

October 15, 2025

Session Two:

Exploitation, Trafficking, and Violence

Child Protection Roundtable Series

switchboard
connecting resettlement experts





Today's Facilitator



Claire Hopkins

Training Officer,
Switchboard



Today's Roundtable Panelists



Carlyn Sperling

Unaccompanied Refugee
Minor Program Director,
Bethany Christian Services



Regina Bernadin

Director of Protection –
Safety, Health & Education
Technical Unit, International
Rescue Committee

Learning Objectives



By the end of this roundtable, you will be able to:

1

IDENTIFY

signs of trafficking and exploitation that may impact newcomer youth before and after arrival

2

DESCRIBE

how systemic factors—such as labor practices, digital access, and grooming tactics—contribute to newcomer youth vulnerability

3

USE

prevention and safety planning strategies that center youth voice and cultural context



When you think of trafficking and exploitation, what words come to mind?



Exploitation

Involves taking advantage of someone's vulnerability for personal or financial gain.

Trafficking

Involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, or provision of a person for labor or services through force, fraud, or coercion.



Common Signs of Exploitation and Trafficking

- Received promises of jobs or education before or during migration
- Traveling with non-relatives or unclear guardianship
- Lack of contact with family and friends or controlled communication
- Debt bondage or forced arrangements and fear for their loved ones' safety

What signs of exploitation or trafficking have you seen after youth arrive in the U.S.?

- Sudden changes in housing or caregivers
- Working long hours or unsafe jobs; unexplained cash or gifts
- Signs of physical abuse or neglect
- Lack of school enrollment or attendance
- Isolation, secrecy online, fear of authorities
- Lack of access to their documents



Case Scenario: Camila



Exploitation and Trafficking Warning Signs

Camila is a 17-year-old unaccompanied refugee minor (URM) from Honduras who lives in a foster care agency's independent living girls' group home. She came to the U.S. hoping to reunify with an adult cousin she believed would support her.

At first, Camila spoke positively about their relationship. Recently, however, she has begun to withdraw. She appears tense when weekends with her cousin approach, guards her phone, and spends long periods online late at night.

The cousin has given her expensive electronics for her upcoming 18th birthday, suggested “quick cash jobs,” and told her to keep their conversations private.

In a recent therapy session, Camila shared that someone close to her pressured her to send private photos and implied there would be consequences if she refused.



Thinking about Camila's situation, what possible warning signs of trafficking or exploitation stand out to you?



**Labor Practices, Digital Access, and Grooming Tactics
Contribute to Youth Vulnerability**

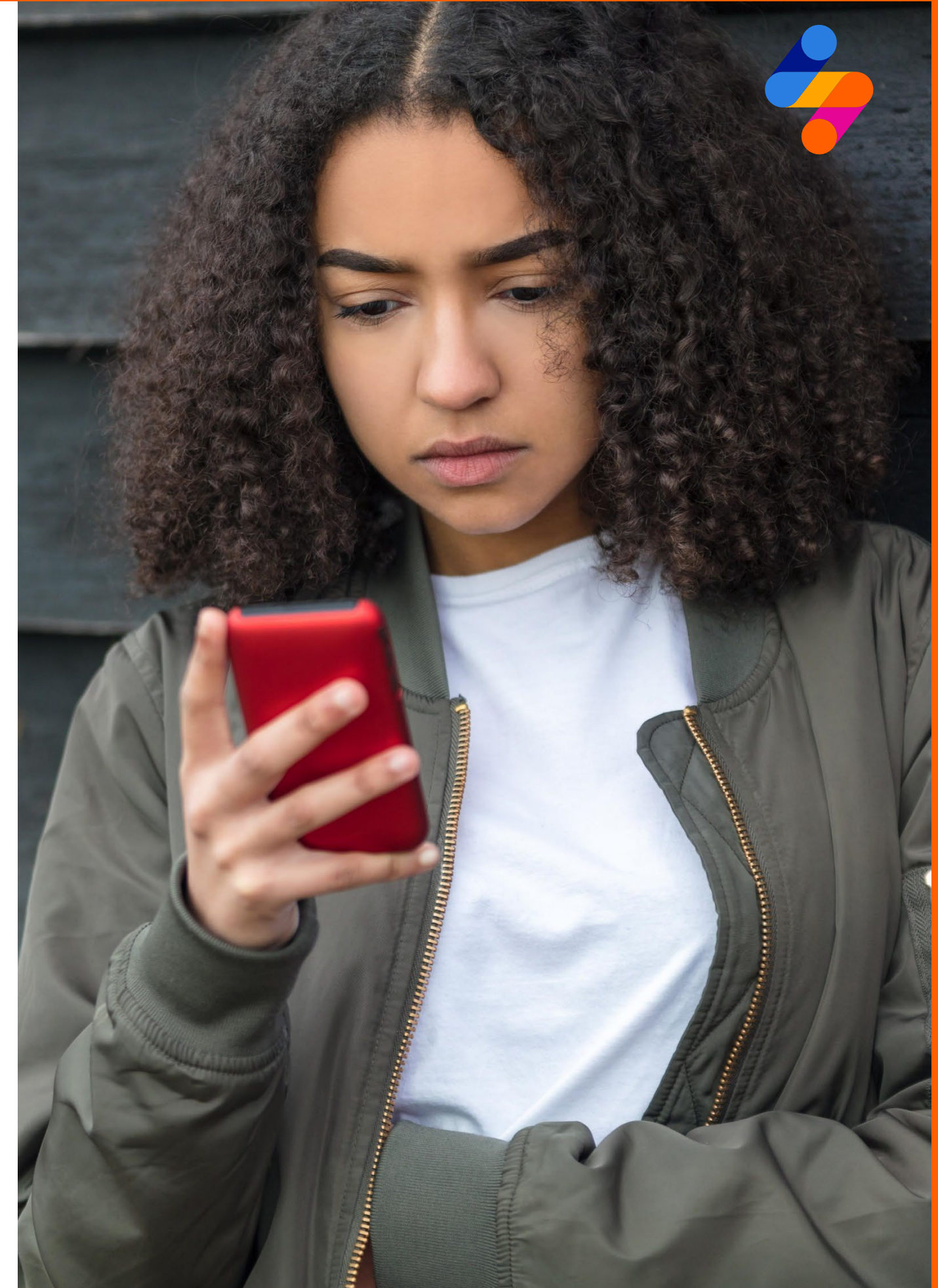
What are the impacts of immigration and labor practices on newcomer youth?

