53%
Lack of communication among stakeholders 53%
Miscommunication 47%
Turf wars 47%
Unfounded criticism of leadership 25%

Global Challenges: A Shared Struggle

Victim service providers (VSPs) (including ally- and survivor-led organization leaders) face challenges that vary by location and the specific populations they assist. Yet, they share common global issues such as underfunding, inadequate regulatory oversight, and the significant emotional toll of their demanding roles. While regional focuses differ—with some areas concentrating on sex trafficking and others on labor trafficking or the exploitation of migrant workers—the need for improved funding, better regulatory standards, and stronger support systems is a consistent global theme.

In many countries, cultural and legal barriers further complicate service provision, making it even more difficult for VSPs to operate effectively. For example, in areas where trafficking is deeply intertwined with local economies or where cultural competencies may accept gender-based violence and abuse, service providers face unique challenges that require tailored solutions. The need for transparency, accountability, and survivor-centered and survivor-informed care extends beyond borders, making it a global priority that demands attention and action from all sectors involved.

Reflecting on the Past and Envisioning a Path Forward

Since the introduction of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, the landscape of anti-trafficking efforts has undergone significant transformations due to the dedicated work of stakeholders across the globe. Notably, some activists have been engaged in combating human trafficking even before the enactment of the first TVPA, laying the groundwork for the forthcoming legislative frameworks and initiatives. Over the past two decades, there has been considerable progress in the fight against human trafficking, marked by collaborations, innovative awareness, training programs, and a deep-seated passion for combating this crime against humanity. Those efforts have been directed towards providing care and support to survivors of all forms of human trafficking, driven by a mission that aligns with the core principles of justice and human dignity. Despite these advancements, the path forward is challenged by critical gaps in resources and systemic support needed to sustain and amplify these efforts. However, this paper highlights the unresolved challenges and gaps among victim service providers and emphasizes dedicated leaders' significant achievements and daily sacrifices.

It celebrates the extensive work carried out by most leaders and activists, recognizes the personal toll on these individuals, and critically examines how a small number of nonprofits misuse their position in working with survivors.

United Against Slavery (UAS) has collected frontline data among victim service providers and survivors on the National Outreach Survey for Transportation that provides insight into many of the existing unresolved challenges and also provides recommendations for improvement over the next decade.

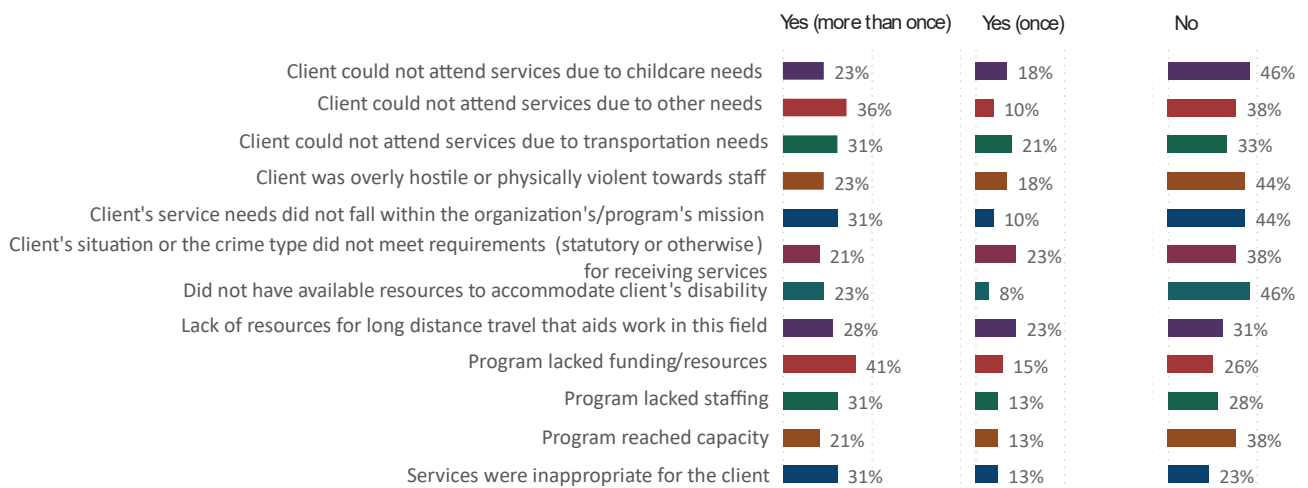
This data underscores the need for a more structured approach to funding and operations within the anti-trafficking sector, highlighting the critical gaps in resources and support that could be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of these vital services. Data collected in UAS research studies are included throughout this paper to illustrate these points and provide empirical support for those areas.

Despite the enactment of numerous counter-trafficking laws and appropriations by legislators, the funding allocated to the anti-trafficking movement falls far short of the actual need. Human trafficking is one of the largest and most complex crimes in the world, yet the financial resources available to combat it are limited. This chronic underfunding exacerbates the challenges VSPs face, especially in their ability to provide resources to survivors.

52% of VSPs (both ally- and survivor-led) said they had to turn away a client because of a lack of resources

52% of VSPs (both ally- and survivor-led) said they had to turn away a client because of a lack of resources (QID_457). Those same respondents provided reasons of how they have had to deny services to survivors (QID_459).

