

UNITED STATES

A21 USA (A21) works nationally throughout the United States to counter trafficking through public awareness, prevention, and education efforts. While A21 provides direct services to survivors of human trafficking throughout various parts of the United States, the full gambit of its aftercare programs is offered primarily in North Carolina (A21 NC), and its surrounding regions, as well as in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas (A21 TX) area. Through A21's direct work with trafficking survivors, as well as intervention efforts in collaboration with law enforcement, A21 has had the opportunity to directly observe the evolving human trafficking patterns in specific regions of the United States. Sex trafficking and labor trafficking remained the most common forms of trafficking observed by A21 in the United States in 2022.



2022 TRENDS

INCREASE IN FOREIGN NATIONAL SURVIVORS

In 2022, A21 engaged primarily with domestic sex trafficking survivors and with foreign national survivors from Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico. Many of these survivors shared similar vulnerability factors; they originate from a rural region and face extreme socio-economic challenges, resulting in an exceedingly low number of employment opportunities.

Consistent with the increase of migrants entering the United States from its southern border, A21 experienced an increase in its encounters with foreign national survivors requesting assistance. A21 received 55 referrals for assistance for potential foreign national victims who had migrated from the southern border; 17 of these individuals were referred to services with A21 partners and 33 entered A21's Aftercare Program. Victims from the southern border

encountered by A21 most commonly traveled to the United States either to pursue employment or to flee unsafe conditions within their home country.

Foreign Nationals Trafficked Along Migration Route

Many of the Latin American trafficking survivors encountered by A21 were the financial providers of their household, resulting in high pressure for employment. These victims often pursued employment without first determining whether the opportunity could be exploitative. Other Latin American survivors migrated to the United States to flee attempted gang recruitment, violence, or threats. Usually, exposure to violence in combination with a lack of job opportunities in their communities leads to the decision to seek employment and safety in the United States. However, these vulnerable individuals are often exploited along the way, or soon after arriving in the United States. Fifty percent of the Latin American foreign national survivors who entered A21's Aftercare Program in 2022 had been trafficked during their journey to the United States. Some of these survivors had also been trafficked through gangs in their home country, often for sex or forced drug trafficking, prior to their migration journey.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) receives reports of migrants in need of assistance from their hotline as well as from referrals from U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Health and Human Services, and similar government agencies. USCRI regularly refers migrants in the surrounding areas in and around Charlotte, North Carolina and Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas to A21 for assistance, upon determining that the migrants had likely been trafficked. A21 assists eligible migrant victims of trafficking with access to legal services to apply for a T-Visa (trafficking visa) whenever possible.

Recruiters Target Victims in Their Home Country

In A21's experience, quite often the recruiter of foreign national survivors exploited in the United States is an acquaintance or a community member of the survivor in their home country. Consequently, despite lack of employment or work conditions verification or detailed information, the vulnerable individual has a preexisting level of trust in the recruiter. This especially applies to those who legally enter the United States on H2A or H2B visas, specific to agriculture and seasonal employment. Employers exploit migrant workers' ignorance of their rights under these valid visas to keep them fearful and powerless about their legal status.

INCREASE IN LABOR TRAFFICKING PROSECUTIONS

While A21 assisted some foreign national survivors of sexual

exploitation, including through online means, the majority were exploited through labor trafficking, primarily in the agricultural sector, and as domestic workers. A21 has observed a notable increase of labor trafficking survivors referred to A21's Aftercare Program, as well as an increase in federal labor trafficking prosecutions generally in 2022.

The majority of labor trafficking survivors assisted by A21 had a similar profile - foreign nationals; limited education; originating from smaller or rural areas; and exploited in their search for employment as their household's primary provider. In 2022, A21 supported labor trafficking survivors who were key victim-witnesses in labor trafficking prosecutions in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

RECRUITMENT METHODS

Domestic Sex Trafficking

Domestic sex trafficking of both adult and minor females continues to be a widespread problem within the United States. Traffickers continued to use online websites that provide sexualized content such as "Only Fans," or escort services such as "Skip the Games," or even commonly known dating/chat websites, such as "Monkey," to both recruit new victims as well as continue to sell their current victims.

