

HUMAN TRAFFICKING CAMPAIGNS

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

PREPARED BY: PALOMA E. BUSTOS, MSW



HIGHLIGHTS ▶

- ✓ Concerns about sensationalized messaging
- ✓ Labor trafficking frequently overlooked
- ✓ Survivor-informed messaging preferred

CONTACT US

- 📞 213-252-7442
- ✉ anti-trafficking@lls.edu
- 🌐 www.lls.edu/sunitajain



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public conversations about human trafficking and major sporting events are often shaped by awareness campaigns and media narratives tied to events such as the Super Bowl, World Cup, and Olympics. In an effort to better understand perceptions of these campaigns, the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative conducted a survey and focus groups with lived-experience experts from across the country. The survey received responses from 34 participants representing experiences of sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and both sex and labor trafficking, followed by two focus groups with a total of 9 lived-experience experts who reviewed awareness campaigns connected to major sporting events.

Findings highlighted significant concerns about how trafficking is discussed in connection with major sporting events, including sensationalized messaging, harmful survivor imagery, and the tendency to focus narrowly on sex trafficking while overlooking labor trafficking and broader structural issues. Participants emphasized the importance of survivor-informed, trauma-informed, and accessible materials that reflect the realities of trafficking without relying on fear-based or graphic imagery. Participants also stressed that awareness alone is not enough and called for stronger worker protections, survivor-informed policies, community outreach, and long-term investments in prevention and support systems ahead of the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games.

Key Recommendations:

- Move away from sensationalized or fear-based imagery and messaging.
- Develop survivor-informed and trauma-informed awareness materials.
- Increase attention to labor trafficking and worker exploitation connected to major sporting events.

- Ensure campaigns are accessible, including bilingual materials and formats accessible to people with disabilities.
- Provide concrete and actionable information, including warning signs, resources, and multiple pathways to support.
- Expand community outreach, worker protections, and prevention efforts beyond awareness campaigns alone.
- Increase investments in survivor support services, housing protections, and long-term prevention strategies ahead of the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games.

BACKGROUND

Awareness campaigns tied to major sporting events have played a significant role in shaping public perceptions of human trafficking. These discussions frequently focus on claims about increases in sex trafficking while giving far less attention to labor trafficking and the conditions that can make people more vulnerable to exploitation during major events. Research has found that narratives linking major sporting events to spikes in sex trafficking often receive significant public attention despite limited evidence supporting consistent increases tied directly to these events, while labor trafficking and labor exploitation risks frequently receive less attention [1].

At the same time, we continue to see harmful or oversimplified portrayals of trafficking survivors used in public awareness efforts, including imagery such as barcodes, covered mouths, chains, price tags, “for sale” signs, and people behind bars. Lived-experienced experts, advocates, and organizations have long criticized these types of representations for reinforcing stereotypes, creating inaccurate perceptions of trafficking, and feeling disconnected from the lived realities of survivors [2].

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to better understand the impact of these campaigns, we created and distributed a survey across our networks seeking feedback from lived-experience

[1] Martin, Lauren, and Annie Hill. “Debunking the Myth of ‘Super Bowl Sex Trafficking’: Media Hype or Evidence-Based Coverage.” *Anti-Trafficking Review*, no. 13, Sept. 2019, pp. 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201219132>

[2] Polaris. *Telling the Real Story of Human Trafficking*. Polaris, Oct. 2021, <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Telling-the-Real-Story-of-Human-Trafficking-by-Polaris.pdf>

experts about how trafficking is discussed and portrayed in connection with major sporting events. Additionally, we hosted focus groups with lived-experience experts to better understand participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of these campaigns, concerns with current messaging, and what they would like to see done differently as Los Angeles prepares for the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games.

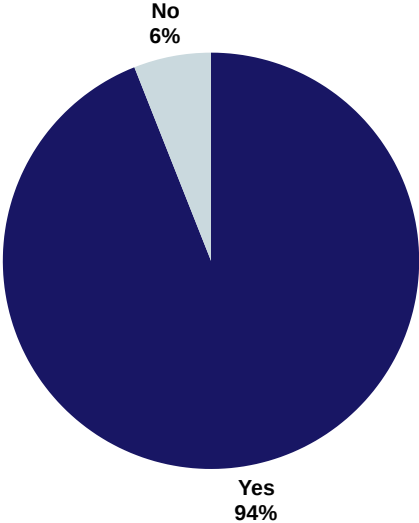
Participants in the survey were given the opportunity to submit their contact information if they wished to be considered for participation in a focus group. Individuals selected to participate were informed that they would receive a \$100 gift card in recognition of their time and participation in the one-hour focus groups. Due to the overwhelming level of interest, focus group participants were randomly selected from those who expressed interest.

