



2016 Trafficking in Persons Report - Liberia

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LIBERIA: Tier 2

Liberia is a source and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Trafficking within the country from rural to urban areas is more prevalent than transnational trafficking, and the majority of victims are children. Most trafficking victims originate from and are exploited within the country's borders, where they are subjected to domestic servitude, forced begging, sex trafficking, or forced labor in street vending, alluvial diamond mines, and on rubber plantations. Traffickers typically operate independently and are commonly family members who promise poorer relatives a better life for their children. Children sent to work as domestic servants for their wealthier relatives are vulnerable to forced labor or, to a lesser extent, sexual exploitation. Orphaned children remain susceptible to exploitation, including in street selling and child sex trafficking. A small number of Liberian men, women, and children are subjected to human trafficking in other West African countries, including Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Women from Tunisia and Morocco have been subjected to sex trafficking in Liberia. During the previous reporting period, Liberian women were subjected to forced labor in Lebanon. Capacity constraints and generalized corruption within the judiciary continued to hamper efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes, including human trafficking.

The Government of Liberia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. During the reporting period, the Ebola outbreak and subsequent recovery efforts continued to severely affect the country and overwhelm the government's resources and capacity to address trafficking in persons effectively. Nevertheless, the government's trafficking in persons taskforce adopted a national referral mechanism and facilitated the repatriation of six Liberian women subjected to trafficking in Lebanon during the previous reporting period. In total, 16 women were exploited in a trafficking ring first uncovered in September 2014. The government also provided \$50,000 for the care and protection of the 16 women. However, the government did not convict any trafficking offenders and continued to make insufficient efforts to investigate cases of internal trafficking, despite this being the predominant form of trafficking in the country. The government also did not implement fully its standard operating procedures for trafficking victim support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIBERIA:

Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict trafficking offenses, with an increased focus on cases involving Liberian nationals; vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict government officials complicit in trafficking offenses; finalize and implement the national referral mechanism adopted by the trafficking in persons taskforce and educate NGOs, law enforcement personnel, magistrates, and other relevant officials on the mechanism and on the "Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operating Procedures;" provide additional training to law enforcement officials and magistrates on the application of the anti-trafficking law and differentiation of trafficking crimes from cases of human smuggling or kidnapping; establish and adequately fund a shelter specifically for trafficking victims; and increase efforts to educate the public, particularly in Liberia's rural areas, about the dangers of human trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained its minimal anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts during the reporting period. Liberia's 2005 Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons prohibits all forms of trafficking. It prescribes a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment for the trafficking of adults and six years' imprisonment for the trafficking of children, but does not include a maximum sentence for the trafficking of adults. The prescribed penalties for the sex and labor trafficking of children are sufficiently stringent, but the prescribed penalties for sex and labor trafficking of adults are not, nor are they commensurate with those prescribed for other serious offenses, such as rape.

The government reported one investigation of a potential internal trafficking case, one prosecution, and no convictions during the reporting period, compared with three investigations and no prosecutions or convictions in the previous reporting period. The one prosecution initiated during the reporting period followed from an investigation during the previous reporting period involving an alleged trafficker residing in Liberia and responsible for the exploitation of 16 Liberian women in Lebanon. The trial began in September 2015 and resulted in a hung jury in January 2016; by March 2016, officials had begun a re-trial. The government also initiated an investigation of one suspect in a potential internal trafficking case. No Liberian trafficking offenders have been convicted under Liberia's anti-trafficking law. All section heads of the Liberia National Police (LNP) received basic training on how to report suspected trafficking cases to the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), which had the lead in investigating such crimes; however, LNP staff did not receive specialized training in investigating human trafficking crimes. Anti-trafficking training is a component of WACPS' mandatory three-week orientation course for all of its new officers. WACPS was unable to provide an estimate of the number of officers trained on anti-trafficking during the reporting period. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses.

PROTECTION

The government maintained modest efforts to identify and protect victims of human trafficking. It identified two potential internal trafficking victims. The government also repatriated six additional forced labor victims identified in a 2014 case, building upon the repatriation of 10 victims from the same case discovered in the previous reporting period. The government provided \$50,000 to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection for the care and protection of the 16 women. The 2013 "Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operating Procedures" were not fully implemented during the reporting period. The standard operating procedures provide guidance for the care and protection of victims and special considerations for child victims of trafficking. The trafficking in persons taskforce developed a national referral mechanism to accompany the standard operating procedures, which was sent to the Minister of Justice in December 2015 for approval necessary prior to its implementation; it remained pending

approval at the conclusion of the reporting period. Government efforts largely focused on a few transnational human trafficking cases. There remained no government-run shelters or safe homes specifically for trafficking victims in Liberia, and the government continued to rely on NGOs and civil society groups to provide basic assistance and psychosocial support to victims. Government resources continued to be insufficient to provide specialized care for male victims or victims with disabilities. The government offers legal alternatives to removal to countries in which victims would face retribution or hardship, such as temporary residency, on a case-by-case basis. No victims were identified during the reporting period that were eligible to receive this type of benefit. The 2005 Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons absolves victims from responsibility for unlawful acts committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking; there were no reports that victims were punished during the year.

PREVENTION

The government made minimal efforts to prevent trafficking in persons. The trafficking in persons taskforce did not hold regular meetings and remained without an operating budget. The country's five-year trafficking in persons national action plan, launched in March 2014, was only partially implemented during the reporting period. Nevertheless, there were sometimes greater coordination efforts amongst government ministries through the taskforce. The Ministry of Labor continued to support anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, mainly through existing billboards; however, the government did not sponsor outreach or awareness activities during the reporting period. The government did not make any discernible efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor or commercial sex acts during the reporting period. The government provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

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