The desire for a loving relationship and/or substance addiction has repeatedly surfaced as two common vulnerabilities shared by many female survivors of sex trafficking in the United States. The most prevalent ways domestic victims are recruited into sex trafficking are through the use of a false romantic relationship (i.e. loverboy), being tricked and/or sold by a friend or family member, and coercion through the use of an individual's drug addiction. Oftentimes, victims believe they are in a romantic relationship with their trafficker which mimics the dynamics found in a domestic violence relationship.

Substance misuse and dependency by adults are high-risk factors for being trafficked. Those with addictions have decreased inhibitions or rationale when presented with options that provide access to their addictive substance. For example, it is not unusual for victims to "agree" to engage in commercial sex where the trafficker receives all payments, in exchange for the trafficker supplying their drug of choice. The level of physical dependency on these substances (specifically opioids) can be so strong and the urge to avoid withdrawals so great, that victims will often forgo safety in response to that physical dependence. Traffickers who exploit this physical addiction have consequently "coerced" the commission of a commercial sex act.

Trafficking of Foreign Nationals

In A21's experience, foreign national survivors of both sex and labor trafficking are primarily recruited through false employment opportunities, through loverboy scenarios, and through friends/family. The forms of control used by traffickers in these cases have not shifted much from previous years. They include withholding documents, threats to report to immigration/law enforcement, threats to family, debt bondage, providing illicit substances to vic-

tims, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse.

To best support the needs of these individuals, A21 has continued to build community between survivors after they have left their trafficking situations by fostering group programs that survivors have the choice to participate in beneficial skills and build a positive community.

A21'S RESPONSE

In response to the increase in foreign national survivors, namely Latin American survivors, being assisted in 2022, A21 increased its English-Spanish bilingual caseworkers to properly support survivors in A21's Aftercare Program. Moreover, A21 provided educational sessions on safe migration contained in A21's Primary Prevention Program (PPP) to children of adult trafficking survivors and child survivors who had migrated from the southern U.S. border into the United States. Given the continued communication with friends and family in their home countries, this educational information could serve to prevent future exploitation along this migration route. A21 staff in the United States continued its prevention work targeted to the vulnerable population in Latin American source countries by collaborating with A21's Latin American office. Specifically, A21 trained non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Costa Rica and other Latin American countries to facilitate A21's PPP with minor migrants as a result of the Venezuelan refugee crisis. Fifty-one professionals were trained to outwork the PPP in Latin America along a migration route with at-risk children.

In addition to adapting resources to assist the increase in requests for assistance for Latin American foreign national survivors, A21 continued to outwork its counter-trafficking strategy by focusing on prevention and awareness, intervention, aftercare, and access to justice.



PREVENTION & AWARENESS

EDUCATION CURRICULUM PILOTED

A21 recognizes that through prevention/education efforts, entire families can be reached with messages promoting safety and awareness of potential trafficking situations. A key initiative for A21 in 2022 was the development and piloting of a K-12 Human Trafficking Education Curriculum, focusing on four lessons for each grade in the areas of: Rights and Responsibilities, Character Development, Relationship Boundaries, and Digital Safety. Over 1,300 educators throughout Texas, Michigan, and Florida received training on this curriculum. It is anticipated that these trained educational leaders will teach the curriculum to potentially 300,000+ students during the 2022-23 school year.

A21 also distributed over 2,000 digital and hard copy versions of another key prevention initiative, the “Steps To Staying Safe Storybook,” for 3-6 year olds. This storybook teaches preschoolers to recognize potentially dangerous individuals, unsafe situations, and learn different ways to identify help from a trusted adult.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

A21’s *Can You See Me?* (CYSM) public awareness campaign (available in print and digital materials) educates both at-risk individuals and the general public on human trafficking and provides a call to action in response to suspected trafficking (See Appendix A). A21’s CYSM campaign continued to be advertised throughout the United States in 2022, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, in airports, train stations, billboards, and in schools. As of the end of 2022, over 1 billion impressions were reported for this campaign in the United States.

