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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cote d'Ivoire

COTE D'IVOIRE (Tier 2)

The Government of Cote d'Ivoire 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 Cote d'Ivoire remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more victims and implementing an NRM with standard victim identification procedures. The government initiated a program to identify and refer vulnerable children, including potential trafficking victims, to care. Officials continued investigating and prosecuting trafficking crimes. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Shelter and services, especially for adult victims, remained inadequate. The interagency anti-trafficking committee (CNLTP) did not meet and remained without dedicated funding for its operations for the fourth consecutive year. The government's draft anti-trafficking NAP remained pending adoption for the second year. Law enforcement lacked the specialized training and adequate resources to effectively investigate trafficking cases and identify victims, and courts convicted significantly fewer traffickers. Labor inspectors did not identify any child trafficking cases during inspections, including in the cocoa sector.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers, including complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Institutionalize training for law enforcement and judicial officials on investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases under the 2016 anti-trafficking law, including specialized investigative and prosecutorial techniques.
- Fully implement and train front-line actors, including law enforcement, judicial officials, labor inspectors, social workers, and NGOs, on the NRM and standardized procedures to identify human trafficking victims, including among vulnerable populations such as Ivoirian labor migrants, foreign migrants, child laborers, and individuals in commercial sex.
- Strengthen the CNLTP's authority to coordinate the government's anti-trafficking efforts, including by providing dedicated financial resources, convening regular meetings, and finalizing an anti-trafficking NAP.

- Increase funding and in-kind resources, as feasible, for the anti-trafficking law enforcement units to investigate trafficking cases nationwide; delineate responsibilities and enhance coordination between the units.
- Increase the quantity and quality of care available for adult and child trafficking victims, including by providing financial and in-kind support to civil society providing victims shelter and services.
- Train law enforcement on effective, victim-centered investigation techniques and trauma-informed approaches when interviewing victims.
- Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Ivoirian economic migrants abroad by extending labor protections to workers including in the informal sector, especially domestic work; increasing oversight of labor recruitment agencies and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable; and banning worker-paid recruitment fees.
- Improve nationwide data collection on anti-trafficking law enforcement and victim identification efforts.
- Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under United Nations Security Council resolution 2397.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained mixed law enforcement efforts. Law No. 2016-111 on the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of 5 million to 10 million West African CFA francs (FCFA) (\$8,130-\$16,265) for adult trafficking and 20 to 30 years' imprisonment and a fine of 10 million to 50 million FCFA (\$16,265-\$81,320) for child trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The 2010 Child Trafficking and Child Labor Law was also used to prosecute child trafficking, and it criminalized child sex trafficking and labor trafficking with 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of 5 million to 20 million FCFA (\$8,130-\$32,530). The government used penal code provisions on illegal mining and "pimping" to prosecute trafficking cases. The penal code prescribed penalties of one to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 1 million to 10 million FCFA (\$1,625-\$16,265) for "pimping" and penalties of two to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 50 million to 100 million FCFA (\$81,320-\$162,640) for illegal mining. These penalties were significantly lower than those prescribed under the anti-trafficking law.

The government reported initiating 10 and continuing 13 investigations, compared with initiating 11 and continuing three investigations during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecution of 25 alleged traffickers (23 for sex trafficking and "pimping," one for labor trafficking, and one for an unknown form of trafficking). This was a significant decrease compared with initiating prosecution of 83 alleged traffickers and continuing prosecution of six alleged traffickers during the previous reporting period. Courts convicted 19 traffickers, including 11 traffickers convicted under the 2016 anti-trafficking law and eight sex traffickers under the penal code, and upheld four trafficking convictions on appeal. This compared with 43 traffickers convicted during the previous reporting period and 12 traffickers in 2020. Judges sentenced six traffickers, convicted under the 2016 law, to between 10 years' and 20 years' imprisonment and four traffickers, convicted under the penal code, to

