In 2000, the United States, along with the majority of countries around the world, declared “human trafficking” a transnational crime. Prior to 2000, practices that are now understood as human trafficking included forced prostitution, forced migration, or were categorized as other crimes. Drawing from the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), states passed legislation to bolster prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership efforts (4Ps). Colorado’s anti-trafficking movement emerged in 2005, with non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and coalitions documenting hundreds of cases.

What would it take to end human trafficking in Colorado?

Since 2005, the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) has endeavored to answer that question more effectively while advancing anti-trafficking efforts across the state. With an array of partners - survivors, advocates, law enforcement, and practitioners – we developed methods to measure Colorado’s progress in addressing human trafficking. The Colorado Project to Comprehensively Combat Human Trafficking 2.0 (CP2.0) is a summary of anti-trafficking efforts across the state of Colorado as of 2018. CP2.0 builds from the original research conducted from 2010-2013 (our baseline assessment). For more information on CP2.0, please see LCHT’s Report and Action plan at combathumantrafficking.org/coloradoproject

Colorado communities differ in their characteristics, strengths, gaps, and opportunities; these regional differences led researchers to create demographic profiles as tools for communities seeking more specific recommendations based on data collected during CP2.0. The aim of these regional profiles is to provide specialized feedback on combating human trafficking in seven regions across the state. These regions, defined by LCHT, are geographic areas grouped by judicial district and county, with a review of industries, population demographics, and the physical landscape that influence the root causes and vulnerabilities to trafficking. Direct quotes from study participants are included below that pertain to this region.

Region 7: Population and Geography

Region 7, the central western part of the state, includes one of the larger and growing cities in Colorado, Grand Junction, as well as several rural and mountain towns. Region 7 is made up of seven counties: Mesa, Ouray, Montrose, Gunnison, Hinsdale, San Miguel, and Delta. This region includes Judicial Districts 21 and 7, encompassing the towns of Montrose, Ouray, and Gunnison as well as the heavily toured resort towns of Crested Butte and Telluride. Interstate 70 runs through the 21st Judicial District and west into Utah, but the majority of this region is rural, away from major highways, and only accessible via mountain passes. Region 7 has a population of about 250,000, about 150,000 of them live in Mesa County and about 63,000 in Grand Junction. The rural and remote counties of Hinsdale (population 820), Ouray (population 4,653), and San Miguel (population 7,804) are significantly smaller in comparison.

The major industries in Mesa County are healthcare, government and transportation. However, there are a significant number of jobs in the service/hospitality industry, mining, manufacturing, construction, trade and real estate. Grand Junction is home to Colorado Mesa University (8,000+ student population). Montrose County offers the second largest number of jobs by multiple sectors in the region. The range of industries represented in
Montrose County is similar to Mesa, but has more agriculture and ranching. Delta County has a large proportion of jobs in agriculture, ranching, retail trade and healthcare. Gunnison County has jobs in recreation and tourism related to the resort community of Crested Butte as well as construction, and is home to Western Colorado University (2,500+ student population). Resort towns cater to tourists and second home owners and there is a high demand for construction and the service industry in these locations which may increase vulnerabilities to human trafficking.

Mesa County has a population of about 150,000, a median household income of about $52,000 and 16% of the population lives in poverty (American Community Survey, United States Census, 2017). In Montrose, the population of about 41,000 people has a median household income of $45,000, about 18% of the population are living in poverty. Delta County has comparable statistics to Montrose. Gunnison, Ouray, and San Miguel counties all have populations under 10,000 and slightly higher median household incomes and slightly less poverty. This region is overwhelmingly white, according to census data, with anywhere from 10-20% of the population identifying as Hispanic.

The average poverty rate in Colorado is 10%, and the median household income is $69,000. Region 7 has a significantly higher rate of poverty (including a lower median household income) compared to other regions --over 15% in several counties, and between 16-18% in the two most populated counties. According to the Colorado Health Institute, Delta and Montrose counties have a child poverty rate of over 23%, well above the statewide average of 13%. The economic crisis of 2007-2009 hit this region relatively hard, pushing those who were already living on the margins of society to even further extremes. Additionally, the median age in Colorado is 36.7 years. However, in most of the rural counties in Region 7, the median age is much higher, ranging from 39 and 44 in Mesa and Montrose counties respectively to 48-57 in the more rural towns. Most of the counties in this region (aside from Mesa) have unemployment rates upwards of 10%, significantly higher than the nationwide average of 3.8% and Colorado’s historically low 2.7%.

