

Potential Trafficking Indicators | Polaris Project
Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking –
Potential Indicators/Red Flags to Keep in Mind

The following is a list of suggested potential indicators or red flags to keep in mind that may be signs of a situation of or a victim of human trafficking. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. In addition, each indicator taken individually may not imply a trafficking situation. Indicators listed are intended only as potential red flags to keep in mind that, taken with other indicators, may cumulatively paint a larger picture of human trafficking. Lastly, many of these indicators apply to victims of both transnational and internal trafficking, and many may apply to situations of both sex and labor trafficking.

Potential Indicators include individuals who:

- Have few or no personal possessions
- Travel through town frequently
- Have few or no personal financial records
- Ask about their whereabouts and/or do not know what city they are in
- Are not in control of their own identification documents (ID or passport)
- Owe a large debt and are not able to pay it off
- Have their communication restricted or controlled. They may not be allowed to speak for themselves, a third party may insist on translating, or they may seem watched or followed.
- Have an attorney representing them that they don't seem to know or didn't seem to agree to representation
- Have injuries, signs of physical abuse, and/or signs of torture
- Have signs of malnourishment
- Have been “branded” by a trafficker with the trafficker’s name
- Lack the freedom to leave working or living conditions
- Exhibit behaviors including fear, anxiety, depression, submission, tension, and/or nervousness
- Are unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips in their work environment
- Are not in control of their own money
- Work excessively long and unusual hours
- Are not allowed breaks during work
- Exhibit a lack of health care for a prolonged period of time
- Are under 18 and are providing commercial sex – de facto
- Live in locations with peculiar security including barbed wire, guarded compounds, bars on outside of windows, or opaque boarded-up windows
- Claim to be “just visiting” an area but are unable to articulate where they are staying or to remember addresses
- Have numerous inconsistencies in their story
- Exhibit unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up “law enforcement”
- Are performing odd tasks at odd hours (e.g., washing a car at 10pm at night in the cold)
- Avoid eye contact
- Exhibit “hyper-vigilance” or paranoid behavior
- Have a loss of sense of time or space