

2025 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 increasing coordination between law enforcement and prosecutors. The government increased funding for victim services and for implementation of its 2022-2026 National Action Plan (NAP). The government also adopted new SOPs to monitor labor conditions in the cocoa sector to prevent child labor and forced labor. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government identified and referred fewer trafficking victims to services, and efforts to screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators such as migrants, asylum seekers, and workers on Chinese national-owned fishing vessels, remained inadequate. Some law enforcement officials lacked understanding of human trafficking laws and policies as well as specialized training and equipment to investigate cybercrimes, including forced labor in online scam centers.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 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 regime-affiliated workers – and refer trafficking victims to protective services.
- Continue to increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, especially labor trafficking and fraudulent recruitment, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Ghanaian workers abroad, including by implementing the 2020 National Labor Migration Policy and ensuring workers do not pay recruitment fees.
- 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.
- Issue or renew identity documents to eligible migrant populations to reduce vulnerability to trafficking.
- 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.
- Establish a DSW representative within the Human Trafficking Secretariat (HTS) to increase coordination on anti-trafficking efforts.
- Continue to 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 Chinese-national-owned fishing vessels in Ghana's exclusive economic zone.

PROSECUTION

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. To date, the government has not issued a fine in lieu of imprisonment in sex trafficking cases and stated that doing so is disallowed.

In 2024, authorities initiated investigations of 273 trafficking cases (103 sex trafficking cases, 149 labor trafficking cases, and 21 cases of unspecified forms of trafficking) and continued four investigations (two sex trafficking and two labor trafficking cases), a significant increase compared with initiating investigations of 109 cases in 2023. The government initiated prosecutions of 65 alleged traffickers (28 for sex trafficking, 31 for labor trafficking, and six for unspecified forms of trafficking) and continued prosecutions of seven alleged traffickers (two for sex trafficking and five for labor trafficking). Courts convicted 25 traffickers under the 2005 anti-trafficking law, including 13 sex traffickers and 12 labor traffickers, and sentenced them to between two years and 20 years' imprisonment. This compared with initiating prosecutions of 47 alleged traffickers and convicting 19 traffickers in 2023. In some cases, the government prosecuted alleged traffickers under other laws 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; courts sentenced two defendants to two years in prison. Despite reports of fraudulent labor recruiters exploiting Ghanaian victims abroad, the government did not report investigating or prosecuting any fraudulent recruitment cases. The government increased cooperation with foreign government counterparts, including Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, on law enforcement activities, which led to increased identification of sex trafficking victims.

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 concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Observers previously 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. Observers reported local officials sometimes pressured law enforcement investigating trafficking cases and DSW personnel to stop investigations into some alleged traffickers, which hampered law enforcement action.

The Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), and the Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO) 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. Eighteen courts had specialized training, procedures, and trauma-informed facilities for cases involving women and child victims, which included trafficking cases. The government and observers reported increased coordination between prosecutors and the GPS, GIS, and EOCO. The government, both independently and in collaboration with foreign governments, international organizations, and 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. Observers reported specialized anti-trafficking units were not present in some regions; as officers regularly moved and changed posts, some regions had a limited number of trained personnel to handle human trafficking crimes. The government reported a lack of sufficient funding and

resources impeded anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. There was a lack of shelter capacity, and law enforcement officers sometimes used personal funds to provide temporary services to victims. Judicial resources were concentrated in urban areas, leaving some victims in rural communities with limited access to the formal justice system. Some courts did not have judges or prosecutors that had received anti-trafficking trainings. Observers reported a lack of specialized training and equipment hampered law enforcement efforts to investigate cybercrimes, including forced labor in online scam centers.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

The government reported identifying 794 trafficking victims (200 sex trafficking victims, 416 labor trafficking victims, and 178 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking). The government reported all victims were referred to services. This compared with identifying and referring to services 944 trafficking victims in 2023. Of the 794 victims identified, 301 were Ghanaian, and 493 were foreign nationals. The majority of foreign victims were from Nigeria (358); other victims identified were from Burundi, Niger, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. Fifty-two Ghanaian trafficking victims were identified abroad, including 43 victims identified in Cote d'Ivoire. NGOs identified an additional 33 trafficking victims, including 31 labor trafficking victims and two sex trafficking victims.

The government continued implementing SOPs to identify trafficking victims and refer them to services, and it developed shorter, user-friendly versions with infographics to provide to partners. 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 and provided counseling services. These teams reported to the district level DSW offices, and they had to self-coordinate across localities to refer survivors to shelters or return them to their homes. Observers reported decentralization and lack of funding and accountability impeded the DSW's effectiveness. Observers reported additional training for DSW personnel on anti-trafficking laws and victim-centered, trauma-informed interviewing techniques was needed.