**Human Trafficking in Colorado**

A central theme emerges from the CP2.0 research: trafficking is happening across the state and the problem is worthy of time and attention. Overall, participants note that there is little agreement on the root causes of trafficking. Communities do not share the same definitions or understanding of trafficking, and participants worry that average citizens may not have the tools to identify the signs of trafficking. Colorado’s legislation, updated in 2014 with House Bill 14-1273, highlighted force, fraud or coercion as the definition of trafficking. Overwhelmingly, Coloradans believe human trafficking to be sex trafficking; however, our current research shows that we are beginning to characterize nuances to include labor trafficking descriptions.

In Colorado, adults and children, foreign-nationals and US citizens, men and women, have all been identified as victims. Colorado sits at a geographic crossroads and is accessible via an international airport and by two major interstates. Denver and Colorado Springs have a disproportionately large number of youth experiencing homelessness compared to other urban centers. Much of the state is used for agriculture, ranching, and tourism, necessitating seasonal/migrant workers. Such circumstances may result in the exploitation of many particularly vulnerable populations including immigrants on temporary visas, refugees, people experiencing homelessness, and victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence.

Ending human trafficking requires collective action and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders. Focusing collaborative community efforts on root causes will support efforts to decrease trafficking. As the anti-trafficking movement reflects upon 19 years since the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), the crime expanded and the response has become more sophisticated. The following sections highlight regional
characteristics, the vulnerabilities to trafficking, and successes occurring across the 4Ps of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership.

**Trafficking Vulnerabilities/Root Causes**

Participants believe that human trafficking decreases in Colorado communities when agencies that provide resources understand the unique circumstances facing their local communities. Participants’ responses emphasize that point, “I think that to truly be more effective, you have to be very locally grounded and understand what’s happening in the different communities.” Additionally, another participant noted, “Every community is very different, and so, how each community handles an incident of human trafficking is going to be unique to that community.”

The realities of human trafficking are challenging for all communities to recognize and address throughout the nation. Rural communities in Colorado have particular challenges regarding human trafficking. These challenges come as a result of factors such as geographical isolation, interstate transportation routes, industries that hire seasonal workers (like tourism, agriculture, energy, and ranching), lack of economic/employment security, lack of victim resources and support, and a lack of training for front line professionals or law enforcement. Geographical isolation can contribute to a delay in intervention and lack of opportunities to identify human trafficking.

Root causes are preexisting social, cultural, and family conditions that create vulnerability for people to be trafficked such as trauma in the home setting, poverty, homelessness, addiction, violence in the home or local community, lack of education, lack of citizenship status, and marginalization from one’s LGBTQIA identity. We asked communities to describe root causes they believe contribute to human trafficking.

Diverse identities and a lack of knowledge about who might be at risk emerge as root causes of trafficking on the Western Slope. For example,

> I think the most important thing for us is identifying where it’s likely to be occurring. And so it’s people that feel powerless, again agricultural workers, many of them are powerless. When you try to interact with them, they’re very – there’s a lot of reticence in talking to anybody that isn’t comfortable in your circle, there’s a power differential between employer and the worker. And I would say that you could – you could extrapolate that into people working in hotels, people working in restaurants, restaurants not so much, I haven’t seen that but we have a demographic too where we have a large Asian community that we have not even touched so we have no idea what’s going on in that demographic.

Another respondent talked specifically about populations who they believed might be especially at-risk, “I think we also have a fairly large homeless population and that demographic. And young people is another demographic; [our] school district has a large number of American Indians.”

In Region 7, participants emphasized the importance of addressing labor trafficking in the agriculture, ranching, and tourism-related sectors as well as transportation routes. For example, “We have 550 and 50 that run through our town and both of them are heavily travelled especially during the summer.” An important aspect to note, that is unique to the western slope, is this recognition of labor trafficking. One participant stated, “part of the community issue that we have with human trafficking is part of labor trafficking, a lot of sheep farmers and people that come in.” This recognition of vulnerabilities to trafficking is a big step forward in finding promising practices to prevent, protect, and prosecute.
WESTERN SLOPE CHALLENGES

Access to Services and Supports

Specific to Region 7, participants agreed that the distance from Colorado’s front range created challenges in ending or preventing human trafficking:

You know I don’t feel like the Western Slope gets a lot of recognition and when it does, it’s usually with Grand Junction, with Mesa County, it’s the largest and it’s also on the I-70 corridor. But we have a lot to offer and we have a lot of the same issues and concerns that are happening all across the state, so I felt like it was really important for [our rural county] to have a voice.