Has your agency/organization ever had to decline working with any survivor for the following reasons ?



Among 31 VSPs, 48% said they need a sabbatical or vacation, salary or better salaries for themselves (55%), and spend less time fundraising (16%) (QID_469).

Many dedicated individuals operate in highly competitive environments where resources are scarce. They often go without the opportunity for sabbaticals or adequate rest, further intensifying their work stress.

Additionally, many grants do not allow for adequate administrative support, usually capping indirect costs at less than 10-15%. This places unrealistic expectations on organizations to manage and deliver services effectively without proper funding for personnel, operational needs, and staff development. This restriction leaves many hardworking nonprofits struggling to secure funding because they cannot cover essential staffing needs separately. **38% of 13 VSPs that oversee their financials said it is the most difficult to secure funding for salaries and 23% said it was average difficulty (QID_76).**

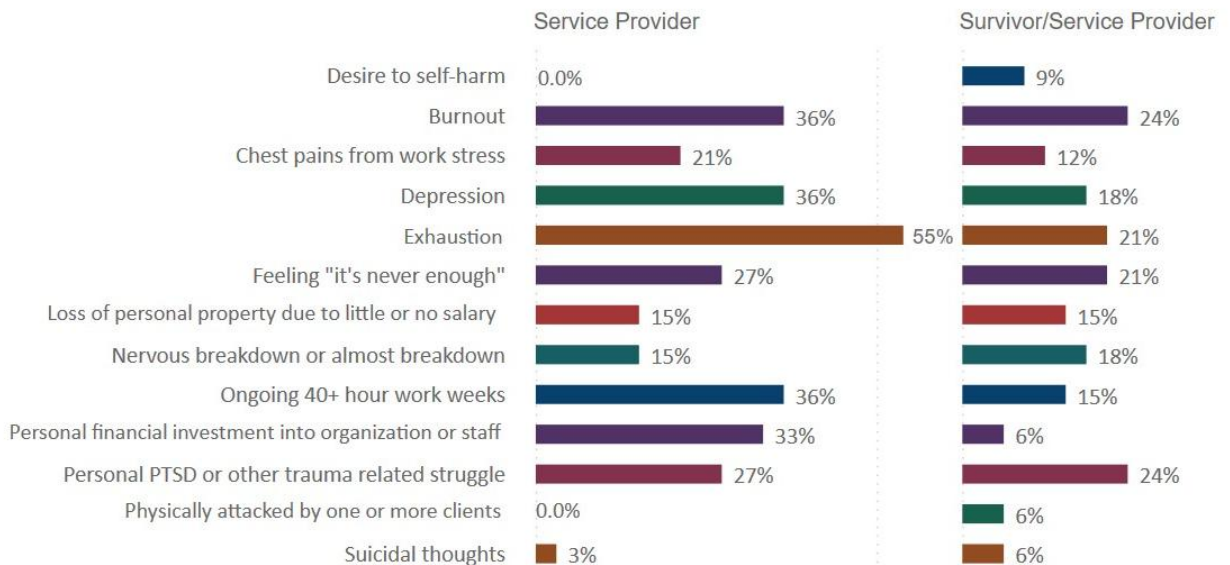
The Unspoken Impact: Addressing the Mental and Emotional Costs in Anti-Trafficking Work

The anti-trafficking movement, while united by a shared mission, often experiences brokenness that exacerbates trauma for its leaders. Competitiveness, egos, and interpersonal conflicts can create an environment where collaboration may take a back seat to individual agendas, leading to infighting and divisiveness. This toxic dynamic can perpetuate stress and emotional harm, as leaders may not work together to address the systemic issues at hand. In this environment, trauma can be caused by the human elements within the movement itself, where leaders unintentionally contribute to each other's suffering.

Among 38 VSPs, 79% said they have experienced trauma by working in the anti-trafficking movement and 5% said they prefer not to answer (QID_571).

A crucial aspect of this discussion is the recognition that while many allied leaders in this space may not be trafficking survivors themselves, they may often have their own histories of trauma or abuse. This shared experience can be both a source of strength and vulnerability. While personal experiences and empathy strongly drive their commitment to the cause, they also make them vulnerable to adverse impacts. Other stresses in the movement further expose them to those impacts. **Experiencing burnout among 33 VSPs was identified by 36% of allies and 24% of survivor-led organization leaders who participated in the NOST (QID_348).**

Please confirm if you have experienced any of the following situations professionally. Select all that apply.



If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, it's important to reach out for help immediately. You don't have to go through this alone. Please contact a mental health professional or call a crisis hotline in your area. In the U.S., you can reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. There are people who care about you and want to support you through this difficult time and help provide hope.

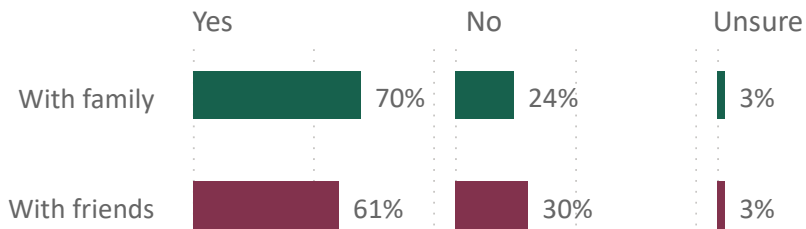
As with all data collected on the NOST, the findings represent those participating in this study and may not represent the larger population. In surveying a larger population of VSPs, the results may vary.

