Utah Department of Public Safety
Statewide Information and Analysis Center
Intelligence Bulletin

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260818-1026452

(U) Analysis of the Human Trafficking Threat to Utah

18 August 2026

(U) Executive Summary

(U//FOUO) ***Scope:*** *This Domain Intelligence Assessment prepared by the Utah Statewide Information & Analysis Center (SIAC) assesses the threats of human trafficking within/or impacting the State of Utah, Utah-based private and public sector, and Utah citizens from 01 January 2021 to 31 July 2026. This assessment is intended for Federal, State, Local, and Tribal partners responsible for mitigating threats and protecting Utah and/or the United States, and its citizens from human trafficking. The information cutoff date for this assessment is 31 July 2026.*

(U) The Utah Statewide Information and Analysis Center (SIAC) assesses the human trafficking[a] threat to Utah will **likely**[b] continue to be **substantial**[c] in 2027. Both sex and labor trafficking crimes are committed in Utah. With sex trafficking, the SIAC identified the commercial sex industry (also known as prostitution) and the illicit massage business industry as the most common venues, while labor trafficking mostly occurs in domestic work, food services, construction, and agriculture.

(U) Commercial sex advertisement data over the last two years continues to rise, both nationally and within the state. Additionally, the SIAC has noted a steady rise in overall human trafficking cases over the last 5 years nationally. While in Utah, 2025 was consistent with the average number of human trafficking cases reported to law enforcement within the year.

(U) Utah law enforcement reporting shows an average of 57.2 human trafficking cases per year over the last five years with an average case clearance of approximately 23% for labor trafficking cases and 21% for sex trafficking cases. The national average is approximately 32% and 39% respectively. Over the past five years the majority of victims have been female between the ages of 0-19, while the majority of offenders have been male between the ages of 30–39.

(U) The SIAC currently faces significant intelligence gaps regarding the full scope of human trafficking within Utah. These gaps are primarily driven by systemic obstacles facing local task forces and agencies, including shifting priorities, limited staffing, and budgetary constraints that prevent the dedication of full-time officers, detectives, and analysts to human trafficking cases. A historical trend of underreporting by victims continues to obscure the true extent of the threat. Compounding these broader challenges are specific operational limitations, such as the inability to track the exact volume of commercial sex advertisements due to blind spots in current detection software. Unless systemic reporting gaps and enforcement hurdles are mitigated, trafficking networks will continue to exploit these vulnerabilities to evade detection. This ongoing evasion ensures the threat remains substantial despite superficially stagnant official case numbers, ultimately inflicting profound physical, emotional, and economic damage on primary victims and their direct affiliates across the state.

[a] Refer to Appendix D for Foundational Definitions and Typologies for human trafficking.
[b] Refer to Appendix A for expressions of likelihood or probability.
[c] Refer to Appendix C for threat assessment methodology.

This report addresses DHS HSEC codes: HSEC-3
This report addresses SIAC Standing Information Requirements: UTSIAC-3
Artificial Intelligence tools were used to assist in the review of this report. All final outputs are human verified for accuracy and reliability.

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(U) Background

(U) Sex Trafficking

(U) Individual Sex Traffickers/Commercial Sex Industry (Prostitution)

(U) Sex traffickers rely on online marketplaces, encrypted communication applications, and dating and socialization applications to further their business in the commercial sex industry. Historically, sex traffickers relied mostly on online marketplaces, such as Backpage[d], to advertise commercial sex to prospective customers both in Utah and nationally. Often, commercial sex advertisements are posted not only in Utah, but across the country.

- (U) Following the federal shutdown of Backpage in April 2018, sex traffickers shifted their operations towards alternative online marketplaces, effectively spreading their marketing out to different websites. At the same time, the SIAC identified an increased inclusion of encrypted and masked systems.[1] This inclusion was also identified in the Rocky Mountain region in 2020.[2] These systems include encrypted communication applications, dating and socialization applications, and content-sharing platforms.[3, 4, 5]
- (U) Commercial sex advertisements have been increasingly advertising specific demographics for sexual services. In 2024, approximately 12% of the commercial sex.

(U) Key Task Forces and Interdictions Resources

- **(U) Utah Statewide Information and Analysis Center (SIAC):** Serves as Utah's primary intelligence fusion hub.
- **(U) Utah Trafficking in Persons (UTIP) Task Force:** Coordinates state-level multidisciplinary enforcement and victim services. Includes the Utah AG's Office SECURE Task Force.
- **(U) Washington County Gang/Human Trafficking Force:** Comprised of law enforcement officers from Washington County to focus on gang and human trafficking crimes in Southern Utah.
- **(U) DCI Human Trafficking Team:** Montana's specialized state-level enforcement division.
- **(U) Regional Task Forces:** Networks such as the Billings, Eastern, Flathead, Gallatin, Helena, Missoula, North Central, and Yellowstone County task forces coordinate local interdiction and community training.

(U) Organized Crime Sex Trafficking

(U) Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), including those designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) in 2024, have been known to actively participate in human trafficking in the United States and in Utah through the use of debt-bondage.[6, 7]

- (U) Major TCOs maintain a long-standing, entrenched presence in Utah, utilizing the state's strategic geographical location and major interstate highway corridors (including Interstates 15, 70, and 80) as vital regional transportation pathways.
    - (U) The business model of these organizations is centered on maximizing organizational profit through criminal enterprises, which includes facilitating human smuggling and human trafficking.[8, 9]
    - (U) These groups require financial payments from human smuggling networks operating near and across the southern border, exposing smuggled individuals to severe risks of exploitation during and after their transit from accumulated debt.[10, 11]

[d] According to Reuters, Backpage was seized by the U.S. Federal Government in 2018. It was known as one of the largest online marketplaces in the U.S. for the solicitation of sexual services.

(U) Commercial Sex Advertisement Trends

(U) Utah commercial sex advertisements peaked in 2023 before dropping in 2024 to near-2021 levels (*Ref. Figure 2*). This decrease may reflect an actual drop in ads, or a shift to websites outside of current software monitoring. However, volumes trended upward again in 2025. In 2026, total advertisements remain consistent with the same period in 2025 (*Ref. Figure 1*).[12]

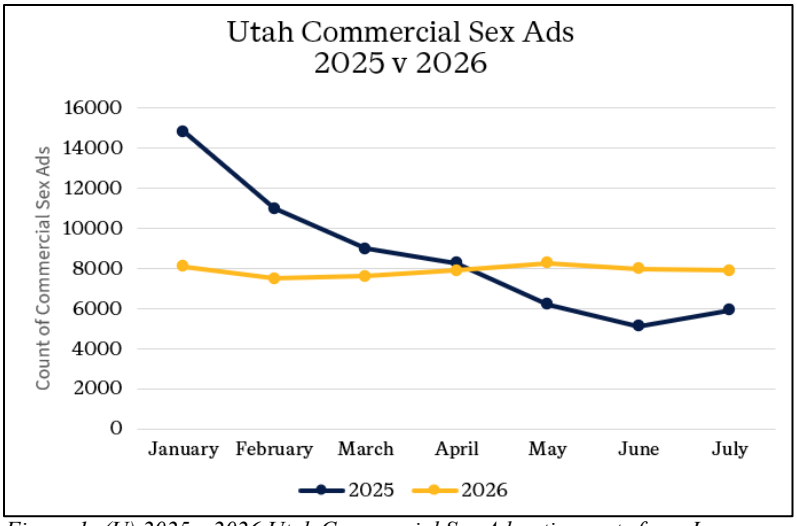


Figure 1: (U) 2025 v 2026 Utah Commercial Sex Advertisements from January through July