With support from an international organization, the government operated three specialized shelters for trafficking victims, including one shelter for adult female trafficking victims, one shelter for child trafficking victims, and a transitional shelter for adult and child victims. The government, with support from the same international organization, also operated two shelters that could accommodate trafficking victims and, in collaboration with NGOs, operated an additional 30 shelters that could support adult and child trafficking victims. Officials could also refer victims to 12 private shelters, including two shelters that could accommodate adult male victims. Despite observers reporting an increase in adult male trafficking victims, the government did not have any dedicated shelters for adult males; the government collaborated with NGOs to provide care to adult male trafficking victims. 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 2,850,000 Ghanaian cedis (\$194,539) for victim services and shelter operations in 2024, an increase compared with expending 2,050,000 cedis (\$139,932) in 2023. 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 coordinated with an international organization and foreign governments to repatriate Ghanaian victims identified abroad and foreign victims identified in Ghana. The government reported screening Ghanaian migrants returning from abroad for trafficking indicators and identified 350 potential trafficking cases.

Due to inconsistent screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. In the previous reporting period, officials, citing security concerns, 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 concerns this also included some Ghanaian Fulbe, who often lacked access to government services and identity documents and were vulnerable to trafficking. Observers previously reported officials sometimes falsely registered Ghanaian Fulbe children in birth registrations as Burkina Faso residents, further increasing vulnerability to trafficking. While the government collaborated with an international organization to register some Burkinabe asylum seekers in Ghana, observers alleged the government hindered some efforts to register Fulbe asylum seekers, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.

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; the government reported 794 victims provided written testimony and three victims provided video statements in 2024. The government expanded and improved the facilities available in 17 courts to better respond to the needs of victims, including by adding closed circuit cameras, child-friendly waiting areas, and separate testifying rooms for children. 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. Officials made efforts to protect victims' confidentiality and separate victims and suspects to avoid intimidation and re-traumatization. The law allowed trafficking victims to obtain restitution, and the government reported courts awarded restitution to five victims. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but none reportedly did so.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking.

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 HTS coordinated anti-trafficking efforts under the MOGCSP, including implementation of the 2022-2026 NAP, and met regularly with members of the anti-trafficking community. The government allocated 900,000 cedis (\$61,433) for the NAP's implementation, an increase compared with 460,000 cedis (\$38,660) during the previous year. Though the DSW was part of the MOGCSP, it did not have a representative in the HTS, which observers reported limited the DSW's ability to contribute to anti-trafficking efforts.

The government conducted extensive trainings and public awareness campaigns with government officials, civil society organizations, and community leaders, both independently and in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations. Observers reported GPS and DSW targeted priority communities, such as fishing communities on Lake Volta and on the coast, for public awareness campaigns and increased coordination with civil society. The government reported training community groups to identify and report potential child labor and child trafficking cases in the fishing industry. GPS operated a tip line that was able to respond to trafficking-related calls. The MOGCSP operated a hotline in English, French, and five local languages for victims of abuse and a mobile application for reporting violence against women and girls, including human trafficking; the government identified at least three victims as a result of hotline calls.

The government provided anti-trafficking training to labor inspectors, and inspectors had a forced labor training manual. The Ghana Maritime Authority had primary responsibility to inspect fishing vessels, but observers reported the staff lacked specialized anti-trafficking training. The government increased efforts to regulate labor standards in the fishing sector; however, overall monitoring and enforcement were limited. Additionally, the government did not report identifying any child victims in exploitative labor situations or referring any potential child labor trafficking cases to law enforcement for criminal investigation, despite conducting 856 labor inspections. The Ministry of Employment and Labor collaborated with the General Agricultural Workers' Union to target outreach and enforcement in key communities vulnerable to child labor. The MOGCSP published SOPs for reducing child labor in Ghana and for cocoa sector labor monitoring systems.

The government regulated formal labor recruitment and required private employment agencies to register; it also provided 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 Ghanaians 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; however, observers reported that the number of Ghanaians exploited in the Gulf continued to increase. Observers reported the policy increased vulnerabilities for Ghanaian laborers by restricting access to legal migration and removing the government's responsibility to regulate labor recruitment to the Gulf. Even though the government of Ghana has bilateral labor agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to protect Ghanaian migrant laborers, those agreements do not extend to Ghanaian domestic workers. The government had a 2020 National Labor Migration Policy and 2020-2024 implementation plan; however, the government did not report taking steps to implement the plan, and efforts to assist migrant workers were insufficient.

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 was one open case of alleged Sexual Exploitation and Abuse with trafficking indicators by a Ghanaian police officer deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2024, and three previous cases involving Ghanaian peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS) were closed. The government had not yet reported the accountability measures taken, if any, for any of these cases at the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking 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 many drown as a result. Women and girls working in the fishing sector are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, including sex trafficking. Observers reported forced child labor in Lake Volta's fishing industry has decreased; however, this has led to a subsequent rise in adult forced labor, including Sahelian migrants. Observers noted lack of access to education, economic hardship, and high unemployment rates increase vulnerability to human trafficking in Ghana. 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 violence against women and girls – 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. Advocates reported vulnerable populations, such as those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and the Fulbe, face widespread difficulty accessing education, employment, financial services, and housing, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Stigma, intimidation, and the perceived bias of some police against these communities dissuade survivors from reporting abuse.

Observers allege Chinese 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 China-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. Chinese nationals working in Ghana may be in forced labor in the formal and informal mining sectors and in fishing. According to the Cuban regime, there were Cuban regime-affiliated workers in Ghana, including medical professionals. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated professionals in Ghana to work. Traffickers exploit Ghanaians and 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.