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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 with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Nigeria remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more traffickers, including officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes, and increasing prosecutions and convictions; identifying more victims and referring all identified victims to care; and finalizing and implementing the handover protocol to refer child soldiers, including some trafficking victims, to care. The government updated its national referral mechanism (NRM) to include guidance on assisting persons with disabilities and adopted a disability inclusion plan to better serve trafficking victims. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Corruption remained a significant concern in the judiciary and immigration services, and it contributed to impunity for traffickers. The government did not investigate or prosecute any members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) for prior forced recruitment or use of child soldiers; potential sex trafficking in government-run IDP camps continued.

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 forced recruitment or use of child soldiers.
- Strengthen efforts to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as children in religious schools, IDPs, returning migrants, and children in domestic service.
- Facilitate training for local, state, and federal judges on human trafficking and the 2015 anti-trafficking law, specifically the provision prohibiting the issuance of fines in lieu of imprisonment in collaboration with international partners.
- Expand shelter capacity for identified victims in coordination with other government entities, civil society, NGOs, international organizations, and the private sector.
- Increase public awareness programming to educate more of the population on human trafficking indicators.
- Enhance coordination between National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and Nigeria Police Force (NPF) on law enforcement efforts – and prosecute suspects while respecting the rights of the accused.
- Identify and implement mechanisms to ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Increase the budget committed to NAPTIP and anti-trafficking efforts.
- Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers – especially labor traffickers, including those who force children to beg – and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Enhance methods of record keeping for trafficking cases, including data on convictions and sentencing.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts, although corruption and complicity continued to contribute to impunity for trafficking crimes. 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 (\$568) 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 (\$2,270). 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 1,242 cases, including 511 sex trafficking cases, 282 labor trafficking cases, and 449 cases of unspecified forms of trafficking. This compared with initiating investigations into 852 cases during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecutions of 78 suspects, including 67 suspects for sex trafficking and 11 suspects for labor trafficking, and continued prosecuting 35 suspects for unspecified forms of trafficking from previous reporting periods. This compared with prosecuting 30 suspects in the previous reporting period. The government convicted 97 individuals, 50 for sex trafficking, six for labor trafficking, and 41 for unspecified forms of trafficking. This compared with convicting 13 individuals in the previous reporting period. Of those convicted, 94 were convicted under the 2015 TIPLEAA and three were convicted under violence against persons laws. The government did not report comprehensive sentencing data, but according to media reports, sentences ranged from one to 21 years' imprisonment. 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 and perpetuating impunity for trafficking crimes. The government reported investigating two officials for involvement in trafficking crimes – a member of the National Immigration Service and a member of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps. The government reported one investigation of sexual exploitation by a government official initiated during the previous reporting period was settled out of court, and two other investigations initiated in the previous reporting period against members of the CJTF for alleged sex trafficking of IDPs are awaiting trial. 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. Despite numerous previous allegations, the government did not report investigating any CJTF members for child soldiering recruitment or use.

The CJTF had child protection units in all sectors of its forces. The Nigerian army trained members of the military on sexual exploitation, human rights, and disarmament and demobilization. The government also cooperated with NGOs to train civil society and the media on trafficking issues. The government conducted trainings, including some in partnership with international organizations, for NAPTIP officials, law enforcement, the military, prosecutors, judicial actors, immigration officials, and civil society on topics including a victim-centered approach to victim assistance, identifying trafficking victims, conducting victim-centered investigations, and shelter management. NAPTIP's Judicial Research Center in Abuja provided NAPTIP officers access to resources to strengthen trafficking cases and enhance prosecution efforts. Terrorist and other illegal armed group activity hindered law enforcement and judicial officials' actions, especially in the northeast region of the country, including Borno State. Community defense groups played a substantial role in judicial service delivery and dispute resolution, which may have included some trafficking cases.

The Nigerian-UK Joint Border Task Force (JBTF) carried out several international anti-trafficking operations focused on disrupting, identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting members of organized crime groups within Nigeria and abroad. NAPTIP collaborated with German, Spanish, and Burundian authorities on several trafficking cases, including by responding to Mutual Legal Assistance Requests. In addition, NAPTIP collaborated with governments, including those of Cambodia, Ghana, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Mali, and Senegal to repatriate trafficking victims. The government signed bilateral agreements on anti-trafficking issues with the governments of The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Germany, India, and Spain.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to identify victims. The government identified 1,634 trafficking victims, including 841 sex trafficking victims, 543 labor trafficking victims, and 250 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking; compared with identifying 935 victims the previous reporting period. Of the 841 sex trafficking victims, 763 were women, four were men; 67 were girls and seven were boys. Of the 543 labor trafficking victims, 183 were men, 290 were women, 17 were boys, and 53 were girls. Of the 250 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, all were children, including 65 boys and 185 girls. The government and government-supported NGOs provided services to all 1,634 victims. This compared with providing services to 987 victims during the previous reporting period.

NAPTIP finalized its Protocol for Identification, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons, which lays out formal procedures for authorities assisting victims trafficked abroad upon identification and during and after repatriation, and disseminated it to stakeholders. In addition, the government, in partnership with civil society, continued training stakeholders on the use of the rapid assessment form to identify and refer trafficking victims to services. The government updated its existing NRM to include, among other things guidance on gender issues, working with people with disabilities, and working with victims in conflict situations. The NRM provided formal guidelines for law enforcement, immigration officials, and service providers to refer victims to care. NAPTIP also adopted a disability inclusion plan to better serve victims living with disabilities, including ensuring sign language interpreters were available when needed. The government worked in partnership with the Network of Civil Society Organizations Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labor (NACTAL) to ensure appropriate referral of victims. Observers reported referral procedures had improved compared to previous years.