Our goal through both the survey and focus group was to gather feedback that could help organizations develop materials that more accurately reflect survivor perspectives, experiences, and recommendations.

SURVEY FINDINGS

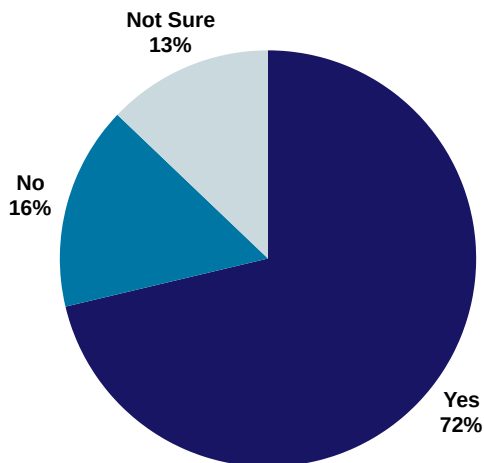
Our survey received responses from 34 lived-experience experts representing experiences of sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and both sex and labor trafficking. Prior to taking the survey, 94% of respondents reported having previously heard claims that sex trafficking increases during major sporting events.

Before This Survey, Had You Heard Claims that Sex Trafficking Increases During Major Sporting Events?

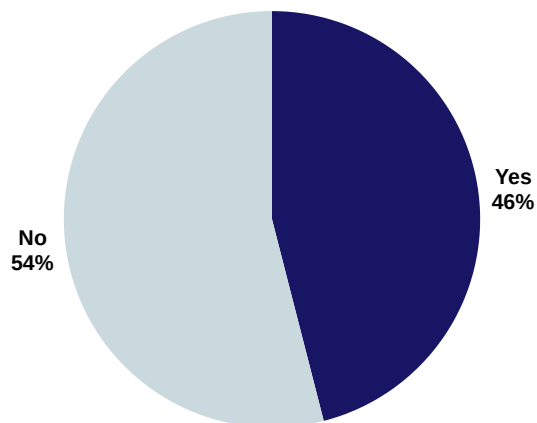


When asked about these narratives and related awareness campaigns, participants expressed significant concern about how trafficking is discussed in relation to major sporting events, with 72% reporting concerns about current public narratives and awareness campaigns. Respondents highlighted issues such as sensationalized messaging, harmful survivor imagery, and the tendency to focus narrowly on sex trafficking while overlooking labor trafficking and broader systemic issues. As one respondent explained, “Workers—especially migrants—can face exploitation, withheld wages, or unsafe conditions, but these stories are often overshadowed.” Reflecting these concerns, a majority of respondents (54%) reported that they had not seen awareness campaigns related to major sporting events that they considered effective, despite years of public awareness campaigns tied to events such as the Super Bowl, World Cup, and Olympics.

Do You Have Any Concerns About How Trafficking is Talked About in Relation to Major Sporting Events?



Have You Seen Good Examples of Social Awareness Campaigns About Human Trafficking During Sporting Events?



Beyond concerns about public messaging, participants also shared broader perspectives on how major sporting events may affect vulnerability to trafficking. With the option to select more than one answer, respondents identified increased tourism (82%), temporary event-related jobs (79%), financial instability (70%), housing insecurity (45%), and lack of workplace protections and monitoring (58%) as factors that can increase vulnerability during major events.

Participants also identified several strategies they believed could help prevent trafficking during major sporting events. The most commonly selected responses included raising awareness so people know the signs of trafficking (94%), policies and programs shaped by survivors' experiences (85%), outreach to communities to share information and resources (82%), stronger protections for workers (73%), and increased workplace inspections and monitoring (67%). Participants also emphasized the importance of housing protections and long-term support systems to reduce vulnerability to exploitation.

