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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE (Tier 2)

The Government of Zimbabwe does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Zimbabwe was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases, including cases of official complicity. The government identified trafficking victims for the first time in two years and referred trafficking victims to services. The government supported repatriation and reintegration of Zimbabwean victims exploited abroad. The government increased training for law enforcement, immigration officials, and other key anti-trafficking officials. The government finalized and began implementation of a new 2023-2028 Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action. The government developed SOPs for oversight of labor recruitment agencies. Additionally, the government established task forces in six provinces to investigate trafficking and coordinate victim services. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not amend its anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking. Reports of low-level official complicity in trafficking crimes persisted. The government did not provide sufficient resources for victim protection, relying on NGOs and international organizations to provide the majority of services to trafficking victims. Additionally, significant backlogs of pending trafficking investigations and prosecutions remained.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Amend the anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking in line with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

- Expedite trafficking cases in courts to address the significant backlog of cases.
- Increase collaboration with civil society organizations assisting trafficking victims, including through efforts of the Anti-Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (ATIMC).
- Implement and consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, and implementing SOPs for ethical recruitment.
- Provide more financial or in-kind support to NGOs that assist trafficking victims.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including complicit officials and perpetrators of child sex trafficking.
- Adequately fund and provide specialized training to law enforcement, labor inspectors, prosecutors, and judiciary officials to conduct human trafficking investigations and prosecutions, particularly as distinct from labor law and immigration violations, using a victim-centered approach.
- Train front-line workers to proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including orphaned children, migrant workers, and Cuban medical workers, and refer them to appropriate services using the NRM.
- Establish shelters for trafficking victims in each province and actively refer identified victims to care.
- Develop mutual legal assistance treaties and other agreements to facilitate information gathering and sharing with foreign governments.
- Collect data on human trafficking trends within Zimbabwe to better inform government anti-trafficking efforts.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. Zimbabwean law criminalized some forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Inconsistent with international law, the 2014 Trafficking in Persons Act defined trafficking in persons as a movement-based crime and did not adequately define “exploitation.” The 2014 act criminalized the involuntary transport of a person and the voluntary transport for an unlawful purpose into, outside, or within Zimbabwe. The focus on transport and the inadequate definition of “exploitation” left Zimbabwe

without comprehensive prohibitions of trafficking crimes. The law prescribed penalties of 10 years to life imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking crimes, commensurate with penalties for other serious crimes, such as rape. Zimbabwe's Labor Relations Amendment Act criminalized forced labor and prescribed penalties of up to two years' imprisonment, which were not sufficiently stringent. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act criminalized procuring a person for unlawful sexual conduct, inside or outside of Zimbabwe, and prescribed penalties of up to two years' imprisonment; these penalties were not sufficiently stringent when applied to cases of sex trafficking. The act also criminalized coercing or inducing anyone to engage in unlawful sexual conduct with another person by threat or intimidation, prescribing sufficiently stringent penalties of one to five years' imprisonment. The government approved the principles for its 2019 draft Trafficking in Persons Amendment Bill, with support from an international organization, which was pending introduction to Parliament for passage. The government reported it consulted with survivors and civil society on the draft legislation.

The government initiated 10 investigations and continued 63 investigations, compared with initiating seven investigations in the previous reporting period. The government initiated eight prosecutions compared with four prosecutions initiated in the previous reporting period. The government convicted one sex trafficker, imposing a sentence of 70 years' imprisonment, compared to none in the previous reporting period and one in 2021. The pandemic severely curtailed investigations and operation of courts during the reporting period, resulting in a continued backlog of trafficking cases. Despite the continued urging from victims to take action on the 17 alleged trafficking cases of Zimbabwean women exploited in Kuwait in 2016, and the victims' stated willingness to participate in the trials, the government did not do so for the sixth consecutive year. The government investigated and prosecuted five Zimbabwean labor recruiters for recruiting Zimbabwean women to Oman for alleged exploitation in domestic servitude; the cases remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The government established a bilateral labor migration agreement with the Government of Rwanda and reported collaborating with the Governments of South Africa and Oman on investigations involving potential trafficking of Zimbabwean victims.