In anticipation of the 2022 Super Bowl, A21 partnered with the It’s A Penalty Campaign to raise awareness about human trafficking through airports, hotels, Ubers, and AirBnBs in Los Angeles, California. An estimated 737.5 million people were likely reached with this campaign. Moreover, during the pendency of this campaign, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reported a 20% increase in calls, 14 missing children were identified, eight victims were identified and recovered, and 494 traffickers and sex buyers were arrested statewide.



A21 continued its annual global Walk For Freedom human trafficking awareness initiative in 2022, with 100 walk events taking place in 35 states across the United States. A host of a walk event in Austin, TX reported over 300 individuals participated in the walk. The host further shared, “We had a survivor share her story who now runs a nonprofit. We had her lead the walk route and she said afterward the experience of sharing her story was healing for her. Such a powerful day.”

IDENTIFICATION & INTERVENTION

A21 participates in law enforcement-led operations, supporting both sex trafficking and labor trafficking investigations. In Texas, A21 participated in eight operations as the primary victim service provider offering services to recovered victims. During these operations, A21 TX assists law enforcement by conducting screenings of potential victims of trafficking, as well as providing services to identified victims. These operations occurred both via street outreach and hotel outreach operations with law enforcement agencies including the Dallas Police Department, Arlington Police Department, and Tarrant County Sheriff’s Office. To date, A21 TX has assisted in the identification of twenty victims during law enforcement-led operations. Additionally, in both locations, A21 provides law enforcement with clothing and hygiene kits for detectives to distribute when they conduct their individual outreaches in high-risk areas.



A strategy for effective intervention is the need for individuals most likely to interact with victims due to their profession (frontline professionals) to be adequately trained to recognize human trafficking. To that end, A21 NC focused on creating a specialized training program for frontline professionals in 2022. The training is based on A21’s firsthand experience working with survivors and incorporates key trends, updates to relevant human trafficking laws, and practical steps to both identify and support victims of trafficking. In 2022, A21 provided professional training to over 400 members of the hospitality industry at major hotels in Los Angeles ahead of the Super Bowl, 230 legal professionals at a law school, 98 law enforcement personnel, and 25 health care providers.

AFTERCARE

LAUNCH OF THE TEXAS FREEDOM CENTER

At the start of 2022, A21 launched its second Freedom Center in the United States in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas. The Freedom Center is a drop-in day center that provides survivors with a safe place to learn life skills, receive case management support, and be empowered with skills and resources to restore wellness, reintegrate safely back into society, and live independently.

A21's first encounter with a survivor of trafficking typically occurs through one of three ways: a law enforcement-led operation, a referral from another service provider or agency, or a direct outreach to A21 for assistance. Depending on the type of referral, A21 will screen and assess the needs of each individual. Using this assessment, A21 creates a tailored case management plan specific to the survivor's unique needs, to support the survivor's goals.

In 2022, A21 TX assisted 140 potential victims of trafficking and accepted 40 survivors into its Aftercare Program, while A21 NC assisted 114 potential victims of trafficking and accepted 31 survivors into its Aftercare Program. Both locations in the United States have noted the increase of foreign national survivors receiving direct services from A21, with A21 TX receiving a significant amount of referrals for Latin American minor survivors. Additionally, A21 TX has observed the online recruitment of many survivors of domestic sex trafficking (e.g. dating apps, social media, etc). To best respond to survivors' needs in Texas, A21 has developed community-wide relationships ranging across law enforcement agencies, service providers, and other NGOs. These relationships have enabled A21 to respond holistically to the needs of referrals, regardless of whether or not the survivor(s) choose to participate in A21's program long-term.



THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT IN PREVENTING REVICTIMIZATION

In A21's experience, poverty and lack of healthy relationships are the primary factors that increase victimization. Survivors living below the poverty level may live in lower income areas with higher crime rates. With a limited number of employment opportunities that provide livable wages, additional sources of income are needed.