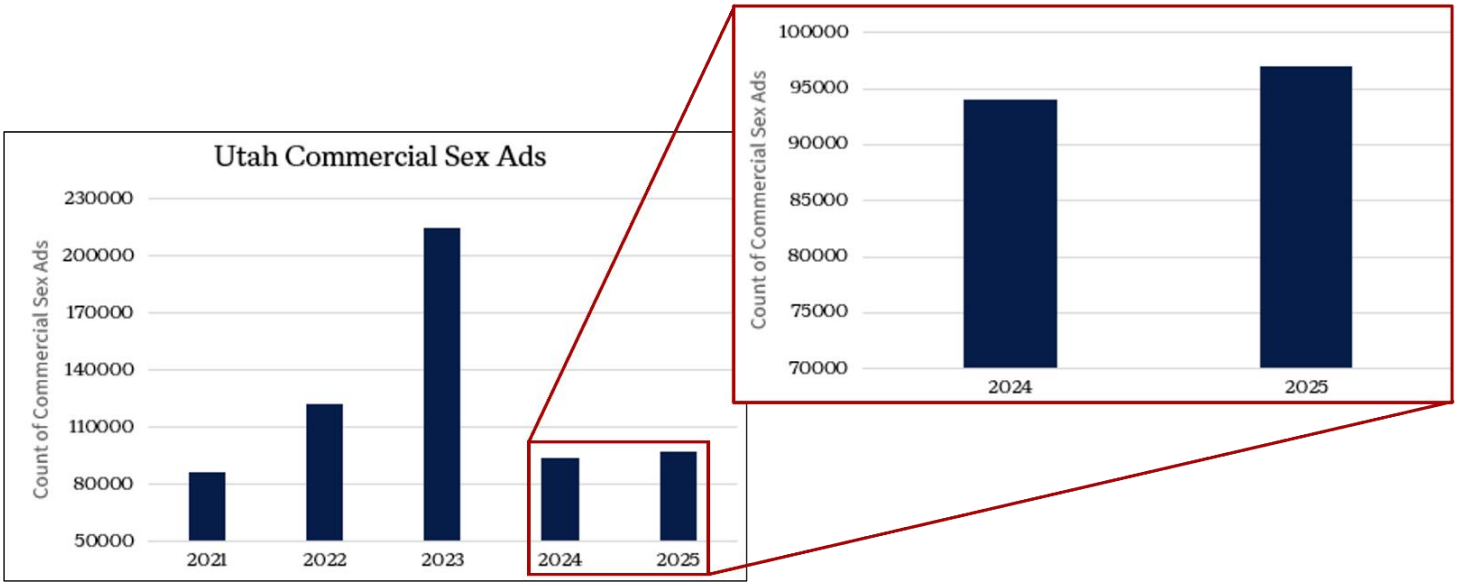


Figure 2: (U) Utah Commercial Sex Ads from 2021 - 2025

(U) National commercial sex advertisement trends mirror Utah's (*Ref. Figure 2 and 3*); as noted above, this could reflect a genuine decrease or a shift in website usage.[13]

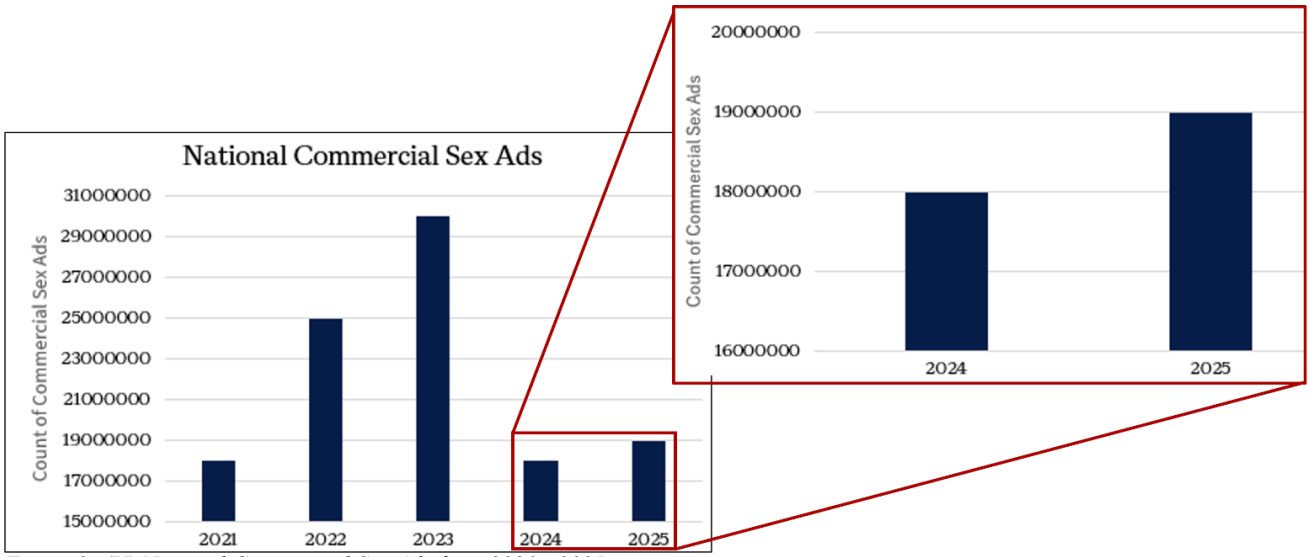


Figure 3: (U) National Commercial Sex Ads from 2021 - 2025

(U) Illicit Massage Businesses (IMB)

(U) As of December 2025, there were approximately 200 massage businesses in the state of Utah that were suspected of illicit activity.[14]

- (U) IMB networks can span across the state as well as across the country with advertisements in other states.[15, 16]
- (U) IMBs have been known to be used for both sex and labor trafficking with larger networks participating in the facilitation of recruitment and movement between locations for a continuous rotation of "new" women for available buyers.[17]
- (U) As of 2018, Polaris[e] estimated there were between 7,500 to 9,000 IMBs operating in the United States, with the average IMB netting an estimated $250,000 a year.[18]
- (U) In 2023, clandestine "diploma mills" emerged in the IMB pipeline to supply fraudulent certifications and test answers. These diploma mills are known to help IMBs obtain legitimate-looking state licenses for massage therapists.[19]

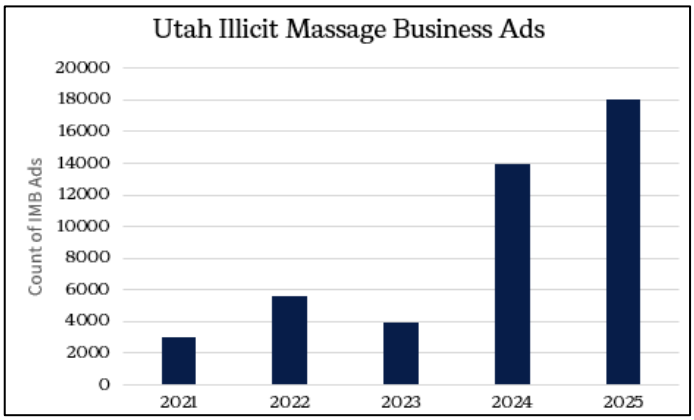


Figure 4: (U) Utah IMB Ads from 2021 - 2025

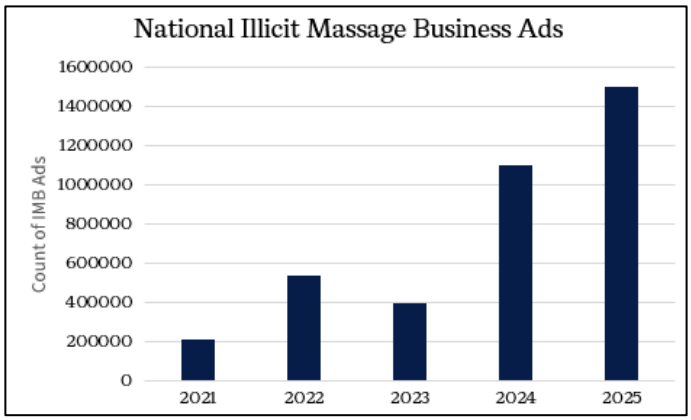


Figure 5: (U) National IMB Ads from 2021 - 2025

[e] Polaris is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to end human trafficking. For almost 20 years, Polaris operated the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline and built a dataset off their work on this hotline.