Moreover, for both ally- and survivor-led organizations, the emotional toll of working closely with survivors, bearing witness to their stories, and the continuous effort to meet ever-increasing service demands can further compound the stress that leaders and staff feel. The ongoing exposure to such intense situations without sufficient emotional and institutional support can lead to compassion fatigue, where individuals may feel emotionally depleted or indifferent towards the suffering they are meant to alleviate.

This exposure can lead to severe stress disorders, such as PTSD, feelings of inadequacy despite extensive efforts, and, in some dire cases, even suicidal thoughts. The long hours worked each week, often without adequate pay or benefits, only exacerbate these issues, leading to high turnover rates among staff. Allies, Survivor Leaders, and Lived Experience Experts leading organizations can feel these challenges. Their deep personal connection to the cause can magnify the impact of secondary trauma and the stress of leadership, adding layers of complexity to their roles. **Among 34 VSPs (ally- and survivor-led leaders), 50% said they had experienced secondary trauma from working with abuse victims, and 9% said they preferred not to answer (QID_350).**

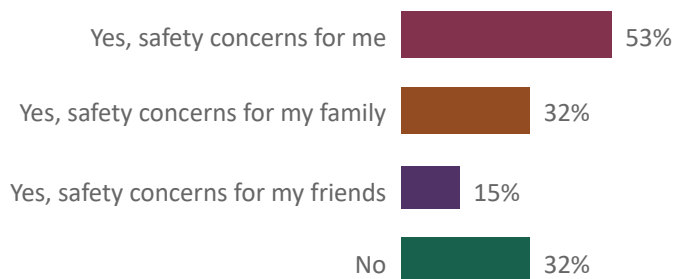
Work-related stress in the anti-trafficking space and that of social workers can extend beyond the office, significantly impacting the personal lives of those involved. The emotional toll of confronting human trafficking daily can lead to anxiety, exhaustion, and a diminished sense of well-being, making it difficult to disconnect from the harsh realities of the work. **33 VSPs responded that work-related stress has impacted their livelihood outside of work (QID_352).**

Do you feel work-related stress has impacted your livelihood outside of work?



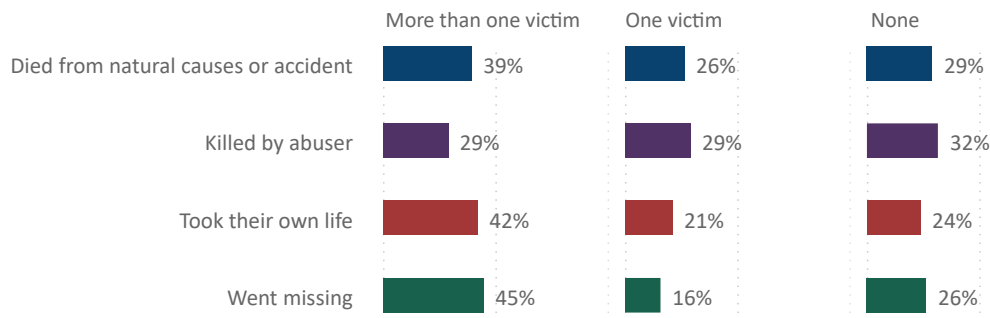
Leaders in the anti-trafficking movement may face safety concerns due to the high-stakes nature of their work. The emotional and psychological stresses of managing sensitive cases, combined with potential threats from traffickers or hostile entities, can create a constant sense of vulnerability and danger, further exacerbating the personal toll on these leaders. **34 VSPs responded about their level of concern with safety in their anti-trafficking work (QID_349).**

SURVIVOR-INFORMED QUESTION: Have you ever had safety concerns in your anti-trafficking work? Select all that apply.



Victim service providers often experience a deep personal loss when a human trafficking victim dies or is killed, as they form strong emotional connections with those they serve and feel the weight of their efforts to protect and support them. **Among 38 VSPs, many acknowledged knowing at least one human trafficking victim who has died or went missing (QID_387).**

SURVIVOR-PROVIDED QUESTION: Do you personally know of a human trafficking victim who has died or went missing?



Leaders and frontline workers may struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries, affecting their relationships, family life, and overall mental health. This imbalance not only jeopardizes their own well-being but also threatens the sustainability of their involvement in the movement.

The disparity between the work required in this space and the funding available to support it is stark. Some nonprofits receive substantial funding but produce minimal impact, while others achieve significant results with limited resources. This inequity stretches organizations thin and hinders their ability to serve survivors effectively and sustainably. It contributes to an environment where even the most committed professionals may feel overwhelmed and underappreciated, further fueling the cycle of burnout and turnover.

