

RISK FACTORS FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

February 2024





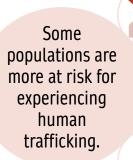
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PURPOSE & KEY TAKEAWAYS

The purpose of this report is to summarize risk factors for human trafficking and describe those populations in Franklin County, Ohio. Understanding populations at risk for human trafficking may increase resource and service allocation to those populations.



Traffickers may target youth who are homeless or who have run away, as well as youth experiencing abuse or neglect.

Community members experiencing mental health issues and substance use disorder are more at risk. This is also true for residents experiencing economic instability, homelessness, and other difficulties meeting their basic needs.

Residents who have recently migrated or relocated are at risk. This is especially true for those who are seasonal or undocumented workers, and recently resettled refugees.



Signals received from Franklin County by the National Human trafficking hotline have increased.

Non-citizen immigrants and



as many overdose deaths were observed in 2021 compared to 2011.



youth experienced homelessness in Franklin County at some point between 2018 to 2022.

There were **195k** residents living in **poverty** in 2022. Groups more likely to be living in poverty may be at higher risk of human trafficking due to economic instability.

90 New Americans are living in

Franklin County.

- 25% of Black/African American residents
- 23% of Hispanic/Latino residents
- 21% of residents who are children
- OVERTY **19%** of immigrant/New American residents



Violence against women and girls is a component of human trafficking. More women and girls died by homicide in 2021 than the previous 10 years. From 2018 to 2022, 10,703 emergency department and urgent care visits were recorded among female residents of Franklin County for violent traumatic injuries, many of which were due to assault, sexual assault, and domestic violence.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS & RESOURCES

National Human Trafficking Hotline

humantraffickinghotline.org/en | (888) 373-7888 | help@humantraffickinghotline.org

Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS) Family Care Program ethiotss.org/family-care-program | (614) 252-5362

Ohio Asian American Health Coalition <u>https://oahcoalition.org/</u> | (614) 419-5751 | <u>ohioasianamericanhealthco@gmail.com</u>

Freedom a la Cart freedomalacart.org/ | (614) 992-3252 | info@freedomalacart.org

Central Ohio Research and Restore Coalition

swo.salvationarmy.org/reachandrestore/ | (614) 437-2149

Gracehaven

https://gracehaven.me/ | (614) 665-0665 | info@gracehaven.me

US Together ustogether.us/columbus-office | (614) 437-9941

Sanctuary Night <u>sanctuarynight.com/</u> (614) 349-1154 | <u>office@sanctuarynight.com</u>

Alianza 614 (Alliance 614)

alianza614.org/ | (614) 500-2123

Out of Darkness

outofdarknesscolumbusoh.org/ | (614) 636-1521 | columbusoh@outofdarkness.org

Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force

ocjs.ohio.gov/anti-human-trafficking/overview | (614) 752-4022

Ohio Attorney General Human Trafficking Initiative

ohioattorneygeneral.gov/ | HTI@ohioattorneygeneral.gov

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

In Franklin County from 2017-2021, the National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 566 total trafficking situations and 868 total likely human trafficking victims through 634 signals, which include calls, texts, emails, web chats, and online reports. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, "human trafficking occurs when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to control another person for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or soliciting labor or services against [their] will."¹ Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline is one picture of human trafficking occurring in Franklin County but does not capture it all.

In Franklin County, **566 cases** and **868 likely victims** of human trafficking were identified from 2017-2021.

National Human Trafficking Hotline, Franklin County, 2017-2021



There are 2 common types of human trafficking: sex trafficking and forced labor trafficking. In Franklin County from 2017-2021, 75% of trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline were sex trafficking while 8% were labor trafficking, 4% were both, and 14% were other situations or unknown.¹ The most common venues for sex trafficking were residence-based, hotel/motel-based, and street-based commercial sex.¹ The most common venues for labor trafficking were traveling sales, domestic work, begging rings, and restaurant/food service.¹

Sex trafficking is more commonly reported than **labor trafficking** in Franklin County.

