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2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria

Nigeria (Tier 2)

The Government of Nigeria 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 to the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Nigeria remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more traffickers, including two members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) involved in alleged sex trafficking; investigating officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes; identifying and providing more services to victims; and developing and implementing a rapid assessment form to identify trafficking victims. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government has not prosecuted any members of the CJTF for prior child soldier recruitment or use, potential sex trafficking in government-run IDP camps remained a concern, and officials removed fewer children from conditions of forced labor. Further, corruption remained a significant concern in the judiciary as well as immigration services, and the Ministry of Defense did not finalize its handover protocol to refer child soldiers to care for the seventh consecutive year.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Hold complicit officials as well as individuals affiliated with the government—including security officials and CJTF members—criminally accountable for trafficking offenses, including for the sex trafficking of IDPs and past unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- Enhance coordination between National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and Nigeria Police Force (NPF) on law enforcement efforts—including investigating illicit centers exploiting women in forced surrogacy—and prosecute suspects while respecting the rights of the accused.
- Finalize the draft protocol to refer children identified in armed conflict to civilian authorities, screen for trafficking among those detained, and provide appropriate care for all those identified as victims.
- Strengthen efforts to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as children in religious schools, IDPs, returning migrants, and children in domestic service.
- Increase public awareness programming to educate more of the population on human trafficking indicators.
- Expand shelter capacity for identified victims in coordination with other government entities, civil society, NGOs, international organizations, and the private sector.
- Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers—including labor traffickers and those who force children to beg—and impose sufficiently stringent sentences involving imprisonment.
- Work with CJTF and the UN to fully implement the child soldier action plan and confirm all children have been removed from the CJTF's ranks.
- Facilitate training for local, state, and federal judges on the 2015 law, specifically the provision prohibiting the issuance of fines in lieu of imprisonment in collaboration with international partners.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. The Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPLEAA), as amended in 2015, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed a minimum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a fine of 250,000 naira (\$617) for both sex and labor trafficking; the minimum penalty for sex trafficking involving a child

was seven years' imprisonment and a fine of 1 million naira (\$2,470). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

The government initiated investigations into 852 cases, including 323 sex trafficking cases, 168 labor trafficking cases, and 361 unspecified cases. The government continued investigating 663 cases initiated in previous reporting periods, including 416 sex trafficking cases and 247 labor trafficking cases. This compared with initiating investigations into 381 cases and continuing investigations into 452 cases during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecutions in 30 cases, including 14 for sex trafficking, three for labor trafficking, and 13 unspecified cases. The government continued prosecution from previous reporting periods of an additional 64 cases, for a total of 94 prosecuted during the reporting period, and 30 of the cases were prosecuted under the 2015 Trafficking Law. This compared with prosecuting 49 suspects the previous reporting period. The government secured 13 convictions, seven for sex trafficking and six unspecified, compared with convicting 36 individuals the previous reporting period. Eleven of this year's convictions were secured under the 2015 Trafficking Law and two under the 2015 Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act. The government did not report comprehensive sentencing data, but according to media reports, sentences for seven of the cases ranged from four to 14 years. Government data may have included crimes outside the international definition of trafficking.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. The government reported investigating four officials for involvement in trafficking crimes—a member of the Correctional Service, one member of the Immigration Service, and two members of the CJTF. The members of the CJTF were both investigated for sex trafficking of IDPs. The government reported one case initiated against a government official during the previous reporting period was adjourned and the other was dropped after the complainant withdrew the charges. Pandemic-related court closures and a judiciary strike limited overall judicial activity. Local judges did not have the same standardized training requirements as federal and state judges, which contributed to corruption and misapplication of the law. Some judges were unfamiliar with the anti-trafficking law, which hindered the government's ability to hold traffickers accountable.

The UN delisted the government-supported CJTF as an armed group using and recruiting child soldiers, citing a "significant decrease" in child soldier recruitment. In cooperation with an international organization, the CJTF established child protection units in its forces. Despite numerous allegations, the government has not reported investigating any CJTF members for child soldiering recruitment or use. The government did not report prosecuting or convicting any suspects for sex trafficking of IDPs, though as noted above the government initiated investigations of two CJTF members for such crimes. Terrorist and other illegal armed group activity hindered law enforcement and judicial officials' actions, especially in the Northeast and Borno State. Community defense groups played a substantial role in judicial service delivery and dispute resolution.