between one month and three months' imprisonment; the government did not report sentencing information for the remaining nine convicted traffickers.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, official corruption and complicity in trafficking crimes remained concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. During the previous reporting period, observers alleged low-ranking police on the borders with Mali and Ghana facilitated migrant smuggling, including potential trafficking cases, and organized a system to collect bribes at checkpoints and along bus routes. In 2018, five gendarmes and two military firefighters allegedly abducted a trafficking victim from an NGO shelter; a military tribunal sentenced four of the gendarmes and the military firefighters to 50 days in military jail in August 2019 as an administrative sanction for unbecoming conduct. Following the 50-day detention, the officials returned to their military duties. A subsequent prosecution of four of the gendarmes and one of the military firefighters for kidnapping of a minor, forced confinement, and attempted rape involving the abducted child victim remained pending before a military investigative judge. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, an international organization reported there was one open allegation, submitted in 2021, of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Ivorian peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti between 2010 and 2012. The government did not report accountability measures taken, if any, for the open case by the end of the reporting period.

The Sub-Directorate in the Fight against Trafficking and Child Labor (SDLTEDJ) bore primary responsibility for enforcing anti-trafficking laws and investigating cases throughout the country; it operated specialized anti-child labor and child trafficking police units in six cities. The gendarmes, under the Ministry of Defense, were responsible for investigations in rural areas where the SDLTEDJ was not present. The Brigade Mondaine was responsible for investigating sex trafficking; however, resource constraints limited investigations to Abidjan and a few regional precincts. The Transnational Organized Crime Unit operated a specialized human trafficking department which had jurisdiction over transnational trafficking cases. However, the law enforcement units lacked coordination, and no unit had a clear responsibility for internal adult labor trafficking cases. Limited funding and resources significantly hindered law enforcement's ability to identify and investigate human trafficking cases. The government did not report operationalizing prosecutorial teams within the appeals courts focused on combating human trafficking in four cities; proposed in 2021, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights intended these to accelerate the procedural process and support trafficking prosecutions. International organizations, with some government support, trained judicial and law enforcement officials on anti-trafficking legal frameworks and investigative techniques. Observers reported law enforcement and judicial officials needed additional anti-trafficking training. Some judges and prosecutors remained unaware of the 2016 law and continued to use the 2010 law and illegal mining and "pimping" statutes to prosecute trafficking cases, which carried lesser penalties. The government did not report collaborating with foreign counterparts on law enforcement activities.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to identify and protect victims. The government reported identifying and referring to care at least 1,185 trafficking victims, including 419 sex trafficking and 766 forced labor victims, compared with identifying and referring 1,190 victims to services during the previous reporting period. The majority of identified victims were foreign nationals, mostly from Nigeria; victims were also from neighboring west African countries, Vietnam, and Thailand. The

government initiated a pilot program to identify vulnerable children using the streets as a source of livelihood, which may include children exploited in forced labor or sex trafficking; authorities referred the children to care centers and, where possible, foster families. Due to the lack of a centralized data collection system and conflation of trafficking with other crimes, victim identification data likely included cases that were not human trafficking, including child labor and sexual abuse. NGOs also reported identifying six sex trafficking and 37 forced labor victims.

The government began implementing an NRM with standardized procedures to proactively identify trafficking victims and refer them to care; officials utilized the NRM to refer victims to services during the reporting period. The NRM directed law enforcement to alert CNLTP when officers identified a victim and CNLTP subsequently coordinated victim referral to services. International organizations, with some government support, trained law enforcement, social workers, and other government stakeholders on the NRM's procedures. However, government and civil society stakeholders reported the NRM was not yet fully operational, and officials required additional training on the NRM's procedures. The government typically referred adult trafficking victims to NGOs or host families and child victims to NGO and government-run shelters or foster families when necessary. Officials could also refer trafficking victims for psychological care to government-run centers for victims of abuse. The government provided food, medical care, and psycho-social support to victims. The government, in partnership with an NGO, operated three shelters for vulnerable children, including two dedicated shelters for child labor and trafficking victims. There was no government-run or supported shelter that could accommodate adult trafficking victims. Government ministries lacked coordination, which hindered the provision of services in some cases. Law enforcement sometimes housed child trafficking victims in their offices for several days, providing basic necessities at their own expense until they could place the child in a shelter. The government provided limited in-kind support to NGOs caring for victims, including food and hygiene products, but did not provide any direct financial support. Observers reported government support for victim protection and services remained inadequate, and in many cases, NGOs funded and provided the majority of victim care. Observers also noted social workers lacked the resources and specialized training to effectively care for and monitor the reintegration of victims. The lack of services, especially for adults, and lack of reintegration assistance rendered many victims vulnerable to re-victimization. Foreign victims had the same access to care as Ivoirian victims. The government did not have a formal policy providing temporary or permanent residency to foreign victims who faced hardship or retribution in their countries of origin. In some cases, the government depended on foreign victims' home embassies to provide shelter and care prior to repatriation. Stakeholders reported law enforcement sometimes used trauma-insensitive tactics when interviewing victims, including children.