NAPTIP's 10 zonal commands, including the Abuja headquarters, each operated at least one victim shelter, for a total of 13 shelters for trafficking victims which served 2,743 victims during the reporting period. NAPTIP shelters offered six weeks of initial care, although officials often allowed victims to stay longer if needed; 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 assistance, and business management skills to victims while in government shelters. If there was not space available in NAPTIP shelters, officials referred victims to NGO shelters for care. As of April 2023, only two organizations meet the NAPTIP standards to operate shelters. 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. There were reports some trafficking victims were held at NGO shelters against their will, and in a previous reporting period NGOs reported some NGO shelters had substandard conditions. In response, NAPTIP began tightening shelter requirements, including reporting requirements, to foster improvements in delivery of care and ensure uniformity in standards of care.

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. International observers reported the government deployed officers to airports throughout the country to assist with screening for trafficking indicators.

The anti-trafficking law prohibited the penalization of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including by armed groups. However, due to a lack of consistent screening, authorities may have detained, arrested, and deported some unidentified trafficking victims. Observers reported 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-West Africa (ISIS-WA), including women and girls who insurgents had forcibly married or sexually enslaved.

After seven years, the government signed and developed an implementation plan for the handover protocol transfer children allegedly associated with armed groups to protection actors. Authorities began implementing the protocol but did not report how many children were transferred to protection actors during the reporting period. Additionally, the government released an unknown number of children associated with armed groups from detention in 2022. 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. Observers 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. Reports alleged there were serious abuse and poor conditions in the program’s detention centers.

The government provided victim-witness assistance for victims participating in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases by providing security, victim advocates, temporary immigration relief, and travel and lodging assistance; the government reported 60 victims participated in criminal justice proceedings and received services. In response to the pandemic, courts sometimes used video to collect testimony and allow witnesses in other jurisdictions to give evidence in criminal trials. Victims were able to testify in the judges’ private chambers to protect their privacy and safety. 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. 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 and that a restitution determination was made in each case during the reporting period. Comprehensive details on restitution orders were not available, but in one case a court ordered 5 million naira (\$11,360) in restitution to a victim. Victims could also file civil suits against their traffickers.

PREVENTION

The government increased 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. The government continued implementing its NAP 2022-2026. NAPTIP inaugurated and trained two new state task forces and conducted coordination meetings with the 21 existing state task forces. The government ran a national trafficking-specific hotline; while the hotline received calls, the government did not

report how many calls were received, the number of potential victims identified, or if any calls led to trafficking investigations. In addition, NGO members of NACTAL took reports of trafficking, but no statistics were available. 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.

NAPTIP conducted awareness raising campaigns in multiple states in addition to continuing its awareness raising campaigns in schools and religious organizations. NAPTIP also continued a monthly social media program to discuss trafficking topics with targeted audiences, produced an anti-trafficking television program, and held awareness raising activities in coordination with NGOs. Awareness campaigns were conducted in all three major Nigerian languages and used print, electronic, and social media. Some policy documents were available in braille. The government had all campaign materials reviewed by trafficking experts, including survivors.

The Ministry of Labor and Employment conducted 17,026 labor inspections and found 2,274 violations of child labor laws and removed 475 children from potential trafficking conditions, this compared with removing 1,193 children from potential trafficking conditions during the previous reporting period. Of the children removed from potential trafficking conditions, the government referred 109 to social services but did not specify whether children actually received the services. The government trained labor inspectors on child trafficking. 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. The government launched an online registration portal for labor and sports recruiters, among others, which issued clearances and licenses to operate. The government prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees. The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. 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 sex trafficking 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. Extreme flooding in the north and southeast has exacerbated already challenging conditions, placing residents at increased risk of trafficking. Highly-organized criminal groups, sometimes linked to Nigerian cult organizations or confraternities, are responsible for most sex trafficking to Europe. Criminal elements recruit foreigners for labor trafficking within the country.

There are reports that teachers and actors posing as teachers in Quranic schools coerce students to beg. Observers report worsening poverty related to the pandemic's economic impacts may have increased 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 southern part of the country. 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. 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.

Authorities identified Nigerian trafficking victims – often exploited by Nigerian traffickers – in countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East during the reporting period. Media and government officials reported an increase in trafficking to the UAE. 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 UK for sex trafficking. 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. In previous years Edo, Delta, Kano, Abia, Ebonyi, Imo, and Kogi were among the most common origin states. During a previous reporting period, an international organization noted cases of labor trafficking involving domestic workers to Türkiye, the Middle East, and Gulf states increased. Reports of men coerced into sex trafficking 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 sex trafficking 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. Traffickers also exploit irregular migrants in forced labor and sex trafficking 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 sex trafficking 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 two million IDPs in the country and over 340,000 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 systems. 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 government officials, as well as security forces, and aid workers have committed sexual exploitation crimes – 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 previously reported 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 sex trafficking rings in the prison.

The Nigerian military coordinated some operations with the CJTF to combat Boko Haram and ISIS-WA in northeastern Nigeria. Insecurity in northeast Nigeria prevented observers from accessing many areas in Borno State and other regions of concern to investigate allegations of child soldier recruitment or use. During a 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.