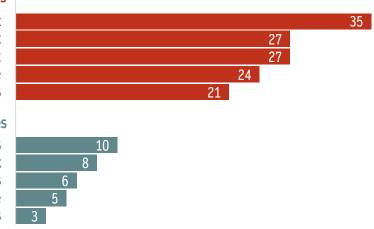
National Human Trafficking Hotline Total Victims by Top Venues/Industries, Franklin County, 2017-2021

Top Sex Trafficking Venues/Industries

Residence-Based Commercial Sex Hotel/Motel-Based Commercial Sex Street-Based Commercial Sex Personal Sexual Servitude Illicit Massage/Spa Business

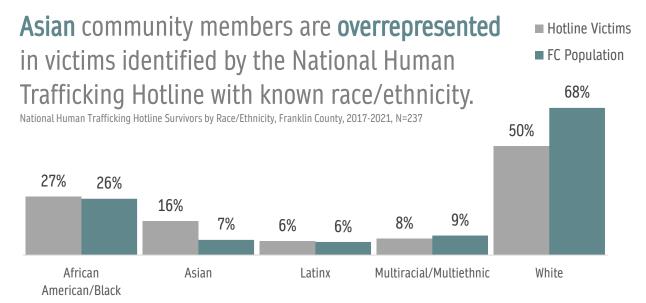
Top Labor Trafficking Venues/Industries

Traveling Sales Crews Domestic Work Begging Rings Restaurant/Food Service Illicit Activities



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY CONT.

According to data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, not all groups experience human trafficking similarly in Franklin County. Of the over 200 victims identified in Franklin County with known race/ethnicity, Black/African/African American and Asian populations are overrepresented compared to the Franklin County population.¹ Moreover, 68% of Franklin County victims with known age were children when they entered into exploitation.¹ Of over 800 victims in Franklin County with known gender, 89% were female.¹



In 2021, the National Human Trafficking Hotline received 319 total substantive signals in Franklin County.¹ Substantive signals are signals (calls, texts, emails, web chats, and online reports) that involve actionable details that meet the mandated reporting threshold. In the same year, 78 human trafficking cases involving 100 victims were identified.¹ Many individuals who are trafficked are forced into exchanging sex for money,¹ which is illegal in Ohio. In Franklin County, an estimated 1,200 women are arrested each year for solicitation.²

The number of substantive signals received from Franklin County have increased but the number of identified trafficking situations have decreased. This could indicate an increase in awareness. Franklin County Signals Received & Situations Identified by Nat 123 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021



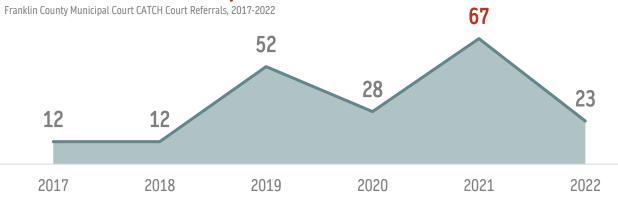
FRANKLIN COUNTY CATCH COURT

Franklin County's Creating Autonomy Through Collaborative Healing (CATCH) Court is a specialized list of legal cases (docket) through the Franklin County Municipal Court that is dedicated to breaking the cycle of abuse for victims of human trafficking. More specifically, it is a court-supervised justice diversion program that offers programming as an alternative to incarceration for solicitation defendants, or those who have exchanged sexual acts for payment or services, potentially through sexual exploitation. Since 2007, CATCH Court has enrolled more than 350 community members and graduated 69 participants.² From 2017 through 2022, the average age of CATCH Court referrals was 34 years, with only 15 referrals under the age of 25 years.² The most common substances used by those referred were fentanyl, heroin, and cocaine.²

Among CATCH Court participants:²



CATCH Court referrals **peaked** in 2021.



LEADING RISK FACTORS FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The top 5 risk factors for human trafficking in the United States are recent migration or relocation, substance use, runaway and homeless youth, mental health concerns, and involvement with the child welfare system.⁴



Additional risk factors include:

- Experiencing poverty or homelessness
- History of abuse or neglect
- Substance abuse and untreated mental health issues
- Migrant and seasonal work, recently resettled refugee status, undocumented work status, and other unauthorized work (e.g., visitor or student visa)
- Working in hazardous or dangerous industries
- Familial dependence on remittances (cash or goods sent back to the family for support)



