

Document #2036246

USDOS – US Department of State

2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cyprus

CYPRUS: Tier 1

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore Cyprus remained on Tier 1. These efforts included amending laws to strengthen prosecution efforts, such as significantly increasing prescribed penalties for trafficking, strengthening the criminalization of the demand for sex trafficking, and enabling police to wiretap telephone communication of suspected traffickers with an approved court warrant. The government increased resources for the government-run trafficking shelter and NGO-run transitional housing for sex trafficking victims. The government, in consultation with NGOs, drafted and adopted the 2019-2021 national action plan. The Ombudsman produced three public reports on the government’s anti-trafficking policies, two of them in response to civil society concerns. Although the government meets the minimum standards, it identified fewer victims, it investigated and prosecuted fewer suspects, and courts did not convict any perpetrators for sex trafficking or forced labor under their trafficking law in 2019 or 2018. Court proceedings lasted years, and foreign victims and witnesses often returned to their countries of origin, resulting in lenient sentences for related crimes. The police anti-trafficking unit (ATU) lacked sufficient resources to thoroughly investigate all referrals of potential victims. Social Welfare Services (SWS) lacked training to accurately identify victims; as a result, SWS did not respond in a timely manner to referrals of potential trafficking victims and failed to refer all potential victims to ATU for official identification procedures. Victims continued to face delays in receiving financial assistance.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers under Law 60(I) and sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms. • Strengthen coordination between police and prosecutors during trafficking investigations. • Reduce delays in providing victim assistance, including access to health care, rental disbursements, and financial assistance. • Train government personnel, particularly SWS officials, on victim identification, assistance, and referral. • Allocate sufficient resources to enable the anti-trafficking unit to effectively investigate all offenses. • Proactively identify victims among vulnerable populations, including migrants and agricultural workers. • Reduce delays in court proceedings. • Strengthen the capacity of the Labor Inspectorate to identify and refer victims of forced labor. • Improve victim-centered investigations and prosecutions and implement witness protection measures when necessary. • Implement recommendations made by the Ombudsman and other entities that monitor and evaluate anti-trafficking policies and efforts.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. The government adopted Law 117(I)/2019 in July, which amended Law 60(I)/2014 that criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Law 117 (I)/2019 increased prescribed penalties from up to 10 years’ imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim to 25 years’ imprisonment. Additionally, the law increased prescribed penalties for offenses involving a child victim from up to 20 years’ imprisonment to up to life imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for serious crimes, such as rape.

The police investigated 24 suspected traffickers (32 in 2018); 13 suspects for sex trafficking, four suspects for forced labor, and seven suspects for both sex trafficking and forced labor (26 suspects and a company for sex trafficking and six for forced labor, including four for forced begging in 2018). The police also investigated 11 suspects for forced marriage (eight suspects in 2018), which authorities considered to be trafficking under their law. The government prosecuted 16 defendants (30 in 2018); nine defendants for sex trafficking and seven for both sex trafficking and forced labor (27 defendants and two companies for sex trafficking and three defendants for forced labor in 2018). The government also prosecuted three defendants for “soliciting or patronizing a sex trafficking victim” (none in 2018) and eight defendants for forced marriage (16 in 2018). The government