Building a Unified Care Framework: Ensuring Safe and Equitable Housing for Survivors

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of a centralized regulatory agency to oversee victim service providers (VSPs) and their associated nonprofits. This may also help VSPs secure more funding due to transparency and oversight. VSPs offer various services, including organizations that provide legal and medical assistance and housing options to adults and/or minors. Unlike domestic violence shelters, VSPs in the anti-trafficking space operate in a landscape that lacks consistent oversight. Each state typically has its own department or agency responsible for overseeing domestic violence shelters. See the endnotes for a complete list of state regulatory offices. Examples include:

- California has the [Department of Social Services](#) overseeing shelter standards and funding.
- New York has the [Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#), which sets standards and supports shelters.
- Texas has the [Texas Council on Family Violence](#), which provides guidelines and resources for shelters.

Legislative [protections](#) for domestic violence victims have expanded substantially, complemented by the enactment of numerous [federal laws](#) aimed at supporting human trafficking victims. The laws provide a framework for protection and assistance, offering victims legal recourse, support services, and enhanced safety measures. [Studies](#) assessing the effectiveness of housing options for children have been conducted to provide recommendations for improvement from those in this space.

Nonprofits that offer residential housing services to minors may be subject to stricter state requirements compared to those that solely provide housing accommodations for adults. Those more stringent requirements might include rigorous background checks for staff, adherence to strict safety protocols, and the provision of appropriate age care and support services, all designed to safeguard the well-being and development of young residents. Such measures are crucial in creating a secure environment that promotes the physical, emotional, and psychological health of minors in these settings. These heightened regulations ensure that minors receive additional protection and that their unique needs are appropriately addressed, including [migrant children](#) who are labor and/or sex trafficked into the United States.

Some anti-trafficking organizations provide housing that meets basic care standards, though consistency varies. However, concerns persist about organizations offering services outside of housing. While nonprofits with 501(c)(3) status are subject to annual regulatory filings, these mandates do not extend to overseeing the organization's daily operations, particularly in their interactions with survivors. This gap creates a situation where transparency and accountability can vary widely, particularly for organizations not funded through state or federal grants. Even when funding is sourced from private donors or foundations, enforceable regulations or best practices are scarce to ensure these funds' effective and ethical use. This absence of oversight can result in inefficiencies, and, in some instances, the misallocation of resources intended for supporting survivors and operational needs.

“Workers should go through appropriate and continual training like counselors [who] have to get CEU’s every year. This would be a part of them maintaining their nonprofit status or getting funded. Also, working with various trauma and becoming more trauma-informed would be required training.”

“At minimum for state/federal grant funded organizations there should be a level of accountability and independent evaluation/review. With Cal OES funding for instance in CA, most of the organizations are not providing services to labor trafficking survivors, even though it is part of the grant. I’m appalled that the State hasn’t ensured that their service providers are doing more for both forms of trafficking.”

“HT service providers should have to receive a minimum level of training and continuing education in order to be certified to work with survivors.”

“As a professional social worker, we have to uphold a code of ethics within our profession. There currently aren’t any codes or standards with working in the [human trafficking] movement. There are national boards for social workers NASW etc. and the same should be implemented for [human trafficking].”

(QID_493)

Licensing is not universally required for service providers in the anti-trafficking sector, which includes a few notable exceptions. Many nonprofits now proactively employ licensed social workers and therapists to ensure comprehensive, consistent care, but this practice is not uniformly enforced. This variability poses a significant challenge, especially as trafficking survivors often require services from multiple organizations throughout their recovery process. If survivors must relocate for safety or other reasons, they may encounter vastly different resources and care quality levels at another nonprofit. Consequently, the lack of mandatory licensing can lead to considerable disparities in care quality among organizations and states. Services have broadened to accommodate better diverse groups such as migrants, refugees, males, LGBTQ+ individuals, Indigenous people, and survivors with disabilities that require Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. However, it is crucial to understand that the needs of these groups can vary greatly. Significant gaps exist, especially in areas lacking resources or facing more funding competition between community organizations. The idea that a one-size-fits-all approach can address the needs of all survivors is also fundamentally flawed, given the varied experiences and requirements of different groups. Services must be customized to meet everyone's circumstances effectively. Ensuring seamless continuity of care, where survivors receive consistent support regardless of where they seek assistance, is essential for safeguarding their privacy and security.

Several challenges arise when attempting to license every anti-trafficking nonprofit that provides services to trafficking survivors. First, the diverse nature of these organizations' services means that a one-size-fits-all licensing approach may not be feasible. Different types of care, such as emergency shelter, long-term psychological support, immigrant and migrant support, and long-term advocacy, each require unique standards and qualifications that can differ significantly. Additionally, the administrative burden and costs associated with obtaining and maintaining licensure and oversight can be significant, particularly for smaller nonprofits with limited resources. This could potentially divert crucial funds away from direct services for survivors. Furthermore, standardizing licensure across different states or regions involves navigating complex legal landscapes, which can delay the implementation of necessary services.

While licensing aims to ensure quality and safety in service provision, overly stringent requirements could inadvertently exclude some organizations from operating legally, reducing the availability of crucial services to survivors in rural areas. Even with known challenges, it should not prevent state considerations from requiring some oversight to protect greater protection for human trafficking survivors. Consideration should be given to using federal and state appropriations to fund a research study assessing the costs and implementation strategies for oversight over the next decade. The mission of every victim service provider should ensure unwavering support and accountability to the survivors they serve.