(U) Total Sex Advertisements

(U) Combined data for both IMBs and commercial sex advertisements indicates a year-over-year increase in Utah from 2024 to 2025 (Ref. Figure 6). While the two categories followed different trendlines individually, total sex advertising volume rebounded slightly in 2025 following a significant drop the previous year.[20]

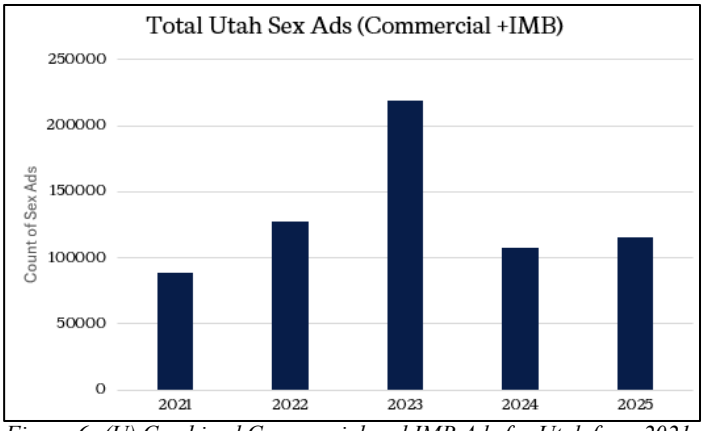


Figure 6: (U) Combined Commercial and IMB Ads for Utah from 2021 - 2025

(U) Sex Trafficking Statistics

(U) The Utah Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Incident-Based Reporting System (FBI NIBRS) track human trafficking offenses, including demographic information, for all law enforcement reported offenses. While Utah BCI specifically focuses on the state, FBI NIBRS looks at each state individually and combines them to look at the overall national picture. Current 2026 numbers are up to July 2026 for both Utah and national offenses.

(U) Utah BCI data shows sex trafficking offenses peaked in 2021 before a steep decline in 2022. Following a secondary spike in 2023, offenses have steadily declined year-over-year through 2025 (*Ref. Figure 7*).[21] The trend of these offenses does not follow the combined Utah commercial sex advertisement trends for both prostitution and IMBs. Additionally, Utah sex trafficking offense trends do not follow national sex trafficking offense trends when compared with the FBI NIBRS database.

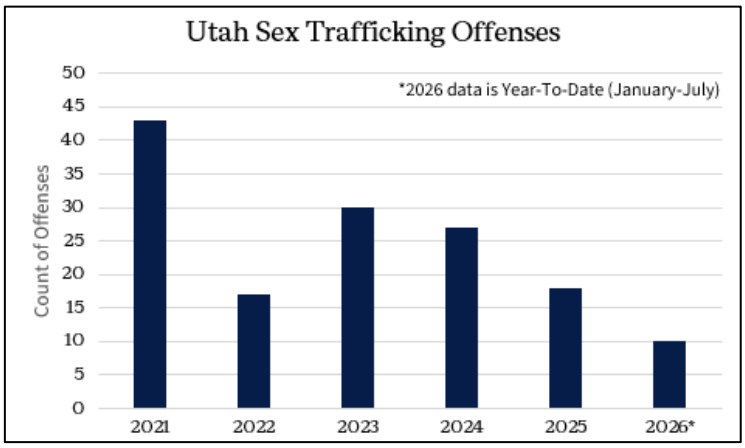


Figure 7: (U) Utah Sex Trafficking Offenses from the Utah BCI database

(U) National sex trafficking trends have continued to grow since 2022 (*Ref. Figure 8*). However, current 2026 month-over-month numbers are tracking lower than 2025.[22]

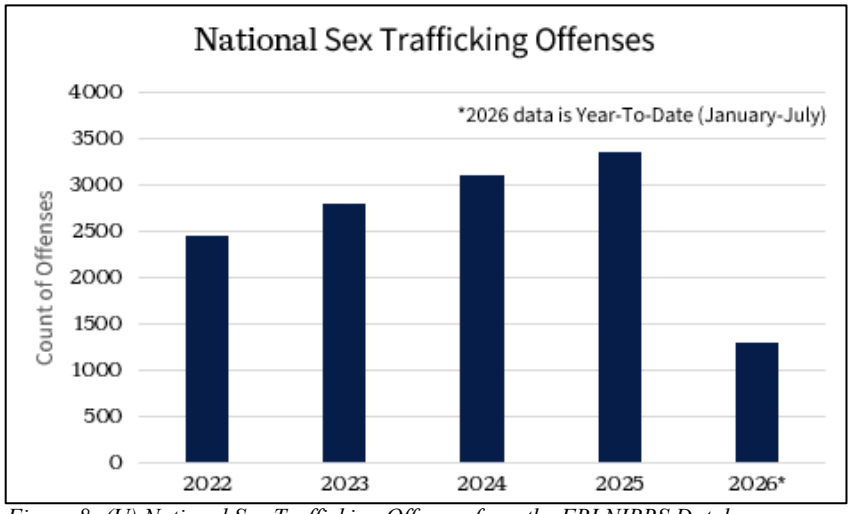


Figure 8: (U) National Sex Trafficking Offenses from the FBI NIBRS Database

(U) Clearance rate is the rate of sex trafficking cases per year that were closed by investigators by arrest or exceptional means. The FBI NIBRS database tracks clearance rate by state and nationally. While the United States has thousands more sex trafficking cases per year, the national clearance rate averages approximately 39% since 2022. By contrast, Utah's average clearance rate since 2022 is 21%, impacted by year-over-year volatility, including a sharp but isolated spike in 2024 (*Ref. Figure 9*).[23]

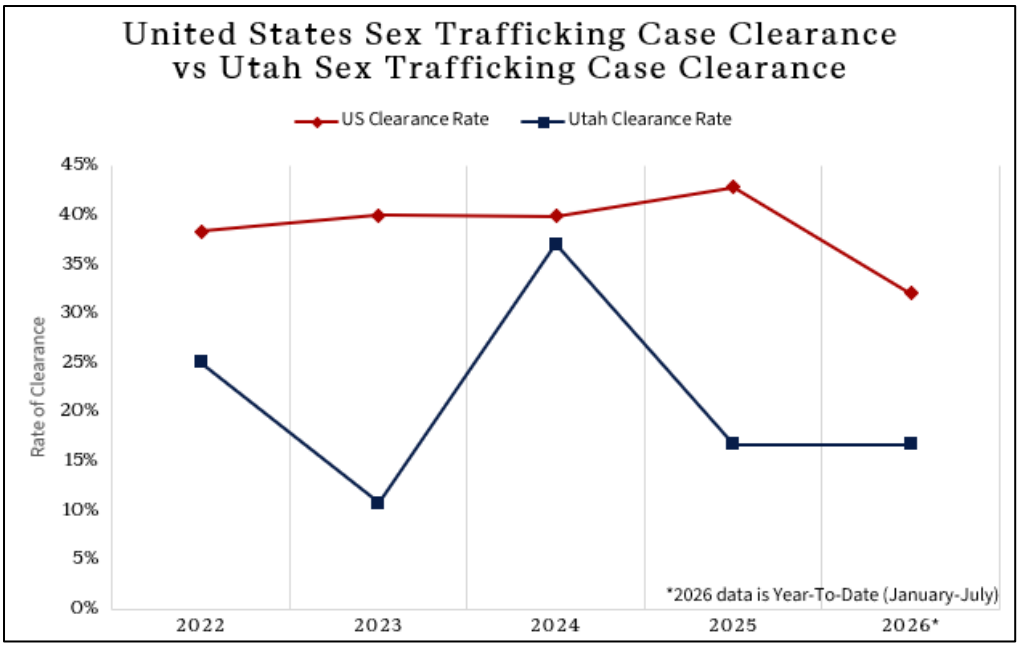


Figure 9: (U) US Sex Trafficking Case Clearance vs Utah Sex Trafficking Case Clearance from the FBI NIBRS Database

