

The Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking

is a U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) grant-funded program that brings together key partners to develop, expand, or strengthen multidisciplinary task forces to address human trafficking. With this approach, local, state, or tribal service providers; law enforcement; prosecutors; and other collaborators can:

- Identify victims of trafficking,
- Access a comprehensive array of service options, and
- Seek justice for victims by implementing victim-centered and trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions.

THE WINDOWS SERIES



Foundations Edition



Case Spotlight Edition



Disciplines Edition

INTRODUCTION

The **Windows Series** offers insights into the ECM model and task forces with examples from the efforts of ECMs nationwide. These examples showcase different structures, successes, innovations, and ideas that:

- demonstrate a commitment to addressing serious crime and supporting victims and survivors;
- illustrate the spectrum of activities and approaches employed by the ECMs;
- share successful strategies to encourage stakeholder cooperation;
- enhance public awareness by highlighting the nature and scope of work;
- offer a behind-the-scenes look at the field and its day-to-day work to a wider audience.

The **Foundations Edition** looks at how different task forces have approached or implemented key parts of the ECM model, including co-leadership models, enhanced collaborative efforts, engagement with lived experience expertise, statewide efforts, and efforts to identify and respond to labor trafficking.

LABOR TRAFFICKING CASE ORIGINS

Labor trafficking cases can be difficult to identify. With the help of federal funding, ECM human trafficking task forces have uncovered cases in various circumstances using a range of proactive strategies. This Window highlights a range of origin points for cases and illustrates the benefit of collaborative and multidisciplinary efforts.

Cook County Human Trafficking Task Force



FUNDED PARTNERS | Cook County State's Attorney's Office & The Salvation Army STOP-IT Program



GEOGRAPHY | Cook County, IL; Northern District of Illinois

US v. Malinek. In 2019, a factory worker reached out to a Spanish radio station with concerns about a coworker after listening to one of their segments. The radio station connected the worker to the Guatemalan consulate, who had previously been trained on human trafficking by the lead service provider. The consulate connected the original caller and the Guatemalan coworker with the trainer from the lead service provider, who assessed for safety and needs. During that call, the service provider learned that there were multiple victims and that reaching these individuals could pose some safety risks. With permission, the service provider submitted a report to the lead law enforcement provider who in turn, connected the victims to federal law enforcement. Law enforcement and the victims agreed that law enforcement intervention was necessary to leave the situation safely.

In 2021 a woman was sentenced in federal court in the Northern District of Illinois to 6 and a half years in prison for forced labor. The case came to the attention of the Cook County Task Force when the lead service provider partner received a call from the Guatemalan Consulate.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation took the lead on the case. Significant preplanning for extraction was required due to the large number of potential victims—about 30 people were staying in a basement together. Community center space was secured, and victim service providers and legal aid offered support and services. Because of existing Task Force relationships, they already had a comprehensive strategy, could move quickly, and knew who to call. Due to the operation, individuals were

connected to services, and a pattern of behavior was identified along with the same trafficker’s name. Among other forms of coercion, the trafficker leveraged connections in their home village in Guatemala to intimidate and threaten the victims. With the Task Force’s support, the victims received assistance with legal status to allow them to testify against their trafficker. Victims were supported throughout the investigation and engaged with service providers in writing victim impact statements. According to the United States Attorney’s Office, Northern District of Illinois (2021), the trafficker ultimately pled guilty and was sentenced and ordered to pay \$112,545 in restitution to the victims.

Unless otherwise cited, this information was provided via an interview with Anna Pastor and Summar Ghias; March 2024.

Washington Advisory Committee on Trafficking



FUNDED PARTNERS | Seattle Police Department (SPD) & International Rescue Committee



GEOGRAPHY | Western Washington—primarily King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties

US v. Ruiz-Hernandez. In 2017, Seattle 911 received a call from an individual alleging they were a victim of trafficking. The call was routed to the Seattle Police Department (SPD) for response. Responding officers noted concerns about sexual assault and indicators of labor trafficking. An SPD detective funded by the ECM grant and assigned to Homeland Security Investigations opened an

In April 2024, the owner of a landscaping company in Washington state was sentenced to 20 years in prison for forced labor. The case originated with a 911 call in Seattle, that was routed to Task force lead law enforcement partner, Seattle PD.

investigation into possible labor trafficking. This detective specialized in labor trafficking investigations and working with foreign national populations. Through her experience and involvement with the Washington Advisory Committee on Trafficking (WashACT), she quickly connected the individual to services. Six additional victims came forward through connections to service provider partners on the Task Force.

