

2024 Trafficking in Persons Report:

Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE (Tier 2 Watch List)

The Government of Zimbabwe does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included convicting more traffickers, including a government official complicit in trafficking. The government formally launched its 2023-2028 Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action and continued awareness-raising campaigns, in coordination with NGOs. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. The government did not amend its anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking. Reports of low-level official complicity in trafficking crimes persisted. The government reported identifying and referring fewer victims to services, and did not provide sufficient resources for victim protection, relying on NGOs and international organizations to provide the majority of services to trafficking victims without adequate funding or in-kind support. Therefore Zimbabwe was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS: ✓

Amend the anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking in line with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. * Using the SOPs and National Referral Mechanism for Vulnerable Migrants in Zimbabwe (NRM) for victim identification and referral to care, proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including orphaned and unaccompanied children, migrant workers, domestic trafficking victims, and Cuban government-affiliated medical workers, and refer them to care, and train stakeholders on the SOPs. * Implement the National Plan of Action and dedicate resources to its implementation. * Increase the availability of protection services, including shelters, for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with and allocating funding or in-kind support to civil society service providers. * Implement and consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, and implementing SOPs for ethical recruitment. * Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including for both transnational and internal trafficking crimes and of complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Direct law enforcement to investigate all allegations of human trafficking. * Expedite trafficking cases in courts to address the backlog of cases. * Adequately fund and provide specialized training to law enforcement, labor inspectors, prosecutors, and judiciary officials to conduct human trafficking investigations and prosecutions, particularly as distinct from labor law and immigration violations, using a victim-centered approach. * Develop mutual legal assistance treaties and other agreements to facilitate information gathering and sharing with foreign

governments. * Collect data on human trafficking trends within Zimbabwe to better inform government anti-trafficking efforts.

PROSECUTION ✓

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. Zimbabwean law criminalized some forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Inconsistent with international law, the 2014 Trafficking in Persons Act defined trafficking in persons as a movement-based crime and did not adequately define “exploitation.” The 2014 act criminalized the involuntary transport of a person and the voluntary transport for an unlawful purpose into, outside, or within Zimbabwe. The focus on transport and the inadequate definition of “exploitation” left Zimbabwe without comprehensive prohibitions of trafficking crimes. The law prescribed penalties of 10 years to life imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking crimes, commensurate with penalties for other grave crimes, such as rape. Zimbabwe’s Labor Relations Amendment Act criminalized forced labor; amendments to the law made in July 2023 prescribed penalties of up to 10 years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both, which were sufficiently stringent. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act criminalized procuring a person for unlawful sexual conduct, inside or outside of Zimbabwe, and prescribed penalties of up to two years’ imprisonment; these penalties were not sufficiently stringent when applied to cases of sex trafficking. The act also criminalized coercing or inducing anyone to engage in unlawful sexual conduct with another person by threat or intimidation, prescribing sufficiently stringent penalties of one to five years’ imprisonment. In the previous reporting period, the government approved the principles for its 2019 draft Trafficking in Persons Amendment Bill, with support from an international organization; the bill remained pending for the second consecutive year.

The government initiated 10 investigations, the same as in the previous reporting period. All investigations involved transnational trafficking crimes. The government initiated eight prosecutions and continued three prosecutions from previous reporting periods; this compared with eight prosecutions initiated in the previous reporting period. Of the eight prosecutions, three were for sex and labor trafficking and five were for labor trafficking. The government convicted five traffickers, imposing sentences ranging from three to 30 years’ imprisonment, compared with one conviction in the previous reporting period. Among these convictions, authorities sentenced a trafficker to 30 years’ imprisonment for exploiting Zimbabwean victims in Oman. A lack of judicial capacity hindered the ability to address court backlogs, including trafficking cases. The government reported dedicated police, prosecutors, and courts handled human trafficking cases. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) had responsibility to investigate grave crimes, including human trafficking, in all 10 provinces. Observers noted CID may have lacked access in rural areas, where local police sometimes investigated trafficking crimes. In 2022, the government investigated and prosecuted five Zimbabwean labor recruiters for recruiting Zimbabwean women to Oman for alleged exploitation in domestic servitude; however, the cases remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The government reported continued collaboration with the Governments of South Africa and Oman on investigations involving potential trafficking of Zimbabwean victims. The ZRP coordinated with INTERPOL on a multi-country human trafficking operation.