(U) Labor Trafficking: Methods and Platforms

(U) Labor Trafficking Venues

(U) Labor trafficking often occurs in domestic work, food services, construction, and agriculture. Illicit activities, such as drug distribution, can also be forms of labor trafficking when victims are forced, coerced, or defrauded into their involvement.[24]

- (U) In Utah, labor trafficking has been identified in restaurants, ranches/farms, construction, maintenance companies, and street vendors. In instances where it has been identified with illicit activity (e.g., drug trafficking and drug distribution), alleged gang or TCO involvement has also been identified.[25]
- (U) Nationally, data provided by the National Human Trafficking Hotline identifies the domestic work sector as having the highest rates for labor trafficking. The second highest sector is restaurants, followed closely by construction, agriculture, and illicit activities.[26]
- (U) According to the Department of Homeland Security, there were approximately 27.6 million labor trafficking victims worldwide in 2024.[27]
- (U) Official community support metrics from the non-governmental organizations (NGO) revealed a major structural shift in the demographics of survivors receiving advocacy and support services in Utah. During the 2021 and 2022 reporting periods, the number of enrolled labor trafficking survivors receiving specialized services overtook enrolled sex trafficking survivors for the first time. This represented a significant shift from the 2020 baseline, where sex trafficking victims constituted the majority of the organization's service caseload.[28]

(U) Organized Crime Labor Trafficking

(U) Human traffickers routinely exploit victims by forcing them to engage in secondary crimes to increase the traffickers' profits, which explicitly includes forcing victims to transport and distribute illicit narcotics on their behalf. Local investigations have similarly identified a recurring nexus where drug use, drug trafficking, and theft intersect with human exploitation cases.[29]

(U) Labor Trafficking Statistics

(U) Labor trafficking has been the most reported crime in Utah in three of the past five years (*Ref. Figure 10*), accounting for approximately 4% of all nationally reported cases. While historical reporting trends varied between the state and the nation, current data indicates they are now aligning.[30, 31]

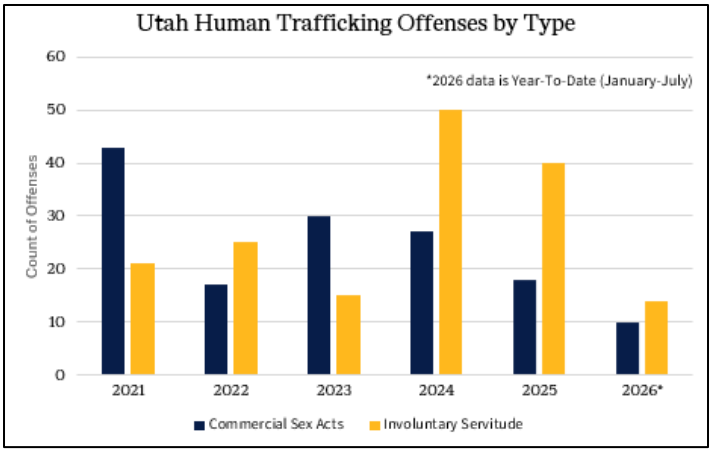


Figure 10: (U) Utah Human Trafficking Offenses by Type from the Utah BCI Database

(U) Leading up to 2024, national labor trafficking cases increased steadily year-over-year. Conversely, Utah's cases fluctuated, dropping in 2023 before experiencing a massive, isolated spike in 2024.

(U) Despite the differing lead-ups, both national and state reports peaked in 2024 before declining in 2025 (*Ref. Figure 11 and 12*). Looking forward, current 2026 month-over-month data shows a continued downward trajectory for both Utah and the rest of the nation.[32, 33]

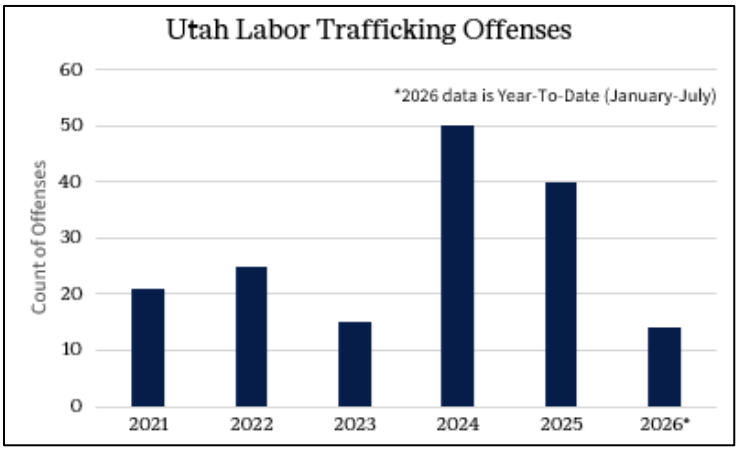


Figure 11: (U) Utah Labor Trafficking Offenses from the Utah BCI Database

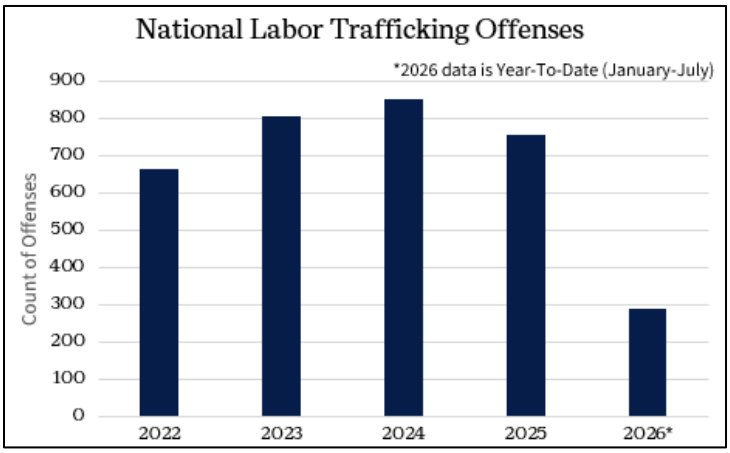


Figure 12: (U) National Labor Trafficking Offenses from the FBI NIBRS Database

(U) The current national average from 2022 to 2026 for labor trafficking case clearance rates is approximately 32%, though the national trend has steadily declined over this period. By contrast, Utah averages 23% but has exhibited significant volatility. After plummeting to a low in 2024, Utah's clearance rate rebounded sharply, surpassing the declining national average in 2026 (Ref. Figure 13). However, note that 2026 data reflect year-to-date figures and is not yet complete.[34]