Traffickers capitalize on this vulnerability by offering employment opportunities or otherwise promising financial assistance, which turn out to be exploitative. Additionally, a lack of healthy relationships and/or boundaries creates prime opportunities for traffickers to romantically lure individuals with an exploitative intent from the outset. Risk factors linked to unhealthy romantic relationships are addressed through case management support, access to counseling, building a supportive community, developing healthy self-worth, boundaries, and relationship skills through A21's Life Programs, and teaching safety.

To address the risks associated with poverty, A21 assists survivors to reach financial independence through continuing education, vocational training, job search assistance, or offering interim financial assistance.

Understanding the importance of stable employment in reducing victimization, A21 specifically focuses on job readiness training and opportunities. In partnership with corporations such as Marriott International, A21 NC offered specialized training sessions on job skills and career paths to survivors at the Freedom Center. As a result of these targeted activities, as well as survivors' own initiative, 19 survivors obtained new employment during 2022.

COMMON CHALLENGES

While direct services overall have generally stabilized following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of counter-trafficking housing programs within the A21 NC and TX operating areas no longer accept clients. This has resulted in extremely limited options for emergency and transitional housing. Furthermore, inflation and rising housing costs have resulted in survivors' difficulty obtaining long-term, independent housing. Although A21 partners with hotels and shelters for immediate/emergency housing, this is not a sustainable long-term option. The limited options for transitional and long-term independent housing will ultimately adversely affect a survivor's successful transition to independence.

Survivors' access to childcare also impacts their ability to transition fully to independence. A21 has primarily supported these needs through financial assistance for childcare for meetings or events. A21 works with survivors to help identify creative options for childcare and supports survivors' decisions for their children. A21 also provides risk assessments and safety plans for some survivors facing intimate partner violence from non-traffickers after their trafficking situation. Through these safety plans, A21 connects survivors to the appropriate law enforcement or service providers and provides relocation support.

SURVIVORS COMPLETING A21'S AFTERCARE PROGRAM MAINTAIN INDEPENDENCE

In sum, 71 new survivors entered A21's U.S. Aftercare Program in 2022, for a total of 119 survivors receiving assistance through A21's long-term Aftercare Program. Utilizing the International Justice Mission's Assessment of Survivor Outcomes (ASO)¹ tool, A21 has been able to collect data on survivors' functioning at the time of case intake, closure and one year follow-up. Results demonstrate that on average survivors

are restored at case closure and that these survivors have maintained restoration and independence at one year follow-up.

The increase in consistent intakes into A21's Restore program from 2021 to 2022 (97.2% increase), as well as graduations and transitions (260% increase), is due to A21's second location launching in Texas. It is also in part related to the return to pre-COVID-19 pandemic protocols, including the reinstatement of A21 services from remote to in-person case management, the continuation of court cases and identification operations, as well as the return of other community service providers to pre-pandemic processes.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice is an important aspect of recovery for human trafficking survivors. A21 provides survivors in its Aftercare Program access to its Legal Assistance Program. Under this program, A21 supports survivors subpoenaed to testify in criminal prosecution proceedings against their trafficker, as well as coordinates access to legal services for other related matters such as expungement of criminal convictions, immigration assistance, and other civil matters. In 2022, 40 survivors participated in A21's Legal Assistance Program.

CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS

A21 NC noticed a 21% increase in the investigation, prosecution, and sentencing of human trafficking cases, with an emphasis on federal labor trafficking cases in 2022. The focus on labor trafficking prosecution contrasted to the emphasis in prior years. In 2022, 28 survivors in A21's Legal Assistance Program were being assisted as victim-witnesses in criminal prosecution. A21 provides assistance in these criminal prosecutions through emotional support at hearings, as well as tangible assistance such as providing court-appropriate clothing and meals in between court matters. Additionally, A21 assists in the coordination of logistics for court hearing purposes (transportation to and from court, lodging, etc.). This form of support mitigates the number of potential crises and needs that can occur during court proceedings which can significantly distract victims who are key witnesses in the prosecution.