continued to prosecute 86 defendants; 44 defendants for sex trafficking, 38 for forced labor, and four for both sex trafficking and forced labor. Courts did not convict any traffickers for sex trafficking or forced labor under their trafficking law in 2019 or 2018. Courts convicted four perpetrators prosecuted under the trafficking law with lesser offenses, including living off of the proceeds of prostitution, failing to pay taxes, illegal possession of tax-free products, providing false information to a police officer, and illegal possession of goods (three perpetrators in 2018). Judges sentenced one perpetrator to three months' imprisonment, another to three months' imprisonment with a fine of €17,910 (\$20,130). Two others received fines of €800 (\$900) and €500 (\$560). OSCE reported cases relied heavily on victim and witness testimonies without additional corroborating evidence and court proceedings lasted up to three years. Foreign victims and witnesses often returned to their countries of origin, resulting in lenient sentences and downgraded cases, and acquittals of suspects on trafficking charges due to a lack of evidence.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order maintained an ATU, which conducted proactive investigations. Observers reported that inadequate ATU staffing limited the number of investigations. In 2018, the ATU reported that the absence of legislation allowing the use of electronic surveillance hampered its ability to collect sufficient evidence and corroborate victim and witness testimonies; however, the government amended the law, enabling police to wiretap telephone communication of suspects, including traffickers, with a court warrant and other approvals. Observers reported local police, particularly in rural areas, tolerated practices that were indicators of forced labor, including withholding salaries and confiscating travel documents. In September 2018, the ATU and the Internal Affairs Unit arrested and prosecuted four immigration police officers on suspicion of aiding a criminal network involved in trafficking; the case was still pending trial. The Police Academy continued to train police officers on trafficking issues, including new recruits, immigration police, and community police. The government, separately and with technical assistance from international organizations, the U.S. government, and NGOs, trained judges and police officers on various anti-trafficking issues. The government continued joint investigations with British, Cameroonian, and Polish authorities and participated in a EUROPOL operation. The government executed three international investigations related to trafficking, one from Poland and two from Romania and issued European arrest warrants for two Bulgarian nationals and international arrest warrants for an Indian national and a Pakistani national for trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government identified 24 victims (31 victims in 2018); eight were sex trafficking victims, 11 victims of both sex trafficking and forced labor, and five victims of forced labor, including one of forced begging (21 victims of sex trafficking, eight victims of both sex trafficking and forced labor, and two victims of forced labor in 2018); 21 were female and two were male (25 female victims and one male victim in 2018); and one was a child victim (none in 2018). The government also identified four victims of forced marriage (five in 2018), which authorities considered to be trafficking under their law. A multi-disciplinary national referral mechanism (NRM) provided standard operating procedures for identifying and referring victims to services, including an operational manual and written guidance for first responders. The government updated the operational manual to include guidelines for child victims. The NRM required first responders to conduct preliminary identification of potential victims and refer potential victims to SWS. The police conducted proactive identification efforts, particularly in apartments, pubs, and agricultural establishments, but observers reported the ATU lacked sufficient resources to effectively investigate all referrals of potential victims, including among asylum-seekers. SWS officers provided potential victims with information and notified the ATU, who officially identified victims.

The government approved a standardized form for referrals to SWS; however, OSCE and civil society representatives reported SWS lacked training to accurately identify victims. As a result, SWS did not respond in a timely manner to referrals of potential trafficking victims and failed to refer all potential victims to ATU for official identification procedures. Additionally, SWS lacked capacity to maintain contact with potential victims, according to OSCE and other civil society representatives, who noted some potential victims did not have access to adequate accommodations and financial assistance. SWS assigned an on-call officer outside of working hours and on weekends to provide emergency accommodation and financial support to potential victims, but observers noted the NRM was not fully functional on weekends and the on-call SWS officer did not deem potential trafficking cases an emergency. While experts reported cooperation generally improved with SWS in the referral process, it depended largely on the individual SWS officer assigned to the case. The ATU interviewed 246 potential victims referred by SWS (111 in 2018); referral statistics for 2019 were incomplete, but the government referred at least 117 potential victims, NGOs referred 79, and three self-identified (the government referred 74 potential victims, NGOs referred 37 potential victims in 2018). The government established a permanent screening system for newly arrived asylum-seekers, and observers reported identification of potential victims among asylum-seekers improved compared to previous years; the government and NGOs referred 172 asylum-seekers as potential victims (48 in 2018). Observers reported the ATU identification process lacked transparency and some interviews were not victim-centered, while authorities reported using internal identification manuals based on

international standards and guidelines. Specialized personnel in the police anti-trafficking unit, including a forensic psychologist, conducted interviews with potential and identified victims before taking an official statement. The process of identifying victims exploited prior to arriving in Cyprus lasted several months, according to observers, who said police and SWS did not keep potential victims informed about the status of their cases. The government, at times in cooperation with an international organization, trained social welfare officers and asylum officers on victim identification and assistance.

