

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Côte 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; therefore, Cote d'Ivoire remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more trafficking crimes and establishing a new law enforcement unit to combat child begging in Abidjan. The government repatriated 73 Ivoirian trafficking victims and provided anti-trafficking training to judicial officials, law enforcement officials, social workers, and labor inspectors. The government also entered into a framework of action with foreign governments and private businesses to combat child labor and child labor trafficking in cocoa production. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government prosecuted and convicted fewer traffickers, and it identified and referred to services fewer trafficking victims. Shelter and services, especially for adult victims, remained limited. Law enforcement lacked specialized training and adequate resources to effectively investigate trafficking cases and identify victims. Despite reports of child forced labor in the agricultural sector, labor inspectors did not identify any child trafficking cases during inspections. The interagency anti-trafficking committee (CNLTP) lacked the authority and resources to effectively coordinate the government's national anti-trafficking response.

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.
- Proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including in the cocoa and mining industries.
- Increase care available for trafficking victims, especially adults, including by partnering with NGOs providing services to victims.
- Increase funding and in-kind resources, as feasible, for anti-trafficking law enforcement units to investigate trafficking cases nationwide; delineate responsibilities and enhance coordination between the units.
- Strengthen the CNLTP's authority to coordinate the government's anti-trafficking response and implement the 2022-2025 anti-trafficking NAP, including by providing dedicated financial resources and convening regular meetings.
- Institutionalize training for law enforcement and judicial officials on investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases under the 2016 anti-trafficking law and employing specialized investigative and prosecutorial techniques.
- Improve nationwide data collection on anti-trafficking law enforcement and victim identification efforts, separate from child labor and other crimes.
- Fully implement the NRM and standardized procedures to identify human trafficking victims, including among vulnerable populations such as Ivoirian labor migrants, foreign migrants, child laborers, refugees, and individuals in commercial sex, and train front-line actors, including law enforcement, judicial officials, labor inspectors, social workers, and NGOs on their use.
- Train law enforcement on effective, victim-centered investigation techniques and trauma-informed approaches when interviewing victims.
- Increase efforts to prevent the fraudulent recruitment and exploitation of victims in Cote d'Ivoire and abroad, including by increasing oversight of labor recruitment agencies,

holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, and banning worker-paid recruitment fees.

- Ensure labor protections are enforced in the informal sector, especially domestic work.

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 five million to 10 million West African CFA francs (FCFA) (\$7,987-\$15,974) for adult trafficking and 20 to 30 years' imprisonment and a fine of 10 million to 50 million FCFA (\$15,964-\$79,872) for child trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave 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 five million to 20 million FCFA (\$7,987-\$31,948). The government also 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 one million to 10 million FCFA (\$1,597-\$15,974) for "pimping" and penalties of two to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 50 million to 100 million FCFA (\$79,872-\$159,744) for illegal mining. These penalties were significantly lower than those prescribed under the anti-trafficking law.

In 2024, the government reported investigating 150 trafficking cases (43 sex trafficking cases, 99 labor trafficking cases, and eight cases of unspecified forms of trafficking) and continued investigations of 14 cases from previous years. This was an increase compared with 98 investigations during the previous reporting period. The government reported initiating prosecutions of 21 alleged traffickers, including 14 for sex trafficking and seven for labor trafficking, and continued prosecutions of 20 alleged traffickers from previous years. The government reported convicting 18 traffickers, including 15 sex traffickers and three labor traffickers, under the 2016 anti-trafficking law. This was a decrease compared with prosecuting 109 alleged traffickers and convicting 46 traffickers during the previous year. The government did not provide sentencing information for the convicted traffickers. Government data may have included other crimes, such as sexual abuse or child labor, outside the international definition of trafficking.

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. The government did not report taking any action on previous complicity concerns. 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. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, there was one new case of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by an Ivoirian peacekeeper deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic; the government did not report accountability measures taken, if any, 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 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 cases; however, resource constraints limited investigations to Abidjan and a few regional precincts. The Transnational Organized Crime Unit operated a specialized human trafficking department that had jurisdiction over transnational trafficking cases; no unit was specialized to investigate internal adult labor trafficking cases. In July 2024, the government established a new police brigade to address child begging, including trafficking, in Abidjan; authorities identified and referred children

removed from the streets to care. Observers reported law enforcement units lacked coordination and limited funding and resources, especially a lack of vehicles, hindered efforts to identify and investigate human trafficking cases. The government previously proposed operationalizing its prosecutorial teams within the appeals courts to accelerate the procedural process for human trafficking trials in four cities; however, it did not report any efforts to implement this proposal.