The Nigerian army trained members of the military on sexual exploitation, human rights, and disarmament and demobilization. The government trained justice officials on justice access issues for women and girls with disabilities, a group at risk of trafficking. The government also cooperated with a local NGO to train civil society on trafficking issues. In partnership with international organizations, the government trained NAPTIP officials, law enforcement, prosecutors, judicial actors, immigration officials, and civil society on topics including drafting international anti-trafficking MOUs, shelter standards, identifying trafficking victims, and conducting victim-centered investigations. NAPTIP's Judicial Research Center in Abuja provided NAPTIP officers access to resources to strengthen trafficking cases and enhance prosecution efforts.

The Nigerian-United Kingdom Joint Border Task Force (JBTF) carried out several international counter-trafficking operations focused on disrupting, identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting members of organized crime groups within Nigeria and abroad. NAPTIP collaborated with German, Spanish, and Italian authorities on several trafficking cases, including by responding to Mutual Legal Assistance Requests. In addition, NAPTIP collaborated with the Indian government to arrest a Nigerian sex trafficker in India and repatriate the victims, who were also Nigerian. The government signed Memoranda of Understanding on counter-trafficking issues with the governments of Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Niger. The government also created a counter-trafficking Joint Technical Working Group with the government of Niger, which met several times.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to identify victims, although services for many victims remained insufficient. The government identified 935 trafficking victims, including 521 sex trafficking victims, 129 labor trafficking victims, and 285 victims of unspecified exploitation, compared with identifying 499 victims and 812 potential victims the previous reporting period. Of the 521 sex trafficking victims, 158 were children, all girls, and the rest were women. Of the 129 labor trafficking victims, 26 were men, 37 were women, 11 were boys, and 55 were girls. The victims of unspecified exploitation

included four men, 29 women, 71 boys, and 181 girls. NGOs identified an additional 52 trafficking victims, of which 43 were sex trafficking victims, including eight girls; six labor trafficking victims, including four girls; and three victims of unspecified exploitation, all children. The government and government-supported NGOs provided services to 987 individuals, including 564 sex trafficking victims, including 172 children; 135 labor trafficking victims, including 70 children; and 288 victims of unspecified exploitation, including 255 children. This compared with providing services to 434 victims and 321 potential victims during the previous reporting period.

NAPTIP, in partnership with an international organization, developed and implemented a rapid assessment form to help NAPTIP officers identify trafficking victims and refer them to appropriate services. The government's existing national referral mechanism provided formal guidelines for law enforcement, immigration officials, and service providers. The government worked in partnership with the Network of Civil Society Organisations Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labour (NACTAL) to ensure appropriate referral of victims. Observers reported victim identification and referral to services remained a gap in the government's efforts.

NAPTIP's 10 zonal commands, including the Abuja headquarters, each operated a victim shelter during the reporting period, for a total of 10 shelters for trafficking victims with a total capacity of 334. A new shelter building with a proposed capacity of 96 individuals is currently being renovated. NAPTIP shelters offered six weeks of initial care, although officials often allowed victims to stay longer if they desired to do so; access to the shelters was not based on victims' cooperation with law enforcement. The government provided access to legal, medical, and psychological services, as well as vocational training, financial empowerment, family reunification, and business management skills to victims while in government shelters. If there was not space in NAPTIP shelters, agency officials referred the victim to NGOs for care. Nigerian trafficking victims exploited abroad were able to stay in shelters upon repatriation. NAPTIP had agreements with certain hospitals and clinics to provide additional medical and psychological treatment for victims, as needed. Additional government and NGO shelters provided services, including long-term shelter, to vulnerable children and victims of crime, including trafficking; authorities sometimes assigned child trafficking victims to foster homes or orphanages for care. Foreign victims had the same access to services as domestic victims. In a previous reporting period, an NGO reported some trafficking victims were held at shelters against their will and that some private shelters had substandard conditions.

NAPTIP continued to partner with an international organization and a foreign donor to implement a screening and sensitization campaign to identify sex trafficking victims in IDP camps. NAPTIP reached an unreported number of camps in the Kano area with screening, sensitization, or both. Additionally, NAPTIP officials reported coordinating with the Ministry of Defense's zonal commanders on protection issues pertaining to IDP camps by funding social workers, raising awareness of the crime among camp residents, and identifying victims.