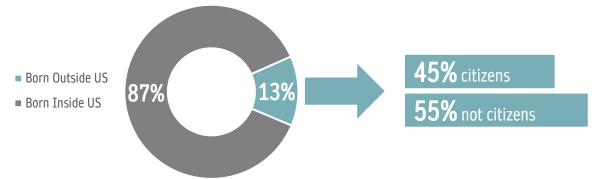
RECENT MIGRATION OR RELOCATION

Recent migration or relocation and citizenship status can increase the risk for human trafficking due to financial hardship, employment barriers, and fear of law enforcement and deportation.^{5,6,7} Moreover, "traffickers and abusers often use a lack of immigration status to exploit and control victims."⁵ Victims may even be lured by traffickers with false promises of jobs or better lives.⁷ Recently resettled refugees and community members whose families depend on remittances may be particularly at risk. Furthermore, refugees and asylum seekers might have experienced trafficking during their immigration journeys or while living in refugee camps before settling.

In 2022, 166,436 Franklin County residents had been born outside of the United States, accounting for 13% of the total population.⁸ Of those, 52% (86,821) entered the US in 2010 or later and 55% (90,838) did not have citizenship status.⁸ Among residents born outside the US, most were born in Asia (34%), Africa (34%), and Latin America (24%).⁸ Overall, 70% of residents born outside the US speak a language other than English at home and 50% speak English "less than very well."⁸ Despite 33% of non-citizen residents having a Bachelor's degree or graduate degree, an estimated 22% are living below the federal poverty line.⁸ In 2019, an estimated 29,000 unauthorized (undocumented) community members lived in Franklin County.⁹

Of the **166,436** Franklin County residents born outside of the US, **more than half** were **not citizens**. Non-citizen community members can be more at risk of human trafficking due to fear of deportation.

Place of Birth and Citizenship Status Among Franklin County Residents, 2022



Human trafficking organizations have suggested potential interventions to protect immigrant and New American community members from experiencing human trafficking. Examples include increasing awareness of immigration benefits for victims and survivors of trafficking,⁵ increased cultural competency and language availability in educational and informational resources,^{5,7} and enforcement of existing labor and employment protections.⁷

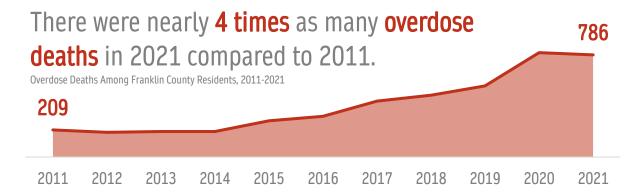


SUBSTANCE USE

Many Franklin County community members use substances and suffer from substance use disorder, a disease of the brain that leads to the inability to control the use of substances like drugs and alcohol.¹⁰ From 2016 to 2018 among Franklin County residents ages 12 years and older, an estimated 12% used illicit drugs in the past month and 27% binge drank alcohol in the past month.¹¹ During the same period, about 8% of residents 12 years or older experienced substance use disorder in the past year.¹¹ The number of Franklin County residents that died due to overdose nearly quadrupled between 2011 and 2021.¹² In 2022, there were 3,870 emergency department visits for suspected overdose.¹³ Overdoses affect all sociodemographic groups, but overdose death rates are:¹²

- Higher among men than women.
- Higher among Black/African American residents than white residents.

While Black women make up a smaller proportion of overdose deaths compared to Black men, Black women have seen the largest increase in the number of overdose deaths in recent years.¹² Between 2012 and 2021, the count of overdose deaths in this population increased by 1100%, while the count of overdose deaths among Black men increased by nearly 900%.¹² If trends continue, Black women may become a priority population for overdose death prevention.



Among Franklin County CATCH Court referrals over the past 5 years, 100% were found to be using illicit substances.² Traffickers may coerce individuals into sex or labor trafficking through the exploitation of existing substance use disorders by traffickers or the introduction of drugs to gain control.^{14,15} Furthermore, the relationship between substance use disorder and human trafficking can be cyclical.¹⁴ Largely due to stigma and misunderstanding, substance use disorder and sex trafficking victimization can create difficulties with:¹⁶

- Identifying victims of trafficking
- Providing services for victims
- Providing appropriate criminal justice responses to sex trafficking



RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

Runaway and homeless youth are at higher risk for experiencing human trafficking because they are socially vulnerable. According to the National Network for Youth, 1 in 5 runaway and homeless youth is a victim of human trafficking.¹⁷ Some youth experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of trafficking, including those who lack basic needs, experience early trauma, identify as LGBTQ+, spend time in foster care, and more.^{17,18} Another possible risk factor is youth who run away from foster care.¹⁹ Ultimately, "youth experiencing homelessness who have also been victims of sex trafficking are more likely to have mental health and substance use issues."¹⁸ Targeted early intervention and outreach may be important for reaching this population.