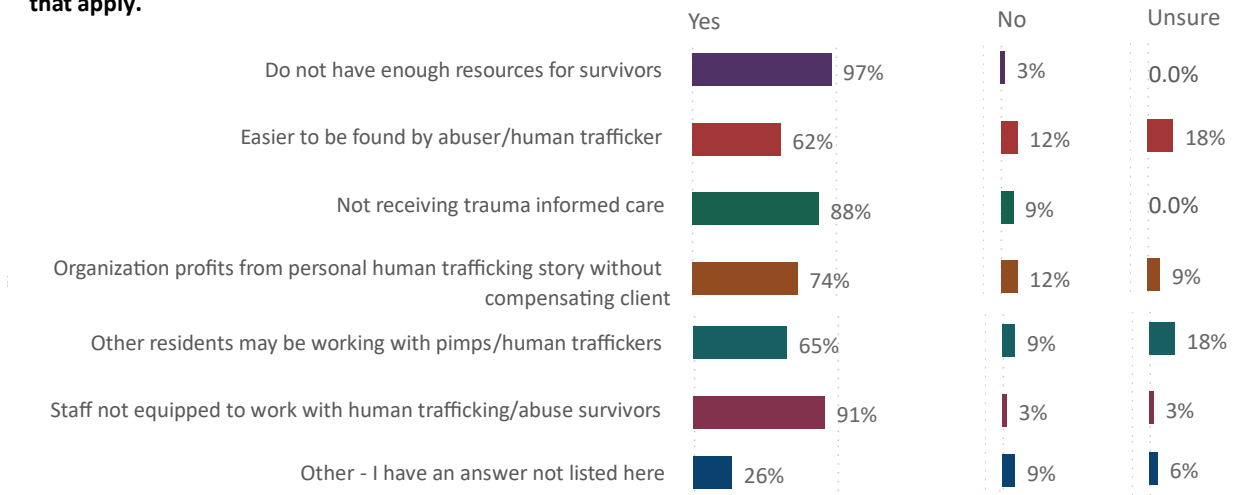
92% of 34 VSPs agreed that anti-trafficking service providers should be held to the same standard of care as social workers are held (QID_492).

Ethics in Action: Safeguarding Survivors from Re-Exploitation

A crucial aspect of providing support to survivors of human trafficking is ensuring their safety and dignity within the very organizations designed to protect them. Unfortunately, re-exploitation risk remains a significant concern within some nonprofits, including those that offer residential housing. Survivors trust these organizations to provide proper care without exploiting them for organizational or personal gain. While there is no comprehensive data to support the prevalence of such exploitation, it is essential to recognize that most individuals involved in the anti-trafficking mission are likely motivated by genuine intentions to assist and protect survivors. However, the potential for misuse of power and trust cannot be overlooked, and all actions within these organizations must be scrutinized to ensure that survivors are never re-exploited.

Ensuring that trafficking survivors are not re-exploited by victim service providers is critical to fostering true healing, empowerment, and long-term stability. **To prevent re-exploitation, organizations must establish clear ethical guidelines, prioritize survivor autonomy in decision-making, provide financial and emotional support, and implement oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability. Among 34 VSPs, a majority believed that survivors could be revictimized at shelters/safe houses (QID_491).**

Do you believe that survivors can be re-victimized at shelters/safe houses for any of the following reasons? Select all that apply.



By prioritizing survivors' needs and voices, victim service providers can foster a safe, supportive environment that upholds dignity and promotes genuine recovery. Organizations should also involve Lived Experience Experts in administrative or advisory roles and ensure they receive equal compensation to other experts on the same project. **Among 39 VSPs (both ally- and survivor-led), 85% agreed that human trafficking survivors should receive equal pay when a project is funded (QID_362).**

See **Re-Exploitation of Human Trafficking Survivors** on the next page.

Re-Exploitation of Human Trafficking Survivors

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

- **Forced Labor:** Assigning survivors tasks under the guise of therapy or rehabilitation that are intended for the financial benefit of the organization.
- **Misuse of Survivor Stories:** Using survivors' personal stories for fundraising or promotional purposes without their informed consent or fair compensation.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

- **Over-dependence:** Encouraging or allowing survivors to become overly dependent on the organization limits their ability to make autonomous decisions or transition to independent living.
- **Therapeutic Overreach:** Providing counseling services without proper boundaries or qualifications, which can lead to further emotional harm rather than healing.

PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE

- **Inappropriate Relationships:** Developing personal or sexual relationships between staff and survivors, which can exploit the inherent power imbalance.
- **Neglect in Care:** Failing to provide adequate physical security, privacy, or health care within the facility.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND CHOICE

- **Restrictive Practices:** Implementing unnecessarily strict rules that restrict survivors' freedom of movement, communication, or personal choices under the guise of safety.
- **Withholding Information:** Not providing survivors with complete information regarding their rights, available services, or organizational policies affecting them.