The government allocated €337,970 (\$379,740) to operate the SWS-run shelter, compared to €280,000 (\$314,610) in 2018. This amount did not include salaries for the SWS-run shelter staff. The government allocated €168,980 (\$189,870), compared with €213,420 (\$239,800) in 2018, for rent allowances and financial assistance to trafficking victims through a public benefit scheme known as Guaranteed Minimum Income. In addition, the government allocated €30,000 (\$33,710) for emergency rent and assistance to cover urgent needs, compared with €25,000 (\$28,090) in 2018. SWS evaluated the needs of victims and potential victims and referred them to the appropriate government agencies and NGOs for assistance. SWS operated a specialized shelter for female sex trafficking victims with the capacity to accommodate 15 victims; the SWS-run shelter accommodated 53 official and potential victims (69 in 2018). Victims may stay for one month or longer, as appropriate, in the shelter for a reflection period. The SWS-run shelter allowed adult victims to leave the shelter voluntarily after an assessment conducted by the ATU. The government maintained a memorandum of cooperation with an NGO to manage transitional housing for female sex trafficking victims, which accommodated sex trafficking victims searching for permanent residence after leaving the state-run shelter, and to provide longer-term accommodation for female victims in apartments. The government allocated €147,000 (\$165,170) to the NGO, compared with €62,000 (\$69,660) in 2018. The government also provided a rent subsidy and a monthly allowance for all victims and partnered with NGOs to provide apartments for male victims; however, victims experienced delays in rent disbursements resulting in the eviction of one victim and landlords' threats of eviction for other victims in 2018.

The law entitled victims to psycho-social services, health care, translation and interpretation services, education, vocational training, and financial assistance. The government trained health care professionals on the mental health care for sex trafficking victims, and all staff at the government-run shelter participated in monthly training sessions from Ministry of Health clinical psychologists. The government maintained a children's house to provide education, placement into foster homes, and specialized medical and psycho-social care for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, including trafficking. Observers reported good quality of service at the government-run shelter, health care services, and labor offices; however, victims continued to rely heavily on NGOs to help navigate cumbersome SWS procedures to access support services. In previous years, the government streamlined the process for providing financial support to victims and prioritized public benefit applications from trafficking victims; however, observers reported victims still waited approximately four months to receive benefits with no retroactive payments. Victims received emergency financial assistance in cases of delayed distribution of monthly allowances, but the amount was insufficient to cover basic necessities. Observers reported victims were unable to register with the new government-run General Healthcare System (GESY) due to a technical issue. To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, in March the government began requiring referrals from GESY-registered personal doctors for individuals to get treatment at state hospitals, which observers said prevented victims from accessing health care. Employment counselors trained to handle sensitive cases sought suitable employment for each victim. Employment counselors helped 10 victims find employment during the reporting period.

The government and civil society did not report any cases of penalization of victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. The government voluntarily repatriated or granted residence permits and work authorization to foreign victims, including those who decided after their reflection period not to cooperate with the police. The government extended the residence and work permit for 10 victims (six victims in 2018) and granted asylum to one victim (two in 2018). All 24 identified victims assisted law enforcement in investigations (27 in 2018). The government permitted victims to leave Cyprus and return for trial, and police remained in contact with victims while they were abroad; one victim left Cyprus and returned to testify in trial (none in 2018). However, victims and witnesses often left the country and did not return before trial due to long delays, hindering prosecution efforts. The law entitled victims to witness protection through a request made by the police to the Attorney General; no requests were made in 2019 or 2018. Police officers escorted victims to court proceedings and the law allowed courts closed-door trials, a partition to separate victims from their traffickers, remote testimony, and the use of video-recorded testimonies for child victims; however, courts used none of the methods in 2019 or 2018. Prosecutors did not seek restitution in criminal cases, but the law allowed victims to pursue compensation through civil suits or through the victim compensation fund; authorities approved two of the three applications from victims for legal aid to pursue compensation (10 victims applied for legal aid in 2018).

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group (MCG) to combat trafficking, comprising relevant government agencies and NGOs, met three times (twice in 2018) and drafted and adopted the 2019-2021 national action plan. An MCG working group also met to improve coordination between NGOs and SWS to provide victim assistance. The Ombudsman produced two public reports on the government's anti-trafficking policies in response to civil society concerns. One report concluded government services did not fully implement provisions of the victim protection law because authorities did not renew some victims' residence permits. The report also recommended measures to ensure victims received assistance; civil society filed a complaint stating authorities had not fully implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations. A second complaint identified staffing shortages at the SWS-run shelter, which the government had resolved, according to civil society. The Ombudsman produced another report identifying vulnerabilities among domestic workers, including a weak legal framework, a sponsorship system that ties the domestic worker to an employer, and withholding of travel documents—and recommended revising employment contracts, increasing labor inspections, and implementing stronger mechanisms to identify victims. In response to the Ombudsman's report on domestic workers, the government lifted the maximum period of residence (previously six years) and considered additional changes, including revising the employment contract.

