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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Egypt

OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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EGYPT (TIER 2 WATCH LIST)**

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The Government of Egypt does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included approving a new national strategy to combat trafficking, increasing convictions of traffickers, more than doubling the training of officials and partners, and issuing presidential directives to prioritize certain public awareness and protection activities. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity. The government identified the fewest trafficking victims since 2019 and investigations decreased. In a limited number of instances, the government continued cases where trafficking charges were used to prosecute non-trafficking offenses, which undercut efforts to hold sex and labor traffickers criminally accountable. Authorities continued to inappropriately penalize victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Despite high trafficking risks for foreign nationals in Egypt, authorities rarely identified or provided services to non-Egyptian trafficking victims. Victim services and shelter remained insufficient, and the government relied on international organizations and NGOs to provide some services, especially for men and foreign victims, without financial or in-kind support. The government's only specialized trafficking shelter was closed for several months of the reporting period, which prevented the training of staff and reportedly only assisted approximately 20 of the approximately 484 victims identified since the shelter's opening in 2021. For the third

consecutive year, the government did not approve a draft law to expand labor protections to domestic workers. Therefore Egypt was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Significantly improve efforts to proactively identify trafficking victims, especially among vulnerable populations such as migrants, refugees, and domestic workers, and refer identified victims to appropriate shelter and services.
 - Expand protection services and shelters to victims of all forms of trafficking – including male and foreign victims – and allocate adequate resources and staffing for these services.
 - Continue to disseminate, implement, and utilize country-wide procedures and guidelines for law enforcement, judicial, and other relevant officials to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care.
 - Cease coordination with and support to armed groups recruiting or using child soldiers.
 - Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of sex and labor trafficking, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers – including complicit officials and child sex tourists – which should involve significant prison terms.
 - Increase efforts to ensure authorities do not inappropriately penalize trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as immigration violations or prostitution offenses.
 - Expand coordination with and support to NGOs providing services to trafficking victims and populations vulnerable to human trafficking.
 - Cease targeting of non-traffickers through non-germane trafficking charges.
 - Increase efforts to address and reduce the demand for “summer marriages” and commercial sex acts.
 - Amend the labor law to include labor protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers and increase overall efforts to improve protections for domestic workers.
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PROSECUTION

The government maintained uneven law enforcement efforts. The 2010 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties from three to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine between 50,000 and 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$2,020 and \$8,080) for offenses involving an adult victim, and up to life imprisonment and a fine between 100,000 to 500,000 pounds (\$4,040 and \$20,210) for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.

In 2022, the government initiated 76 new investigations of alleged sex and labor trafficking crimes involving 182 suspects, a decrease compared with 149 cases involving 535 suspects for investigations initiated in 2021. The government reported the 76 new investigations included 12 sex trafficking cases, 26 labor trafficking cases, and 38 cases involving an unspecified form of trafficking. The government also continued 40 investigations begun in previous years, including 14 sex trafficking cases, 11 labor trafficking cases, and 15 cases involving an unspecified form of trafficking. The government initiated prosecutions of 96 alleged perpetrators (six for sex trafficking, 17 for labor trafficking, and 73 for an unspecified form of trafficking) in 2022, compared with 74 alleged perpetrators prosecuted in 2021. The government also continued prosecuting 91 alleged traffickers (25 for sex trafficking, 19 for labor trafficking, and 47 for unspecified forms of trafficking) from cases initiated in previous reporting periods. Courts convicted 95 perpetrators (20 perpetrators for sex trafficking, 22 perpetrators for labor trafficking, and 53 defendants for unspecified forms of trafficking in addition to other offenses) in 28 cases in 2022, an increase compared with 22 traffickers convicted in 11 cases in 2021. Courts upheld three convictions upon appeal. Sentences ranged from three years' imprisonment with hard labor and a fine to life imprisonment.

Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, the government continued investigating two allegations, one each from 2020 and 2021, of Egyptian peacekeepers serving in the UN peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic for alleged sexual exploitation involving transactional sex; the investigations were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The government reported there were three active trafficking cases against four allegedly complicit officials but did not report the status of these cases in the judicial system; courts reportedly issued criminal sentences against six officials in trafficking-related cases but did not provide further details. Aside from these cases, the government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. During the reporting period, an NGO reported that the government coordinated and conducted joint operations with a militia in the Sinai Peninsula that allegedly recruited and used children, including some in direct hostilities. The government continued

court proceedings against two social media “influencers” on human trafficking charges during the reporting period, upholding a sentence of six years’ imprisonment for one case and a second where a ten year sentence was reduced to three years. The prosecution argued the defendants exploited minors by encouraging them to appear in social media videos for financial benefit of the defendants. In a third case, a defendant – a minor at the time of the alleged criminal act – was convicted on “prostitution” and debauchery charges; however, other defendants were convicted of trafficking her in the same incident. Multiple NGOs and international observers commented the charges and convictions were inappropriate, undercut the government’s credibility in its efforts to hold sex and labor traffickers criminally accountable, and falls short of obligations to protect victims of trafficking.

