



Office for
Human Life
Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

Human Trafficking

A Catholic guide to seeing the human person

Human dignity calls for a response that honors and protects it.

Human trafficking treats a person as a commodity for profit or control. The Church rightly names this as a grave violation of human dignity and a “*crime against humanity*.”

What is Human Trafficking?

The use of **force, fraud, or coercion** to compel labor and/or commercial sex. When a minor is involved in commercial sex, proof of force, fraud, or coercion is not required.

Three Windows into a Hidden Reality:



State of Ohio

2,586

potential or confirmed survivors
identified by participating agencies |
2021-present



United States

42,887

likely victims reported
to the National Hotline | 2020 - 2022



Global

~ 230,000

trafficked persons assisted
in the CTDC partner dataset | 2002-2024

The Most Important Number: There Is No Single Total

Trafficking is a “hidden crime.” These figures describe people identified, reported, or assisted through different systems--not every person being trafficked. High counts may reflect stronger screening and services

What the Data Help Us See:

Exploitation takes different forms

58 % sexual exploitation

40 % forced labor

CTDC records; categories may overlap

It is present in our own communities

211 survivors Cuyahoga county

27 survivors Lorain County

identified by participating Ohio agencies

A Person, Not a Category

Behind every statistic is a person whose freedom has been violated, but whose God-given dignity can never be lost. Survivors need safety, patient accompaniment, trauma-informed care, and pathways toward healing and self-determination.



Trafficking profoundly disfigures the humanity of the victim, offending his or her freedom and dignity. Yet, at the same time, dehumanizes those who carry it out.

~Dignitas Inffinita, no. 41

What Can We Do as Catholics?

Pray | Learn | Serve | Advocate

Recognize Possible Warning Signs

Trafficking victims are often hidden in plain sight and may not identify themselves as victims.

Signs of Coercive Control

Someone else holds IDs, money, phone, or speaks for the person and closely monitors their interactions

Signs of Fear or Trauma

Appears fearful, anxious, submissive, or “coached;” afraid to ask for help; distrusting of authorities

People at Higher Risk

Immigrants, people living in poverty, people with undocumented status or lack strong social networks

Living Situations

The person lives in crowded or poor housing; lives at work; is often isolated, or has movement restricted.

Respond Safely: Do NOT Investigate or Attempt a “Rescue”

If there is immediate danger, **call 911**. Otherwise, prioritize safety and personal agency. If it is safe to speak privately, ask simple questions: “Do you feel safe?” “Would you like help?” Offer them the Hotline number; let an adult individual decide whether or not to use it. Do not confront a suspected trafficker.

Four Ways to Put Faith Into Action

Pray

Pray regularly for survivors, those at risk, and the conversion of those who exploit others.

Meditate on the human rights violation of trafficking by praying the USCCB’s [“Human Trafficking Stations of the Cross.”](#)

Educate Ourselves

Read and study the 2019 Vatican document, “[Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking](#)”

Learn about Coercive Control by reading through our [“Coercive Control Advocacy Handbook”](#) (jointly developed by the Office of Marriage & Family Ministries and the Office for Human Life)

Get Involved

Support survivor-centered organizations, safe housing, counseling, and employment pathways. Follow their lead on actual needs. Consider supporting local agencies like:

[Teleios](#) (for male-survivors)

[Harriett Tubman Movement](#)

Advocate

Support policies that protect survivors, reduce vulnerability, and ensure ethical labor practices.

Examine parish and household purchasing.

[Current Ohio Legislation](#)

[Current USCCB Action Alerts](#)

Need Help or Want to Report a Concern?

National Human Trafficking Hotline

1-888-373-7888

Text **HELP** or **INFO** to **233733** | TTY 711 | Get Help: 24/7 Confidential | 200+ languages



Information Used in this Resource:

Catholic Sources: *Dignitas Infinita* (2024) | *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*

Data Sources: Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force State Data Dashboard; National Human Trafficking Hotline/Polaris Project; Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative; Talitha Kum Annual Report (2025).



[Visit the OHL webpage](#)