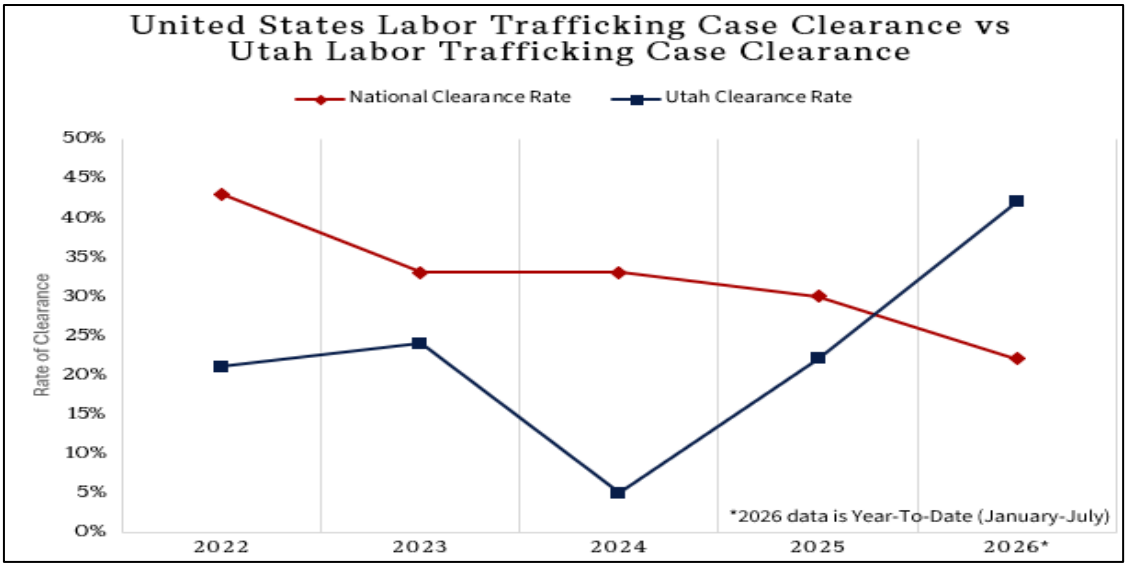


Figure 13: (U) US Labor Trafficking Case Clearance vs Utah Labor Trafficking Case Clearance from the FBI NIBRS Database

(U) Recruitment Tactics and Control Mechanisms

(U) In Utah, the primary recruitment tools are romantic manipulation ("boyfriend"/ "girlfriend" grooming schemes), false job promises, and exploiting existing substance addictions.[35, 36] Nationally, familial recruitment, romantic manipulation, and job offers/advertisements were the primary means of recruitment.[37] Methods of control include illicit substance withholding, threats of violence or immigration reporting, control over physical needs like money or shelter, and emotional manipulation.[38, 39]

- (U) Utah has seen a rise in debt-related human trafficking cases throughout 2025 and 2026.[40, 41]
- (U) Data from Polaris shows a rise in smuggling-related recruitment for both sex and labor trafficking.[42]
- (U) The majority of recruitment occurs on the internet through venues such as social media and dating websites/applications.[43]

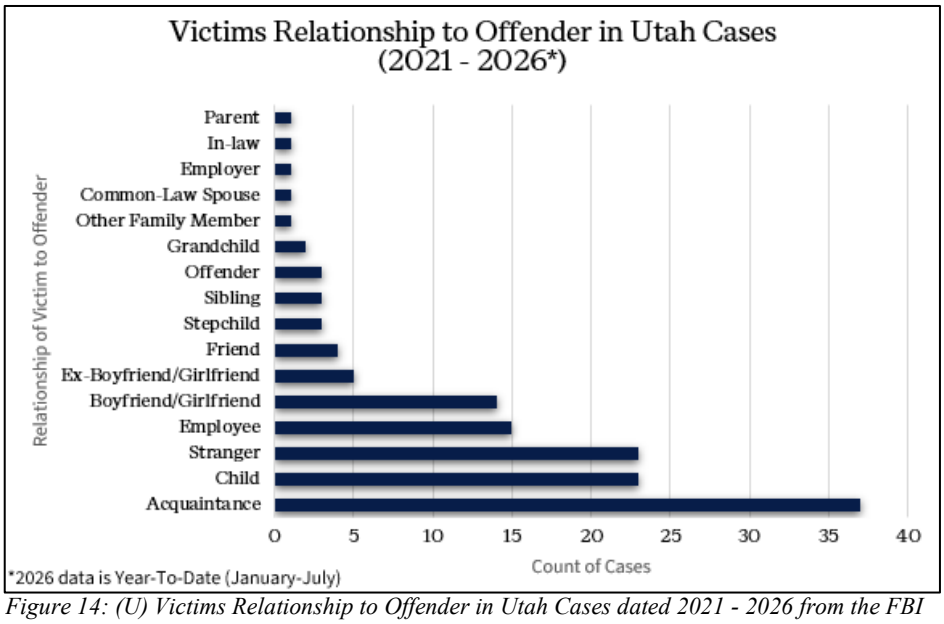


Figure 14: (U) Victims Relationship to Offender in Utah Cases dated 2021 - 2026 from the FBI NIBRS Database

(U) Victim and Suspect Demographics

(U) There is no single demographic that fits a human trafficker. Utah human trafficking perpetrators can be men, women, parents, romantic partners, business owners, employers, and foreign nationals according to reporting. Over the past five years, the majority of offenders have been between the ages of 30 – 39 and male (*Ref. Figure 15 and 16*).[44]

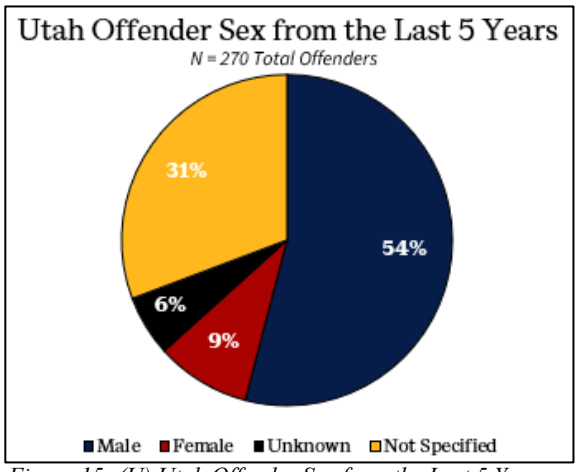


Figure 15: (U) Utah Offender Sex from the Last 5 Years from the FBI NIBRS Database



Figure 16: (U) Utah Offender Ages from the Last 5 Years from the FBI NIBIRS Database

(U) Victims of human trafficking, according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, were predominately adults and female for the nation and the state of Utah.[45, 46] However, when reviewing data from law enforcement reported cases in the NIBRS system, the majority of victims were between the ages of 10 – 19. Victims were also predominately female (*Ref. Figure 17 and 18)*.[47]