The government increased criminal investigations of officials complicit in trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns. The government charged a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) officer with human trafficking for complicity in recruiting Zimbabwean women for exploitation in domestic servitude in Oman and charged a high-ranking political official with visa fraud related to alleged human trafficking crimes; both investigations remained ongoing. Observers reported the government did not have a

system to investigate and prosecute complicit officials. The government did not report taking action on cases from recent years involving potential forced labor on farms either belonging to officials or of children housed in government-funded institutions. In 2020, an NGO assisted four potential labor trafficking victims allegedly exploited on a member of Parliament's farm; the government did not report any action to investigate the allegations by the end of the reporting period. Military officers patrolling the Beitbridge border post and the Robert Mugabe International Airport received bribes to facilitate unauthorized entry from organized criminal groups likely transporting human trafficking victims. Officials accepted bribes to not inspect farms and businesses using exploitative labor practices. Violent gangs utilized forced labor in some artisanal and defunct gold mines, operating with impunity due to their connections to police and local politicians who allegedly accepted bribes and allowed workers to enter the mines without oversight. In some cases, trafficking victims reported law enforcement threatened and intimidated them when they tried to report their cases.

The government trained ZRP officers on investigating human trafficking in refresher training courses and included an anti-trafficking module in training for new recruits. With support from an international organization, the ATIMC also trained government officials, including immigration officials, diplomats, magistrates and judges, prosecutors, police officers, immigration officials, correctional officers, and social workers on topics such as anti-trafficking laws, victim interviewing, and the NRM. However, observers reported the government lacked systematic procedures and capacity to effectively investigate cases, and insufficient training on identification for front-line officials resulted in trafficking crimes often remaining undetected. Law enforcement officers and prosecutors routinely investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases as wage infractions or immigration violations.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim identification and protection efforts. The government identified 54 trafficking victims, compared with none in the previous two reporting periods, and referred all victims to services. Of the 54 victims identified, traffickers exploited 25 female victims in labor trafficking abroad and 29 victims in sex trafficking domestically, including 16 adult females, three adult males, and 10 children. NGOs identified an additional 135 Zimbabwean women exploited in domestic servitude in Oman and referred the victims to the government for assistance. In response, the government dispatched an inter-ministerial task force to engage the Omani government, identify additional victims, facilitate repatriation, and investigate trafficking crimes. The government repatriated 131 victims exploited in Oman, coordinated victim services

and shelter with NGOs and international organizations, and provided each victim with ZWL361,900 (\$1,000), a bank account, and basic necessities. The government relied on NGOs and foreign donors to fund trafficking victim services; however, organizations struggled to operate without adequate and consistent financial support, and some could only provide short-term care. The government operated one shelter in Harare for GBV and trafficking victims and operated 24 vulnerable children's homes that could serve child trafficking victims. The government partnered with NGOs and international organizations to provide care for trafficking survivors, including shelter, food, medical treatment, family reunification and reintegration assistance, counseling, and income-generating assistance; government social workers facilitated access to government benefits. Shelters and services for trafficking, domestic violence, and GBV victims were available to men and women, nationals and foreigners, irrespective of the victim's participation in legal proceedings. The 2014 anti-trafficking act required the government to establish service centers in each of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces and provide counseling and reintegration services to survivors; however, the government had not established these centers.