Access to victim services was not dependent on cooperation with law enforcement proceedings. Ivoirian law required the government to provide protection and assistance, which could include legal assistance, shelter, victim-witness assistance, and voluntary return assistance to support victim participation in the criminal justice process; the government reported providing this assistance to some victims during the reporting period. Observers reported the government did not always provide or refer trafficking victims to legal aid, which hindered victims' ability to press charges against alleged traffickers and, for foreign victims, to address immigration issues. Trafficking victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but none reportedly did so. Ivoirian law allowed victims to obtain restitution; courts ordered restitution in some cases, but no traffickers paid it during the reporting period. Due to inconsistent application of standardized victim identification procedures, some victims may have remained unidentified within the law enforcement system. International organizations reported border agents sometimes denied entry to foreign nationals, including potential victims, without

screening for human trafficking indicators. Law enforcement officials reportedly only screened individuals in commercial sex for trafficking when detaining or arresting them.

PREVENTION

The government maintained insufficient efforts to prevent trafficking. The CNLTP, while intending to lead the government's anti-trafficking prevention efforts, did not meet for the second consecutive year, and the government did not report allocating dedicated funding for its operations for the fourth consecutive year. The government's draft 2022-2025 NAP remained pending adoption for the second consecutive year. The government continued implementing its 2019-2023 NAP to combat child labor and child trafficking and allocated 28.6 billion FCFA (\$46,515) for its application. The Oversight Committee to Combat Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Child Labor (CNS) and the Inter-Ministerial Committee in the Fight Against Child Trafficking, Child Exploitation, and Child Labor (CIM) continued to coordinate efforts to combat child labor and child trafficking. CNS oversaw CIM and conducted monitoring and evaluation activities of the NAP to combat child labor and child trafficking. Observers continued to report the need for dedicated resources and more collaboration between the three committees for the CNLTP to be fully effective. Regional anti-trafficking committees coordinated anti-trafficking efforts in four regions, including implementing regional anti-trafficking action plans. The government conducted limited awareness raising activities on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in collaboration with international organizations. The government also held public awareness campaigns focused on child labor, which included some anti-trafficking components. The labor code regulated labor recruitment and labor migration in the formal sector, but it did not extend to the informal sector, including domestic work, which increased some migrant workers' vulnerability to trafficking. The government did not report active efforts to monitor such agencies or to hold fraudulent labor recruiters accountable. The government did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. The government trained labor inspectors on identifying child labor and trafficking victims. However, despite conducting more than 9,400 inspections in 2022, labor inspectors did not identify any child labor or child trafficking cases during inspections. The Ministry of Water and Forests, responsible for surveilling the country's natural resources, also monitored for child labor or trafficking violations during regular patrols of the forests, and its Special Surveillance and Intervention Brigade conducted investigations at cocoa farms; ministry personnel did not report referring potential child labor or trafficking cases to law enforcement for criminal investigation. The government continued implementing its Child Labor Observation and Monitoring System in Cote d'Ivoire (SOSTECI), an early warning mechanism to prevent child labor, and created SOSTECI monitoring committees in 87 cocoa-producing areas. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Families continued operating a hotline to report child protection and human rights violations; officials did not report identifying any potential victims as a result of hotline calls, compared with identifying 27 potential child trafficking victims during the previous reporting period.