Access to resources also appeared to be a concern,

For me personally as an advocate, it will be nice when we get to a point where we know what the go-to shelter is locally, right now we have the national hotline and Denver. As an advocate working with a victim, Denver seems like a million miles away.

Grand Junction, as the largest city in the region, can still be a significant drive away from cities like Montrose, Gunnison and especially Ouray.

Need for Human Trafficking Awareness

Many participants felt that people within the community do not think that human trafficking is happening, evidenced by these quotes: “I don’t think our broader public thinks trafficking happens here in Grand Junction;” “the network of faith-based churches that I’ve worked with virtually have no understanding that human trafficking takes place here at all.” The western region is not alone in this lack of awareness. One participant describes the cultural perceptions that may create barriers to raising awareness about human trafficking in these communities. They state, “I think with human trafficking it’s ‘oh that doesn’t happen here, those are just kids being kids.’ Or, ‘That girl is just promiscuous.’ And it’s still battling that we do know what we’re talking about.” This participant aptly summarizes the state of trafficking awareness by noting,

We are at the start of the road, and I think that creating our awareness in our community and I think creating preventions, and reporting too. Reporting is very important because oftentimes our community is very afraid to report because they fear doing that will end them up in jail. Some of them do not have documentation to be here legally so often if they have been victims they will not report so we try and open their ears and let them know that it is okay to report.

Participants in this region also specifically described an interest in becoming more connected with schools to prevent trafficking among minors:

I wish we could have more trainings and getting them into other areas. It’s a battle to get into the school districts to do any presentations at all. Because it’s hard to get all of the teachers together and they really don’t like us taking up some of their time. But I think if we could do some bigger presentations like that, maybe even some evening, I don’t know like, coffee and chat. And I think that’s a goal for the task group and the partnerships to spread the word. It’s just I wish we had more ways to do that over here.
Well I think one of the big things that I’ve done is really, I’m working with the CMP [Collaborative Management Partnership] to really make it a priority for our community and to keep reminding our, like our school district, and our center for mental health, and our law enforcement that this needs to, we all need to keep it on the front of our mind.

Three key sectors for partnership and training development emerged: law enforcement, behavioral health / primary care, and schools.

Resources for Trafficking Survivors

This region boasts the Western Slope Against Trafficking, which has been collaborating with local agencies and organizations since 2013 to bring awareness, hold discussions, support identification of services and provide trainings to the region. WSAT also represents a regional(city-wide human trafficking task force or coalition on the Governor-appointed Colorado Human Trafficking Council.

Local resources that may be able to offer support to victims of exploitation or human trafficking (not an exhaustive list):

- Disability Law Colorado-Mesa County; Marillac Clinic in Mesa County. Additionally, the Mesa County Sheriff’s Office is able to provide resources for survivors like case management, transportation and short-term housing.
- Hilltop Community Resource Centers in Ouray, Montrose and Delta counties
- The Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP) in Montrose offers services to the immigrant communities in all the counties in Region 7
- Uncompahgre Medical Center; San Miguel Resource Center
- Project Hope of Gunnison Valley; Gunnison County Department of Health and Human Services

Human Trafficking Response in Region 7

Community responses are driven in part by the ways in which the cause of the crime is framed, availability of local resources, how resources interact with each other, and how communities talk about the innovative work that is successful in their local community. We asked professionals and community members across the state to explain what is working in their communities, as well as to share their ideas for the future.

PREVENTION

Generating public awareness around the issue of human trafficking is underway in Region 7, but also competes with other deserving priorities like poverty, unemployment and a quickly increasing cost of living. Some organizations and agencies in the region are trying to keep anti-trafficking issue relevant and growing. For example,

It’s quite in the plan to extend our services to six different counties here on the Western Slope and to also work on human trafficking so educating our community and obviously educating ourselves. So I think it’s a step forward.
One participant mentioned that even with minimal efforts, awareness in Region 7 is growing in a way. They stated,

What we’re seeing statewide which has been an increase, if not an increase in the trafficking itself, definitely an increase in awareness of trafficking and the impact that it does have in our community, I could not have said the same thing a year ago but I can say now about what I’m seeing. I can’t say that I - a year ago, I personally wasn’t aware and watchful of things that I see with not only in our community but out and about traveling at truck stops, in restaurants, at - in hotel lobbies. So, I guarantee that there’s a lot more awareness.