The government continued to use the NRM and SOPs, which outlined procedures for the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims. The government established provincial task force teams to investigate trafficking and coordinate victim services in six of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces. The technical steering committee for trafficking victim protection, led by the Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare (MPSLSW), met during the reporting period and coordinated repatriation of Zimbabweans exploited in Oman. The MPSLSW had a system whereby an NGO and a Department of Social Development caseworker jointly handled each reported potential trafficking case, but it did not use the system in practice. The government provided victim-witness assistance during the criminal justice process; however, police unfamiliarity with trafficking crimes often caused re-traumatization of trafficking victims. The government reported 134 trafficking victims participated in investigations and prosecutions. During trials, the government provided victims with transportation and accommodation, and assisted victims who opted to provide written statements. Courts had separate rooms for victims to testify away from their alleged perpetrators, and victims could choose to testify via video or written testimony; however, the government did not report whether victims utilized these services. Observers reported limited access to the necessary equipment for video testimony in some courts, especially in rural areas. The anti-trafficking law entitled victims to restitution from convicted traffickers; however, the government did not report awarding restitution during the reporting period. The government did not have legal alternatives to the removal of foreign trafficking victims to countries in which they would face retribution or hardship.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking. The ATIMC served as the national inter-ministerial coordinating body for all anti-trafficking activities, and its secretariat led the government's trafficking efforts. The ATIMC met twice during the reporting period. The ATIMC developed and began implementation of the 2023-2028 National Plan of Action, which was approved by the Cabinet and partially resourced. The government raised public awareness of human trafficking through radio programming and held exhibitions at two trade and agricultural fairs, providing materials in several languages. The government launched a hotline for GBV victims, which was equipped to identify and refer trafficking victims. An NGO operated hotline identified 47 potential trafficking victims.

The government continued to lack political will to address child and forced labor, particularly in agriculture, but reported increased efforts during the reporting period. A tripartite committee of government, labor unions, and business representatives determined the MPSLSW led efforts to raise awareness of child and forced labor among the tobacco industry, conduct a survey, and mandate policies for contract tobacco farmers to prevent child and forced labor. The government reported its 120 labor inspectors, 100 occupational safety inspectors, and 80 mining sector inspectors received training to identify child and forced labor. Inspectors' prioritized inspections in tobacco and industrial sectors and had the authority to monitor private farms and homes for forced child labor but did not report doing so. Inspectors faced shortages in operational vehicles and fuel, which limited their effectiveness.

In addition to prosecuting five alleged fraudulent recruiters, the government, in collaboration with an international organization, developed and formally adopted SOPs for labor recruitment companies to ensure fair and ethical practices. In collaboration with an international organization, the government established a resource center in Harare to educate both departing and returning migrants on the dangers of human trafficking and available assistance. The government reported contributing information to a regional centralized anti-trafficking database. The government trained diplomats assigned to foreign missions on anti-trafficking through its Consular Assistance course and increased engagement with its missions abroad to effectively respond to Zimbabweans exploited abroad. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Zimbabwe, and traffickers exploit victims from Zimbabwe abroad. Internal trafficking is prevalent and underreported. Traffickers exploit Zimbabwean adults and children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including in cattle herding, domestic service, and mining in gold and diamond sectors. More than 71 percent of child labor occurs in the agriculture sector, including on tobacco, sugarcane, and cotton farms, as well as forestry and fishing sectors, where children weed, spray, harvest, and pack goods. Some of these children are victims of forced labor, including some who work on small, unregulated farms. Observers reported child sex trafficking and child labor likely increased due to economic hardship, particularly in agriculture, domestic service, informal trading, begging, and artisanal mining. Several traditional practices rendered young girls vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking, including the practice of trading daughters for food or money; using them as “replacement” brides for a deceased family member; and for *ngozi*, a reconciliation process where a family gives a family member to another family to make amends for a murdered relative. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Zimbabwean towns bordering South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia in forced labor, including domestic servitude, and sex trafficking in brothels catering to long-distance truck drivers on both sides of the border.