Protection and Dignity for Trafficking Survivors

- **Regular Training and Audits:** Implement comprehensive training for all staff and volunteers on the ethical treatment of survivors, coupled with regular audits of organizational practices and policies.
- **Survivor Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish clear and accessible channels for survivors to provide feedback or report grievances without fear of retribution.
- **Transparent Operations:** Maintain transparency in organizational operations and decision-making processes, ensuring survivors have a voice in matters affecting them.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Enforce strict professional boundaries and ethical guidelines to prevent any form of emotional, physical, or sexual misconduct.
- **Reporting and Accountability:** Set up a rigorous system for reporting and investigating allegations of misconduct or exploitation, with strict consequences for those found guilty.
- **Survivor-Centric Policies:** Develop and implement policies prioritizing survivors' safety, autonomy, and well-being and ensuring they are always treated with respect and dignity.

Beyond the Drug War: The Need to Increase Funding to Combat Human Trafficking

Even though human trafficking is one of the largest and most complex crimes in the world, the financial resources available to combat it are severely limited. Despite numerous counter-trafficking laws and legislative appropriations, the funding provided to the anti-trafficking movement remains significantly below what is required, especially in comparison with the funding allocated to combat drugs. At the end of 2024, the Fiscal Year 2025 budget* for combating drugs in the United States has been set at \$46.5 billion, representing a significant increase of \$3.2 billion over the FY 2024 budget of \$43.3 billion. This increment reflects the ongoing commitment to addressing drug-related issues, including prevention, treatment, and enforcement efforts across various federal agencies. The Fiscal Year 2025 federal budget* for combating human trafficking in the United States is approximately \$139 million. This allocation is directed towards the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office) within the U.S. Department of State. This funding is intended to support initiatives that address human trafficking both domestically and internationally.

While billions have been invested in combating drug trafficking, funding for counter-trafficking efforts remains disproportionately low despite the vast scale of exploitation and its devastating human toll. To dismantle trafficking networks, support survivors, and prevent future victimization, governments and stakeholders must allocate significantly more resources toward frontline interventions, victim services, law enforcement, and data-driven strategies. Without sustained and substantial investment, the fight against modern slavery will continue to fall short, leaving countless lives at risk.

* At the time of this release, the new presidential administration is updating the fiscal year 2025 budgets, which currently do not reflect the amounts listed from 2024. The previous links to the White House fiscal budgets are no longer active and were removed from this paper.

Mobilizing for Impact: Essential Recommendations to Strengthen Counter-Trafficking Initiatives

VSPs were asked several questions about what they felt would help their efforts in the anti-trafficking space.

31 VSPs responded about what would empower them more as leaders and to select all that applied (QID_469).

Among 33 VSPs, 91% said a website should be created to connect donors with anti-trafficking nonprofits with unmet agency/organization needs (QID_470).

- Attend leadership workshops 74%
- Better communication with local partners 52%
- Leadership retreat 65%
- Better information sharing 71%
- More resources from community businesses 58%
- More support from state association/task force 39%
- Need a larger facility 26%
- Need a sabbatical or vacation 48%
- Need assistance writing grants 52%
- Need more paid staff 55%
- Need more volunteers 26%
- Obtain more funding 77%
- Salary or better paying salary for myself 55%
- See more funding opportunities available 58%
- Spend less time fundraising 16%

To address these critical gaps in the anti-trafficking nonprofit support system, we must consider a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes both the well-being of VSPs and the survivors they serve. Here are several key recommendations:

1. **Establish a Regulatory Oversight Body:** It is crucial to create a centralized regulatory agency or a dedicated division within an existing agency to oversee VSPs. This body should develop and enforce standards for transparency, accountability, and ethical use of funds, like those in place of domestic violence shelters.
2. **State-Wide Licensing for Service Providers:** To ensure a consistent standard of care, state-wide licensing for organizations and individual service providers should be introduced for any nonprofit that works with trafficking survivors and solicit charity funds for those services. This could include certifications for trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and survivor-led service provision.
3. **Increase and Equitably Distribute Funding:** Legislators and philanthropic organizations must commit to increasing the overall funding for the anti-trafficking movement, including smaller nonprofits with a proven history of positive impacts. Equitable distribution mechanisms should be implemented to ensure that under-resourced areas receive adequate support.
4. **Implement Support Systems for VSPs:** Establishing support systems for frontline workers is essential to combating burnout and secondary trauma. These could include leadership retreats, sabbaticals, access to mental health services, and further opportunities for professional development. Ensuring that staff is properly compensated is also essential for their support.
5. **Develop Survivor-Centered Leadership Programs:** Leadership training programs that prioritize survivor voices and experiences should be developed to empower survivors to take on leadership roles within the movement. These programs should also be accessible to non-survivors with valuable perspectives and expertise.
6. **Standardized Data Collection and Reporting:** Standardizing data collection and reporting is crucial for transparency, accountability, and identifying areas for improvement. Adequate funding ensures that all organizations, regardless of size or budget, can maintain consistent reporting standards. This strengthens trend analysis, intervention evaluation, and resource allocation. Increased funding also supports adopting advanced data collection and analysis technologies, enhancing the sector's ability to combat human trafficking effectively. **Among 15 VSPs who oversee their organization's data collection efforts, they provided clarity on the data they collect (QID_238) and shared the barriers they face in collecting data (QID_247).**

Please confirm the type of data that you collect at your agency / organization. Select all that apply.

