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LEBANON: Tier 2

Lebanon is a source and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking, and it is a transit point for Eastern European women and children subjected to sex trafficking in other Middle Eastern countries. Women and girls from South and Southeast Asia and an increasing number from East and West Africa endure domestic servitude in Lebanon, facilitated by recruitment agencies that at times engage in fraudulent recruitment. Under Lebanon's sponsorship system, workers who leave their employers' houses without permission forfeit their legal status, putting them at risk of re-trafficking. Lebanese government officials and NGOs report most employers withhold their workers' passports, putting workers at risk of trafficking. Women from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Dominican Republic enter Lebanon to work in the adult entertainment industry through Lebanon's *artiste* visa program, which sustains a significant commercial sex industry and enables sex trafficking; 5,120 women entered Lebanon under this program in 2015, a substantially higher number than in 2014. The terms of the *artiste* visa prohibit foreign women working in adult nightclubs to leave the hotel where they reside, except to "perform," and nightclub owners withhold the women's passports and control their movement; these women also experience physical and sexual abuse, withheld wages, and domestic servitude. Some women from East and West Africa also endure sex trafficking in Lebanon. Lebanese children are victims of forced labor in street begging and sex trafficking facilitated by male pimps, husbands, and boyfriends, and, at times, through early marriage. Small numbers of Lebanese girls may be subjected to sex trafficking in other Arab countries.

Men, women, and children among the 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon are at risk of sex trafficking and forced labor. Restrictions on Syrians' ability to work legally in Lebanon, as well as strict enforcement of visas and residence permits, increase this population's vulnerability to trafficking. The Lebanese government and media reported in late March 2016 an extensive sex

trafficking ring exploiting primarily Syrian women and girls in Beirut; the majority of the women and girls were fraudulently recruited from Syria with false promises of work and subjected to commercial sexual exploitation where they experienced mental, physical, and sexual abuse and forced abortions. In 2015, reports indicated a sharp increase in forced begging among Syrian children, some of whom are also forced or coerced to conduct criminal activity. An international organization reported in 2015 evidence of bonded labor within refugee communities where child labor is used in exchange for living in informal tented settlements. Syrian girls are brought to Lebanon for sex trafficking, sometimes through the guise of early marriage. Lebanese pimps may force or coerce some Syrian women and Syrian LGBTI refugees into prostitution. Syrian gangs force Syrian refugee men, women, and children to work in the agricultural sector in the Beqaa Valley.

The Government of Lebanon does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Internal political instability, insufficient funding, and threats of violent extremism continued to limit the government's ability to effectively address trafficking. Moreover, Lebanon's sponsorship system, which places a significant amount of power in the hands of employers, remained a significant impediment to authorities identifying and protecting trafficking victims. Despite these challenges, the government investigated and prosecuted trafficking offenders, including breaking up an extensive sex trafficking ring that exploited women and girls, and it convicted 30 traffickers in 2015 – a significantly higher number of convictions in comparison to the previous reporting period. The government continued to identify trafficking victims, including 45 primarily Syrian sex trafficking victims, and partnered with NGOs and international organizations to provide victims appropriate protection services; however, the government did not implement victim identification procedures or directly protect victims. Additionally, authorities continued to arrest, detain, deport, and – in some cases – prosecute trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as illegal foreign migrants, children, and women in prostitution, for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. The government reinvigorated its anti-trafficking steering committee in 2015 and implemented anti-trafficking awareness campaigns.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEBANON:

Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of offenders under the anti-trafficking law, including officials complicit in human trafficking; investigate employers and recruitment agents who withhold workers' passports, travel documents, or wages for potential trafficking crimes; increase training for judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officials, and diplomatic personnel about the crime of trafficking and application of the anti-trafficking law; legally prohibit the withholding of workers' passports and travel documents, including for persons under the *artiste* visa program; reform the sponsorship system to ensure workers are not bound to abusive employers and to allow workers, including those under the *artiste* visa program, freedom of movement; enact the labor law amendment extending legal protections to foreign workers and the draft law providing increased labor protections to domestic workers; ensure identified trafficking victims are not detained, deported, or prosecuted for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking; implement standard procedures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, such as illegal migrants, women holding *artiste* visas, domestic workers, and Syrian refugees; continue to work in partnership with NGOs to identify and provide protection services to victims; and increase efforts to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking activities effectively.

PROSECUTION

The government demonstrated progress in its law enforcement efforts, but resource constraints, security challenges, and a lack of capacity continued to hinder prosecution efforts. Lebanon's 2011 anti-trafficking law prohibits all forms of human trafficking. Prescribed penalties for sex trafficking and forced labor range from five to 15 years' imprisonment, which are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Nevertheless, government and NGO officials reported the law was applied unevenly, as most judges lacked understanding of the crime and knowledge of best practices to handle trafficking cases appropriately. Likewise, some judges gave convicted traffickers weak sentences. The continuing lack of a law to prohibit and punish employers or labor agents from confiscating workers' passports or travel documents remained a concern.