An estimated **8,691 youth** experienced homelessness in Franklin County at some point from 2018 to 2022. This amounts to over **100 school buses** full of children.

In 2021, 1 in 4 (26%) Ohio victims and survivors contacted through the National Human Trafficking hotline were minors.¹ Furthermore, over half (68%) of Franklin County victims with known age were minors when they were first trafficked.¹ In Franklin County, 3,038 children were reported missing in 2022, which was nearly 300 more children than the prior year.²⁰ More children were reported missing in Franklin County than any other Ohio county.²⁰ In Ohio, the majority of missing children's cases were among girls, and 99% of the cases with specified circumstances were considered runaways.²⁰ The Ohio Missing Persons Unit collaborates with multiple organizations to locate missing children, including the Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force.

At one point in time in 2023, an estimated 2,337 community members were experiencing sheltered, transitional, or unsheltered homelessness in Franklin County.²¹ The Community Shelter board reports 15,459 youth individuals served from 2018 to 2022, 8,691 of whom experienced homelessness.²² This amounts to over 100 school buses full of children. Furthermore, 3,689 individuals aged 0 to 17 entered homeless system programs in 2022.²² These programs include emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, street outreach, transitional housing, veteran supportive housing, and youth shelter programs.²² Of these individuals, 48% were girls, 20% had a disability, 10% were uninsured, 85% were Black or multiracial, and 7% were Hispanic.²² Among the more than 3,500 youth entries, under 300 entered youth shelters while the remainder entered other programs.²²



MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Mental health concerns can increase the risk for experiencing human trafficking because of the effects of mental illness, such as reduced decision-making capacity and dependence on others.²³ Children with mental illness associated with a previous trauma may be particularly vulnerable.²⁴ Traffickers may intentionally leverage poor mental health as a tool and lure potential victims into trafficking. Not only can mental illness increase human trafficking victimization, but human trafficking can also result in mental illness due to the trauma that victims experience.

An estimated 1 in 20 (5.1%) of Franklin County adult residents had potentially disabling mental health conditions in 2021.²⁵ This proportion increased when limited to residents living in poverty.²⁵ Moreover, in 2021, 5 in 20 (23.5%) Franklin County adults were depressed and 17.3% reported 14 or more days where their mental health was not good.²⁶ Estimates show 1 in 20 (5.3%) adults had a serious mental illness that resulted in functional impairment¹¹ from 2016 to 2018, which would amount to 51,000 Franklin County residents in 2022 if the prevalence remained the same.

In 2021, an estimated 3.5% of Franklin County children over the age of 5 years had a functional mental health impairment, amounting to 7,537 children.²⁵ Gaps in data in Franklin County make it difficult to estimate the true proportion of mental illness among youth residents.

About **1 in 20** adults had **serious mental illness** in the past year from 2016 to 2018, amounting to **51,000** residents in 2022. This includes residents with diagnoses resulting in serious functional impairment.¹⁰

Franklin County Adults With Serious Mental Illness, 2016-2018



CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

In 2022, Franklin County Children Services helped over 28,000 children and their families. This means nearly **1 in 10** Franklin County **children** interacted with the **child welfare system**.

Children Interacting with Franklin County Children Services, 2022

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While it is a slight decrease from 2021, Franklin County Children Services helped 28,393 children and their families directly and through partnerships in 2022.²⁷ This amounts to nearly 1 in 10 Franklin County children. During the same year, Franklin County Children Services had:²⁷

- 3,090 children in agency custody
- 2,210 children in paid care
- 1,557 children in purchased foster care
- 523 children placed in group or institutional care
- 1,316 children placed with relatives or in other kinship arrangements

