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2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ghana

GHANA (Tier 2)

The Government of Ghana 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; therefore Ghana remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, and identifying and referring more trafficking victims to services. The government provided trauma-informed training for judicial and law enforcement officials and increased its coordination with civil society on protection and prevention efforts. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government continued its 2017 ban on labor migration to Gulf states, which increased vulnerability to trafficking. Despite reports of fraudulent labor recruiters exploiting Ghanaian victims abroad, the government did not report holding any fraudulent recruiters accountable. The government did not adequately address complicity in trafficking crimes, and it did not amend the anti-trafficking act regulations to remove the option of a fine in lieu of imprisonment in cases where the trafficker was a parent or guardian of a child victim. Efforts to screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators such as labor migrants, asylum seekers, and workers on People's Republic of China (PRC) national-owned fishing vessels, remained inadequate.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue to increase efforts to investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers, including complicit officials and fraudulent labor recruiters, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Ghanaian workers abroad, including by ending the ban on labor migration to Gulf states, implementing the 2020 National Labor Migration Policy, and ensuring workers do not pay recruitment fees. * Amend the 2015 implementing regulations for the 2005 human trafficking law to remove the option of a fine in lieu of imprisonment in cases where the trafficker is a parent or guardian of a child victim. * Fully implement and train front-line officials on the SOPs to proactively screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations – including Ghanaian women traveling abroad for domestic work, returning migrants, child laborers, refugees and asylum seekers, and Cuban government-affiliated medical workers – and refer trafficking victims to protective services. * Increase the quantity and quality of care available to trafficking victims, including by providing financial and in-kind support to civil society providing shelter and victim services. * Institutionalize training for law enforcement, judicial officials, and Department of Social Welfare (DSW) personnel on the 2005 human trafficking law, and on trauma-informed, specialized investigative and prosecutorial techniques. * Improve victim-witness assistance programs to increase protective services for victims participating in the criminal justice process. * Increase coordination between law enforcement, prosecutors, and social workers on trafficking victim identification and protection. * Allocate resources and develop the capacity to proactively screen for and investigate trafficking cases on PRC-national-owned fishing vessels in Ghana's exclusive economic zone.

PROSECUTION

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The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. The 2005 Human Trafficking Act, amended in 2009, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The Human Trafficking Act prescribed penalties of a minimum of five years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. However, the 2015 regulations for this Act, which are non-discretionary and have the force of law, provided specific guidance on sentencing depending on the circumstances; in general, the term is not less than five years' imprisonment and not more than 25 years' imprisonment, but if a parent, guardian, or other person with parental responsibilities facilitates or engages in trafficking, they are liable to a fine, five to 10 years' imprisonment, or both. By allowing for a fine in lieu of imprisonment, these penalties were not commensurate with those for other grave crimes, such as rape.

Authorities initiated investigations of 109 trafficking cases (31 sex trafficking cases, 65 labor trafficking cases, and 13 cases of unspecified forms of trafficking) and continued six investigations (two sex trafficking and four labor trafficking cases) in 2023, compared with initiating investigations of 133 cases in 2022. The government initiated prosecutions of 47 alleged traffickers (15 for sex trafficking, 29 for labor trafficking, and three for unspecified forms of trafficking) and continued prosecutions of two alleged sex traffickers. Courts convicted 19 traffickers under the 2005 anti-trafficking law, including 10 sex traffickers and nine labor traffickers, and sentenced them to between one month and 15 years' imprisonment. This compared with initiating prosecutions of 28 alleged traffickers, continuing prosecutions of seven alleged traffickers, and convicting 10 traffickers in 2022. In some cases, the government prosecuted alleged traffickers under the Children's Act of 1998 when there was insufficient evidence to obtain a conviction under the anti-trafficking law. The government prosecuted and convicted three defendants for exploitative child labor under the Children's Act; courts issued fines to all three defendants. Despite reports of fraudulent labor recruiters exploiting Ghanaian victims abroad, the government did not report investigating or prosecuting any fraudulent recruitment cases. The government did not report cooperating with foreign counterparts on law enforcement activities. However, one NGO reported authorities collaborated with foreign counterparts on a law enforcement investigation of a labor trafficking online scam operation. Media reported law enforcement removed some children from potential trafficking situations without sufficient evidence and used unnecessary force and trauma-insensitive tactics.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees allegedly complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, official corruption and complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Observers alleged some traffickers operated with the support or acquiescence of law enforcement or justice officials and some officials interfered in law enforcement proceedings. Traffickers reportedly bribed law enforcement officials and government-appointed monitors in charge of inspecting Ghanaian-flagged fishing vessels for illegal practices, including forced labor. During previous reporting periods, some law enforcement officers reportedly solicited bribes from suspects and sought payment from victims or civil society for transportation or operating expenses to initiate investigations; in past years, some senior police officers reportedly attempted to intimidate civil society from reporting trafficking cases.

The Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), and the Economic and Organized Crime Office had dedicated, specialized anti-trafficking units. The Ghana Marine Police operated specialized patrols on Lake Volta to identify and investigate child labor and trafficking cases. Fifteen courts had specialized training, procedures, and trauma-informed facilities for cases involving women and child victims, which included trafficking cases. The government, both independently and in collaboration with NGOs, provided extensive training to law enforcement, judicial officials, and other front-line actors on trafficking definitions and legal concepts, investigative and prosecutorial techniques, trauma-informed investigative practices, and victim identification and protection. The GPS and GIS police academy provided anti-trafficking training to new police officers; however, observers reported police officers outside of the

specialized anti-trafficking units required additional training on the 2005 anti-trafficking law and identification of trafficking crimes. Stakeholders also reported a need for additional training on specialized investigative procedures and evidence collection. Government officials and NGOs reported a lack of sufficient funding and resources impeded anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. A lack of shelter capacity sometimes delayed investigations and law enforcement operations to remove potential victims from exploitative situations. Inadequate evidence collection, weak collaboration between police and prosecutors, and a lack of experienced state attorneys further hampered prosecution of suspected traffickers. Judicial resources were concentrated in urban areas, leaving some victims in rural communities with limited access to the formal justice system.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. The government reported identifying and referring to services 944 trafficking victims (including 123 sex trafficking victims and 821 labor trafficking victims) in 2023, compared with identifying and referring 574 victims 2022. The majority of identified victims were children (505). Most identified victims were also Ghanaian (616). Of the 123 foreign national victims, most were Nigerian; other victims identified were from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Vietnam. NGOs identified an additional 145 trafficking victims, including 139 labor trafficking victims and six sex trafficking victims.

Observers noted the government increased interagency coordination on victim protection and its collaboration with civil society. The government continued implementing SOPs to identify trafficking victims and refer them to services, and it developed an abridged, child-friendly version of the procedures to use with child victims. The government trained social workers, service providers, law enforcement, and NGOs on the SOPs. Social workers also had case management SOPs for vulnerable children. District DSW personnel accompanied local law enforcement on anti-trafficking operations and conducted screenings to identify potential victims; however, these teams reported to local governments rather than a centralized government entity. Observers reported decentralization, lack of funding, and poor management impeded the DSW's effectiveness and sometimes resulted in inadequate and inconsistent treatment of victims. Observers reported additional training for DSW personnel on anti-trafficking laws and victim-centered, trauma-informed interviewing techniques was needed.

The government operated a shelter for adult female trafficking victims and, with an international organization's support, operated a shelter for child trafficking victims. Two government-run shelters for child abuse victims could accommodate child trafficking victims. Officials could also refer victims to 12 private shelters, including two shelters that could accommodate adult male victims. However, observers reported overall shelter capacity, especially for child trafficking victims and victims in rural areas, remained insufficient. Government services for trafficking victims included shelter, medical care, needs assessments, psycho-social care, education and skills training, interpretation for foreign national victims, assistance obtaining identity documents, registration with the national health service, and assistance during legal proceedings. Through its Human Trafficking Fund (HTF) and DSW, the government expended 2,050,000 Ghanaian cedis (\$172,270) for victim services and shelter operations in 2023, a significant increase compared with expending 1,440,000 cedis (\$121,010) in 2022. Foreign victims had the same access to care as Ghanaian victims. Foreign victims could seek temporary residency during legal proceedings and, with the Interior Minister's approval, permanent residency if deemed to be in the victim's best interest; the government granted residency permits to at least nine victims. The government coordinated with an international organization and foreign governments to repatriate Ghanaian victims identified abroad and foreign victims identified in Ghana.