Business operation data (e.g., donors, volunteers, community engagements) 53%
Client demographic data 67%
Community data on human trafficking 60%
Needs assessment data 67%
Trafficker profile data 20%

What barriers exist to having better data collection practices at the agency / organization? Select all that apply.

Lack of experience to analyze data 60%
Lack of personnel time to focus on data 67%
Little appreciation of the benefits of leveraging data 27%
Little understanding of how to use data properly 40%
No centralized location to store all data 33%
No funding to purchase data collection software 60%
Unsure of what data collection software to use 47%

7. Advocate for Legislative Change: Continued advocacy for legislative change at both state and federal levels is necessary to ensure the anti-trafficking movement receives the resources and support it needs. This includes pushing for more comprehensive counter-trafficking laws and increased appropriations.
8. Foster a Survivor- and Trauma-Informed Organizational Culture: Organizations should prioritize creating a survivor- and trauma-informed culture that extends beyond direct service provision. This includes training for all staff, from leadership to volunteers, on recognizing and addressing secondary trauma and promoting a supportive work environment.
9. Encourage Survivor-Led Research and Innovation: Supporting survivor-led research initiatives can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current practices and inspire innovative approaches to service provision.
10. Equitable Compensation for Lived Experience Experts: Nonprofits must ensure that survivors and Lived Experience Experts leading or contributing to the organization are compensated at the same rate as other experts. This includes paying them for their expertise in a manner that recognizes their unique perspectives and contributions.
10. Promote Collaboration Over Competition: Encouraging collaboration among organizations rather than competition for limited resources can lead to more effective service provision. Funding agencies should incentivize partnerships and collaboration of multi-disciplinary teams.

Here are several examples of how funding agencies can incentivize partnerships and collaboration among multi-disciplinary teams beyond just supporting task forces:

1. Joint Grant Opportunities: Grants could require multi-disciplinary teams from various sectors—social work, law enforcement, healthcare, and academia—to collaborate on tackling human trafficking from multiple angles.
2. Shared Resource Centers: Funding could support shared hubs providing tools, data, and expertise to foster collaboration and shared learning among stakeholders.
3. Interdisciplinary Conferences and Workshops: Agencies could fund events that unite professionals across disciplines to discuss, train, and plan collaborative strategies.
4. Innovation Labs: Support for labs where experts from law enforcement, psychology, social services, and technology develop new tools and methods to combat trafficking.
5. Pilot Projects: Encouraging pilot projects that involve collaborations across different sectors can help test how well specific interdisciplinary approaches work in practice. Funding these pilots can provide essential insights and data guiding larger-scale implementations.

These initiatives encourage a more holistic approach to problem-solving and can lead to more sustainable impacts in the fight against human trafficking.

Building a Resilient Future: Catalyzing Lasting Change in Anti-Trafficking Efforts

This paper explored the complex challenges and gaps within the anti-trafficking sector, highlighting significant issues in regulatory oversight, funding, and service provision that hinder adequate support for survivors. Based on United Against Slavery's research involving service providers and survivors, these findings emphasize the urgent need for improvements in funding strategies and operational capacity.

While the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 marked a pivotal moment in the fight against trafficking, progress over the past two decades has been met with persistent challenges. Collaborative efforts, training programs, and advocacy have contributed to meaningful strides, but significant resource gaps continue to impede the movement's long-term sustainability and impact.

The lack of adequate funding severely limits VSPs, leading to burnout among staff and restricting their ability to offer essential services. This funding shortfall, compounded by the absence of oversight, further exacerbates challenges in maintaining service quality across diverse and often underserved areas.

Additionally, the risks of re-exploitation within support systems and the strain on the individuals running these initiatives underscore the need for systemic change. Addressing these concerns will help improve the operational efficiency of anti-trafficking efforts and strengthen the network supporting survivors.

Moving forward, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving the establishment of more transparent regulatory frameworks, equitable funding distribution, and enhancing working conditions and professional development opportunities for the workforce. Strengthening these key areas will provide a solid foundation for long-term success in the anti-trafficking movement, ensuring it can effectively adapt to emerging challenges.

It is essential not only to recognize the obstacles in combating human trafficking but also to take deliberate steps toward foundational change that will increase resources for survivors and those working to help them. While each organization may define its success differently, a shared commitment to continuous improvement and accountability is vital for the movement's progress.

In conclusion, while the challenges outlined in this paper are significant, the ongoing dedication of all stakeholders in the anti-trafficking movement is critical. By building existing efforts with innovative solutions and sustained advocacy, the gaps can be closed in survivor support and strengthen the anti-trafficking movement. The recommendations here aim to drive essential changes, advance global anti-trafficking efforts, and ensure the continued success of those who work with survivors...and, ultimately, for victims and survivors to receive the needed care and resources in their healing journeys.