According to Polaris, children may be trafficked by caregivers, intimate partners, or other people who use threats, violence, and manipulation to compel children into labor and sex trafficking.²⁸ In 2014, 8% of trafficking cases involving minors reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline referenced the child welfare system.²⁸ There is overlap between the risk for human trafficking due to runaway status and child welfare system involvement. Evidence shows youth may run away from foster care situations and runaways have a higher risk of becoming sex trafficking victims.²⁸ Other indicators of trafficking among children may include economic instability and lack of basic needs like housing, frequenting of hotels and motels, unusually long work hours, mental health concerns, untreated medical issues, truancy or frequent absences from school, and more.²⁸ Suggested interventions include mandatory human trafficking training for all child welfare personnel, mandatory human trafficking screening processes, designation of human trafficking specialists and professionals, and specialized housing placements for trafficked youth.²⁸

"All alone in a big city at 15, I started to seek the love and acceptance that I wasn't getting from my parents. I found it online with a 36-year-old man who I eventually formed a relationship with in real life." – *Jose Alfaro, Survivor*²⁹



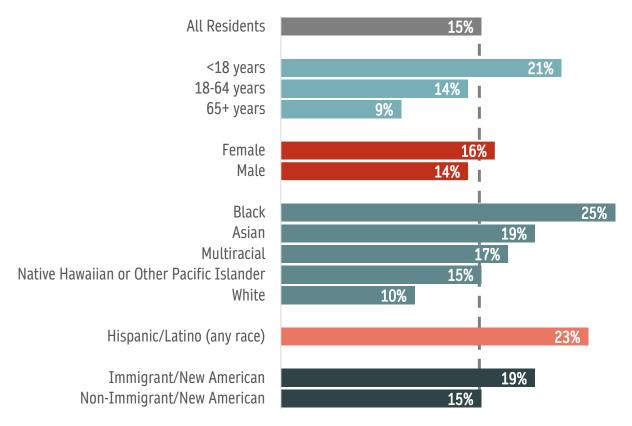
POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY

Poverty and economic instability can make someone vulnerable to human trafficking because traffickers target people with fewer economic opportunities and who have a hard time meeting their basic needs. Poverty has not changed much over the past 5 years in Franklin County.³⁰

In 2022, an estimated 15% of Franklin County residents were living in poverty, amounting to 194,696 residents.⁸ Among those residents, 16% were female, 25% were Black/African American, 23% were Hispanic/Latino and 19% were Asian.⁸ Furthermore, 1 in 5 (21%) Franklin County children were living in poverty.⁸ In Franklin County, immigrant and New American community members live in poverty at higher rates than non-immigrants.⁸ Given poverty is a risk factor for human trafficking, groups with higher poverty rates may be at higher risk of human trafficking.

In Franklin County, **Black** residents, **Hispanic/Latino** residents, and **children** are at the **highest risk** of living in **poverty**.

Poverty Rate by Sociodemographic Group Among Franklin County Residents, 2022





ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur before someone turns 18 years old but can impact someone for their whole life. There are many possible risks of ACEs, including depression, substance use, poor physical health, financial stress, and more. The trauma of ACEs can increase the risk for human trafficking, and the risk increases as the number of ACEs increases.³¹ In 2021, an estimated 34% of Franklin County children had experienced 1 to 3 adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and 7% had experienced 4 or more ACEs.²⁵

In 2021, **41%** of Franklin County Children had **at least 1 ACE**.



This amounts to approximately 36,607 children experiencing 3 or more ACEs in Franklin County. 12% of Franklin County children had 3 or more ACEs in 2021 and disparities were evident.²⁵ 18% of children living below the federal poverty level experienced 3 or more ACEs compared to only 9% of children who were not living in poverty.²⁵ While male and female children experienced 3 or more ACEs at similar rates, 20% of children with Medicaid insurance and 28% of children with a disability had experienced 3 or more ACEs.²⁵

The most common ACE experienced by Franklin County children was divorce or separation of parents or guardians, followed by living with someone who was mentally ill, suicidal, or severely depressed and living with someone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs.²⁵

The most common ACE is divorce, followed by mental health struggles and substance abuse.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Prevalence Among Franklin County Children, 2021

