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2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Egypt

EGYPT: Tier 2

The Government of Egypt 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; therefore Egypt remained on Tier 2. The government investigated and convicted more alleged traffickers and identified more child trafficking victims than in the previous reporting period. It also dedicated resources to and finalized the renovation of a new trafficking shelter. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not identify any adult trafficking victims, and it did not report referring or assisting any of the child trafficking victims it identified. The government also prosecuted fewer traffickers than in the previous reporting period. The government remained without effective victim identification and referral procedures; as a result, at times authorities penalized identified and unidentified victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration and prostitution violations. As in the previous reporting period, the government lacked appropriate protection services, including shelters, for victims of all forms of trafficking; and it did not provide in-kind support or funding to civil society organizations that provided essential victim care.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implement and utilize country-wide procedures and guidelines for law enforcement, judicial, and other relevant officials to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care. • Provide protection services, including dedicated shelters, to victims of all forms of trafficking and allocate adequate resources and staffing for these services. • Implement measures to ensure authorities do not treat trafficking victims as criminals for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration or prostitution violations. • Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of sex and labor trafficking, and punish offenders—including complicit officials and child sex tourists—with sufficiently stringent sentences. • Use the specialized trafficking courts and train judicial officials in these courts on a victim-centered approach for the treatment of victims and witnesses of trafficking crimes during investigations and court proceedings. • Continue to train all government officials, including police, security officials, judges, prosecutors, and social workers, on implementation of the anti-trafficking law, victim identification techniques, and victim referral procedures. • Provide a legal and regulatory environment that allows NGOs to provide services to trafficking victims and populations vulnerable to human trafficking. • Increase efforts to address and reduce the demand for “summer marriages” and commercial sex acts. • Amend the labor law to include labor protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers. • Improve data collection for human trafficking cases and disaggregate sex, labor, and other forms of trafficking. • Continue ongoing nationwide awareness campaigns.

PROSECUTION

The government demonstrated uneven law enforcement efforts. The 2010 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties from three to 15 years’ imprisonment and a fine of between 50,000 and 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,130 and \$12,500) for offenses involving an adult victim, and up to life imprisonment and a fine of between 100,000 to 500,000 pounds (\$6,250 and \$31,250) for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. During the reporting period, the government investigated 154 cases of alleged sex and labor trafficking crimes, and it continued to investigate 22 cases of sex and labor trafficking that it initiated in the previous reporting period; this represented an increase from the 78 investigations it initiated during the previous reporting period. Among the 154 investigations, in February 2020, the media reported authorities arrested and detained four members of a criminal network that allegedly sold Egyptian girls into marriages with wealthy Arab men for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The government also requested judicial assistance from foreign countries in the investigation of three alleged trafficking cases, but it did not report further details. In addition, during the reporting period the government initiated the prosecution of 25 alleged perpetrators for sex and labor trafficking but did not provide additional case details; the government also continued the prosecution of 41 alleged perpetrators that it initiated in previous reporting periods. Included in this data was the prosecution of five government officials for trafficking crimes, but the government did not report additional details of this case or when it was initiated; the trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Prosecutions during this reporting period

represented a decrease from the 60 alleged perpetrators the government prosecuted for sex trafficking and child trafficking during the previous reporting period. The government convicted 67 perpetrators for forced labor and sex trafficking under the anti-trafficking law, which represented an increase from the 11 convictions of traffickers during the previous reporting period. The government did not report sentencing data for convicted traffickers except for one case, in which an unspecified number of traffickers received suspended sentences and no prison time. The media reported that in August 2019, the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced four traffickers to five years’ imprisonment and two traffickers to two years’ imprisonment for labor trafficking crimes.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) maintained eight specialized judicial circuits in the courts of appeal with 30 judges assigned to prosecute human trafficking cases. In January 2020, the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM & TIP) partnered with an international organization to provide anti-trafficking training to 20-25 judges in these specialized courts. The MOJ did not report utilizing these courts during the reporting period, nor did it report detailed information on the resources, staffing, or responsibilities of these courts or the selection process for these specialized judges. During the reporting period, the government continued to distribute updated legal guidelines for evidence collection, prosecution of trafficking cases, and victim protection to relevant authorities. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior conducted multiple training courses for Egyptian police officers on human trafficking and the anti-trafficking law, migrant smuggling, and other crimes. NCCPIM & TIP partnered with other governmental agencies to train prosecutors and judges, as well as with international organizations to provide additional trainings.