Survivors supported with direct services earlier in the process (ideally, when initially recovered) have a higher likelihood of successful court cooperation. Access to case management and other services can empower victims to be cooperative witnesses and instill the con-

fidence to testify against their trafficker in court. For example, A21 NC assisted eight survivors in 2022 with transportation, emotional support, and physical support surrounding two federal grand jury cases. All of these survivors were either battling drug addiction or newly sober. While opioid addiction would normally decrease the likelihood of a survivor testifying in a court proceeding, all eight survivors complied with their subpoenas and testified successfully. Additionally, A21 provided similar support to two other survivors required to testify twice in their trafficker's federal trial. Both survivors were foreign nationals pending legal status, had families, and other issues which caused challenges in timely appearances at trial. However, with the support of A21 NC, both survivors successfully presented trial testimony on both occasions, leading to a guilty verdict.

CIVIL LEGAL CASES

A21 outworks its civil legal assistance cases by coordinating with pro bono legal services or hiring attorneys as needed. In addition to coordinating legal services, A21 provides transportation, gathers supporting documents to support the civil case, assists in application submissions, and continues its direct services through its Aftercare Program. In 2022, A21 assisted 26 survivors with their civil legal cases; 14 of these survivors were already receiving support with a criminal prosecution in which they were a victim-witness. Civil cases included immigration application,² criminal record expungement of charges incurred while trafficked, and family court/custody issues. Assisting foreign national survivors obtain legal status reduces their vulnerability to revictimization. For example, if a foreign national victim of labor trafficking does not obtain a Continued Presence VISA, a necessary precursor for a work permit, that victim in desperation may accept illegal employment which may be exploitative.

Criminal expungement cases are critical to ensure that survivors are not discriminated against in their search for appropriate housing or employment. Appropriate employment and housing provides stability to a survivor's life post-trafficking, decreasing the likelihood of revictimization. Additionally, civil cases such as family court cases are extremely crucial in a survivor's recovery process. Oftentimes, victims may lose custody of their children due to events surrounding their trafficking situation. In such cases, traffickers can leverage the children to control the victim. Therefore, coordinating legal services to survivors for family court matters can be life-changing.



TWO FOREIGN NATIONAL SURVIVORS SUPPORTED IN THEIR TESTIMONY IN DOMESTIC SERVITUDE PROSECUTION

In 2022, A21 NC supported two female survivors of labor trafficking serving as critical witnesses in a monumental federal domestic servitude and human smuggling prosecution. A recruiter acquainted with these women in their home country in Central America, specifically targeted these women after becoming aware of their financial situation and need for employment. After convincing them of their guaranteed employment in the United States, and settling on the recruitment and travel fees, the recruiter arranged to smuggle the victims across the border and to North Carolina where they thought a job opportunity awaited them. Upon their arrival however, the women's identifications were confiscated and they were forced into domestic servitude. The victims were recovered after one victim found a cell phone and called the police while she wasn't being monitored.

Upon A21 NC's introduction to the survivors, they were in need of social, financial, immigration, and mental health support. Both women entered A21's Aftercare Program during

the pendency of the prosecution, where they received assistance with housing, healthcare, referrals to immigration attorneys, financial assistance, and basic care. A21 bilingual caseworkers worked closely with the survivors to facilitate their testimony for the prosecution, including transporting and accompanying them to court, providing comfortable court-appropriate attire for their testimony, meals during the trial, and emotional support. Ultimately, all four perpetrators involved (recruiter, traffickers, and homeowner who facilitated the domestic servitude) were found guilty of various crimes and sentenced accordingly. While not all the perpetrators were found guilty of a trafficking offense per se, the court heard testimony surrounding the details of the trafficking for purposes of consideration in sentencing. This trial notably highlights the increased interest in prosecuting labor trafficking cases in the United States despite the implicit evidentiary difficulties in such cases.

¹ International Justice Mission. "Assessment of Survivor Outcomes Guidance Manual." 2018, pp. 1–33., www.ijm.org/documents/studies/ASO-Guidance-Manual.pdf.

² Various provisions within U.S. immigration laws provide immigration relief upon fulfillment of certain criteria which can implicate trafficking victims and unaccompanied minors.