Due to inconsistent application of victim identification procedures, authorities may have deported some unidentified trafficking victims. Citing security concerns, officials returned more than 1,200 Burkinabe Fulbe asylum-seekers to Burkina Faso (more than 80 percent of whom were women and children) without screening for trafficking indicators; observers reported this likely included Ghanaian Fulbe, who were

subjected to discrimination and marginalization, and often lacked access to government services and identity documents. Observers reported officials sometimes falsely registered Ghanaian Fulbe children in birth registrations as Burkina Faso residents, further increasing vulnerability.

Access to victim services was not conditioned on cooperation with law enforcement proceedings. The government, in cooperation with NGOs, provided victim-witness assistance, including legal services, funding for lodging and transportation, and psycho-social support. Victims could provide video or written testimony, and some courts had child-friendly spaces that allowed child victims to testify from a separate room via video. Observers reported some judges set aside consecutive days for trafficking victims' testimony to reduce revictimization and significantly decrease trial length. Observers noted judges who had received specialized trauma-informed training demonstrated an increased awareness and application of trauma-informed mechanisms. However, officials did not always protect victims' confidentiality. Law enforcement and protection actors were instructed to separate victims and suspects to avoid re-traumatization; however, law enforcement sometimes brought victims and accused traffickers together when conducting interviews, which placed enormous pressure on victims to change their testimony. The law allowed trafficking victims to obtain restitution; however, the government did not report courts awarded restitution to any victims. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but none reportedly did so.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The Human Trafficking Management Board – the inter-ministerial committee mandated to administer the HTF, advise the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP) on anti-trafficking policy, promote prevention efforts, and facilitate the protection and reintegration of trafficking victims – met quarterly. The Human Trafficking Secretariat (HTS) coordinated anti-trafficking efforts under the MOGCSP, including implementation of the 2022-2026 NAP and accompanying communications strategy, and met regularly with anti-trafficking stakeholders. The government allocated 650,000 cedis (\$54,620) on the NAP's implementation, compared with 460,000 cedis (\$38,660) during the previous year.

The government conducted extensive trainings and public awareness campaigns with government officials, civil society stakeholders, and community leaders, both independently and in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations. The government hosted the annual ECOWAS Trafficking in Persons Forum to improve regional collaboration. The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, in coordination with the HTS, conducting trainings on child labor and child trafficking for fishing industry workers, advocates, management committees, and other community stakeholders. The government had a standardized trafficking data collection system in five regions, developed with an international organization's support; however, the system was not fully implemented. GPS operated a tip line that was able to respond to trafficking-related calls. The MOGCSP operated a hotline in English and six local languages for victims of abuse and a mobile application for reporting gender-based violence (GBV) crimes, including human trafficking; the government identified at least two victims as a result of hotline calls.

The government provided anti-trafficking training to labor inspectors, and inspectors had a forced labor training manual. Inspectors identified and removed child victims from exploitative labor situations and referred 54 cases, including suspected trafficking cases, to law enforcement for criminal investigation; at least seven of the cases resulted in convictions. The government did not adequately inspect Ghanaian-flagged fishing vessels for indicators of forced labor; while government-appointed monitors inspected some vessels for illegal fishing practices and indicators of forced labor, they were often threatened or bribed to issue false reports.

The government regulated formal labor recruitment and required private employment agencies to register; it also provided optional pre-departure trainings for migrant workers, and the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MELR) and GIS screened for trafficking indicators. However, there were continued reports of fraudulent labor recruiters exploiting women in domestic servitude abroad. The law did not prohibit worker-

paid recruitment fees; however, MELR discouraged licensed recruitment agencies from charging recruitment fees. The government continued its 2017 ban on labor migration to Gulf states; the policy restricted Ghanaians' access to legal migration, subsequently increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. The government continued implementing and training government and NGO stakeholders on its 2020 National Labor Migration Policy and 2020-2024 implementation plan; the plan included provisions to prevent labor exploitation and increase Ghanaian embassies' capacity to assist migrant workers abroad and protect foreign workers in Ghana.