PROTECTION

The government demonstrated weak victim identification and protection efforts. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) reported that its child protection hotline for individuals to report crimes against children, including potential child trafficking cases, identified 49 potential child trafficking victims out of more than 20,000 complaints it received; these cases involved allegations of forced labor, sex trafficking, and child marriage. This demonstrated a slight increase from the previous reporting period when the hotline identified 42 potential child trafficking victims. Similar to the previous reporting period, the government did not report if it referred any of the 49 child victims to protection services. Authorities did not report proactively identifying or referring to protection services any adult trafficking victims, even though both the government and NGOs reported that Egyptian and foreign adults were at risk of trafficking in the country. NCCPIM & TIP reported providing victim identification training to an unspecified number of police officers, and NCCM and the National Council for Women (NCW) began using trafficking indicators to identify victims during the reporting period. In January 2020, NCCM—in cooperation with an international organization—launched standard operating procedures for handling child protection cases, which included instructions on handling child trafficking cases. NCCM also maintained 320 child protection committees around the country and worked with 40 NGOs to identify potential child trafficking cases. Despite these efforts, the government remained without an effective country-wide victim identification and referral system. Although the government maintained a national victim referral mechanism, authorities did not use it consistently throughout the reporting period. While some NGOs reported they received some victim referrals from various governmental entities, NGOs continued to report the referral mechanism was overall ineffective and underutilized, and various government stakeholders were unaware that it existed.

Authorities typically relied on NGO referrals or for victims to self-identify; however, NGOs reported that Egyptian and foreign female victims—particularly those among African migrants and refugees—were hesitant to report or file criminal complaints against traffickers or speak to interpreters due to fear of cultural social stigmas. Ineffective victim identification and referral procedures contributed to authorities potentially punishing or penalizing identified and unidentified victims for illegal acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration and prostitution violations. For example, NGOs reported police officers arrested and detained female victims of sex trafficking on wrongful charges of prostitution or debauchery; judges typically released these victims due to insufficient evidence to support the charges of the crimes. During the reporting period, an NGO reported police detained, but later released, hundreds of potential victims of sex trafficking. In addition, foreign embassies in Egypt reported the government required foreign victims to pay overstay fees, thus preventing them from leaving the country and potentially hindering them from leaving situations of trafficking.

The government’s provision of appropriate protection services to victims of all forms of trafficking remained weak. The government remained without shelter or other essential rehabilitative services specifically dedicated to the needs of trafficking victims. However, throughout the reporting period, the government contributed one million Egyptian pounds (\$62,500) and worked with an international organization to equip and finalize the renovation of a shelter for female Egyptian trafficking victims; the shelter was completed but not fully operational at the end of the reporting period. The shelter will have the capacity to house 25 trafficking victims with a projected staff of 25-30 personnel; however, the shelter will not be available to foreign victims, despite recommendations from civil society to allow foreign victims care at the shelter. In the absence of an operational shelter for trafficking victims, NCCPIM & TIP reported that eight shelters run by the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) could receive trafficking victims. Several NGOs stated that MoSS shelters were not appropriate for some trafficking victims due to concerns about security and privacy procedures and a lack of adequately trained staff. In December 2019, MoSS updated the bylaws for all eight shelters to allow access for non-Egyptian victims. According to an NGO, a shelter operated by NCCM assisted one potential adult victim of domestic servitude, whom the NGO referred, during the reporting period; however, the government did not report the types of services the woman received at the shelter. Egyptian labor law did not include protections for domestic workers, which continued to create greater vulnerabilities to trafficking among this