### PROTECTION

While both local partnerships can serve as a starting point for referrals when seeking resources for the communities in Region 7, generally this region needs more resources for protecting victims of human trafficking. Hilltop Resource Centers are scattered throughout the region and provide valuable assistance to families in need in several counties. They are also either leading or at the table in partnerships and mentioned as vital to the community by several participants. A participant specifically suggested,

So, Hilltop provides a lot of the services that are suggested or provided to families and so [they] definitely are an important part of the overall puzzle if you will and making sure that families have services that they can access. It’s really important if you identify, you help a family identify what their needs are based on their concerns and you give them a list of different possibilities to help them meet those needs. You really kind of have to have those services in place and a family resource center such as Hilltop is a great place to access those services.

Because of the lack of resources local to this region, statewide resources like Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA), Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA), and Colorado Legal Services play a large role in protection services in Region 7. Several participants utilize federal resources like Homeland Security when local resources are not sufficient to serve survivors, or calling on partnerships in the region for guidance. Regional partners noted the support they receive from larger agencies:

I think we work together for the survivors by sharing resources and avenues for resources. As I said we don’t have a lot here in Montrose, but what we do have we can build on by reaching out to the Department of Human Services or Homeland Security or whoever is out there. I feel comfortable reaching out to another county, especially one that is on the task group and saying ‘I have this situation, I really don’t know what I need to be doing, or can you help me, give me some ideas?’ And I don’t know if it just feels like the trust has always just been there. There’s not been a moment where it felt like someone was intruding on my... you know this is my silo, you stay over there... it’s just hasn’t ever felt like that.
Regional Community Profile:

There have been three human trafficking cases (5 filings) in Region 7 since the passage of the 2014 Human Trafficking legislation, all related to the sex trafficking of a minor. In 2018, the CoNEHT 24/7 Human Trafficking Hotline received 14 calls from Region 7.

As told by study participants, the larger issue is labor trafficking in this rural, agricultural area. However, participants expressed concerns about the resources that are available for survivors of labor trafficking in Grand Junction. Some think that this is not an issue that matters to the local police. For example,

The Grand Junction police department is completely over burdened with the sort of routine criminal investigation and I think we need maybe the state department of agriculture to get funding to start looking into those things or the department of revenue or other taxing agencies, statewide or federal entities that can be specifically trained in those things.

Beyond law enforcement agencies, another respondent stated,

Well if they’re anything like our local DA and law enforcement, they just don’t attend, I mean you invite and invite and it’s just not a priority to them to join a meeting. And some of it I understand is that they’re probably short staffed so it’s hard to step away from active duty or active road coverage for an hour. Our DA always seems… it always feels like he has something he thinks is more important to do. And they joined the monthly child advocacy center, MDT’s, typically we have law enforcement presence and DA presence there, but not every month. So I don’t know. It just never feels like… and to be honest it just never feels like crimes against children are a priority and that’s frustrating.

And while the community clearly has some awareness around labor trafficking, participants noted a lack of support for prosecuting labor trafficking cases. They said,

As far as labor trafficking I think we’re all very frustrated with the lack of resources in investigative abilities which goes beyond the training. There’s no point in training the Grand Junction Police Department in how to combat labor trafficking on a farm for migrant workers--that’s just not going to happen.

STATE JUDICIAL CASES AND FILINGS OF

THE 2014 HUMAN TRAFFICKING STATUTES BY REGION, CY 2014-2018

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<td>181(130)</td>
<td>29(21)</td>
<td>1(1)</td>
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*ERRONEOUS FILING OF LABOR TRAFFICKING-ANCILLARY CHARGES RELATED TO SEX TRAFFICKING
**ERRONEOUS FILING OF LABOR TRAFFICKING; CRIMINAL CONDUCT MOST CLOSELY MATCHED SEXUAL ASSAULT WITH NO EVIDENCE OF FORCED LABOR
The Grand Junction Police Department and Mesa County Sheriff’s Office provide resources where capacity allows, but it appears communities throughout Region 7 would like to see more engagement and connection across both law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies.

**PARTNERSHIP**

Some participants highlighted that they have had ongoing relationships with other agencies for many years now. Having sustainable partnerships is key to anti-trafficking work and the Western Slope participants overwhelming noted that partnerships are the primary vehicle for successful support to survivors and prevention efforts. For example,

> We actually hold our meetings at the Hilltop facility, we have Hilltop present, Department of Human Services, The House, CASA, Western Slope Center for Children, and then the faith-based [representatives]. And really what we’ve tried to do is identify what groups are likely to come across victims of trafficking and make sure they’re at least invited to the table and get them trained. And we’ve been pretty successful whenever we’ve identified a group that we think is likely to come across victims to at least get them to attend a few meetings and become educated on the issues.

This participant states,

> Yes, I think the Department of Human Services and Child Welfare units are integral in investigating and providing support after the fact for human trafficking, so I think being on the task group and having that partnership and being able to have that voice on making changes or suggestions is very important.