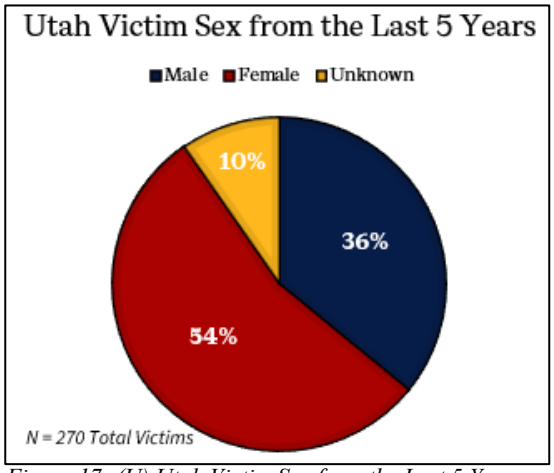


Figure 17: (U) Utah Victim Sex from the Last 5 Years from the FBI NIBRS Database

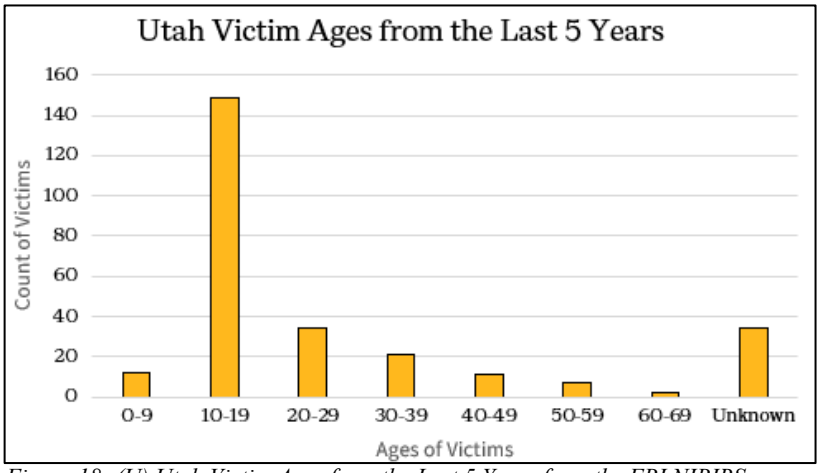


Figure 18: (U) Utah Victim Ages from the Last 5 Years from the FBI NIBIRS Database

(U) Intelligence Gaps and Limitations

(U) Many Utah task forces and agencies focusing on human trafficking face persistent challenges regarding shifting priorities, limited staffing, and budgetary constraints. These systemic issues often lead to an inability to proactively focus on the threat and a lack of dedicated resources or full-time personnel available to combat it.

(U) Human trafficking remains a severely under-reported crime, which obscures the true extent of the threat. Studies identify that only 14% to 18% of potential human trafficking cases are captured in official agency statistics. This massive gap is driven by the difficulty law enforcement faces in identifying trafficking

indicators, coupled with victims' fear of reporting their situations.[48, 49] Consequently, all human trafficking statistics in this report are based strictly on law enforcement reporting and tips made to the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

(U) Compounding these agency constraints is a geographic disparity in victim support. Agencies outside of Northern Utah report a significant lack of accessible resources for victims of human trafficking. Even within Northern Utah, specifically the Salt Lake Metropolitan Area, resources to support victims rely heavily on NGOs.

(U) Regarding operational intelligence, the commercial sex advertisement detection software currently utilized by the SIAC does not pull data from all online marketplaces. Due to these software blind spots, the SIAC is unable to accurately determine the exact volume and prevalence of commercial sex advertisements across Utah.

(U) Outlook

(U) The SIAC assesses the human trafficking threat to Utah will likely continue to be **substantial** in 2027. Unless systemic reporting gaps and enforcement hurdles are mitigated, trafficking networks are projected to further exploit these vulnerabilities, ensuring the threat remains substantial despite superficially stagnant official case numbers. This assessment is made with **high confidence**[f] based on open-source reporting from the Department of Justice, NGOs, and statistics from FBI NIBRS, BCI, and the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

(U) Over the last two years, commercial sex advertisement data has continued to rise both nationally and within Utah. Similarly, national reporting shows a steady five-year increase in overall human trafficking cases. In contrast, Utah’s 2025 state-reported cases remained consistent with its five-year average, excluding reports to federal agencies. However, these figures represent only a rough estimate of the crime being committed. With studies indicating that only 14% to 18% of potential cases are captured by official agencies, the true footprint of human trafficking in Utah is significantly larger than current reporting suggests. Furthermore, Utah's clearance rates for both sex (21%) and labor (23%) trafficking remain notably below national averages, underscoring ongoing enforcement challenges. Because the actual volume of exploitation is masked by low reporting and hindered by below-average clearance rates, organized human trafficking operations are projected to steadily outpace local enforcement capacities in the near term.

(U) Looking ahead, trafficking networks will likely become increasingly sophisticated and organized. Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) continue to leverage Utah's strategic interstate corridors to facilitate human smuggling and enforce highly profitable debt-bondage schemes. Additionally, traffickers are known to exploit legitimate administrative systems, such as utilizing clandestine "diploma mills" to legitimize IMBs, and employ remote management tactics, including directing Utah-based commercial sex workers from out of state.

(U) Along with leveraging victims' fear of reporting, both individual traffickers and larger networks consistently demonstrate the ability to rapidly adapt to enforcement pressures. They will continue to obfuscate their operations from law enforcement by migrating to alternative online marketplaces outside of current software detection capabilities, as well as utilizing encrypted communication and dating applications. Combating this highly adaptable threat is further complicated by persistent intelligence gaps, statewide budgetary and staffing constraints, and a geographic disparity in victim resources outside of Northern Utah. This continuous evasion and systemic friction allow human trafficking to persist, ultimately inflicting profound physical, emotional, and economic damage on primary victims and their direct affiliates across the state.

[f] Refer to Appendix B for confidence in sources supporting assessments and judgments.

(U) Contact Information

(U//FOUO) Any questions related to this intelligence bulletin should be directed to the SIAC by calling 801-965-3838 or emailing SIAC@utah.gov.

(U) Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood or Probability

Almost no chance	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly even chance	Likely	Very likely	Almost certain(ly)
01-05%	05-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

(U) Appendix B: Confidence Intervals Regarding Analytic Judgments

(U//FOUO) Confidence levels are assigned to judgements and sources in order to inform individuals the level of credibility assigned to the information. Typically, confidence levels are assigned to information received from sources and the analyst's level of confidence in the accuracy of that information based on their experience and other reporting that validates the source's reporting. Confidence levels are also assigned to threat analysis/outlook sections of reports to identify the analyst's level of confidence in their analysis of the identified situation based on the available information.

- **High Confidence** – indicates the judgement/analysis is based on high-quality information from multiple sources or from a single, highly reliable source, and the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgement.
- **Medium Confidence** – indicates the judgement/analysis is credibly sourced and plausible but can be interpreted in various ways or is not sufficient to warrant a higher level of confidence.
- **Low Confidence** – indicates the judgement/analysis is based on information that has questionable credibility or plausibility, the information is too fragmented to make solid analytical inferences, or sources of information are questionable/unreliable.

(U) Appendix C: Threat Assessment Methodology

(U) Domain Management is the systematic process by which the SIAC develops and improves the strategic, contextual, and domain awareness of threat issues. The Domain Analytic Methodology serves as the foundation for Domain Intelligence Assessments and the State Threat Assessment to address threat issues in Utah.

- Step 1: Research relating to the overall domain intelligence question.
- Step 2: Framework questions to address the overall domain intelligence question, *What is the currently observed and potential impact of the threat issue in Utah?* Framework questions address threat actors, threat activities, threat targets, facilitation platforms, level of understanding, and evolution of the threat.
- Step 3: Answering the overall domain intelligence question includes determining the observed and potential impact of the threat to Utah using the following matrix.

(U) Impact Level Characterization

What impact is the threat issue currently having on the AOR based on an assessment of the observed harm to the domain's safety, economy, government operation, US national security, or trust in law enforcement over the last 6-12 months? What impact could the threat issue have on the AOR over the next 12-24 months, based on an assessment of the potential harm to the domain's safety, economy, government operation, US national security, or trust in law enforcement?