The Prosecutor General’s Office maintained eight specialized offices, one in each appellate court district, to manage trafficking and irregular migration cases; the prosecutors oversaw the prosecution of or directly prosecuted trafficking cases depending on the severity or complexity of each case. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) maintained eight specialized judicial circuits in the courts of appeal with 30 judges assigned to prosecute trafficking cases. During the reporting period, the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM & TIP), at times in partnership with international organizations, nearly doubled its training efforts by organizing over 70 anti-trafficking training sessions, capacity-building workshops, and international exchanges on victim identification, referral procedures, and protection resources for over 2,100 officials, including prosecutors, judges, labor inspectors, law enforcement, diplomats, and social workers, as well as local NGO partners engaged in preventing trafficking and service provision.

PROTECTION

The government decreased overall victim protection efforts. Services remained insufficient for male and foreign victims, and unidentified victims continued to be inappropriately penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government reported identifying 212 trafficking victims (43 sex trafficking victims, 89 labor trafficking cases, and 80 victims of unspecified forms of exploitation); this was a multiple year decrease compared with the 272 trafficking victims identified in 2021 and 519 victims in 2020. Of the 212 identified victims, 65 were adults (35 women and 30 men) and 147 were children. All identified victims except for one forced labor victim were Egyptian nationals. The government also reported identifying 138 potential child trafficking victims through the National Council

for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) hotline in 2022 but did not report further details. The government reported referring all identified trafficking victims to services but did not specify what assistance was provided. An international organization reported identifying and assisting 48 foreign trafficking victims between January and November 2022. During the reporting period, the government completed updating the NRM and accompanying user manual which included a victim identification worksheet for front-line responders. The government began training implementing partners and service providers on how to utilize the NRM and solicited feedback on the means to improve the NRM in future iterations. NGOs and international organizations recognized the development of the NRM as a significant development and an achievement for NCCPIM&TIP. However, some observers also assessed authorities reportedly did not use it consistently, some government stakeholders were unaware of its existence, and the government's identification and referral procedures overly focused on Egyptians at the expense of vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees.

NCCPIM & TIP cooperated with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), NCCM, and an NGO to operate the government's only specialized trafficking shelter; the government did not report how many victims the shelter assisted during the reporting period and the shelter was closed for several months to reportedly recruit new and adequately train staff. In addition, the shelter reportedly assisted approximately 20 victims since it opened in 2021; it is unclear what shelter, if any, assisted the approximately 484 victims identified since the official opening in 2021. When open, the shelter could accommodate 30 women and girls and was staffed by female psychologists, social workers, and medical staff. Although officials reported there were no prohibitions restricting foreign victims from accessing the shelter, the government shelter has not assisted a foreign victim, despite non-Egyptian victims being vulnerable to trafficking and the government identifying five foreign victims since 2020. During the reporting period, the president issued a directive for relevant agencies to establish a total of seven specialized trafficking shelters and NCCPIM & TIP began to refurbish an existing shelter for trafficking victims. Ten shelters (in nine governorates) for violence against women (VAW), run by the MoSS, could receive female and child trafficking victims; foreign victims could access all 10 VAW MoSS shelters; and male victims could access the remaining 45 MoSS shelters throughout the country. Some NGOs stated MoSS shelters were not appropriate for some trafficking victims due to concerns about security, privacy, and a lack of adequately-trained staff. MoSS bylaws stated victims were able to access the shelters without identification documents for up to three days. The government's ability to provide specialized services to trafficking victims, especially foreign and male victims, remained limited according to some NGOs. The government was dependent on international organizations and NGOs to provide some victim services, including repatriation. NGOs and international organizations

reported non-Egyptian victims sought services from NGOs and international organizations due to the distrust of authorities and inadequacy of the government's services.