The government investigated officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns. Media reported the government convicted a former ZRP officer for facilitating and recruiting Zimbabwean girls to Oman whom traffickers exploited in sex trafficking in Oman and sentenced the officer to 20 years' imprisonment. Observers reported authorities arrested two government officials for allegedly altering birth records in a potential sex trafficking case; the investigation remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In the previous reporting period, the government charged a ZRP officer with human trafficking for complicity in recruiting Zimbabwean women for exploitation in domestic servitude in Oman and charged a high-ranking political official with visa fraud related to alleged human trafficking crimes; both investigations remained ongoing. The government did not report taking action on cases from recent years involving potential forced labor on farms either belonging to officials or of children housed in government-funded institutions. Officials accepted bribes to not inspect farms and businesses using exploitative labor practices. Border and port of entry officials reportedly accepted bribes to facilitate unauthorized entry from criminal groups, including individuals who may have been trafficking victims. Violent gangs utilized forced labor in some artisanal and defunct gold mines, operating with impunity due to their connections to police and local politicians who allegedly accepted bribes and allowed workers to enter the mines without oversight. In some cases, trafficking victims reported law enforcement threatened and intimidated them when they tried to report their cases.

The government, in coordination with NGOs, organized a regional training for law enforcement, immigration officials, and other key anti-trafficking officials. The ZRP made available an anti-trafficking module in training for new recruits; however, the government did not report training any officers in 2023. Observers noted a need for greater coordination with foreign governments on investigations and training for law enforcement on investigative techniques. Observers reported the government lacked systematic procedures and the capacity to effectively investigate cases, and insufficient training on victim identification for front-line officials resulted in trafficking crimes often remaining undetected. Law enforcement officers and prosecutors routinely investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases as other crimes, including wage infractions, immigration violations, or sexual assault, resulting in weakened deterrence and lesser penalties which did not reflect the seriousness of the crime.

PROTECTION ✓

The government decreased victim identification and protection efforts. The government reported identifying and referring to care four trafficking victims, in collaboration with NGOs, compared with 54 in the previous reporting period. All four victims were Zimbabwean and exploited in labor trafficking abroad, including three in Burma and one in Oman. The government did not report identifying any trafficking victims in Zimbabwe. An international organization reported identifying and providing services to three additional victims, whom traffickers exploited in forced labor in online scam operations in Burma. The government reported referring, in collaboration with NGOs, all four victims to care. In response to victims exploited in Oman in the previous reporting period, the government continued to coordinate with the Omani government. The government did not report repatriating any victims. The government relied on NGOs and foreign donors to fund trafficking victim services; however, organizations struggled to operate without adequate

and consistent financial support, and some could only provide short-term care. The government operated one shelter in Harare for gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking victims, which housed all four victims, and conducted assessments of two other shelters in Bulawayo and Mutare to determine whether they needed to be updated. However, observers reported a need for shelters in the remaining seven provinces. The government operated 24 vulnerable children's homes that could serve child trafficking victims; however, the government did not report how many child trafficking victims these homes assisted. An NGO operated 14 domestic violence shelters, which could accommodate female trafficking victims; however, the government did not provide resources to the shelters. The government partnered with NGOs and international organizations and could provide care for trafficking survivors, including shelter, food, medical treatment, family reunification and reintegration assistance, counseling, and income-generating assistance; government social workers facilitated access to government benefits. Shelters and services for trafficking victims were available to men and women, nationals and foreigners, irrespective of the victim's participation in legal proceedings. The 2014 Trafficking in Persons Act required the government to establish service centers in each of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces and provide counseling and reintegration services to survivors; however, the government had not established these centers by the end of the reporting period. The government, in coordination with an international organization, reported providing one victim with a reintegration allowance in 2023.