Factors Identified as Increasing Vulnerability During Major Sporting Events

Factor	Percentage
Increased tourism	82%
Temporary event-related jobs	79%
Financial instability	70%
Lack of workplace protections and monitoring	58%
Housing insecurity	45%

Strategies Participants Identified to Help Prevent Trafficking During Sporting Events

Strategy	Percentage
Raising awareness about signs of trafficking	94%
Policies and programs shaped by survivors' experiences	85%
Outreach to communities to share information and resources	82%
Stronger protections for workers	73%
Increased workplace inspections and monitoring	67%

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

In preparation for the focus group, SJI identified and selected recent awareness campaigns used in connection with major sporting events. We then conducted two focus groups with a total of 9 lived-experience experts from across the country, including individuals from California, New York, Michigan, and Minnesota. Participants included survivors whose experiences with trafficking ranged from approximately two to ten years ago, many of whom are now engaged in direct services, advocacy, and other efforts supporting victims and survivors of trafficking.

CAMPAIGNS REVIEWED

Participants reviewed five campaigns, including a newly designed flyer from It's A Penalty (Campaign 1) specifically developed for the 2026 World Cup, as well as the organization's most recent video campaign connected to the 2025 NFL season [3]. As one of the more widely recognized organizations working on awareness campaigns tied to major sporting events, It's A Penalty is known among survivor leaders in the field for its international campaigns connected to the NFL, World Cup, and Olympics. Notably, the flyer shared with participants had not yet been publicly released and was included in the focus group to gather initial reactions and feedback that could help inform potential improvements before public release. Following the focus groups, SJI shared participant feedback and recommendations with the service provider organization partnering with It's A Penalty on the campaign. While the campaign was subsequently updated prior to its public release, this report reflects participant feedback on the version reviewed during the focus groups.

The remaining campaigns included two flyers designed by the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative (Campaigns 2 and 3) [4] for the upcoming 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games, the Blue Campaign created by Department of Homeland Security for the 2024 NFL Super Bowl (Campaign 4) [5], and a campaign connected to the 2024 Paris Olympics (Campaign 5) [6]. Copies of all campaigns reviewed during the focus groups are included in Appendix A.

[3] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sH7Ob3HmT4>

[4] <https://www.ils.edu/sunitajain/preventing-trafficking-sporting-events>

[5] <https://dgccommunications.com/scoring-big-crafting-your-super-bowl-ad-strategy/>

[6] <https://contrelatraite.org/raising-awareness-on-the-sidelines-of-major-sporting-events>

IT'S A PENALTY CAMPAIGN

Feedback regarding the It's A Penalty campaign stood out given the organization's long history of developing awareness campaigns connected to major sporting events. Participants generally responded negatively to Campaign 1, the flyer created for the 2026 World Cup. Many participants felt the campaign lacked a human connection and appeared overly polished, corporate, or disconnected from the realities faced by trafficking victims and survivors. As one participant explained, "Trust is the most expensive thing for survivors...This doesn't give me any sense of safety. It's too marketing, too flashy." Several described the imagery and messaging as resembling an employment, insurance, or legal advertisement rather than an anti-trafficking campaign. Participants also commented about the visual presentation of the flyer, including the dark color palette, difficulty identifying the individual featured in the image, and the person's crossed-arm posture, which some felt appeared overly serious or unapproachable. One participant noted that the individual looked more like "an angry employer" or an "intimidating boss" than someone offering support. Participants suggested that imagery more clearly connected to the World Cup, such as wearing a jersey or using more relatable visuals, may have helped create a stronger human connection and clearer context for the campaign.

