

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105707](#), a testimony Before the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Congress and federal agencies need data of sufficient quality to help ensure vulnerable populations are appropriately identified and supported. For example, virtual currencies are increasingly used in various legitimate transactions, but can also facilitate illicit activities, including human and drug trafficking. Further, AI/AN women in the U.S. experience higher rates of violence than most other women, and tribal and federal officials have stated that this incidence of violence constitutes a crisis. Federal officials and tribal stakeholders have raised concerns about challenges with cross-jurisdictional cooperation and a lack of comprehensive national data on cases.

This statement discusses GAO's prior work on (1) the extent to which the number of missing or murdered AI/AN women in the U.S. is known; and (2) what is known about the use of virtual currency for human and drug trafficking and the extent to which U.S. agencies collect data on these topics.

GAO reviewed available data and agency documentation on missing and murdered AI/AN women and the illicit use of virtual currency in human and drug trafficking, including relevant agency policies and procedures.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made 15 recommendations in prior reports, including developing a plan to continue analyses of data on missing and murdered AI/AN women and countering the illicit use of virtual currency in human and drug trafficking. Agencies concurred with 14 of 15 recommendations and GAO is monitoring planned actions to address them.

View [GAO-22-105707](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or [goodwin@gao.gov](mailto:goodwin@gao.gov).

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## HUMAN AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

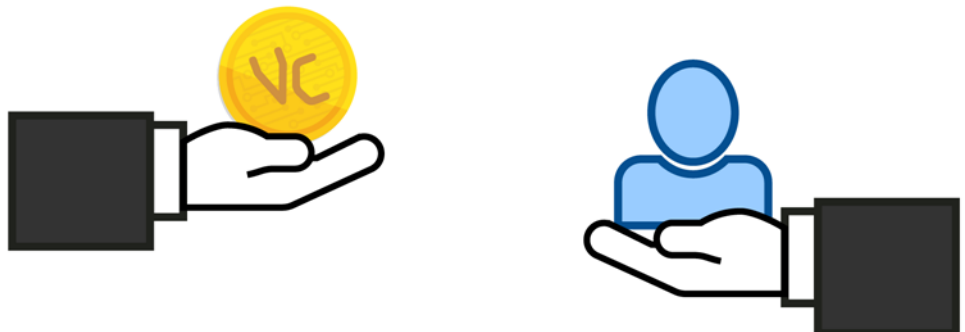
### Actions Needed to Address Gaps in Federal Data to Counter Illicit Activities

## What GAO Found

GAO has reported on issues affecting a variety of vulnerable populations, the need for additional data, and opportunities to help ensure that relevant data is accessible and of sufficient quality. Specifically:

- In October 2021, GAO reported that data on the total number of missing or murdered Indigenous women—referred to as American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women in this report—is unknown because federal databases do not contain comprehensive national data. Due to differences in the characteristics of these databases, including their intended purposes, specific contents, organization, and any applicable statutory restrictions, they cannot be combined together for this purpose. GAO reported that the Department of Justice has taken some steps to analyze data in federal databases related to cases of missing or murdered AI/AN women, including publishing more detailed single-year statistics in 2020 on missing persons by race, gender, and age. However, at the time of GAO's report, data analysis efforts were in the early stages, and the department did not have a plan to continue these efforts past November 2021. Developing such a plan could provide DOJ and other stakeholders with information to better understand the nature of the missing or murdered AI/AN crisis and identify emerging trends.
- Virtual currency is increasingly used illicitly to facilitate human and drug trafficking (see fig.). For example, in December 2021, GAO reported that the number of suspicious activity reports filed with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network that involve virtual currency and drug trafficking increased fivefold (from 252 to 1,432) from calendar year 2017 to 2020. In December 2021, GAO also reported that data from selected federal agencies on virtual currency use for human and drug trafficking may not be consistently captured. Consequently, agencies may lack complete data when assessing or reporting on the illicit use of virtual currency in human and drug trafficking. GAO has made numerous recommendations in prior reports designed to address data challenges discussed in this statement. Agencies have taken some steps to address these recommendations and GAO is monitoring those ongoing efforts.

#### Virtual Currency is Being Used to Facilitate Human Trafficking



Source: GAO. | [GAO-22-105707](#)