



*from Equip for Equality*

## EFE Fact Sheet – Trafficking of People with Disabilities

### **What is human trafficking?**

Human trafficking is a system where people are treated like property to be bought and sold. Trafficking can happen in a number of ways. Sometimes traffickers make their victims work and then keep the money earned or the government benefits their victims receive. The victim feels they cannot leave and must complete this work. This is labor trafficking. Other times, traffickers force or trick their victims into sexual acts with others and keep money they are paid. This is sex trafficking. Traffickers also tell victims they must work or sell sex in order to “pay” for the housing, food, or other amenities the trafficker provides them.

Human trafficking does not require physical restraint, physical force, or physical bondage. Psychological control, such as threats, fraud, or abuse of the legal process (e.g. threatening to have someone deported), are enough for the crime. Unlike smuggling, which requires that the person move from state to state, human trafficking can happen even if the victim never changes locations.

### **Where does human trafficking happen in Illinois?**

Labor and sex trafficking happen in Illinois in both legal and illegal places. For example, it happens on the street illegally through prostitution. However, it also happens in places you may not expect. For example, it happens in massage parlors, hair salons, and restaurants that appear to be legitimate businesses but the way they operate their businesses is exploitative.

### **Why do traffickers target people with disabilities?**

Traffickers use whatever they can to gain control over their victims, and people with disabilities are often targeted. Traffickers take advantage of people with disabilities in a number of ways. For example, traffickers sometimes force people with disabilities to beg on the streets and then keep any money they receive. Traffickers also steal a victim’s medication or social security and/or disability benefits in order to maintain control over a person with a disability.

According to the U.S. Department of State, people with disabilities also face barriers to justice which make them especially vulnerable to trafficking. Many people with disabilities are exploited by people close to them, in positions of trust (guardian, caretakers, etc.), which make them less likely to identify the abuse and/or report the abuse to authorities. Others may have difficulty reporting abuse because of communication barriers or social biases against the credibility of their statements.

Many people with disabilities are also not able to effectively participate in the criminal justice process or other similar processes (e.g. communication barriers, physical barriers, social biases, etc.). As a result, traffickers often target people with disabilities, because they believe they will not be caught or punished for their crimes.

## How can I protect myself from trafficking?

- If a situation or person makes you uncomfortable, trust that feeling.
- Let a trusted friend or family member know if you feel in danger or if a person/situation seems suspicious.
- Always keep identification with you. No employer or friend has the right to take or hold your documents without your permission.
- Always keep important telephone numbers with you, including the number of someone you feel safe contacting if you are in trouble.
- Always make sure you have a way to communicate with someone (cell phone or phone card), access to your bank account, and any medication you might need with you.

## What are some red flags that a relationship may turn into trafficking?

- Someone promises things that seem too good to be true.
- Someone expects you to agree to their offer on the spot and says otherwise the opportunity will be lost.
- Someone is unable to provide clear details about a job such as the location or company name.
- Someone does not allow you to contact friends or family.
- Someone does not allow you to have your money.
- Someone asks you to do things outside of your comfort zone such as performing sexual favors for friends or strangers, videotaping sexual activity/nudity, or using drugs.
- Someone seems dangerous: tries to control where you go and what you do, lashes out or punishes you for not following their rules, or is verbally/emotionally/physically abusive.

## Who do I call if I need help leaving a human trafficking situation?

If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1. You may also contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline by calling 1-888-373-7888 or by texting "HELP" or "INFO" to 233733 to obtain local referrals for shelter or other social services and support.



DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION?

Contact Equip for Equality (all services are free of charge):

800.537.2532 (voice) or 800.610.2779 (TTY)

[Contactus@equipforequality.org](mailto:Contactus@equipforequality.org)

[www.equipforequality.org](http://www.equipforequality.org)

This resource material is intended as a guide for people with disabilities. Nothing written here shall be understood to be legal advice. For specific legal advice, an attorney should be consulted.

Equip for Equality, an independent nonprofit organization, is the Illinois state Protection & Advocacy System whose mission is to advance the human and civil rights of children and adults with disabilities.

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