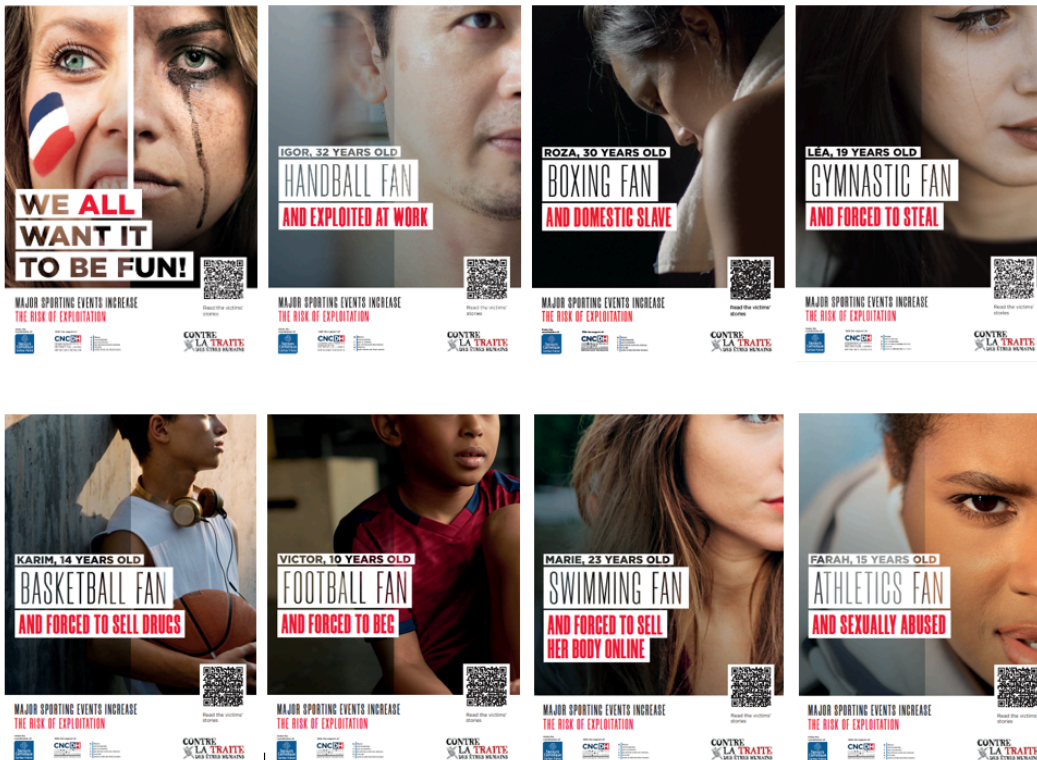
Concerns were also raised about the language used in the flyer, including phrases such as "too good to be true" and "expert on your team." Participants felt this language assumed a level of trust and support that many victims and survivors do not have, such as feeling safe seeking help, having reliable support systems, or believing that existing institutions will protect them. Participants emphasized that many survivors have experienced betrayal, fear law enforcement or immigration consequences, distrust systems, or have previously been ignored or harmed when seeking help. Others felt the language did not clearly identify the intended audience and could be confusing for survivors or vulnerable workers.



Feedback on the organization’s video campaign connected to the 2025 NFL season was also mixed. While participants appreciated the effort to raise awareness, many felt the video lacked storytelling, emotional connection, and concrete information about warning signs or how to seek help. Some participants described the video as feeling more like a commercial or insurance advertisement than a survivor-centered awareness campaign.

2024 PARIS OLYMPICS

Participants responded more positively to the campaign connected to the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris. Many participants described the campaign as visually engaging, informative, and more reflective of the realities of trafficking without relying on graphic or sensationalized imagery. Participants especially responded positively to the use of storytelling, realistic imagery, survivor-centered messaging, and visual examples reflecting different forms of trafficking, including labor trafficking. As one participant noted, “This one, you don’t even need to explain. The whole campaign tells the story itself. It’s so profound.” Several participants also appreciated that the campaign felt more educational and action-oriented while maintaining a stronger human connection.



Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative Campaigns

Feedback regarding Campaigns 2 and 3, the flyers developed by the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative for the upcoming 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games, was also generally positive. Participants appreciated that the campaigns attempted to move away from sensationalized imagery and included more realistic and direct messaging about trafficking and exploitation. Several participants noted that the campaigns felt more grounded, educational, and easier to understand. Participants also responded positively to the inclusion of labor trafficking and worker exploitation, which many felt are often overlooked in awareness campaigns connected to major sporting events. As one participant noted, “Labor trafficking is often left out of these conversations.”



Blue Campaigns

Feedback regarding the DHS Blue Campaign connected to the 2024 NFL Super Bowl (Campaign 4) was mixed. While some participants appreciated the campaign's straightforward messaging and recognition of trafficking during major events, others felt the campaign relied too heavily on generalized awareness language without providing enough concrete or actionable information. Some participants also expressed concern that campaigns connected to law enforcement agencies may not feel safe or approachable to all victims and survivors, particularly individuals with negative experiences involving law enforcement, immigration systems, or criminalization. As one participant explained, "Not everybody feels safe calling law enforcement." Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that awareness campaigns provide multiple pathways to support and do not rely solely on enforcement-centered messaging.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Across both focus groups, participants shared several consistent themes regarding awareness campaigns connected to major sporting events and human trafficking. Participants emphasized the importance of survivor-informed, trauma-informed, and accessible materials that accurately reflect the realities of trafficking without relying on sensationalized imagery or messaging.

