AAUW believes that global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development, and mutual security for all people.

What Is Human Trafficking?
In the past decade human trafficking has emerged as one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in the world. This modern-day form of slavery claims an estimated 20.9 million victims internationally and is a serious violation of human rights.1 Traffickers use violence, debt bondage, and other forms of coercion to manipulate victims into engaging in commercial sex acts or labor services against their will.2 Though awareness of and concern about this industry have increased in recent years, human trafficking is consistently underreported due to its covert nature, low community awareness, lack of law enforcement, limited resources for victim recovery, and social blaming of victims.3

Sex Trafficking
Sex trafficking is a growing global industry and occurs in a wide variety of venues within the sex industry, including residential brothels, online escort services, fraudulent massage businesses, strip clubs, and on the streets.4 Under federal law, any minor under the age of 18 who has engaged in commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking — regardless of whether or not the trafficker used force, fraud, or coercion.5 The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime reports that 54 percent of human trafficking victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation.6

Labor Trafficking
Similar to sex trafficking, labor-trafficked victims are coerced; however, instead of being sexually exploited, victims are abused in a variety of labor settings including domestic work, small businesses, large farms, and factories.7 Trafficked victims in every industry work long hours for little to no pay, but the physical and psychological control employers have over victims often forces them to assume they have no other option but to stay. The International Labor Organization estimates that there are 21 million people trapped in forced labor all over the world.8

Human Trafficking Worldwide
Human trafficking victims from roughly 160 countries have been detected in about 140 different countries around the world.9 Although some trafficking is global, human trafficking is largely a regional and local issue, with 43 percent of trafficking happening domestically.10 The key destinations for transregional trafficking include western and southern Europe, as well as wealthy countries in the Middle East and North America, with large numbers of victims coming from sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia. Victims of human trafficking in Europe and the Americas are primarily trafficked for sexual exploitation, and trafficking for forced labor is more frequently detected in Africa and central Asia.11

Human Trafficking in the United States
Contrary to popular belief human trafficking also occurs in the United States, and it is a growing problem for every state. Since 2007, there have been 25,696 cases of human trafficking reported in the United States. In 2015 alone 5,973 cases were reported in every state and Washington, D.C.12 The National Human Trafficking Resource Center found that of cases reported in the United States from 2007 to 2012, 41 percent of sex trafficking cases and 20 percent of labor trafficking cases identified U.S. citizens as victims.13

Human Trafficking Affects Women
Though this epidemic affects people from all cultures, social classes, and backgrounds, human trafficking disproportionately affects women and girls. Resulting from a global tendency to devalue women, women who lack the rights to own land, property, and inheritance become more vulnerable to trafficking. Seventy-one percent of victims of trafficking are women and girls; 72 percent of female victims are trafficked for sexual
exploitation. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center reported that women were the victims in 85 percent of sex trafficking cases reported in the United States from 2007 to 2012.

**Current Efforts to End Human Trafficking**

The main federal legislation in the United States used to combat trafficking is the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). TVPA was recently reauthorized as part of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in 2013. The law includes invaluable specialist services for survivors of human trafficking, grants prosecutors new tools to go after traffickers for exploiting others, and enhances partnerships with priority countries to protect children and prevent child trafficking. Additionally, early in the 114th Congress, the Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking Act, a bill aimed to end the demand for illegal trade and support survivors, was signed into law. The federal government has also worked to end human trafficking through the Department of Homeland Security’s Blue Campaign, which strives to bring those who exploit human lives to justice.

Even with these federal efforts much work is still left to be done at the state level. All states should have statutes in place that address protection of victims, prosecution, and prevention. Protection must include provisions that cover safe harbor, victim assistance, civil remedies, the ability to vacate convictions for survivors, and strict hotline posting requirements.

**Additional Resources**

National Human Trafficking Resource Center  
[www.traffickingresourcecenter.org](http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org)

“2014 State Ratings on Human Trafficking Laws”

Polaris Project  
[www.polarisproject.org/2014stateratings](http://www.polarisproject.org/2014stateratings)

“State Policy Sex Trafficking Tool Kit”

AAUW and the National Council of Jewish Women  

Human Trafficking Legislative Updates  
Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking  
[www.endslaveryandtrafficking.org/legislative_updates](http://www.endslaveryandtrafficking.org/legislative_updates)

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime  

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