The Ministry of Labor (MOL) inspected 136 employment agencies (128 in 2018) and revoked the licenses of 14 employment agencies (six in 2018). The MOL also imposed a fine on four employment agencies for failing to maintain required records (one in 2018), and police separately investigated one employment agency for trafficking-related offenses (one in 2018). The Ministry of Interior maintained a contract for employment of domestic workers and defined the process by which the employee or the employer could terminate the contract. In addition, the contract set a €310 (\$350) minimum salary for domestic workers and required employers to be responsible for accommodation, medical insurance, meals, visa fees, travel expenses, and repatriation ticket. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, including by strengthening the criminalization of the demand and purchase of commercial sex from a trafficking victim. The government did not operate a hotline.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Cyprus. Foreign victims identified in Cyprus in 2019 were from Bulgaria, Cameroon, Czechia, Greece, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Romania, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, and Vietnam. In previous years, victims were also from China, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, and Uzbekistan. Traffickers subject women, primarily from Eastern Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, to sex trafficking. Sex trafficking occurs in private apartments and hotels; on the street; and in bars, pubs, coffee shops, massage parlors, and cabarets known for the availability of commercial sex. Traffickers exploit short-term tourist visas available to Ukrainian and Russian nationals to recruit young women for sex trafficking in bars and private establishments and recruit some female sex trafficking victims with false promises of marriage or work as barmaids or hostesses. Traffickers subject foreign migrant workers—primarily from South and Southeast Asia—to forced labor in agriculture. Employment agencies recruit and exploit migrant workers who enter the country on short-term work permits in labor trafficking; after the permits expire, traffickers use debt-based coercion, threats, and withholding of pay and documents. Domestic workers from India, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka are vulnerable to forced labor. Traffickers subject asylum-seekers from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe to forced labor in agriculture and domestic work. Unaccompanied children, children of migrants, Roma, and asylum-seekers are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor. Romani children are vulnerable to forced begging. Traffickers exploit Cypriots addicted to drugs and young women with disabilities to commit criminal offenses such as distributing illegal substances and committing welfare benefits fraud.

AREA ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

The northern area of Cyprus is administered by Turkish Cypriots. In 1983, the Turkish Cypriots proclaimed the area the independent “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”). The United States does not recognize the “TRNC,” nor does any other country except Turkey. If the “TRNC” were to be assigned a formal ranking in this report, it would be Tier 3. Turkish Cypriot authorities do not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and are not making significant efforts to do so. However, in March “Parliament” amended the “TRNC criminal code” to include trafficking for the first time, and “Parliament” also passed the 2000 UN TIP Protocol in April 2018. Turkish Cypriot authorities did not keep statistics on police efforts to combat trafficking. The “Nightclubs and Similar Places of Entertainment Law of 2000” stipulated nightclubs may only provide entertainment such as dance performances; however, Turkish Cypriot authorities rarely enforced this “law,” and observers said commercial sex, including forced prostitution, commonly occurred in nightclubs. Local press reported that police at times enforced prostitution-related offenses, including forced prostitution, which occurred outside of nightclubs during the year. Turkish Cypriot authorities prosecuted a suspect for forcing two women into prostitution and convicted two perpetrators for “encouraging and forcing a woman into prostitution.” Labor “laws” continued to be inadequately

enforced, according to observers, and charging high recruitment fees, confiscating passports, and withholding salaries were common practices. Turkish Cypriot authorities made no significant efforts to punish labor recruiters or brokers involved in the recruitment of workers through knowingly fraudulent employment offers or excessive fees for migration or job placement.

The area administered by Turkish Cypriots lacked shelters and social, economic, and psychological services for victims. Turkish Cypriot authorities did not allocate funding to anti-trafficking efforts; police did not receive training to identify victims; and authorities provided no protection to victims. Police confiscated passports of foreign women working in nightclubs and issued them identity cards, reportedly to protect them from abuse by nightclub owners who confiscated passports. Observers reported women preferred to keep their passports, but police convinced them to render passports to avoid deportation. Foreign victims who voiced discontent about the treatment they received were routinely deported. The “government” reportedly allowed trafficking victims serving as material witnesses against a former employer to find new employment and reside in temporary accommodation arranged by the police, but experts reported women were accommodated at nightclubs. Turkish Cypriot authorities did not encourage victims to assist in prosecutions against traffickers and deported all foreign victims.