Key themes included:

- **Move away from sensationalized or fear-based imagery and messaging.**

Participants emphasized the importance of campaigns that feel authentic, human-centered, and grounded in the lived realities of trafficking rather than polished or fear-based portrayals that can feel disconnected from impacted communities.

- **Increase attention to labor trafficking and worker exploitation.**

Participants expressed concern that many campaigns focus too heavily on sex trafficking while overlooking labor trafficking, particularly in industries connected to major sporting events such as construction, hospitality, cleaning, merchandise production, and venue services.

- **Ensure campaigns are accessible and inclusive.**

Accessibility was repeatedly identified as a major concern. Participants emphasized the importance of bilingual materials, accessible formats for people with disabilities, compatibility with assistive technologies such as screen readers, simpler visuals, easy-to-understand language, and multiple ways to access support beyond QR codes or websites.

- **Include multiple pathways to support.**

Many participants expressed concerns about relying solely on the National Human Trafficking Hotline, citing negative experiences with long wait times, limited support, and barriers to access. Participants recommended including multiple resource options and local organizations in campaign materials.

- **Provide clear and actionable information.**

Participants emphasized the importance of clear and actionable information, including warning signs, risk factors, examples of exploitation, and concrete ways to seek help or support others.

- **Use diverse and survivor-informed representation.**

Participants also stressed the importance of diverse representation, including different races, genders, ages, disabilities, labor sectors, and forms of trafficking. Several participants specifically noted the absence of disability representation and older survivors in existing campaigns.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Findings from the survey and focus groups highlighted significant concerns about how trafficking is discussed in connection with major sporting events. Participants also expressed concern about what one respondent described as “misdirected policy responses” tied to sensationalized narratives. The respondent explained that “authorities may invest heavily in short-term crackdowns (like raids or surveillance of sex workers), which don’t necessarily help trafficking victims.”

Furthermore, participants emphasized that awareness alone is not enough. While campaigns can help increase visibility and public understanding, participants repeatedly stressed the need for meaningful prevention efforts, survivor-informed policies, and long-term investments in support systems. Many advocated for more visible, in-person support during major sporting events, including resource booths, community outreach teams, and immediate access to shelter and services rather than relying solely on hotline referrals.

Participants also raised broader concerns about prevention planning ahead of the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games, including the lack of dedicated funding commitments from FIFA and LA28 for anti-trafficking prevention and survivor support efforts. Participants noted that while both FIFA’s Human Rights Report [7] for Los

[6] Los Angeles World Cup 2026 Host Committee. *Los Angeles Host Committee Human and Civil Rights Approach*. Apr. 2026, https://losangelesfwc26.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Los-Angeles-Host-Committee-Human-and-Civil-Rights-Approach_Final-1.pdf

Angeles and the LA28 Human Rights Strategy [8] acknowledged increased risks related to trafficking and exploitation ahead of the games, participants felt the plans lacked concrete prevention measures and dedicated funding commitments to address those risks. Beyond these concerns, participants emphasized that future awareness and prevention efforts should move beyond sensationalized messaging and instead prioritize accessibility, realistic portrayals, labor trafficking awareness, survivor leadership, and concrete pathways to support and prevention.

While this project reflects feedback from a relatively small group of lived-experience experts and cannot represent all survivor perspectives, the findings provide important insight into how awareness campaigns connected to major sporting events are perceived by impacted communities. The findings also underscore the importance of engaging lived-experience experts in campaign development, prevention planning, and policy discussions related to major sporting events. With the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games still two years away, participants identified consistent themes and recommendations that can help inform more survivor-informed, trauma-informed, and effective awareness, prevention, and support efforts in Los Angeles and at future sporting events.

