

# Human Trafficking Hubs

The project focuses on three major United States human trafficking hubs in different regions of the country to understand the transnational networks behind these criminal activities. Upon completion, the research will provide a unique and rigorously comparative picture of the nature of human trafficking in El Paso, Texas, Miami, Florida and Northern Virginia area that, through comparative analysis will help law enforcement identify and disrupt trafficking networks in these cities and beyond.

Human trafficking is a business in which crime groups from different regions have distinct patterns of operations relying on contractors, facilitators, and supply chains to exploit human beings. Due to the particularities of trade across global regions there are different modus operandi of trafficking organizations operating from Latin America, Asia, and other regions within the United States. Moreover, the United States has a significant amount of trafficking of domestic minors, a result that is reflected in our initial research results. Past research suggests that the business models of traffickers differ depending on the nature of the traffickers—whether they are domestic gangs or complex transnational networks moving individuals across different regions of the country. Key differences among traffickers include the size of the trafficking group, the role of drugs in the recruitment and retention of victims, the extent of violence used against victims, the extent and destination of profits, supply chain dynamics including law enforcement and corruption at source and transshipment points, and the extent to which these groups use social media and technology to recruit victims and to find customers. Our year 1 research thus far indicates that there are different levels of violence deployed against the victims by different types of trafficking groups. Levels of violence may be higher against American citizens than foreign victims who can be compelled and intimidated in other ways. Human trafficking is a major challenge confronting the United States government and American society. Every year thousands of individuals are trafficked from outside the US into involuntary servitude in the US leading to slave labor which deprives lawful residents of work opportunities, human rights abuses, and, in many cases, sexual exploitation.

The dominant perspective on human trafficking in the US today, however, is limited as a result of the ways that human trafficking victims are silenced by their victimizers and the ways in which the legal system puts trafficking victims in legal jeopardy as a result of their, often, undocumented status in the country. Our domestic perspective on human trafficking is also limited largely by the fact that foreign human trafficking victims usually are undocumented. Often victims of sex trafficking are also illegal migrants and, therefore, one sphere of illegality intersects with another. While we have a general understanding of key source countries we have much less understanding of the specific towns and neighborhoods where human trafficking victims originate and the supply chains by which these victims are brought to the United States for exploitation. Through a detailed examination of human trafficking at key exploitation and transit hubs in the US and abroad, this project will address these limitations in our understanding of human trafficking and, through that, provide a more nuanced set of tools for law enforcement officers in their efforts to control the traffic in human beings.

Our research helps to specifically address this mission by better understanding the different types of human trafficking supply chains that operate in different cities in the United States. Our work will build a typology of human trafficking hubs and the particular domestic and international supply chains that operate in those locales. This will enable us to better understand the supply chain dynamics associated with human trafficking. The typology will provide a basis for developing different targeted responses appropriate to the nature of human trafficking supply chains operating in particular cities.

This analysis and our products will enable members of the HSE and the stakeholder community to better respond to human trafficking supply chains. The model that we will build through this research will enable a range of jurisdictions to develop new forms of responses to human trafficking based on the particular ways that supply chains operate in their jurisdictions. By focusing on supply chains, this analysis will point to multi-layered response strategies to disrupt human trafficking supply chains not just in particular jurisdictions but across the length of the supply chain. This analysis will further provide stakeholders with the ability to understand how supply chains are evolving in particular cities in response to law enforcement actions. Our project will provide a forward-looking framework to the HSE and stakeholder community that will enable members of these communities to better understand and respond to problems across human trafficking supply chains as they exist today and as they will change in the future.