The anti-trafficking law prohibited the penalization of trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers, including armed groups, compelled them to commit. However, due to a lack of consistent screening, authorities may have detained, arrested, and deported some unidentified trafficking victims. Reports from past reporting years alleged the government arrested and, in some cases, inappropriately detained for prolonged periods—reportedly for a security screening and perceived intelligence value—women and children removed from or allegedly associated with Boko Haram and ISIS-WA, including women and girls who insurgents had forcibly married or sexually enslaved.

The military released 294 children from detention between March 2021 and September 2021. For the seventh consecutive year, the government did not officially adopt the handover protocol to refer children identified in armed conflicts to civilian care providers. After release from detention, the military generally referred women and children classified through a security screening process as "low risk" or "inactive" in the conflict to a government-run rehabilitation center. Previous reports noted some trafficking victims—including women and children whom non-state armed groups forced to be combatants or exploited in sexual slavery—likely remained in detention and subject to criminal prosecution for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. The government collaborated with donors to continue the "Operation Safe Corridor" de-radicalization and rehabilitation program for combatants formerly associated with terrorist organizations. Due to poor screening procedures, noncombatants, who may have included trafficking victims, fleeing the conflict were wrongly labeled militants and detained. Previous reports alleged there were serious abuse and poor conditions in the program's detention centers.

The government encouraged victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases by providing security to victims; the government did not report how many victims assisted in investigations and prosecutions during the reporting period. In response to the pandemic, courts sometimes used video to collect testimony and allow witnesses in other jurisdictions to give evidence in criminal trials. NAPTIP, in collaboration with an international organization, the Ministry of Justice, and NGOs, ran legal hubs in Edo, Delta, and Lagos states, with the aim of enhancing victims' access

to justice through legal aid counseling and representation in court. Several Nigerian embassies, particularly within West Africa, provided funding or in-kind support to repatriate Nigerian trafficking victims exploited abroad.

The government did not have a formal policy to prevent the removal of victims to countries where they would face hardship or retribution. It could grant temporary residence visas to a trafficking victim who had a pending criminal, civil, or other legal action; the government did not report any foreign victims requested this relief. In a previous reporting period, observers reported the government forcibly returned some Nigerian refugees from Cameroon.

The victims' trust fund, financed primarily through confiscated assets of convicted traffickers, was available to all victims, but the government did not allocate any funds from the trust fund to victims during the reporting period. The anti-trafficking law provided for victim restitution. The government reported its courts had awarded restitution but did not provide details. Victims could also file civil suits against their traffickers.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. NAPTIP continued to lead the federal government's efforts to combat trafficking, although officials from the ministries of Defense, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Labor and Productivity, and Women Affairs and Social Development all had responsibilities in supporting the country's response to human trafficking. Numerous changes in NAPTIP leadership hindered the agency's effectiveness, but following the September appointment of the most recent director, the agency's efficacy improved. NAPTIP did not have resources to carry out sufficient proactive anti-trafficking operations in much of the country, and the agency's officers remained concentrated in state capitals, hindering identification and investigation of trafficking in many rural areas.

NAPTIP finalized, and the Federal Executive Council approved, the National Action Plan 2022-2026. NAPTIP inaugurated and trained four new state task forces and conducted coordination meetings with existing state task forces in the north central and southwest regions of the country. Inadequate information management technology—including basic infrastructure such as computers and internet services, especially in zonal commands outside Abuja—hindered data collection, dissemination, and research; many offices continued to use paper-based systems for case management.

NAPTIP conducted awareness raising campaigns in border communities, with a focus on communities bordering Niger, in addition to continuing its awareness-raising campaigns in schools and religious organizations. NAPTIP also began a monthly social media program to discuss trafficking topics with targeted audiences, produced an anti-trafficking television program, and, in coordination with an international organization, continued a community awareness-raising campaign. Awareness campaigns were conducted in all three major Nigerian languages and used print, electronic, and social media. The government had all campaign materials reviewed by trafficking experts.