Overall, the investigation identified seven victims and an elaborate scheme to exploit them. The trafficker recruited his victims from his hometown in Mexico and promised a better life for their families. He required collateral before coming to the United States, and once they arrived, they were forced to work for his company and live in his home, charging them extremely inflated prices for food, rent, and other expenses. This debt bondage and other violations of the victims' rights were investigated, and advocates, interpreters, and victim witness coordinators worked diligently to support the seven victims from their initial disclosures through the trial and beyond. All seven survivors testified on situations of forced labor and servitude. The committed work of the Task Force and the close partnership between law enforcement and victim service partners resulted in the ongoing support of survivors and the successful prosecution of the trafficker, yielding multiple counts of forced labor, transporting and harboring people without status in the United States, and money laundering.

Unless otherwise cited, this information was provided via an interview with Megan Zentner; May 2024

Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force



FUNDED PARTNERS | Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office & Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Palm Beach



GEOGRAPHY | Palm Beach County, FL

US v. Moreno, et al. In 2017, a Florida-based worker rights program, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, received a call for help from two H-2A agricultural workers employed by Los Villatoros Harvesting LLC. The workers shared they had been stuck in abusive conditions and only managed to escape by hiding in the trunk of a car. Recognizing potential criminal and civil violations, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers contacted federal authorities in Palm Beach County, FL. Then, agencies and jurisdictions began to investigate and prosecute.

In 2022, three defendants were sentenced in the Middle District of Florida for their roles in a multi-state forced-labor scheme. The case originated with a Palm Beach Task Force federal partner receiving a report from a Florida-based worker rights program.

Over the 5-year investigation, 17 victims came forward, claiming the defendants (employers of Los Villatoros Harvesting LLC) forced them to complete hundreds of hours of physically demanding agricultural labor in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia, and North Carolina. The Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force, including the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Homeland Security Investigations, uncovered that the defendants were using fraudulent recruiting practices, making threats to deport and harm their workers, and providing poor living conditions. The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs (2022) stated in a press release:

According to court documents, the defendants each conspired to operate and manage Los Villatoros Harvesting LLC (LVH) – a farm labor contracting company that brought large numbers of temporary, seasonal Mexican workers into the United States on H-2A agricultural visas – as a criminal enterprise engaged in a pattern of racketeering activity. The enterprise’s racketeering activity included subjecting LVH’s H-2A workers to forced labor, harboring many of LVH’s H-2A workers for financial gain, committing fraud in foreign labor contracting and submitting fraudulent visa related documents to the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor.

In 2022, the owner of Los Villatoros Harvesting LLC was sentenced to nearly 10 years in prison on racketeering charges and conspiracy to commit forced labor.

Unless otherwise cited, this content is derived from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ blog, BREAKING: Forced Labor Ringleader Sentenced to Nearly 10 Years in Federal Prison (full citation provided in the reference list), and verified for accuracy by Carlos Lisboa in September 2024.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Having specialized personnel within law enforcement agencies can increase the ability to identify all forms of trafficking.
- Providing systemwide training to include 911 operators can be a helpful resource for your jurisdiction to ensure that all first responders know where trafficking may occur and how to connect cases to task force partners.
- Ensuring task force membership includes partners who interface with populations placed at increased risk of trafficking is important for a steady stream of referrals and easy connection to services.
- Building trust with victims through honesty and transparency pays dividends for future referrals and cases when victims tell others how they were received/treated by respective agencies.
- Outreach efforts may not immediately lead to disclosures of human trafficking, and yet, they can eventually (with trust and time) open new doors for victims to come forward, resulting in more collaborative efforts and comprehensive connections to resources.

REFERENCES

Coalition of Immokalee Workers. (2022, December 30). *Breaking: Forced labor ringleader sentenced to nearly 10 years in federal prison*. <https://ciw-online.org/blog/2022/12/breaking-forced-labor-ringleader-sentenced-to-nearly-10-years-in-federal-prison>

Office of Public Affairs. (2022, October 27). *Three defendants sentenced in multi-state racketeering conspiracy involving forced labor of Mexican agricultural H-2A workers* [Press release]. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/three-defendants-sentenced-multi-state-racketeering-conspiracy-involving-forced-labor-mexican>

United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois. (2021, April 19). *Suburban Chicago woman sentenced to six and a half years in prison on federal labor trafficking charge* [Press release]. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndil/pr/suburban-chicago-woman-sentenced-six-and-half-years-prison-federal-labor-trafficking>