The government had two inter-ministerial commissions to adjudicate claims for an official statelessness status and issue nationality documents and birth certificates. While the adjudication process for statelessness status lacked resources and processed claims slowly, the commissions issued more than 10,000 national identity documents to vulnerable populations. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by arresting and convicting buyers of commercial sex. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers; although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, there was

one open case of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Ivoirian peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Cote d'Ivoire, and traffickers exploit victims from Cote d'Ivoire abroad. Due to a stronger emphasis on combating internal child trafficking, the prevalence of adult trafficking may be underreported. Traffickers exploit Ivoirian women and girls in forced labor in domestic service and restaurants and in sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ivoirian boys and boys from West African countries, especially Burkina Faso, in forced labor in agriculture, especially cocoa production. Traffickers also exploit boys in forced labor on coffee and rubber plantations, animal herding, mining, carpentry, construction, and forced begging in Cote d'Ivoire. Corrupt Quranic teachers exploit Ivoirian and West African boys, including Burkinabe, Malian, Nigerien, and Senegalese nationals, in forced begging in northern and central Cote d'Ivoire. Drug traffickers use children – some of whom may be forced labor victims – in drug production and to sell and transport drugs in restaurants and nightclubs. Traffickers – commonly distant relatives – bring girls from rural Cote d'Ivoire and other West African countries to Abidjan ostensibly to go to school or receive professional training but subsequently exploit them in domestic servitude. Observers reported the pandemic's economic impacts, as well as insecurity in neighboring countries, have increased child labor and forced child labor, especially on cocoa farms; one NGO estimated more than 790,000 children, ages 5 to 17, work on Ivorian cocoa plantations.

Traffickers exploit migrant workers, including Malian, Burkinabe, and internal Ivoirian migrants, in the cocoa sector in forced labor and debt bondage; observers reported recruiters deceive workers about working conditions, including wages, hours, and length of contracts – indicators of forced labor. These recruiters charge worker-paid recruitment fees, including for transportation costs; some employers pay the fees and subsequently exploit the workers in debt bondage, reportedly charging them up to five times the original cost of transportation. Traffickers exploit Nigerian, Burkinabe, Ivoirian, Malian, and Moroccan women in sex and labor trafficking. Nigerian traffickers exploit Nigerian and foreign national women from neighboring West African countries in sex trafficking in cocoa-producing regions, and Nigerian traffickers exploit Nigerian women and girls in sex trafficking in Cote d'Ivoire's northern and western mining regions, including near gold mines in Tengrela. An international organization noted cultural beliefs correlating sex with increased chances of finding gold have increased the demand for sex trafficking in mining communities. Nigerian traffickers bring Nigerian children to northern Cote d'Ivoire for domestic servitude. Returning refugees and individuals living in Cote d'Ivoire without identity documents are at risk of statelessness, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. North Korean nationals working in Cote d'Ivoire may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.

Traffickers recruit Ivoirian women and girls for work in the Middle East and Europe, and subsequently exploit them in forced labor in Europe, North Africa, and Gulf countries. Traffickers often operate in well-established networks consisting of both Ivoirians and foreigners and use social media to fraudulently recruit victims for employment abroad. Ivoirian migrants in Libya and Tunisia are vulnerable to trafficking. Migrants commonly depart from Daloa and proceed via airplane to Tunisia or travel overland via Niger to Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. Mali was previously a transit point, but numbers have reportedly decreased due to instability. In Tunisia, intermediaries confiscate migrants' identity documents until they can pay for the next part of their journey, increasing vulnerability to

trafficking. In 2022, Tunisian authorities identified an estimated 372 Ivoirian trafficking victims, approximately 66 percent of the total trafficking victims identified in Tunisia. International organizations and Ivoirian law enforcement agencies reported Ivoirian migrant smuggling networks based in Tunisia increasingly became involved in trafficking as European governments blocked migration inflows and these networks also coerced Ivoirians to engage in unlawful acts, including drug smuggling. Organized criminal networks and smugglers fraudulently recruit Ivorian boys to play professional soccer in North Africa or Europe; once they arrive, they are vulnerable to forced labor. Traffickers exploit men and boys in forced labor on farms in Tunisia, often promising the men well-paying jobs and the boys the opportunity to play soccer. An international organization reported an increase in Ivoirian migrant women and unaccompanied children arriving in Italy; an NGO reported traffickers sexually exploited many of the women in Libya prior to their arrival in Italy. Once in Italy, Ivorian children and young adults are at an increased risk of sex trafficking.

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