The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MLE) conducted 10,526 labor inspections, found 3,234 violations of child labor laws, and removed 1,193 children from potential trafficking conditions; this compared with conducting 9,877 inspections and removing 2,996 children from potential trafficking conditions during the previous reporting period. Of the children removed from trafficking conditions, the government referred 120 to social services. The government trained labor inspectors on child trafficking. The government reported labor inspectors were required to work from home due to the pandemic, severely limiting their ability to conduct inspections in informal work settings where child and forced labor is predominant. International observers reported the government deployed 130 officers to airports throughout the country during the reporting period to assist with screening for trafficking indicators, building on NAPTIP's past sensitization programs at transportation hubs. The government regulated private employment agencies and had a licensing requirement for labor recruiters; the government did not report revoking any licenses for exploitative recruitment practices during the reporting period. The government prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees. Despite allegations in prior years that Nigerians traveled to Togo for child sex tourism, the government did not report efforts to address this crime. The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex.

The government ran a trafficking-specific hotline, which was available nationwide. The government hotline received 618 calls, 172 of which had a trafficking nexus. This compared with receiving 12,000 calls and identifying 145 potential victims the previous reporting period. The government did not report whether any of the calls led to trafficking investigations. In addition, NGO members of NACTAL took reports of trafficking, but no statistics were available.

The government provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. The government demoted and jailed an officer deployed on a peacekeeping mission in 2019 against whom there were substantiated charges of sexual exploitation with trafficking

indicators. Government action in a similar case involving an officer in 2017 remained pending. The government provided pre-departure training to ambassadors, chiefs of mission, and deputy chiefs of mission on human trafficking principles.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Nigeria, and traffickers exploit victims from Nigeria abroad. Internal trafficking is prevalent with Nigerian perpetrators recruiting victims from rural areas, especially the country's southern regions, for exploitation in commercial sex and forced labor in domestic work in cities such as Aboekuta, Calabar, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. Traffickers exploit victims in sex trafficking, as well as in forced and bonded labor in street vending, domestic service, artisanal mining, stone quarrying, agriculture, textile manufacturing, begging, and in the tie-dye sector in the northwest and southwest of the country. Those most vulnerable to trafficking include people from rural communities, IDPs, irregular migrants, those working in the informal economy, and those with disabilities. Extreme poverty, lack of economic opportunity, corruption, insecurity throughout the country, as well as climate change-related pressure to migrate increase Nigerians' vulnerability to trafficking. Highly-organized criminal groups, sometimes linked to Nigerian cult organizations or confraternities, are responsible for most trafficking for sexual exploitation to Europe. Criminal elements recruit foreigners for labor trafficking within the country.

There are reports that teachers in Quranic schools coerce students to beg and sometimes subject them to sexual slavery. In the latest available estimate from 2010, the government estimated as many as 9.5 million boys, often from impoverished homes, were studying in Quranic schools. Observers report worsening poverty related to the pandemic's economic impacts may increase the enrollment of these schools, as well as the risks of exploitation of the children by teachers, businesses, and local community members seeking labor.

Illicit actors operate "baby factories," which the government and NGOs describe as a widespread criminal industry in the country most prevalent in the south. Experts state the phenomenon is driven by poverty and a lack of opportunity for young girls as well as the demands of the illegal adoption market and cultural pressure for large families in Nigeria. Recruiters operating out of unregulated clinics work with enforcers to control the women through childbirth. The traffickers then sell the children, sometimes with the intent to exploit them in forced labor and sex trafficking. In southern Nigeria, especially Lagos, some women drug and "rent" their infants out to street beggars to increase the beggars' profits.

Traffickers exploit children in forced labor, including in granite quarries and artisanal mines, construction, agriculture, transportation, street hawking and begging, and domestic service. Observers in previous reporting periods stated agricultural firms in rural Nigeria force Togolese to work in palm wine production in rural Nigeria. Nigeria's ports and waterways around Calabar remain transit points for West African children subjected to forced labor in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. During a previous reporting period, NGO and media sources reported Nigerian traffickers compelled Cameroonian child refugees, displaced by Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and staying in camps in Nigeria, to work in forced labor in domestic service and, in some cases, into sex trafficking; there were allegations some parents were involved in selling their children.