	Severe	Substantial	Limited	Unobserved/Not Present
Effect – Results or consequences of events that followed	Affects beyond the intended target and directly affiliated parties, with collateral implications	Affects the intended target and directly affiliated parties	Affects only the intended target	If the fusion center or other elements have not observed the threat issue in the AOR due to a lack of intelligence, the threat is characterized as **UNOBSERVED**. If the FC or Other Elements have sufficient intelligence to indicate the threat is not present in the AOR, the threat is characterized as **Not Present**.
Reach – the scope or extension of the Impact	Causing widespread harm affecting the majority of the US, and/or on a national or international scale	Causing harm on a regional scale or to specific subgroups, including individuals or small groups that may reside outside the AOR	Causing harm on a local scale, or no harm	
Damage – physical harm or injury, including value or loss	Large-scale economic loss, often in the billions of dollars, OR widespread fear or psychological/physical trauma	Significant economic loss, often in the millions of dollars, OR fear or psychological/ physical trauma to specific groups	Minimal financial loss to individuals/small group, OR fear limited to an individual victim/organization	

(U) Appendix D: Foundational Definitions and Typologies

- **Human Trafficking (General):** Exploiting men, women, or children for the purposes of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation through force, fraud, or coercion.
- **Sex Trafficking:** The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion (with coercion being legally irrelevant if the victim is a minor under 18).
- **Labor Trafficking (Involuntary Servitude):** The recruitment, harboring, transportation, or provision of a person into forced labor, peonage, or slavery through force, fraud, or coercion.
- **Debt Bondage:** A primary coercive mechanism where traffickers manipulate smuggling fees, forcing victims to perform labor or commercial sex to pay off highly inflated, fabricated travel debts.
- **Human Smuggling vs. Human Trafficking:** Smuggling is a voluntary, transaction-based crime against U.S. immigration laws involving illegal transport across a border. Trafficking is an ongoing, coercive crime against a person involving exploitation, regardless of whether a border was crossed.

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Department *of* Public Safety
Statewide Information *and* Analysis Center

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Handling Human Trafficking During Large Events

(U) UTIP treats special events as temporary increases of risk for human trafficking, mobility, public reporting, and investigative complexity. However, not all major events cause an increase in human trafficking. Data analyzing commerical sex advertisements during large events in Utah from 2023 - 2025 showed no significant increase in posting volume. This aligns with research from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) that examined 33 public events and found no statistically significant changes in online commercial sex advertising.

Best Practices for Operational Planning and Execution During Special Events	
Pre-Event	Establish written operational plans before the event that include baseline intelligence from weeks preceding the event; establishing 24-hour contact procedures; and geographic identification for hotels, transportation hubs, temporary labor sites, entertainment districts, informal lodging, and event-related workplaces.
During the Event	UTIP uses trained victim specialists during field contacts and enforcement procedures; separates potential victims from suspected traffickers immediately; maintains interpreter coverage throughout operational hours; and keeps victim-service capacity aligned with enforcement activity.
Post Event	Agencies maintain victim contact, coordinating with other jurisdictions as required, and continue the human trafficking investigations that began during the event.

(U) Training for Human Trafficking

(U) UTIP's Tier System

All Agency Personnel:

Be aware of basic definitions, common indicators, referreral procedures, and the difference between trafficking and smuggling.

Investigators:

Receive scenario-based instruction on human trafficking investigations, going over trauma-informed interviewing, labor-trafficking investigations, financial investigations, electronic investigations, immigration related coercion and corroboration, and victim safety planning.

Frontliners (i.e. Patrol Officers):

Practice separating involved parties, conducting preliminary screenings. and identifying urgent needs.

Department *of* Public Safety
Statewide Information *and* Analysis Center

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations
28 September 2026

(U) Summary

(U) Law enforcement investigations into human trafficking, both globally and across Utah, place significant emphasis on victim safety and rapport building. Utah task forces, including the Utah Trafficking in Persons Task Force (UTIP) and Washington County Gang and Human Trafficking Task Force, integrate trauma-informed care across routine casework and operations stemming from special events. Investigators deliberately pursue victim-independent evidence, as victims are often unwilling to speak after the initial interview. While UTIP treats special events as high-risk environments requiring targeted enforcement, any resulting cases follow the standard investigative path once the event concludes. To support these efforts, UTIP recommends a tiered training model tailored to personnel roles. This approach ensures all staff possess basic trafficking awareness, equips frontline officers with preliminary screening skills, and provides investigators with advanced, scenario-based instruction alongside prosecutors. Ultimately, because law enforcement training and procedures for human trafficking investigations are not widely available through open-source channels, determining universal best practices remains a significant intelligence gap.

(U) Human Trafficking Investigations Best Practices and Training

	Operational Best Practices
Victim Care & Identification Rapport Building & Stabilization: Build trust using open-ended questions, avoid accusatory phrasing (e.g., “Why didn’t you leave”), document exact victim phrasing regarding threats, explain officer roles and limits of confidentiality.	• Immediately separate potential victims from employers, companions, and controllers prior to substantive questioning. • Ulilize qualified interpreters who are independent of the emploter, family, or suspected trafficking organization. • Address immmediate safety, medical care, housing, food, transportation, communication, and childcare before expecting a detailed statement. • Explain the officer’s role, what will happen next, and any limits on confidentiality. • Avoid promises concerning immigration relief, immunity, compensation, or a particular charging outcome. • Use recognized trafficking-screening process covering recruitment, work conditions, payment, movement, identification documents, threats, debts, housing, medical care, and the person’s ability to leave. • Screen for both labor and sex trafficking. • For minors, immediately follow child-protection, mandatory-reporting, forensic-interview, and guardian-notification procedures, unless a parent or guardian may be involved in the explotiation.
Victim-Independent Evidence Corroborative Proof: Build cases capable of conviction independently of ongoing victim participation or courtroom testimony.	• Employment, payroll, timekeeping, tax, and contractor needs. • Bank records, payment applications, checks, money transfers, and cash withdrawals. • Recruitment advertisements, job offers, contracts, and communications. • Text messages, social-media accounts, job offers, contracts, and communications. • Housing arrangements, transportaiton records, surveillance video, access-control records, and hotel records. • Immigration and identifcation documents, including evidence that documents were withheld or misused.

Department of Public Safety
Statewide Information and Analysis Center

Intelligence Note

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations
28 September 2026

(U) Summary

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(U) Human Trafficking Investigations Best Practices and Training

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Investigating Human Trafficking

(U) Utah law enforcement investigations for human trafficking include two separate parts: the victim and the evidence. Often victims view their trafficker as an employer, partner, family member, protector, or source of housing and financial support. This, in turn, makes victims fearful of retaliation, deportation, arrest, homelessness, or losing access to children leading to prevention of disclosure or unwillingness to speak to law enforcement after the initial interview. To ensure successful investigations, law enforcement also focuses on evidence separate from the victim.[1]

(U) The Utah Attorney General's Office Utah Trafficking in Persons Task Force (UTIP) and the Washington County Gang and Human Trafficking Task Force initial response and victim identification best practices include:

- Separating the potential victim from employers, controllers, companions, and suspected traffickers before asking substantive questions.[2, 3]
- Use of qualified interpreters who are independent of the employer, family, or suspected trafficking organization.[4]
- Addressing immediate safety, medical care, housing, food, transportation, communication, and childcare before expecting a detailed statement.[5]
- Explaining the officer's role, what will happen next, and any limits on confidentiality.[6]
- Avoiding promises concerning immigration relief, immunity, compensation, or a particular charging outcome.[7, 8]

This report addresses DHS HSEC or IE-HIPF codes: HSEC-3
This report addresses SIAC Standing Information Requirements: UTSIAC-3
Artificial Intelligence tools were used to assist in the review of this report. All final outputs are human verified for accuracy and reliability.