The government reported cooperating with foreign counterparts on law enforcement activities; it had an MOU on combating human trafficking with Nigeria and signed a new MOU with Morocco to strengthen bilateral anti-trafficking cooperation. The Ministry of Justice held trainings for magistrates and members of the judicial police on the 2016 anti-trafficking law. The government also provided anti-trafficking trainings to law enforcement officials, social workers, child labor inspectors, law enforcement officials, and civil society members. However, observers reported law enforcement and judicial officials needed additional specialized anti-trafficking training, especially on cyber-trafficking. Officials often conflated human trafficking with other crimes, such as child labor. The government's capacity to collect anti-trafficking statistics and comprehensively report on law enforcement action was limited.

PROTECTION

The government maintained efforts to identify and protect victims.

The government reported identifying and referring to care at least 1,161 trafficking victims, the majority of whom were adults, including 310 sex trafficking and 802 labor trafficking victims, and 49 victims exploited in unspecified forms of trafficking. This was a decrease compared with identifying and referring 2,292 victims to services during the previous reporting period. The majority of identified victims were Ivoirian; foreign national victims were from Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, other West African countries, and Vietnam. 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 outside the international definition of trafficking. NGOs identified an additional 31 victims, including four sex trafficking, 21 labor trafficking victims, and six victims of unspecified forms of trafficking. The government reported it funded the repatriation of 73 Ivoirian trafficking victims exploited abroad and referred them to services upon their return. The government continued its program to identify vulnerable children using the streets as a source of livelihood, including potential trafficking victims; authorities referred the children to temporary shelters and, where possible, foster families.

The government continued implementing an NRM with standardized procedures to proactively identify trafficking victims and refer them to care. 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 implementation of the NRM. The government typically referred adult trafficking victims to NGOs or host families and child victims to NGO and government-run shelters or foster families. Officials could also refer trafficking victims for psychological care to government-run centers for victims of abuse. The government allocated at least 25 million FCFA (\$39,936) for trafficking victim assistance, the same amount it allocated in the previous reporting period. The government provided food, medical care, legal, family reunification, vocational training, and psycho-social support to victims. The government, in partnership with an NGO, operated three shelters for vulnerable children, which could accommodate trafficking victims. There was no government-run or supported shelter that could accommodate adult trafficking victims. A lack of coordination among government ministries 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. Observers reported government support for victim protection and shelter services remained limited, rendering some victims vulnerable to re-victimization and deterring some law enforcement from proactively investigating child trafficking crimes. 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 coordinated with foreign victims' home embassies to provide shelter and care prior to repatriation.

Access to victim services was not dependent on cooperation with law enforcement proceedings. The government offered some victim-witness assistance, including legal support, shelter, and voluntary return assistance to support victim participation in the criminal justice process. However, observers previously 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. Stakeholders reported law enforcement sometimes used trauma-insensitive tactics when interviewing victims, including children. Trafficking victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but none reportedly did so. Ivoirian law allowed victims to obtain restitution, but the government did not report ordering restitution in any cases. Officials screened for trafficking indicators among migrants and individuals in commercial sex. However, due to inconsistent application of standardized victim identification procedures, 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.

PREVENTION

The government modestly increased efforts to prevent trafficking.

The CNLTP coordinated the government's efforts to combat human trafficking. The government had a 2022-2025 anti-trafficking NAP. The government reported allocating a three-year budget of 5.8 billion CFA (\$9.3 million) for the implementation of the NAP. This compared with reporting 2.7 billion CFA (\$4.3 million) allocated for the CNLTP's operations in 2023, including implementation of the NAP, during the previous reporting period. 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 previously reported the CNLTP, although intended to lead the government's anti-trafficking response, lacked the authority and resources to effectively do so. In practice, CNS oversaw child anti-trafficking efforts and CNLTP oversaw adult anti-trafficking efforts; observers noted this contributed to a disparity between interventions for adult and child victims. Observers also reported the need for more collaboration between the three committees. Nine regional anti-trafficking committees coordinated regional prevention efforts and reported to the CNLTP.