Authorities identified Nigerian trafficking victims—often exploited by Nigerian traffickers—in countries in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East during the reporting period. Criminal groups and brothel owners exploit Nigerian women and girls in sex trafficking within Nigeria and throughout Europe, including in France, Italy, Spain, and Austria. Traffickers commonly send victims to Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom for sexual exploitation. According to reports, 80 percent of women in Spain's unlicensed brothels are victims of sex trafficking, with Nigerians forming a large percentage of that population. While some sex trafficking victims arrive in Europe believing they will be in commercial sex, traffickers coerce them to stay in commercial sex by altering working conditions and increasing victims' travel debts. Traffickers often threaten victims' families in Nigeria to maintain control; illicit recruiters generally target women and girls from impoverished families and require them to take a loyalty oath to their traffickers. Some victims' parents encourage them to obey their traffickers and endure exploitation to earn money.

Trafficking victims originate from throughout Nigeria, with Edo, Delta, Kano, Abia, Ebonyi, Imo, and Kogi among the most common origin states. During a previous reporting period, an international organization noted cases of labor trafficking involving domestic workers to Turkey, the Middle East, and Gulf States increased. Reports of men coerced into sexual exploitation and drug running to Europe also increased. In a previous reporting period, an international organization reported traffickers recruited women and girls from IDP camps in Northeast Nigeria for ostensibly legitimate jobs in Europe but exploited them in commercial sex in North Africa, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. Experts stated traffickers recruit victims directly from asylum or migrant reception centers in Italy and elsewhere in Europe.

Before departure for work abroad, or upon arrival in Europe, many Nigerian women participate in a traditional ceremony with a juju priest; some traffickers exploit this tradition and tell the women they must obey their traffickers or a curse will harm them, which prevents victims from seeking assistance or cooperating with law enforcement. Although the Oba of Benin—the religious leader of Benin City—revoked all previously administered juju spells and publicly renounced sex traffickers in 2018, reports continued to note traffickers performed the juju ceremonies in neighboring states, such as Delta.

Traffickers transport women and children to other West and Central African countries—including Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal—as well as to South Africa, where they exploit them in forced labor and sex trafficking; experts report mixed migration networks were well organized and involved in both smuggling and trafficking operations. Traffickers also exploit irregular migrants in forced labor and sexual exploitation at multiple stages of their journey through Northern Africa to Europe. Libyan and Nigerian illicit actors exploit Nigerians in Libya in forced labor in construction and agriculture and in commercial sex in Benghazi, Misrata, Sabha, and Tripoli; traffickers keep victims in “control houses” or “prostitution camps” near Tripoli or Misrata until they can repay travel debts.

There are approximately three million IDPs in the country and more than 337,000 Nigerian refugees in other countries; many of these IDPs and refugees are vulnerable to traffickers due to their limited access to economic opportunity and formal justice. Increasing violence stemming from expanding terrorist threats exacerbated the vulnerability of many IDPs and limited the government’s ability to respond to the trafficking threat throughout much of the north. Reports indicate other IDPs, aid workers, government officials, and security forces have committed sexual exploitation—including sex trafficking—in government-run IDP camps, informal camps, and local communities, including around Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. Additionally, there were reports from previous reporting periods traffickers exploited IDPs moving to cities such as Gombe and Kano and to neighboring countries such as Niger in forced labor.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued their practice of forcibly recruiting, abducting, and using child soldiers as young as 12 years of age as cooks, spies, messengers, bodyguards, armed combatants, as well as suicide bombers in attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. The groups continue to abduct women and girls in the northern region of Nigeria, some of whom they subject to domestic servitude, sexual slavery, and forced labor. Boko Haram routinely forces girls to choose between forced marriages for the purpose of sexual slavery to its fighters and becoming suicide bombers, with the terrorist organization frequently using drugs to control victims’ behavior. An NGO reported in prior reporting periods children detained for association with armed groups in Maiduguri Maximum Security Prison in Borno state were confined with adult inmates who allegedly exploited the children in commercial sex rings in the prison.

The Nigerian military coordinated some operations with the CJTF to combat Boko Haram and ISIS-WA in northeastern Nigeria. Worsening insecurity in northeast Nigeria, as well as pandemic-related movement restrictions, prevented observers from accessing many areas in Borno State and other regions of concern to investigate allegations of child soldier recruitment or use. During the previous reporting period, an NGO alleged soldiers in Giwa Barracks sexually exploited female detainees. Despite authorities releasing some individuals from detention, the government continued to detain children as young as five years old whom authorities suspected of being associated with Boko Haram or ISIS-WA.

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