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- Using a recognized trafficking-screening process covering recruitment, work conditions, payment, movement, identification documents, threats, debts, housing, medical care, and the person's ability to leave.[9]
- Screening for both labor and sex trafficking.[10]
- For minors, immediately follow child-protection, mandatory-reporting, forensic-interview, and guardian-notification procedures, unless a parent or guardian may be involved in the exploitation.[11]

(U) Separate from victims, UTIP pursues evidence that is not dependent on the victim's cooperation. Examples of evidence that is not dependent on victim's cooperations include, but are not limited to:

- Employment, payroll, timekeeping, tax, and contractor records.[12]
- Bank records, payment applications, checks, money transfers, and cash withdrawals.[13]
- Recruitment advertisements, job offers, contracts, and communications.[14]
- Text messages, social-media accounts, call records, location information, and electronic devices.[15]
- Housing arrangements, transportation records, surveillance video, access-control records, and hotel records.[16]
- Immigration and identification documents, including evidence that documents were withheld or misused.[17]

(U) The U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons published a report in 2023 identifying promising practices used by countries and states to combat human trafficking. The report identifies "promising practices" as one that is based on evidence or sound programming principles, is well-executed, meets reasonable goals, reaches an appropriate target audience, and demonstrates potential for sustainability.[18] A few of the promising practices from this report include:

- Embedding prosecutors who specialize in human trafficking with task forces to advance the odds of successful convictions.[19]
- Embedding consultants who specialize in human trafficking with task forces.[20]

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Working with Human Trafficking Victims

(U) Law enforcement agencies across the United States, other countries, and national institutes place a lot of emphasis on creating a safe, trauma-informed space for victims. Many agencies focus on ensuring the victims' immediate needs, such as housing and food, are taken care of first. This effort to ensure victim safety and comfortability can help build rapport between law enforcement and victims, potentially allowing them to feel safer in sharing their story. All agencies and institute reports state that victims should be approached through the lens of trauma-informed care. UTIP and the Washington County Gang and Human Trafficking Task Force use rapport-based, trauma-informed, and victim-pacing techniques.[21, 22, 23]

(U) UTIP and Washington County Gang and Human Trafficking Task Force best practices for victim interviews include:

- Beginning with safety and rapport building rather than demanding a complete chronological account.[24, 25]
- Using open-ended questions before specific or confirmatory questions.[26]
- Avoiding accusatory language such as, "Why didn't you leave?" or "Why did you agree to go?"[27]
- Documenting the victim's exact words when describing threats, debts, working conditions, control, isolation, document confiscation, or fear.[28]
    - Focus on victims telling their story. Often victims do not understand that they have been coerced, defrauded, or forced. Law enforcement must be prepared to find the elements of the crime in the story.[29]
- Asking what the victim believed would happen if the person refused to work, left, reported the conduct, or failed to meet a demand.[30]

- Distinguishing actual freedom from theoretical freedom. A person may appear able to leave but reasonably believe that leaving will lead to violence, deportation, financial ruin, homelessness, harm to relatives, or arrest.[31]

(U) In addition to investigative strategies, the aforementioned U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons report in 2023 highlights international efforts focused specifically on victim support and public awareness. A few of these practices include:

- Installing connectivity equipment in sectors that are most vulnerable to human trafficking, such as the fishing sector in Thailand, on vehicles and persons which can be used by employees in these sectors. This equipment is then supported by a single hub which responds to communications from employees and provides information on workers' rights. In Thailand, this practice has seen an increase in report information and connectivity with families as well as increased pathways for more legal employment allowing for more avenues to prevent human trafficking.[32]
- Creating a digital platform to help migrant workers navigate the legal process to work in a country. The application in this practice gives migrants the ability to store their work documents on their phone, facilitating access to legal protection and services.[33]
- Some countries provide paralegal assistance to human trafficking victims separate from law enforcement personnel and state or federal legal assistants.[34]

(U) Furthermore, the United Kingdom (including Wales) utilizes what is known as the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). This is a framework designed to safeguard potential victims while investigations are conducted. This framework is separate from law enforcement and protects potential victims from deportation or prosecution related to their exploitation. Only first responders can refer to the NRM and once the agency logs the referral, they evaluate the evidence based on the low evidentiary threshold "I suspect but cannot prove". Once referral is approved, the victim goes into a "reflection and recovery" period where they cannot be deported or prosecuted. In Wales, the Salvation Army provides secure accommodation, legal aid, medical assistance, and counseling. Once the recovery window is over the agency uses law enforcement evidence to determine if the probable victim is officially recognized as a victim. Reflection and recovery are a minimum of 30 days but lasts until the final decision by the agency using law enforcement evidence.[35, 36]

(U) Law Enforcement Best Practices for Handling Human Trafficking During Large Events

(U) UTIP treats special events as temporary increases of risk for human trafficking, mobility, public reporting, and investigative complexity.[37] However, not all major events cause an increase in human trafficking. Data analyzing commercial sex advertisements during large events in Utah from 2023 – 2025 showed no significant increase in posting volume.[38] This aligns with research from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) that examined 33 public events and found no statistically significant changes in online commercial sex advertising.[39]

(U) UTIP's best practices for operational planning and execution during special events include:

- Pre-Event: Establishing written operational plans before the event that include baseline intelligence from weeks preceding the event; establishing 24-hour contact procedures; and geographic identification for hotels, transportation hubs, temporary labor sites, entertainment districts, informal lodging, and event-related workplaces.[40]
- During the Event: UTIP uses trained victim specialists during field contacts and enforcement procedures; separates potential victims from suspected traffickers immediately; maintains interpreter coverage throughout operational hours; and keeps victim-service capacity aligned with enforcement activity.[41]
- Post-Event: Agencies maintain victim contact, coordinating with other jurisdictions as required, and continue the human trafficking investigations that began during the event.[42]

(U) Similarly, FBI operations commonly embed victim specialists and specially trained forensic interviewers with operational teams so that support begins when victims are located, rather than after the event ends.[43]

(U) Training for Human Trafficking

(U) According to UTIP, best practices for law enforcement training include a tiered system depending on their position within the agency and their level of interaction with these cases.[44]

- All agency personnel should be aware of basic definitions, common indicators, referral procedures, and the difference between trafficking and smuggling.[45]
- Frontliners, such as patrol officers, should practice separating involved parties, conducting preliminary screenings, and identifying urgent needs.[46]
- Investigators should receive scenario-based instruction on human trafficking investigations going over trauma-informed interviewing, labor-trafficking investigations, financial investigations, electronic investigations, immigration related coercion and corroboration, and victim safety planning.[47]

(U) Additionally, investigators and prosecutors should participate in joint training exercises on human trafficking to strengthen case development and successful prosecutions.[48]

(U) Intelligence Gaps

(U) Because law enforcement training and procedures for human trafficking investigations are not widely available through open-source channels, determining universal best practices remains a significant intelligence gap. Future policy or legislative efforts should support better unclassified information sharing mechanisms across jurisdictions to establish state standards.

(U) Contact Information

(U//FOUO) For additional information or questions about this product, please contact the SIAC at siac@utah.gov.

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[11] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[12] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[13] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[14] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[15] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[16] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[17] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
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[21] (U) National Institute of Justice | 20 NOV 2024 | A Practical Guide to Interviewing Potential Human Trafficking Victims | https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/practical-guide-interviewing-potential-human-trafficking-victims?utm_source=chatgpt.com, Access 17 SEP 2026 | The NIJ is the research, evaluation, and technology agency for the U.S. Department of Justice.
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[23] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012143 | 17 SEP 2026 | (U) | Washington County Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[24] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012143 | 17 SEP 2026 | (U) | Washington County Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
[25] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
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[27] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.
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[41] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.

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[43] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.

[44] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.

[45] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.

[46] (U) | SIAC | 2026-0012144 | 16 SEP 2026 | (U) | UTIP Best Practices for Human Trafficking Investigations | Extracted information classification is U | Overall document classification is U.

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