population. The government continued to rely on international and civil society organizations to provide and fund victim assistance, but it did not—in turn—provide financial assistance to these organizations, which affected their ability to offer protective services to victims.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. The government continued to implement the 2016-2021 National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons, but it did not report information on the resources allocated for implementation of the plan. NCCPIM & TIP continued to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking efforts throughout the reporting period; however, NGOs continued to report that NCCPIM & TIP did not fully utilize trafficking experts, which hindered training for police, judicial officials, and prosecutors. NCCPIM & TIP’s mandate to address both smuggling and trafficking crimes may have impeded the government’s overall efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking as a distinctly different crime. Nevertheless, NCCPIM & TIP and other governmental entities continued to conduct multiple awareness raising activities throughout the reporting period, which included some campaigns in partnership with an international organization; one such campaign reportedly reached more than three million online viewers. The government also produced and widely distributed to the public several animation videos to raise awareness of sex and labor trafficking crimes in Egypt. During the reporting period, NCCPIM & TIP also distributed an anti-trafficking manual for Egyptian missions and Egyptian laborers abroad. In November 2019, NCCPIM & TIP hosted a regional forum of national coordinating bodies to combat trafficking from 18 African countries to exchange knowledge and enhance anti-trafficking coordination. NCCM continued to operate a child protection hotline for individuals to report crimes against children, including potential child trafficking cases, which operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week; the hotline was equipped with trained personnel including two lawyers and offered counseling services. In 2019, NCCM partnered with an international organization to train NCCM’s hotline staff and provide database software to track demographic data of victims reported through the hotline, including potential trafficking cases. Throughout the reporting period, a hotline run by NCW received equipment and training from an NGO to improve hotline operators’ capacity to receive reports of potential trafficking crimes involving female victims; the government did not report if the hotline identified any potential trafficking cases during the reporting period. In the absence of labor law protections for domestic workers, the government continued to promote a voluntary labor contract that employers of domestic workers could choose to use, which offered some protections for Egyptian domestic workers, but it did not provide protections for foreign domestic workers. In March 2020, NCCPIM & TIP, in cooperation with NCW and several NGOs, conducted a meeting with domestic workers to raise their awareness about human trafficking and highlight the domestic worker. The government made some 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 Egypt, and traffickers exploit victims from Egypt abroad. Traffickers subject Egyptian children to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service, street begging, drug trafficking, quarrying, and agricultural work in Egypt. Traffickers, including some parents, force Egyptian children to beg in the streets of Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria or exploit girls in sex trafficking. NGOs report the lack of economic and educational opportunities cause family members, including parents, husbands, and siblings, to subject women and girls to sex trafficking to supplement family incomes; in some cases, family members rape women and girls to coerce or force them into prostitution. Child sex tourism occurs primarily in Cairo, Alexandria, and Luxor. Individuals from the Arabian Gulf, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates purchase Egyptian women and girls for “temporary” or “summer marriages” for the purpose of commercial sex, including cases of sex trafficking, as well as forced labor; the victims’ parents and marriage brokers, who profit from the transaction, often facilitate these arrangements. Traffickers reportedly exploit Egyptian children—primarily from Fayoum and Damietta—in commercial sexual acts in Europe. Traffickers subject Egyptian men to forced labor in construction, agriculture, and low-paying service jobs in neighboring countries.

Traffickers subject men and women from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa to forced labor in domestic service, construction, cleaning, and begging, as well as sex trafficking. In 2017, observers reported an increase in West African trafficking victims, although it was unclear if this was the result of increased victim identification or an actual increase in numbers. Foreign domestic workers—who are not covered under Egyptian labor laws—primarily from Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Sri Lanka—are highly vulnerable to forced labor, whose employers at times require them to work excessive hours, confiscate their passports, withhold their wages, deny them food and medical care, and subject them to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Some employers file false claims of theft to further exploit domestic workers. Traffickers subject women and girls, including refugees and migrants from Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East to sex trafficking in Egypt. In 2018, an international organization reported a new trend of Colombian nationals who were smuggled into Egypt to work in the entertainment industry, and in 2019, an NGO reported that employers in resort towns, such as Sharm El Sheikh, sexually exploit dancers from Colombia. Refugees from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen that live in Egypt are at risk of trafficking. For example, increasingly traffickers target Syrian refugees who have settled in Egypt for forced child labor, sex trafficking, and transactional marriages of girls—which can lead to sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking and forced labor. NGOs reported in January 2020 that unaccompanied minors (UAMs) among the African migrant population are increasingly at risk of trafficking in Egypt; Sudanese gangs reportedly target UAMs to force or coerce the minors to sell drugs or commit other petty crimes. Irregular migrants and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa, who transit Egypt en route to Europe, are increasingly at risk of trafficking along this migration route.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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