



MEDIA REPORTING ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

From traditional news outlets to social media, a growing movement is exposing human trafficking as a concern both from a human rights and a national security perspective.

Just 15 years ago, human trafficking was an under-reported and often misrepresented issue and some reporting sensationalized the problem or even misinformed the public. In the last few years, a significant shift has occurred in the media's reporting of human trafficking, from dramatic exposés to in-depth original research and agenda-setting public-interest reporting. These media reports have helped change the way the public looks at human trafficking—from a crime that happens to "others" to one that has an impact on people's everyday lives, in nearly every community and region of the world.

Some of the highlights and exemplary reporting in the last few years include:

- **2009, *Des Moines Register*.** A Register investigation in 2009 led to the release of dozens of men with intellectual disabilities, who were living in squalor, abused, and forced to work for as little as 41 cents per hour processing turkeys in a plant in Atalissa, Iowa. After four years of court battles with the company, the men won a \$240 million jury verdict, which was subsequently reduced to \$50,000 per person.
- **2010, *CNN Freedom Project*.** The network originally committed to a one-year project dedicated to raising awareness about modern slavery around the world. This year, the network celebrates seven years of the "Freedom Project," which has covered more than 600 investigative stories on human trafficking to date.
- **2011, *Al Jazeera English*.** The network started a ground-breaking series, "Slavery: A 21st Century Evil," highlighting modern slavery around the world.
- **2012, *National Public Radio*.** A two-part series on Morning Edition exposed forced labor in the seafood sector and its link to American dinner tables.
- **2014, *the Guardian*.** A six-month investigative series, "Modern-day Slavery in Focus," revealed direct links between the men forced to labor on fishing boats and in the production of seafood sold by major retailers throughout the world.
- **2014, *Los Angeles Times*.** The four-part investigative series, "Product of Mexico," revealed the harsh living conditions and exploitative situations endured by migrant farmworkers in Mexico who supplied significant amounts of agricultural produce to the United States.
- **2015, *New York Times*.** A seven-part series, "The Outlaw Ocean," which took two years to investigate, provided a comprehensive look at the overall lawlessness at sea and chronicled a diversity of crimes, including forced labor on fishing boats.
- **2015, *Capital News Service*.** Students from the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland produced a six-part investigative series, "The Brothel Next Door: Human Trafficking in Maryland," that examined more than three-dozen state and federal human trafficking cases from 2005 to 2015, and submitted 70 public records requests for reports on forced labor and sex trafficking cases.
- **2016 *Associated Press*.** The 18-month investigative story, "Seafood from Slaves," led to the release of more than 2,000 trafficking victims, traced the seafood they caught to supermarkets and pet food providers across the United States, and led to the jailing of perpetrators, congressional hearings, and the introduction of new laws.

Media play an enormous role in shaping perceptions and guiding the public conversation about human trafficking. Human trafficking schemes are constantly evolving, and the media's vigilance helps keep the public informed and engaged. As media pursues more research and investigative work on the issue, the public will better understand how the crime works, how to identify and help trafficking victims, and ultimately, what can be done to prevent the crime from happening.