The Internal Security Forces (ISF) Anti-Trafficking Unit continued to conduct anti-trafficking investigations, although it suffered from inadequate staffing. In 2015, it investigated 14 suspected trafficking cases, while the Directorate of General Security (DGS) investigated 52 potential trafficking cases. In late March 2016, ISF investigated and broke up an extensive sex trafficking ring, which exploited primarily Syrian women and girls in Beirut, and arrested 16 perpetrators involved in the ring, including a doctor who performed over 200 abortions on the victims; authorities immediately revoked the doctor's license and closed his medical clinic. This investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. After reports of complicity by some ISF officers regarding the trafficking ring, the Minister of Interior opened an investigation into the claims; however, the investigation began after the end of the reporting period. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) reported investigating 93 suspected traffickers, of which the government charged and prosecuted 71 under the anti-trafficking law, on par with the 72 prosecutions in 2014. Thirty-three of these offenders were referred to the courts for trial; these cases involved forced labor, forced child street begging, and sex trafficking. The government obtained convictions for four of the 33 cases initiated in the reporting period; three offenders were convicted of child sex trafficking and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, a fine, and loss of civil rights, and the fourth offender was convicted of forced labor and subject to the same penalties. Despite these efforts, officials generally sought to resolve trafficking cases involving foreign workers through mediation between the employer and worker, rather than refer them for criminal prosecution. Government officials continued to report security forces were reluctant to arrest parents for trafficking their children due to a lack of social services available should the child be removed from the family. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking offenses during the reporting period; however, NGOs continued to report a common perception that DGS officers accepted bribes to protect adult nightclubs or issue *artiste* visas. The government provided some anti-trafficking training for officials, but the breadth and scope was inadequate to fully address the problem in Lebanon; the government encouraged officials to participate in trainings provided by NGOs. In 2015, DGS conducted weekly awareness-raising sessions on human trafficking for its staff, and the ISF included a trafficking component in human rights trainings for officers. The army continued to require anti-trafficking training for soldiers, while widely distributed military publications featured articles on human trafficking to raise awareness among military officers.

PROTECTION

The government made some efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims, yet victims remained vulnerable to punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. The government did not have formal procedures for officials to identify trafficking victims appropriately, and the cabinet did not formally adopt draft procedures for the referral of victims to NGO services; in practice, officials continued to identify and refer trafficking victims to care on an *ad hoc* basis. The ISF anti-trafficking bureau identified 33 potential victims of sexual exploitation in cases officials referred to the judiciary in 2015. Additionally, in March 2016 ISF identified and referred to NGO protection services 30 to 45 women and child sex trafficking victims, who were rescued during an investigation of a sex trafficking ring in Beirut; at the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) continued to coordinate with an international organization to assist the victims, including providing them with resettlement to a third country. This demonstrated an increase in victims identified by officials, in comparison to the previous reporting period. The government did not directly provide protection services to trafficking victims, and it continued to rely on an NGO-run safe house to provide some services to female trafficking victims. A 2013 memorandum of understanding (MOU) between an NGO and the government required DGS to refer victims to the safe house and provide security for the location. In October 2015, the government renewed the MOU for another three years. In 2015, the safe house assisted 34 trafficking victims, six of whom the government referred. ISF also referred four victims to another NGO. The government punished victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking, such as domestic workers who fled abusive employers, out-of-status migrant workers, women holding *artiste* visas, and persons in prostitution, whom authorities often arrested, detained, and deported without screening for trafficking. Women holding *artiste* visas were subject to immediate deportation upon arrest for prostitution violations, while foreign workers without valid residence and work permits were subject to detention for one to two months – or longer in some instances – followed by deportation. Some children involved in criminal activity – some of whom may have been trafficking victims – faced arrest and prosecution. For example, MOJ reported in 2015 the investigation, prosecution, and conviction of Syrian and Lebanese children for committing illicit activity; such cases involving Syrian children had notably increased. DGS maintained a 500-person detention center in Beirut for illegal foreign migrants, many of whom were unidentified trafficking victims. While DGS did not proactively identify victims within the detention center, an NGO permitted to screen for victims identified four trafficking victims in the detention center; the NGO also reported an increased level of professionalism and sensitivity among DGS officials and investigators. The government did not adopt the labor law amendment extending legal protections to foreign workers nor the law providing increased labor protections to domestic workers.

Government officials did not encourage victims to file criminal charges against their traffickers, although victims were permitted to file civil suits. The government did not provide legal redress for victims who chose voluntary repatriation because they were not present in the country to testify against their traffickers. NGOs reported foreign victims prefer quick administrative settlements followed by repatriation rather than long criminal prosecutions because of the lack of protection services during the criminal proceedings. The government did not provide temporary or permanent residency status or other relief from deportation for foreign trafficking victims who faced retribution or hardship in the countries to which they would be deported.

PREVENTION

The government made modest efforts to prevent trafficking. The national anti-trafficking steering committee resumed its monthly meetings in 2015, after many years during which the committee did

not meet. The government did not formally adopt a national anti-trafficking action plan, yet relevant ministries continued to take efforts to implement the draft plan. The Ministry of Labor (MOL) launched anti-trafficking public awareness campaigns focused on forced labor and exploitation of migrant workers, in cooperation with NGOs in July and October 2015. DGS officers at Beirut International Airport continued to return passports directly to migrant domestic workers upon their arrival. DGS and MOL continued to operate hotlines to receive complaints, including for trafficking crimes, but it was unclear how many trafficking victims were identified through these hotlines. DGS continued a program to inform *artiste* visa holders about restrictions and obligations of their visa status upon arrival to Beirut International Airport. Under the program, if the visa holder objects to the visa's terms, she is free to return to her home country; in 2015, DGS repatriated two foreign women upon their request. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor. DGS continued to periodically issue circulars calling on Lebanese employers to abide by guest worker regulations. MOL closed 18 employment agencies for employment violations against foreign workers in 2015, and maintained a blacklist of recruitment agencies for committing fraudulent recruitment practices; however, the government did not report prosecuting any recruitment or employment agencies for potential trafficking crimes, nor did MOL report the number of blacklisted recruitment agencies. Nevertheless, MOL and ISF continued to require Syrian nationals to hold work permits in specific sectors where they were not previously required, which increased Syrian refugees' vulnerability to trafficking by legally binding them to their employers under the sponsorship system. The government did not take steps to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or address child sex tourism by Lebanese nationals abroad. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.