The government continued to use its NRM and SOPs, which outlined procedures for the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims. Some NGOs reported implementation of the NRM and SOPs was inconsistent and more training on the procedures was needed. The government had provincial task force teams who could investigate trafficking and coordinate victim services in six of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces. The technical steering committee for trafficking victim protection, led by the Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare (MPSLSW), was responsible for coordinating the repatriation of Zimbabweans abroad; the committee did not report meeting. The MPSLSW had a system whereby an NGO and a Department of Social Development caseworker jointly handled each reported potential trafficking case, but it did not use the system in practice. The government reported it could provide victim-witness assistance during the criminal justice process; however, the government did not report how many victims received this assistance in 2023. Experts further noted police unfamiliarity with trafficking crimes often caused re-traumatization of trafficking victims. The government reported 35 trafficking victims participated in criminal justice proceedings. During trials, the government provided victims with transportation and accommodation and assisted victims who opted to provide written statements. Twenty-two dedicated courts had separate rooms for victims to testify away from their alleged perpetrators, and victims could choose to testify via video or written testimony; however, the government did not report whether victims utilized these services. Observers reported limited access to the necessary equipment for video testimony in some courts, especially in rural areas. The anti-trafficking law entitled victims to restitution from convicted traffickers; however, the government did not report awarding any restitution. The government did not report providing any compensation to trafficking victims in 2023. The government did not have legal alternatives to the removal of foreign trafficking victims to countries in which they would face retribution or hardship. Observers reported authorities may have detained or deported foreign victims without screening for trafficking indicators, including child victims exploited in forced criminality.

PREVENTION ✓

The government demonstrated mixed efforts to prevent trafficking. The Anti-Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (ATIMC) served as the national inter-ministerial coordinating body for all anti-trafficking activities, and its secretariat led the government's anti-trafficking efforts. The ATIMC met three times. In April 2023, the ATIMC formally launched its previously approved 2023-2028 NAP, developed in coordination with international organizations, but it did not report what resources were allocated for its implementation. The NAP addressed plans for training law enforcement; increasing capacity of the judiciary; awareness raising; improving victim identification, repatriation, and assistance; improving shelter access; and establishing a government hotline. The government, in coordination with an NGO, raised public awareness of human trafficking through television programming and held exhibitions at two trade and agricultural fairs, distributing anti-trafficking educational materials. The government continued to utilize a hotline for GBV victims, which was equipped to identify and refer trafficking victims.

The government continued to lack political will to address child and forced labor, particularly in the agriculture and mining sectors. The government did not report the number of labor inspectors, and unlike in the previous reporting period, did not report training labor inspectors on identifying cases of human trafficking. Previously, inspectors prioritized inspections in tobacco and industrial sectors and had the authority to monitor private farms and homes for forced child labor; however, the government did not report efforts to continue this monitoring during the year, despite reports indicating child and forced labor in the tobacco industry. Inspectors faced shortages in operational vehicles and fuel, which limited their effectiveness. Observers reported labor inspectors did not travel to informal mining areas, and the government lacked information about the prevalence of child labor in this sector.

The government had SOPs for labor recruitment companies to ensure fair and ethical practices. However, the government did not report efforts to implement these and regulate labor recruiters. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to diplomats. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE: ✓

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Zimbabwe, and traffickers exploit victims from Zimbabwe abroad. Internal trafficking is prevalent and underreported. Traffickers exploit Zimbabwean adults and children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including in cattle herding, domestic service, and mining, including in the gold and diamond sectors. Child labor occurs in the agriculture sector, including on tobacco, sugarcane, and cotton farms, and on small, unregulated farms, as well as forestry and fishing sectors, where children weed, spray, harvest, and pack goods, and in the mining sector, in mineral extraction. Observers reported unaccompanied children are at risk of exploitation. Observers reported child sex trafficking and child labor are likely increasing due to economic hardship, particularly in agriculture, domestic service, informal trading, begging, and artisanal mining. Observers reported traffickers exploit children, including those with disabilities, in forced begging. Several traditional practices

render young girls vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking, including the practice of trading daughters for food or money; coercing them into forced marriages to “replace” deceased relatives; and for “ngozi”, a reconciliation process where a family gives a relative to another family to make amends for a murdered relative.

