



POLICY GOAL

State law provides policy guidance to facilitate access to services and assistance for trafficked foreign national children.

To see where your state and others fall on this issue, click on the related survey chart at <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/related-resources/#2.2>.

STATE CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING LAWS SHOULD

protect all victims, regardless of immigration status; however, foreign national victims of child trafficking may be barred from accessing critical services, benefits, and protections provided for under state law. Noncitizen immigrant children, particularly those who have recently arrived or have arrived unaccompanied, are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).¹ Children may enter the United States as a result of their trafficking, or they may face victimization after their arrival. Federal law provides several forms of immigration relief to trafficked children, but federal immigration law provides only limited guidance on what types of services should be made available to noncitizen trafficked and exploited children. For example, only youth who are identified as unaccompanied² are transferred out of the Department of Homeland Security to the custody of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.³ Therefore, states must ensure that all children, regardless of immigration status or nationality, are afforded access to all services and benefits available for survivors of child sex trafficking and CSE.

Under federal immigration law, child trafficking victims can access relief by filing for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a T-visa (for trafficking victims), or a U-visa (for crime victims). Despite these federal immigration law protections in place for sex trafficked and commercially sexually exploited children, state protections and benefits for survivors need to encompass noncitizen and undocumented children as they will often

encounter state agencies before the federal immigration system. Federal law also does not equally cover all exploited children; federal immigration law provides more robust protections to *unaccompanied* children, therefore excluding noncitizen children who enter with their traffickers or parents or other legal guardians.⁴ State law must therefore be equipped to address the needs of noncitizen child trafficking victims through specific language pertaining to this population within state laws addressing a range of services and assistance. This includes the response of child welfare agencies, which play a key role identifying and serving child sex trafficking victims regardless of immigration status.

To ensure that child welfare and other state agencies can provide necessary services to this vulnerable population, state law should provide policy guidance for stakeholders who interact with and serve foreign national children. The goal of this mandate is to facilitate access to care and benefits and mitigate the collateral consequences (e.g., under-identification, punitive immigration proceedings). Policy guidance should inform child protective services workers that there is no mandate to report immigration status of a child or family and that a referral to CPS should not trigger immigration proceedings. Policy guidance should also include information on relief options and how to access relief, including coordinating with local refugee services agencies and state refugee coordinators to apply for Eligibility Letters through ORR. Finally, policy guidance should consider addressing the inclusion of refugee service organizations in multidisciplinary team responses.

DRAFTING CONSIDERATIONS:

TO ACCOMPLISH THIS POLICY GOAL, STATE LAW SHOULD...

- ▶ Develop policy guidance on responding to foreign national children.
- ▶ Explicitly state that a child's immigration status should not be considered when providing services and benefits to child sex trafficking victims.
- ▶ Ensure these laws will not be used to target foreign nationals and their families for detention or deportation.
- ▶ Ensure youth are provided access to legal representation on immigration issues.

RELATED ISSUES:

- 3.1 State law mandates a process for coordinating access to specialized services for child sex trafficking victims that does not require involvement in child-serving system.
- 3.3 State law requires child welfare to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES:

- ▶ State Impact Memo

1 Meaghan Fitzpatrick & Leslye E. Orloff, *Abused, Abandoned, or Neglected: Legal Options for Recent Immigrant Women and Girls*, 4 PENN STATE J.L. & INT'L AFF. 614, 615 (2016).

2 An unaccompanied child is one who has no lawful immigration status in the U.S., is under the age of 18, and there is no parent or legal guardian in the U.S. or no parent or legal guardian in the U.S. can provide care and physical custody. 6 U.S.C. § 279(g) (2018).

3 Olga Byrne, *Promoting a Child Rights-Based Approach to Immigration in the United States*, 32 GEO. IMMIGR. L.J. 59, 81 (2017).

4 *Id.*