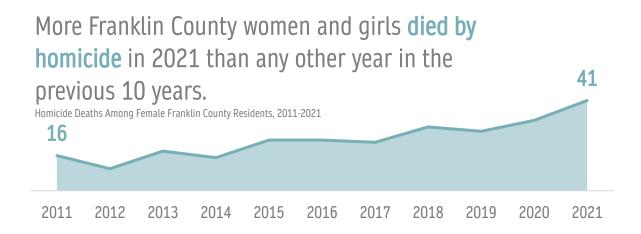
- ightarrow 26% experienced divorce or separation of parents or guardians
- 12% lived with someone who was mentally ill, suicidal, or severely depressed
- 11% lived with someone who had a problem with drugs or alcohol
- 10% experienced a parent or guardian serving jail time
- 8% saw or heard parents or adults slap, hit, kick, or punch one another in the home
- ightarrow 8% were the victim of violence or witnessed violence in their neighborhood
- 7% were treated or judged unfairly because of their race or ethnic group
- 5% 5% experienced the death of a parent or guardian



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

"Force, Fraud, & Coercion"

While human trafficking can happen to anyone of any gender, 89% of Franklin County victims and survivors contacted through the National Human Trafficking hotline from 2017-2021 were women.¹ This trend persists around the world. Furthermore, 100% of CATCH Court referrals from 2017 to 2022 were women. Overall, girls and women are more likely to be trafficked.¹⁸ Systemic and structural inequalities faced by women make them more vulnerable to trafficking. Victims of human trafficking are often subject to physical and psychological abuse, "including beatings, sexual abuse, food and sleep deprivation, threats to themselves and their family members, and isolation from the outside world."⁷



Violence against women and girls is evident in Franklin County. In 2021, 41 women and girls living in Franklin County died by homicide, accounting for the highest number of deaths from this cause in the previous 10 years.¹² Of these 41 residents, 1 in 5 (19.5%) victims were children under the age of 18 years and 68% of the victims were Black/African American despite making up only about 22% of the female population in Franklin County.^{12,8} From 2018 to 2022, records from emergency department and urgent care visits show 10,703 visits from female residents of Franklin County for violent traumatic injuries.¹³ Patient notes indicated that over 9,000 of these visits were due to assault, sexual assault, and domestic violence.¹³ Ages of victims ranged from under 1 year to over 90 years and multiple victims indicated they were pregnant at the time of the assault.¹³ Violence against women can cause long-term health problems for women involved as well as negatively impact children and entire communities.³²



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

According to national data, those more at risk for human trafficking include youth experiencing abuse or neglect, those experiencing homelessness and economic instability, those experiencing substance use disorder and mental illness, women and girls, and undocumented residents. In Franklin County, Black/African American community members are more at risk for homelessness and poverty, as well as overdose deaths. Franklin County has a higher proportion of immigrant/New American residents than Ohio, as well as a higher proportion of non-citizen community members. 1 in 10 Franklin County children have experienced 3 or more ACEs. This data indicates targeting prevention efforts toward the following population groups in Franklin County:

Children, particularly those experiencing homelessness and other ACEs

Undocumented or recently arrived immigrants and New Americans

Women and girls, particularly Black/African American and Asian community members

Public health provides an opportunity to address upstream and downstream factors related to human trafficking. Many risk factors are already addressed by public health priority areas, including social determinants of health and behavioral health outcomes. The risk factors outlined in this report are intersectional and cyclical in nature, creating opportunities for public health intervention.

Targeting public health and social services in areas with populations at increased risk for experiencing human trafficking may mitigate this risk. The census tracts of interest were selected by selecting the top 5 tracts for each risk factor: youth poverty rate, renter housing insecurity rate (a proxy for homelessness), non-citizen immigrant population proportion, and overdose death rate. The selected target geographies overlap with the cities of Columbus, Hilliard, and Dublin as well as Washington Township, Clinton Township, and Franklin Township.

Youth poverty: 29.00, 42.00, 7.30, 62.40, 43.02* Renter housing insecurity: 13.02, 79.58, 62.36, 102.02, 46.10 Non-citizen population: 62.39, 78.20, 75.31, 77.21, 63.52 Overdose death rate: 51.00, 46.20, 87.30, 50.02, 43.02*



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- 32. Office on Women's Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health: Effects of violence against women: <u>https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/effects-violence-against-women</u>

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Some data were provided by the Ohio Department of Health. The Department specifically disclaims responsibility for any analyses, interpretations or conclusions. Mortality data from 2021 is preliminary. With questions or comments about the data, contact Sierra MacEachron, Epidemiology Supervisor, at <u>SierraMacEachron@franklincountyohio.gov</u>.