The government continued to mainly rely on international and civil society organizations to provide and fund victim assistance, but it did not provide financial assistance to these organizations, which affected their ability to offer protective services to victims. The government provided training to some partner NGOs with roles in victim identification and the NRM. The government supported victim assistance in investigations and prosecutions by offering legal assistance to all victims, protecting victims' identities, and providing physical protection when necessary; the government did not report how many victims received this support. Victim participation in law enforcement actions and judicial proceedings was not required in order to receive services; an international organization reported victims who did not participate often had a more difficult time receiving services, including accessing the government's specialized shelter, in part, due to the desire to avoid contact with authorities. To prevent re-traumatization, the government reported prosecutors and law enforcement interviewed victims in the presence of social workers and psychologists and prosecutors could request to hear victims' testimony in closed court sessions. Female victims of domestic servitude or sex trafficking reported a reluctance to cooperate in pursuing charges against traffickers due to the fear of social stigma and retaliation. Article 27 of the 2010 anti-trafficking law provided for a victim compensation fund but the government did not report establishing the fund; finalizing the decree to establish the fund is among the presidential directives issued during the reporting period and the government reported reviewing a draft decree at the end of the reporting period. Prosecutors could pursue restitution in trafficking cases and victims could file civil suits against traffickers; however, the government did not report whether any victims received restitution through criminal proceedings or damages from civil suits during the reporting period. The government did not report whether it had legal alternatives to removal to countries in which victims would face retribution or hardship. As in the previous reporting period, an NGO reported the government forcibly deported Eritrean asylum seekers, including children, without assessing protection needs; the Government of Eritrea had a government policy or pattern of human trafficking exploiting its nationals in forced labor in its compulsory national service and citizen militia by forcing them to serve for indefinite or otherwise arbitrary periods.

Authorities typically relied on NGO referrals or for foreign victims to self-identify; however, NGOs reported non-Egyptian victims were hesitant to report their exploitation to authorities due to fear of being detained, deported, or other penalization. Due to inconsistent victim identification, authorities likely detained and arrested trafficking victims for prostitution

offenses, and may have detained and deported some unidentified trafficking victims for immigration violations. NGOs reported police arrested and detained female sex trafficking victims on wrongful charges of “prostitution” or “debauchery;” after NGOs intervened, prosecutors declined to prosecute these victims; however, some victims continued to face challenges due to their arrest records. An international organization reported unaccompanied migrant children were frequently detained and held with adult detainees without screening for trafficking despite likely experiencing trafficking during their journey to Egypt. Foreign female trafficking victims reported the government required them to pay overstay fees, thus preventing them from leaving the country and potentially hindering them from leaving trafficking situations, which the government also did not screen for.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. The government continued to implement the 2016-2021 National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons and approved the 2022-2026 National Strategy on Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons in September 2022; the strategies were implemented using the budget allocated to NCCPIM & TIP and its 29 member agencies. NCCPIM & TIP continued to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking efforts throughout the reporting period. During the reporting period, the President of Egypt issued a number of directives to prioritize combating trafficking including increasing awareness raising activities, upgrading existing MoSS shelters to receive trafficking victims, increasing training and capacity-building activities, and other initiatives. NCCPIM & TIP and other governmental entities continued to conduct multiple awareness-raising activities, including some campaigns in partnership with international organizations. The National Council for Human Rights, the National Council for Women, and NCCM continued operating hotlines to which the public could report trafficking cases. The government launched a follow-up study to a 2010 report on contractual marriages such as “summer marriages” and trafficking in Egypt. The government also conducted a comparative study of legal frameworks regarding protection of domestic workers in coordination with an international organization.

Labor Law 12 of 2003 gives the Ministry of Manpower authority to regulate labor recruitment and stipulates regulations that govern wages, working hours, and right to terminate the relationship, and penalties for non-compliance with work contracts. The law prohibits companies taking wages from workers for recruitment fees, not to exceed two percent, after the first year of employment but otherwise did not prohibit all worker-paid recruitment fees.

The law also allows for the cancellation of the recruitment agency licenses due to violations; the government did not report the number of licenses canceled or suspended during the reporting period. Egyptian labor law did not include specific protections for domestic workers, which continued to create greater vulnerabilities to trafficking among this population. The legislature continued reviewing labor legislation drafted during the previous reporting period to improve protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers; no legislation was approved at the end of the reporting period but one of the presidential directives urged the government to expedite development of a draft law to protect domestic workers. In the absence of labor law protections for domestic workers, the NCCPIM & TIP continued to promote a voluntary labor contract that employers of domestic workers could choose to use, which offered limited protections for domestic workers. The government did not report providing pre-departure trainings for Egyptians going abroad for work. Some bilateral labor agreements made Egyptian labor migrants more vulnerable; for example, a labor agreement between the Jordanian and Egyptian governments specified an Egyptian national could not leave Jordan without permission from his or her employer, even if the employer was convicted of trafficking crimes. The government reported that Egyptian labor attachés abroad assessed the level of wages and living standards to determine fair wages and conditions when reviewing work contracts of Egyptians working abroad. Bilateral agreements concluded by the Ministry of Manpower include model work contracts as part of the agreement, which includes terms and conditions for appropriate agreements.