The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. However, although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, an international organization reported there were three open cases of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Ghanaian peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2011 and 2012 and South Sudan in 2022. The government had not yet reported the accountability measures taken, if any, for the open cases at the end of the reporting period. Unlike the previous year, the government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Ghana, and traffickers exploit victims from Ghana abroad. Traffickers exploit Ghanaian children in forced labor in inland and coastal fishing, domestic service, street hawking, begging, portering, artisanal gold mining, quarrying, herding, and agriculture. Traffickers exploit Ghanaian children and children from other West African countries in forced labor in cocoa. Widespread poverty among cocoa-growing communities, extremely low cocoa prices and small profits for farmers, and lack of educational opportunities contribute to the prevalence of child labor and forced labor in the cocoa sector. Traffickers exploit children as young as four in forced labor in Lake Volta's fishing industry and use violence and limited access to food to control victims. Traffickers force boys to work in hazardous conditions, including in deep diving, and girls perform work onshore, such as preparing the fish for markets. Women and girls working in the fishing sector are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, including sex trafficking. Relatives often send girls via intermediaries to work in harsh conditions in forced labor in domestic work. Children in northern regions of Ghana, whose parents use intermediaries or relatives to send them to work in agriculture in the south during school breaks or the dry season, are vulnerable to forced labor. Observers noted lack of access to education, economic hardship, and high unemployment rates increase vulnerability to human trafficking in Ghana. An NGO reported climate change, including slow-onset events such as drought, exacerbates vulnerability of Ghanaians migrating from northern farming communities to urban centers in search of employment; girls and young women who work as *kayayie* (head-porters) are exploited in sex trafficking and forced labor, often through debt bondage, and men work in exploitative conditions as farm laborers and in mining, including in bonded labor. Women and girls who migrate to southern Ghana also reportedly do so to escape GBV – including female genital mutilation/cutting – and child, early, and forced marriages, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers subject girls, and to a lesser extent boys, to sex trafficking in urban areas and mining regions across Ghana. Marginalized sub-groups, such as LGBTQI+ persons and the Fulbe, face widespread discrimination in education, employment, financial services, and housing, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Stigma, intimidation, and the perceived bias of some police against marginalized communities dissuade survivors from reporting abuse.

Observers allege PRC national-owned and -operated industrial vessels flagged to Ghana, often through shell companies, exploit Ghanaian workers in forced labor; one organization documented cases of abuse, including physical abuse, underpayment or nonpayment of wages, restricted medical care, and poor living conditions, against Ghanaian men aboard these fleets. An NGO estimated 90 percent of industrial fishing vessels operating in Ghana are owned by PRC-based companies. Traffickers operating fishing vessels flagged to Ireland and the United Kingdom also exploit Ghanaian workers in forced labor, allegedly in

cooperation with some Ghanaian recruitment agencies. PRC nationals working in Ghana may be in forced labor in the formal and informal mining sectors and in fishing. Cuban government-affiliated professionals, including medical workers, may have been forced to work by the Cuban government. Traffickers exploit foreign national victims in forced labor in online scam operations in Ghana; the traffickers often fraudulently recruit victims online, including through the e-commerce site Qnet. Traffickers exploit Ghanaian and Nigerian women and girls in sex trafficking in Ghana, including in mining regions, border towns, and commercial centers. Traffickers lure Nigerian women and girls to Ghana with the promise of good jobs and coerce them into commercial sex to pay exorbitant debts for transportation and lodging.

Traffickers exploit Ghanaian women and children in forced labor and sex trafficking in the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of West Africa. Informal recruitment agencies continue to operate and facilitate recruitment through informal channels, and some agents use predatory tactics, including high recruitment fees and fraudulent job advertising. Unscrupulous agents recruit Ghanaian men and women seeking employment, transport them through North Africa, and exploit them in sex and labor trafficking in Europe and the Middle East. Traffickers fraudulently recruit and exploit Ghanaian women in the Middle East in domestic servitude using predatory recruitment tactics and informal or fake contracts; upon arrival, traffickers seize their passports and sometimes physically or sexually abuse them. Observers have reported registered and unregistered agents recruit Ghanaian workers and, with the assistance of some immigration or airport officials, facilitate their travel out of the country without the required exit documents.

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