- Informal or under-the-table work can mask exploitation
- Limited legal work options push youth toward unsafe jobs
- Fear of deportation or system involvement discourages reporting



What online dynamics or grooming tactics have you seen put newcomer youth at risk?

- Digital access and unmonitored access
- Social media or gaming apps used for recruitment
- Secrecy around phone use or sudden changes in online behavior
- Grooming through gifts, flattery, or promises of stability or immigration help





Case Scenario: Revisiting Camila

Systemic Factors

Camila is a 17-year-old unaccompanied refugee minor (URM) from Honduras who lives in a foster care agency's independent living girls' group home. She came to the U.S. hoping to reunify with an adult cousin she believed would support her.

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In a recent therapy session, Camila shared that someone close to her pressured her to send private photos and implied there would be consequences if she refused.



**Which systemic factors are influencing Camila's vulnerability?
(Select all that apply)**



How might constant phone and device access contribute to Camila's vulnerability in this scenario?

What are Youth-Centered Prevention Strategies?

- **Co-create trusted adult networks**—caregivers, mentors, and community members—and establish safe routines and communication channels
- Teach **online safety** and **digital boundaries** (e.g., privacy settings, recognizing manipulation or grooming)
- Proactively provide clear, linguistically accessible information on **U.S. labor laws and healthy relationships**
- Normalize having **ongoing conversations** about work, relationships, and safety **without shame**



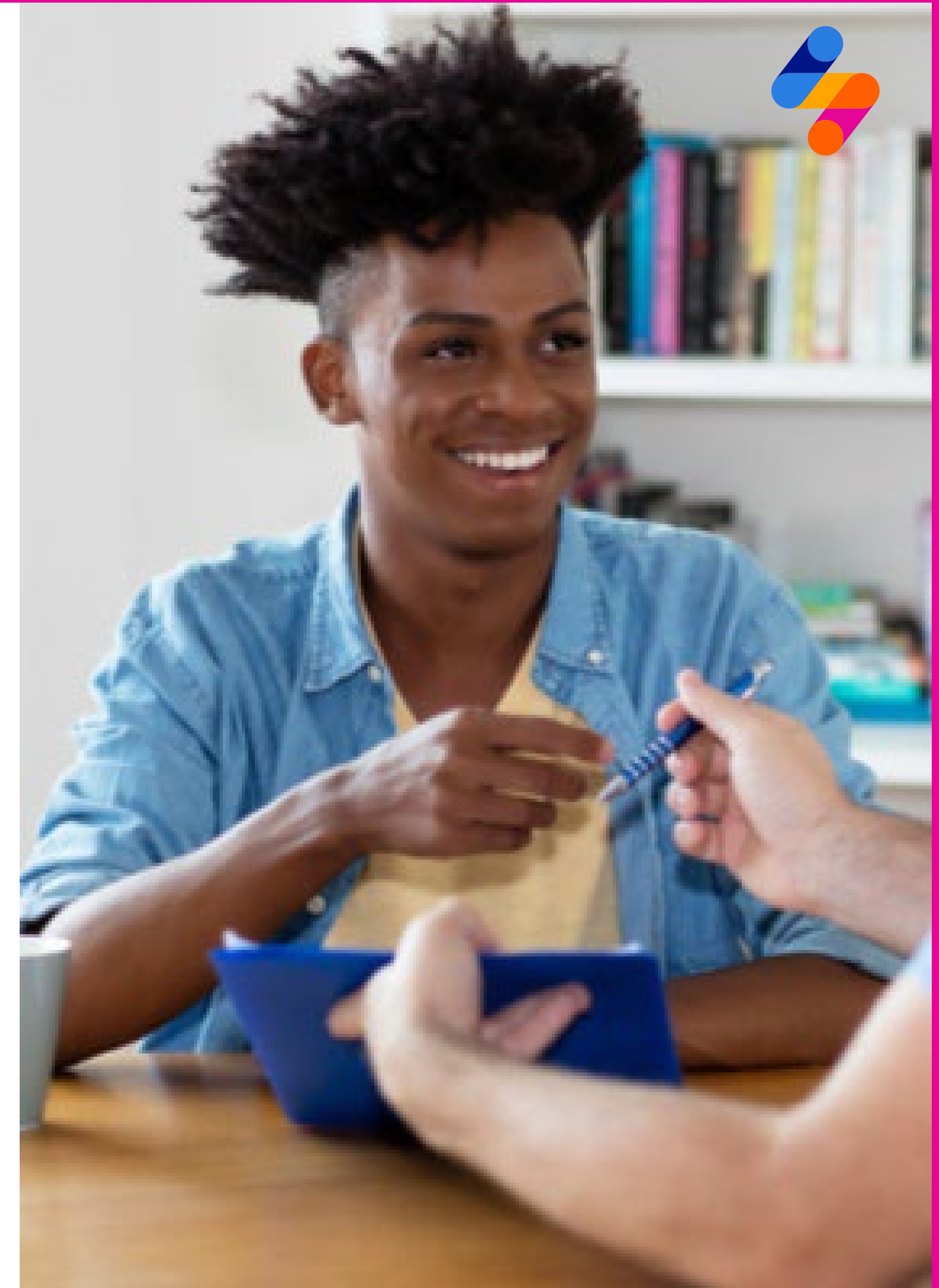
How does cultural context shape prevention and safety-planning strategies?