Near gold and diamond mines, traffickers may exploit child laborers working as gold panners and ore couriers for forced labor, and traffickers force children to sell illicit drugs. Illegal mining syndicates exploit Zimbabweans in forced labor. Some syndicates target vulnerable populations, including illiterate individuals, and transport them to the mines at night to disorient potential victims and prevent their escape. Traffickers also exploit women and children in sex trafficking in areas around the Chiadzwa diamond mines and Mazowe mines. Armed gangs known as “mashurugwi” lure young men to abandoned gold mines through promises of self-employment but force them to work. Child vendors, some of whom sell goods or offer cooking and cleaning services to miners, are exploited by sex traffickers in illegal mining areas or by long-distance truckers who transport coal and minerals. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Zimbabwean towns bordering South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia in forced labor, including domestic servitude, and in sex trafficking in brothels catering to long-distance truck drivers on both sides of the border. Miners coerce girls into “relationships” where they are exploited in sex trafficking in exchange for money and food and sometimes forced to assist with mining operations. In Chiredzi, sex traffickers recruit girls as young as 11 years old from surrounding areas. Children were exploited in sex trafficking in exchange for water in Chitungwiza.

Traffickers and fraudulent recruiters use false promises of legitimate employment opportunities, particularly in nursing and teaching, including through social media, to lure Zimbabweans into sex trafficking and forced labor in neighboring countries, particularly South Africa, and the Middle East. Traffickers have exploited Zimbabwean women in domestic servitude, forced labor, and sex trafficking in Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and Uganda, often under the guise of legitimate employment. In South Africa, traffickers exploit Zimbabweans in forced labor in agriculture, construction, factories, mines, information technology, domestic work, and hospitality businesses. Syndicates operating in South Africa recruit undocumented Zimbabwean migrants with promises of legitimate employment in mining and force them into labor in the illegal mining industry. Due to economic conditions caused by the pandemic and inflation, undocumented Zimbabwean women and children increasingly travel to South Africa for employment, where their lack of legal status increases their vulnerability to traffickers. Facilitators recruit and transport Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa, where international criminal syndicates subject them to sex trafficking in Musina, Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Durban. Media reported multiple cases where migrant smugglers allegedly transported at least 400 unaccompanied children from Zimbabwe to South Africa; such unaccompanied children are at risk of human trafficking. Traffickers recruit Zimbabwean girls with fraudulent scholarships and jobs, including in the PRC, to exploit them in forced marriage. Media reported Zimbabweans living abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland, trick Zimbabweans to travel abroad under the pretenses of tourism or legitimate employment and force them into domestic servitude. Traffickers recruit Zimbabwean girls with promises of marriage and, then during marriage, force them into domestic work.

Zimbabwe is a transit country for trafficking victims and migrants vulnerable to exploitation, including from Somalia, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zambia, often enroute to South

Africa. Zimbabwe is also a destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers subject Mozambican children to forced labor in street vending, including in Mbare, the largest informal market in Harare. Mozambican and Malawian children who work on relatives' farms in Zimbabwe are often undocumented and cannot enroll in school, which increases their vulnerability of trafficking. In prior years, there were reports of refugees from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo traveling from Zimbabwe's Tongogara Refugee Camp to Harare, where traffickers exploited them. Refugees and asylum-seekers are not permitted to have bank accounts and experience difficulties in obtaining identification documents, which limits employment opportunities and increases vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers force some PRC nationals to work in restaurants in Zimbabwe. Construction and mining companies owned by both PRC nationals and PRC parastatal entities in Zimbabwe reportedly employ practices indicative of forced labor, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as coercion to induce work in unsafe or otherwise undesirable conditions. PRC parastatal tobacco enterprises exerted political influence to exempt themselves from labor laws and regulation, including mandates pertaining to child and forced labor. In July 2023, 15 Cuban government-affiliated workers arrived in Zimbabwe for a three-year tour. Cuban government-affiliated medical workers in Zimbabwe may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.