Between April 2019 and January 2020, “TRNC” authorities issued 942 six-month “hostess” and “barmaid” “work permits” for individuals working in nightclubs and pubs known for the availability of commercial sex and potential sex trafficking, which operated in the north (1,605 in 2018). As of January 2020, there were 310 women working under such “permits” (319 as of March 2019). Nightclub owners hired female college students to bypass the cap on the number of employees legally permitted in each club and to avoid taxes and monitoring. Most permit holders came from Belarus, Moldova, Morocco, Russia, and Ukraine, while others came from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Paraguay, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Observers have alleged that some “parliament” members were among the nightclubs’ clientele. Women were not permitted to change location once under contract with a nightclub, and Turkish Cypriot authorities deported 581 women (638 in 2018) who curtailed their contracts without screening for trafficking. “Authorities” deported female nightclub workers who sought help with complaints regarding their working conditions (40 in 2018), also without screening for trafficking. “TRNC” did not provide the number of work permits issued to domestic workers (3,143 in 2018). The “law” prohibited living off the earnings of prostitution or encouraging prostitution, but nightclub bodyguards accompanied female nightclub employees to their weekly health checks for sexually transmitted infections, ensuring the women did not share details about potential exploitation in commercial sex with police or doctors in order to facilitate continued illegal activity. The “law” that governed nightclubs prohibited foreign women from living at their place of employment; however, most women lived in dormitories adjacent to the nightclubs or in other accommodations arranged by the owner, a common indicator of trafficking.

The “Nightclub Commission,” composed of police and “government officials” who regulate nightclubs, prepared brochures on employee rights and distributed them to foreign women upon entry. The “Nightclub Commission” met monthly and made recommendations to the “Ministry of Interior” regarding operating licenses, changes to employee quotas, and the need for intervention at a particular establishment. The “Nightclub Commission” reportedly inspected approximately five nightclubs every two weeks and followed up on complaints; however, in practice, inspections focused on the sanitation of kitchens, and interviews with women working in nightclubs always took place in front of nightclub bodyguards or staff, preventing potential trafficking victims from speaking freely. Turkish Cypriots made no efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex acts. The “Social Services Department” in the “Ministry of Labor” continued to run a hotline for trafficking victims; however, it was inadequately staffed and not always operational. An expert reported trafficking victims were afraid to call the hotline because they believed it was linked to authorities.

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the “TRNC.” Traffickers exploit women from Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa in sex trafficking in nightclubs licensed and regulated by Turkish Cypriot authorities. Nightclubs provide a source of tax revenue for the Turkish Cypriot administration; media reports in 2015 estimated nightclub owners paid between 20 million and 30 million Turkish lira (\$3.4 million and \$5.04 million) in taxes annually. This presents a conflict of interest and a deterrent to increase political will to combat trafficking. Men and women are exploited in forced labor in the industrial, construction, agriculture, domestic work, restaurant, and retail sectors. Traffickers control victims of forced labor through debt-based coercion, threats of deportation, restriction of movement, and inhumane living and working conditions. Labor trafficking victims originate from Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and South and Southeast Asia. Migrants, especially those who cross into the area administered by Turkish Cypriots after their work permits in the Republic of Cyprus have expired, are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Romani children and Turkish seasonal workers and their families are also vulnerable to labor exploitation and trafficking. Foreign university students, many of whom were recruited with false promises of scholarships, free housing, and employment, are vulnerable to both sex and labor trafficking; students who drop out of school or engage in irregular work, many from sub-Saharan African countries, were particularly vulnerable. As in previous years, observers reported that a number of women, some of whom may be trafficking victims, entered the “TRNC” on three-

month tourist or student visas and engaged in commercial sex in apartments in north Nicosia, Kyrenia, and Famagusta. Migrants, asylum-seekers, LGBTI persons, refugees, and their children are also at risk for sexual exploitation.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers and sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms. • Screen for trafficking victims, including in nightclubs and pubs. • Increase transparency in the regulation of nightclubs and promote awareness among clients and the public about force, fraud, and coercion used to compel commercial sex. • Open a shelter and provide funding to NGO care services for the protection of victims. • Investigate, prosecute, and convict “officials” complicit in trafficking. • Provide alternatives to deportation for victims of trafficking. • Acknowledge and take steps to address conditions of forced labor, including among domestic workers.

ecoi.net summary:



Annual report on trafficking in persons (covering April 2019 to March 2020)

Country:

Cyprus

Source:

[USDOS – US Department of State](#)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/cyprus/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

25 June 2020

Document ID:

2036246

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telephone) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