- Safety definitions and norms
- Community or cultural supports
- Linguistic and culturally adapted communications and resources
- Migration history and reunification hopes
- Balancing respect for culture with protection



What challenges have you faced when implementing these strategies, and how did you address them?

- Youth often lack understanding and awareness of trafficking and exploitation
- Trauma history impacts familiarity with healthy vs. unhealthy relationships
- Limited buy-in and strong competition from traffickers who have refined their use of social media for recruitment





Case Scenario: Revisiting Camila

Prevention and Safety Planning Strategies

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What youth-centered steps would you include in Camila's safety plan?

Q&A Panel



Carlyn Sperling

Unaccompanied Refugee Minor
Program Director, Bethany
Christian Services



Regina Bernadin

Director of Protection – Safety,
Health & Education Technical
Unit, International Rescue
Committee



What is one prevention or safety-planning strategy, focused on youth voice and cultural context, that you might use in your work after today's roundtable?

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Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance



Recommended Resources



Switchboard

- **Guide:** [Safety Planning for Suicidal Ideation](#) (2025)
- **Guide:** [Introduction to Safety Planning](#) (2025)
- **Templates:** [Low-Risk Safety Plan](#) (2025) and [Family Violence Safety Plan](#) (2025)
- **Blog:** [What Can We Do to Protect Clients and Staff? Tips for Getting Started with Safeguarding and Protection](#) (2022)
- **Blog:** [Meeting Newcomers' Protection Needs Part II: A Collection of Resources on Sexual and Gender-based Violence](#) (2023)
- **Blog:** [Combating Child Labor Trafficking: A Resource Collection for Providers Serving URM and Other Youth](#) (2023)
- **Webinar:** [Traumatic Stress Among Refugee Children and Youth Part 3: Responding to Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking](#) (2023)
- **Webinar:** [Safety Planning with Unaccompanied Refugee Minors](#) (2021)
- **Webinar:** [Fundamentals of Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) for Refugee Service Providers: The What, Why, and How of Safety Planning](#) (2020)

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE)

- **Video:** [U.S. Laws Overview](#) (2022)

Recommended Resources



Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS)

- **Webinar:** [Refugee Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence: Doubly Vulnerable](#) (2018)
- **Blog:** [Determining Child Abuse & Neglect Across Cultures](#) (n.d.)

Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC)

- **Video:** [Online Sexual Abuse](#) (2021)

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

- **Toolkit:** [Safety Planning with Foreign National Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking](#) (2021)
- **Tip Sheet:** [What You Need to Know About Body Safety and Consent](#) (2023)
- **Guide:** [Gender-Based Violence](#) (2023)

Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers

- **Blog:** [Five Tips for Providers on Supporting Teen and Youth Health and Wellness](#) (2025)

Center for Adjustment, Resilience, and Recovery (CARRE)

- **Tip Sheets:** [Seven Tips to Stay Safe Online](#) and [Online Safety Tip Sheet](#) (2022)
- **Guides:** [Talking with Clients Expressing Fear and Distress Related to Potential Immigration Enforcement Actions](#) (2024) and [Supporting Children Impacted by Hate Incidents and Hate Crimes](#) (2024)

Framework, Tools to Combat Labor Trafficking: [Resource Library](#), [Blog](#), and [Survivor Voices](#)



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