A Global Commitment: The National Outreach Survey for Victim Service Providers

To further these efforts, United Against Slavery's intent has been to launch a large-scale, comprehensive, and collaborative National Outreach Survey for Victim Service Providers. This survey would utilize a mixed methods approach designed to gather data on topics discussed in this paper, both within the United States and internationally. With multiple translations available, this initiative would ensure that the voices of service providers and survivors from diverse backgrounds were heard, and their unique challenges addressed.

The study would utilize the UAS Collaborative Research Model, bringing together diverse experts, including the Survivor Leader Advisory Council and other multi-disciplinary stakeholders. By incorporating insights from these varied perspectives, the survey would help identify unresolved issues and recommendations from across the United States and other countries. The findings would provide the foundation for informed data-driven decision-making and inform the systemic changes needed to create a more effective and equitable support system for those impacted by human trafficking. You can access the [Service Provider chapter](#) in the National Outreach Survey for Transportation and review more analysis on the data collection in this recent study.



Use your camera and take a picture of the QR code to access the Service Provider / Advocate chapter in the NOST.

Disclaimer: The NOST included a small sample of VSPs and does not represent any larger population; however, although standardized conclusions cannot be drawn, the data collected closely resembles what is spoken in private and public conversations across the anti-trafficking movement. A more extensive study, including a longitudinal study, could provide findings representing a larger population.

**ENDNOTES: List of the governing departments or agencies for
family violence shelters and services in each state:**

Alabama: [Alabama Department of Human Resources](#)
Alaska: [Alaska Department of Health and Social Services](#)
Arizona: [Arizona Department of Economic Security](#)
Arkansas: [Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services](#)
California: [California Department of Social Services](#)
Colorado: [Colorado Department of Human Services](#)
Connecticut: [Connecticut Office of Policy and Management](#)
Delaware: [Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families](#)
Florida: [Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
Georgia: [Georgia Department of Human Services](#)
Hawaii: [Hawaii Department of Human Services](#)
Idaho: [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare](#)
Illinois: [Illinois Department of Human Services](#)
Indiana: [Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
Iowa: [Iowa Department of Human Services](#)
Kansas: [Kansas Department for Children and Families](#)
Kentucky: [Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services](#)
Louisiana: [Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services](#)
Maine: [Maine Department of Health and Human Services](#)
Maryland: [Maryland Department of Human Services](#)
Massachusetts: [Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services](#)
Michigan: [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#)
Minnesota: [Minnesota Department of Human Services](#)
Mississippi: [Mississippi Department of Human Services](#)
Missouri: [Missouri Department of Social Services](#)
Montana: [Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services](#)
Nebraska: [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services](#)
Nevada: [Nevada Division of Child and Family Services](#)
New Hampshire: [New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services](#)
New Jersey: [New Jersey Department of Children and Families](#)
New Mexico: [New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department](#)
New York: [New York Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#)
North Carolina: [North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services](#)
North Dakota: [North Dakota Department of Human Services](#)
Ohio: [Ohio Department of Job and Family Services](#)
Oklahoma: [Oklahoma Department of Human Services](#)
Oregon: [Oregon Department of Human Services](#)
Pennsylvania: [Pennsylvania Department of Human Services](#)
Rhode Island: [Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)
South Carolina: [South Carolina Department of Social Services](#)
South Dakota: [South Dakota Department of Social Services](#)
Tennessee: [Tennessee Department of Human Services, Office of Family Violence](#)
Texas: [Texas Council on Family Violence](#)
Utah: [Utah Department of Human Services](#)
Vermont: [Vermont Department for Children and Families](#)
Virginia: [Virginia Department of Social Services](#)
Washington: [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services](#)
West Virginia: [West Virginia Division of Family Assistance and Protection](#)
Wisconsin: [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families](#)
Wyoming: [Wyoming Department of Family Services](#)
Washington, D.C.: [DC Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants](#)

U.S. Territories:
American Samoa: [American Samoa Department of Human and Social Services](#)
Guam: [Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center](#)
Northern Mariana Islands: [Northern Mariana Islands Department of Public Health and Services](#)
Puerto Rico: [Puerto Rico Department of Family Affairs](#)
U.S. Virgin Islands: [U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Human Services](#)



United Against Slavery (UAS) developed a Collaborative Research Model and a comprehensive frontline data collection methodology and repository to collect, maintain, and publish human trafficking data from frontline workers. The data identifies what is and is not working in counter-trafficking efforts in more than 20 sectors.

www.UnitedAgainstSlavery.org

National Outreach Survey for Transportation (NOST) 2021

The following NOST Question Identification Numbers (QID) were used in this Beyond the Mission data review: QID_486, QID_407, QID_461, QID_614, QID_494, QID_345, QID_346, QID_457, QID_459, QID_459, QID_76, QID_571, QID_348, QID_350, QID_352, QID_349, QID_387, QID_493, QID_492, QID_491, QID_362, QID_470, QID_238, QID_247

To access the NOST Report and supporting tools:
<https://www.unitedagainstslavery.org/nost-2021>

Wigle, C., & Baglin, C. (Eds.). (2023). *National Outreach Survey for Transportation: Combating Human Trafficking by Listening to Experiences, Challenges, and Recommendations of Frontline Workers and Those with Lived Experience (2021)*. United Against Slavery.
[<https://files.unitedagainstslavery.org/s/d/NOST-2021-Final-Report>]