Another suggested, “I'd also like to add partnerships, this is an example of partnerships that have been formed, we have good networking and communication but we’re resource limited.” The limited access to resources did appear to strain some of the partnerships. The ongoing need for time commitments were noted as a challenge; here a participant argues,

> Seems like participation has dwindled, just the number of people they get on the calls. I think people just get busy and it’s another meeting to attend. I know we used to meet monthly and it’s gone to every other month, or even, it may even be quarterly now.

And another noted,

> I don’t often hear law enforcement on there, on the task group. I’d imagine, because I experience it here in town, that we invite law enforcement, a representative, and they may attend for 6 months and then it starts dwindling down. So that’s a little disappointing. I would like to hear more from law enforcement or DA’s, it would be really exciting to hear about some DA’s joining the task group.

Partnership efforts, while successful in the region, do take valuable human resources to sustain.
Regional Community Profile:

Recommendations for Region 7 to Comprehensively End Human Trafficking

These regional profiles should spark conversation, discussion, and ultimately, action. We encourage each community to gather in partnership and create goals related to these location-specific questions:

1. How are you measuring the effectiveness of your efforts to end human trafficking? What data would you need to collect to understand your impact? How would you like to share and protect this data? How will you know your efforts are directly impacting the root causes of trafficking in your community?

2. Is everyone at the table for partnerships? Who is missing? Several participants noted groups or identities that may not be represented in partnerships. How can partnerships be more inclusive or create commitments that can be sustained?

3. How can you educate the medical, educational and prosecutorial community? Are there other resources in rural areas so victims do not fall through the cracks in resource-scarce counties?
THE COLORADO PROJECT

THE 4PS: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

STRENGTHS: WHAT EXISTS

GAPS: WHAT’S MISSING

RECOMMENDATIONS: ACTION PLAN

ADVANCE COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS
EVALUATE
REFINE PROMISING PRACTICES
END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THE COLORADO PROJECT TIMELINE

2010-2013
Colorado Project 1.0
- National Survey (2011)
- Statewide Survey, Focus Groups (2012)
- Report Publication (2013)

2013
Colorado Action Plan 1.0
- State Advisory Board
- 14 Recommendations
- 48 Activities
- State Policy Recommendations

2014-2017
Colorado Anti-Trafficking Movement
- Updated Human Trafficking Laws
- Governor’s Council Established (2014)
- Colorado Anti-Trafficking Exchange (2017)

2018-2019
Colorado Project 2.0
- Statewide Survey, Interviews, Focus Groups (2018)

2019
Colorado Action Plan 2.0
- Survivor-Informed Committee
- State Advisory Committee
- 10 Recommendations
The 4P Framework
The Colorado Project Regional Community Profiles frame their recommendations through the “4P” (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) definitions, which were shaped by five global and federal protocols and legislation. The 4P framework recognizes that there are multiple sectors engaged in efforts to combat trafficking, as well as necessarily diverse strategies. Using the 4Ps helps us better understand both strengths and gaps in Colorado, and to develop a more comprehensive response.

**Prevention** measures increase awareness, advocacy, and education towards addressing a community’s systemic vulnerability to a continuum of exploitation, including human trafficking. Prevention plans recognize that exploitation and human trafficking are symptoms of root causes like poverty, gender inequality, and other forms of oppression which create vulnerable populations in the first place.

**Protection** measures ensure that survivors of human trafficking are provided access to (at a minimum) health care, legal aid, social services, and education in ways that are not prejudicial against victims’ rights, dignity, or psychological well-being. Protection also means creating an environment (social, political, and legal) that fosters the protection of victims of trafficking.

**Prosecution** measures ensure the creation and implementation of laws that address the continuum of labor exploitation and the pursuit of criminal punishments for such cases, treating human trafficking as exploitation of victims rather than recruitment/transportation of workers or people in prostitution. This includes not just criminal prosecution, but law enforcement officers and the creation of legislation.

**Partnership** measures acknowledge that combating human trafficking requires a comprehensive response through the cooperation of multiple sectors. Partnerships bring together diverse experiences, amplify messages, and leverage resources. An anti-human trafficking partnership refers to a cooperative relationship between two or more organizations established for the purpose of jointly combating human trafficking in some way (LCHT, 2013, p.8).
The Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Denver, Colorado and an established leader in the national anti-trafficking movement. Since 2005, LCHT has trained over 30,000 professionals and community members; conducted research to drive action and inform policy change; operated Colorado’s 24/7 human trafficking hotline; and developed over 150 future human rights leaders.