Traffickers exploit child laborers working as gold panners and ore couriers by providing inadequate compensation, stealing their income, exacerbating food insecurity, and forcing them to take drugs to perform strenuous tasks. Near gold and diamond mines, traffickers force children to sell illicit drugs; this exploitation increased during the pandemic. Illegal mining syndicates exploit Zimbabweans in trafficking. Experts estimate thousands of children have joined illegal diamond mining syndicates in the Marange fields in Chiadzwa since March 2020; some syndicates target vulnerable populations, including illiterate individuals, and transport them to the mines at night to disorient potential victims and prevent their escape. Traffickers also exploit women and children in sex trafficking in areas around the Chiadzwa diamond mines. Armed gangs known as “*mashurugwi*” lure young men to abandoned gold mines through promises of self-employment but force them to work in the artisanal gold mines. Child vendors, some of whom walk more than 25 kilometers per day to sell goods or offer cooking and cleaning services to miners, are exploited by sex traffickers in illegal mining areas or by long-distance truckers who transport coal and minerals. Girls as young as 12 are exploited in sex trafficking along the Harare-Chinhoyi highway, in the informal settlement of Caledonia, and in gold mining communities in Mashonaland East, West Nicholson, Mazowe, Bindura, and Shurugwi. During the pandemic, observers identified hundreds of children in sex trafficking near the Mazowe mines. Miners coerce girls into “relationships” where they are exploited in sex trafficking in exchange for money and food and sometimes forced to assist with mining operations. In Chiredzi, sex

traffickers recruit girls as young as 11 from surrounding areas. Children were exploited in sex trafficking in exchange for water in Chitungwiza.

Traffickers and fraudulent recruiters use false promises of legitimate employment opportunities, particularly in nursing and teaching, including through social media, to lure Zimbabweans into sex trafficking and forced labor in neighboring countries, particularly South Africa, and the Middle East. Traffickers have exploited Zimbabwean women in domestic servitude, forced labor, and sex trafficking in Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Uganda, often under the guise of legitimate employment. In Oman, Zimbabwean women are exploited in domestic servitude in hazardous and abusive conditions. In South Africa, traffickers exploit Zimbabweans in forced labor in agriculture, construction, factories, mines, information technology, domestic work, and hospitality businesses. Syndicates operating in South Africa recruit undocumented Zimbabwean migrants with promises of legitimate employment in mining and force them into labor in the illegal mining industry. Due to economic conditions caused by the pandemic and inflation, undocumented Zimbabwean women and children increasingly travel to South Africa for employment, where their lack of legal status increases their vulnerability to traffickers. Facilitators recruit and transport Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa, where international criminal syndicates subject them to sex trafficking in Musina, Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Durban. Traffickers use fraudulent scholarship schemes to lure Zimbabwean students to Cyprus ostensibly for educational purposes and exploit them in forced labor and sex trafficking. Media reported Zimbabweans living abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland, trick Zimbabweans to travel abroad under the pretenses of tourism or legitimate employment and force them into domestic servitude. Traffickers recruit Zimbabwean girls into neighboring countries with promises of marriage and, during marriage, force them into domestic work.

Zimbabwe is a transit country for migrants vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking victims, including Somalis, Ethiopians, Malawians, and Zambians en route to South Africa. Zimbabwe is also a destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers subject Mozambican children to forced labor in street vending, including in Mbare, the largest informal market in Harare. Mozambican and Malawian children who work on relatives' farms in Zimbabwe are often undocumented and cannot enroll in school, which increases their vulnerability of trafficking. In prior years, there were reports of refugees from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo traveling from Zimbabwe's Tongogara Refugee Camp to Harare, where traffickers exploited them. Refugees and asylum-seekers are not permitted to have bank accounts and experience difficulties in obtaining identification documents, which limits employment opportunities and increases vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers force some PRC nationals to work in

restaurants in Zimbabwe. Construction and mining companies owned by both PRC nationals and PRC parastatal entities in Zimbabwe reportedly employ practices indicative of forced labor, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as coercion to induce work in unsafe or otherwise undesirable conditions. PRC parastatal tobacco enterprises exerted political influence to exempt themselves from labor laws and regulation, including mandates pertaining to child and forced labor. Cuban nationals working as doctors in Zimbabwe may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.

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