[8] Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games (LA28). *Human Rights Strategy*. 19 Dec. 2025. Submitted to the City of Los Angeles, Council File No. 15-0989-S65. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2015/15-0989-s65_misc_4-07-26.pdf

ABOUT SJI

We are a practitioner-led, survivor-informed, evidence-based, and community-informed think tank that intentionally fills gaps in human trafficking prevention through an intersectional framework that fosters systemic change and progressive policy innovations.

CONTACT

Loyola Law School, Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative

Phone Number

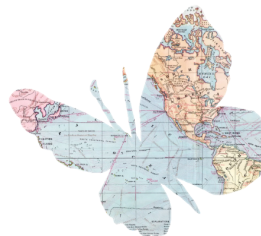
213-252-7442

Email

anti-trafficking@lls.edu

Website

www.lls.edu/sunitajain



APPENDIX A

CAMPAIGN 1

IT'S A PENALTY
PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

DOES YOUR JOB OFFER SEEM TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

LABOR TRAFFICKING IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO SEE, SO IT HELPS TO HAVE AN EXPERT ON YOUR TEAM.

**CALL 1-833-900-1010
TEXT 233733**

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
• FREE • 24/7 • MULTILINGUAL

**SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE, +
FOR ACCESS TO GLOBAL HOTLINES**

SUPPORT • INFORMATION • ACTION

**CRISPE PENALTA
FORMER MEXICO FOOTBALL PLAYER
IT'S A PENALTY AMBASSADOR**

HEADLINE SUPPORTING FRIENDS NGOS SPOTLIGHT PARTICIPATING AIRLINES

CAMPAIGN 2



GAME DAY

TRAFFICKING DOESN'T STOP DURING BIG EVENTS

Watch for signs of labor and sex trafficking, including control and unsafe conditions. The risks are real and often hidden.

✔ **Learn the Signs** ✔ **Speak Up Safely** ✔ **Support Survivors**



NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
888-373-7888 | Text: Help or Info to 233733

CAMPAIGN 3



TRAFFICKING DOESN'T STOP DURING BIG EVENTS



GAME DAY



RISK FACTORS

TEMP JOBS · TOURISM
· LARGE CROWDS

VS

WARNING SIGNS

UNSAFE WORK AND LIVING
CONDITIONS · LIMITED FREEDOM

TRAFFICKING HAPPENS YEAR ROUND

CONSTRUCTION · HOTELS · STREET-BASED ECONOMIES

**TRAFFICKING INCLUDES FORCED LABOR
& SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

**NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE
1-888-373-7888 | TEXT: HELP OR INFO TO 233733**

CAMPAIGN 4

**SACK
SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION**
STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Forced or coerced commercial sex work is a form of human trafficking.

LEARN MORE

BLUE CAMPAIGN
One Voice. One Mission. End Human Trafficking.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN
TACKLE HUMAN
TRAFFICKING**

Victims of sex trafficking and forced labor are often hidden in plain sight.

Learn how to spot the signs at
DHS.gov/TackleTrafficking

BLUE CAMPAIGN
One Voice. One Mission. End Human Trafficking.

**WHEN IT COMES TO
HUMAN TRAFFICKING,
WE'RE ALL ON
THE SAME TEAM**

Learn more about sex trafficking, forced labor, and domestic servitude – and what you can do to stop it.

DHS.gov/TackleTrafficking

BLUE CAMPAIGN
One Voice. One Mission. End Human Trafficking.

CAMPAIGN 5

WE ALL WANT IT TO BE FUN!

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

IGOR, 32 YEARS OLD

HANDBALL FAN

AND EXPLOITED AT WORK

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

ROZA, 30 YEARS OLD

BOXING FAN

AND DOMESTIC SLAVE

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

LÉA, 19 YEARS OLD

GYMNASTIC FAN

AND FORCED TO STEAL

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

KARIM, 14 YEARS OLD

BASKETBALL FAN

AND FORCED TO SELL DRUGS

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

VICTOR, 10 YEARS OLD

FOOTBALL FAN

AND FORCED TO BEG

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

MARIE, 23 YEARS OLD

SWIMMING FAN

AND FORCED TO SELL HER BODY ONLINE

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP

FARAH, 15 YEARS OLD

ATHLETICS FAN

AND SEXUALLY ABUSED

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS INCREASE THE RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Read the victim's story

CONTRÔLE LA TRAFIC DES ÊTRES HUMAINS

Logo: CNCDP