The government conducted awareness raising activities on human trafficking in collaboration with NGOs. It also held public campaigns focused on child labor, which included some anti-trafficking components. Observers reported a need for additional resources to support awareness campaigns. The labor code regulated labor recruitment and labor migration; however, these regulations were poorly enforced in informal sectors, including domestic work, which increased vulnerability to trafficking. Observers previously estimated 80 to 90 percent of Cote d'Ivoire's labor force worked in the informal economy. Despite reports of fraudulent labor recruiters exploiting victims domestically and abroad, the government did not report efforts to monitor recruitment agencies, nor did it make efforts 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. Despite reports of child labor and child forced labor, including on cocoa plantations, labor inspectors did not report identifying any child labor or child trafficking cases during its more than 14,000 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 whether it referred any 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 it had SOSTECI monitoring committees in cocoa-producing areas throughout the country. In November 2024, the government signed a framework of action along with foreign governments and private businesses to combat child labor and child labor trafficking in cocoa production.

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Children operated a hotline to report child protection and human rights violations; it reported identifying seven potential trafficking cases. The government had two inter-ministerial commissions to adjudicate claims for an official statelessness status and issue nationality documents and birth certificates to vulnerable populations; however, observers previously reported the commissions lacked resources and processed claims slowly. The government did not report making any efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did report conducting awareness raising activities on extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse targeted at foreign tourists. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. One case of alleged sexual exploitation by an Ivoirian peacekeeper deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti was closed. The government did not report accountability measures taken, if any, by the end of the reporting period. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

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 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 sex trafficking, especially in Abidjan. Traffickers are increasingly using technology, such as the ecommerce website Qnet, to fraudulently recruit victims for jobs and subsequently exploit them in sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ivoirian boys and boys from other West African countries, especially Burkina Faso and Mali, in forced labor in agriculture, especially cocoa production, and mining. Observers report economic hardship and 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 Ivoirian cocoa plantations. Though the price of cocoa has increased, widespread poverty persists among cocoa-growing communities; small profits for farmers and lack of educational opportunities further increase the prevalence of child labor and forced labor in the cocoa sector. Traffickers exploit boys in forced labor on coffee and rubber plantations, animal herding, carpentry, construction, and forced begging in Cote d'Ivoire. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Corrupt Quranic teachers exploit Ivoirian and West African boys, including from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal, in forced begging in northern and central Cote d'Ivoire. Drug traffickers use children – some of whom are potential forced labor victims – in drug production, transport, and selling. 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; these girls are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Individuals living in Cote d'Ivoire without identity documents are vulnerable to human trafficking; children without identity documents cannot enroll in school past the elementary level, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.

Traffickers exploit Ivoirian and migrant workers, including Malian and Burkinabe nationals, in forced labor in the cocoa sector and artisanal mining, sometimes through debt bondage. Observers report recruiters deceive workers about working conditions and 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. Nigerian traffickers fraudulently recruit women and girls from Nigeria and other neighboring countries for employment in shops or restaurants and subsequently exploit them in sex trafficking in gold mining and cocoa-producing regions. An international organization notes cultural beliefs correlating sex with increased chances of finding gold increase the demand for sex

trafficking in mining communities. Refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants from Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Mali, including children, lacking birth certificates and identity documents are vulnerable to trafficking.

Traffickers fraudulently recruit Ivoirian women, men, 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 to fraudulently recruit and exploit victims 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. In Tunisia, intermediaries confiscate migrants' identity documents until they can pay for the next part of their journey, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. International organizations and Ivoirian law enforcement agencies report Ivoirian migrant smuggling networks based in Tunisia increasingly are becoming involved in trafficking; these networks also coerce Ivoirians to engage in unlawful acts, including drug smuggling. Organized criminal networks and smugglers fraudulently recruit some Ivoirian boys to play professional soccer in North Africa or Europe; once they arrive, they are vulnerable to forced labor. An international organization reports an increase in Ivoirian migrant women and unaccompanied children arriving in Italy; an NGO reports traffickers sexually exploit many of the women in Libya prior to their arrival in Italy. Once in Italy, Ivoirian children and young adults are at an increased risk of sex trafficking. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruit women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Cote d'Ivoire – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently place them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.