The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, the government continued investigating two allegations, one each from 2020 and 2021, of Egyptian peacekeepers serving in the UN peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic for alleged sexual exploitation involving transactional sex; the investigations were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Egypt, and traffickers exploit victims from Egypt abroad. Traffickers subject Egyptian children to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service, street begging, drug trafficking, quarrying, and agricultural work in Egypt. Traffickers, including some parents, force children, including Egyptian and Syrian children, to beg in the streets or exploit girls in sex trafficking.

During the reporting period, an NGO reported visible increases in child forced begging incidents in part due to increasing economic challenges; the NGO reported most victims were experiencing homelessness and noted widely-varying estimates between 200,000 and two million children experiencing homelessness in Cairo and other major cities. NGOs report the lack of economic and educational opportunities causes family members, including parents, husbands, and siblings, to subject women and girls to sex trafficking or forced labor in domestic service to supplement family incomes. Child sex tourism occurs primarily in Giza and Cairo, according to some reports. Individuals from the Arabian Gulf, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, purchase Egyptian women and girls for “temporary marriages” or “summer marriages” for the purpose of commercial sex, including cases of sex trafficking, as well as forced labor; the victims’ parents and marriage brokers, who profit from the transaction, often facilitate these arrangements. Although an NGO reported “summer marriages” decreased during the reporting period, the practice continues. An NGO reported some parents facing socio-economic challenges force underage girls into permanent marriages where they were coerced into domestic servitude or commercial sex. An international organization also reported some husbands coerce their adult wives into sex trafficking or domestic servitude.

During the reporting period, international organizations and NGOs reported an increase in Egyptians irregularly migrating through Libya in an attempt to reach Europe, in part due to the closure of Egypt’s sea routes; once in Libya, some of these migrants were subject to sex trafficking and forced labor. Traffickers reportedly exploit Egyptian children in sex trafficking and forced begging in Europe. Traffickers subject Egyptian adults to forced labor in construction, agriculture, domestic work, and low-paying service jobs in the region. An international organization reported an increase in the use of online methods to recruit trafficking victims; in 2021, media reported a Saudi recruitment agency coordinated with an Egyptian marketing company to use a social media site to fraudulently recruit women into domestic servitude in other parts of the Middle East. During the reporting period, an NGO reported the government coordinated and conducted joint operations with a militia in the Sinai Peninsula that allegedly recruited and used children, including some in direct hostilities.

Traffickers reportedly subject men and women from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa to forced labor in domestic service, construction, cleaning, and begging, as well as sex trafficking. Male refugees and migrants are vulnerable to exploitative labor practices, including forced labor. Foreign domestic workers – who are not covered under Egyptian labor laws – primarily from Syria, Yemen, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, and parts of West Africa are highly vulnerable to

forced labor; employers at times require them to work excessive hours, confiscate their passports, withhold their wages, deny them food and medical care, refuse to provide them with work visas, and subject them to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Some employers file false claims of theft to further exploit domestic workers. Traffickers subject women and girls, including refugees and migrants from Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East to sex trafficking in Egypt. During the reporting period, an NGO reported migrant smugglers recruit economically marginalized migrants from the Horn of Africa to travel to Egypt in exchange for work or minimal fees; however, the smugglers then exploit the migrants, in particular unaccompanied children, at various locations along the migration route in sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced labor on construction sites in hazardous and exploitative working conditions. Once the migrants arrive in Egypt, their smugglers/traffickers then hold them in captivity until their “debts” are paid. In 2018, an international organization reported Colombian nationals were smuggled into Egypt to work in the entertainment industry, and in 2019, an NGO reported that employers in resort towns, such as Sharm El Sheikh, sexually exploit dancers from Colombia. An international organization reported new cases during the reporting period involving victims fraudulently recruited to play or coach sports in Egyptian sports clubs, in particular soccer clubs, having their passports confiscated, and being forced to do domestic work such as cleaning for club management and owners; the international organization reported assisting victims from Bolivia, Argentina, Haiti, and Sub-Saharan African countries. Refugees and migrants from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen who live in Egypt are at risk of trafficking. NGOs and international organizations report unaccompanied children among the African migrant population are at risk of trafficking in Egypt; Sudanese gangs reportedly target unaccompanied and separated children to force or coerce the children to sell drugs or commit other petty crimes. Undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa, who transit Egypt en route to Europe, are at risk of trafficking along this migration route.

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