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2024 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 with the previous reporting period; therefore Nigeria remained on Tier 2. These efforts included convicting two complicit officials for the first time in four years; increasing collaboration with foreign counterparts on anti-trafficking law enforcement activities; and implementing the handover protocol to refer children associated with armed groups, including trafficking victims, to care. In an effort to improve the quality of victim services and ensure uniformity in standards of care, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) finalized and launched minimum standards and guidelines for service providers assisting trafficking victims. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Corruption involving trafficking crimes, including among NAPTIP officials and the judiciary, remained significant concerns and contributed to impunity for traffickers. The government investigated and prosecuted fewer cases compared with the previous reporting period. Efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, especially IDPs, women and children allegedly associated with armed groups, and children exploited in begging in religious schools, were insufficient.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Hold complicit officials as well as individuals affiliated with the government – including Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) members – criminally accountable for trafficking crimes, including for the sex trafficking of IDPs, and for past recruitment or use of child soldiers. * Increase efforts to implement and train front-line officials on the national

referral mechanism (NRM) and SOPs to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as IDPs, women and children allegedly associated with armed groups, children in religious schools, labor migrants, returning migrants, women in commercial sex, and children in domestic service, and refer all trafficking victims to services. * Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes – especially labor trafficking– and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Increase trainings for local, state, and federal judges on the 2015 anti-trafficking law, specifically the provision prohibiting the issuance of fines in lieu of imprisonment, and procedures for transferring trafficking cases to the High Courts. * In coordination with international organizations, continue implementing the handover protocol on children associated with armed groups and train security forces and other front-line officials on handover procedures. * Enhance protection measures to ensure victims, including women and children allegedly associated with armed groups, are not inappropriately penalized solely for offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked and prioritize their reintegration. * Allow victims residing in NAPTIP shelters freedom of movement and ensure authorities take a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach to victim care. * Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Nigerian victims abroad by investigating and prosecuting fraudulent labor recruiters, prohibiting worker-paid recruitment fees, and raising public awareness of fraudulent recruitment. * Strengthen NAPTIP's ability to fully execute its mandate, including by increasing its dedicated funding, personnel, and resources, and expanding coordination with the state task forces. * Increase public awareness campaigns on all forms of trafficking, especially among rural communities, in collaboration with civil society. * Fund and implement the victims' trust fund, as called for in the 2015 anti-trafficking law, to increase victims' access to financial and reintegration support. * Improve nationwide data collection, including data on convictions and sentencing.

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 (\$280) 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 (\$1,100). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping.

The government reported initiating investigations of 698 cases, including 333 sex trafficking cases, 172 labor trafficking cases, and 193 cases of unspecified forms of trafficking. This was a significant decrease compared with initiating investigations of 1,242 cases during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecutions of 48 alleged traffickers,

including 45 for sex trafficking and three for labor trafficking, and convicted 24 sex traffickers. This compared with initiating prosecutions of 67 alleged traffickers and convicting 97 traffickers in the previous reporting period. A majority of the convicted traffickers were convicted under the 2015 TIPLEAA, and at least three traffickers were convicted under violence against persons laws. These cases included one National Immigration Service (NIS) official convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for human trafficking and one CJTF member convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for sex trafficking; these were the first reported trafficking convictions of complicit officials in four years. Prosecutions of one CJTF member and one Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps member for alleged sex trafficking remained pending. In Nigeria's first mutual legal assistance case with a foreign government, the government worked with Belgian authorities to investigate and prosecute a sex trafficker recruiting and exploiting Nigerian victims in Belgium; the court sentenced the trafficker to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine. The government did not report sentencing data for the rest of the convictions. Some officials estimated the average sentence was five years' imprisonment and a fine, while other observers estimated 50 percent of convicted traffickers received sentences below the minimum penalties prescribed by the 2015 TIPLEAA. In at least one case, the court allowed a trafficker to pay victim compensation in lieu of imprisonment, which did not serve to deter or adequately reflect the nature of the crime. Government data may have included crimes outside the international definition of trafficking.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes, including among designated officials with responsibilities to combat human trafficking, remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action and perpetuating impunity for trafficking crimes. NAPTIP fired five staff members, including a deputy director, and demoted three staff members for complicity in trafficking crimes, including soliciting bribes and leaking confidential information to trafficking suspects. The government investigated and initiated criminal prosecutions of two of the staff members. Endemic judicial corruption impeded prosecutions and convictions of most crimes, including human trafficking. Observers reported some security officers sexually abused and exploited IDPs, including children, in and around Maiduguri (the Borno State capital). Despite numerous previous allegations, the government did not report investigating any CJTF members for the alleged recruitment or use of child soldiers.

NAPTIP investigators and prosecutors in 10 zonal command offices, including its Abuja headquarters, were responsible for investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases. Each NAPTIP zonal office had one prosecutor assigned to six-to-seven states. The High Courts had jurisdiction over trafficking cases; however, in practice, cases were sometimes tried in state courts, which heard lower-level or misdemeanor

crimes. Local judges did not have the same standardized training requirements as federal and state judges, which contributed to corruption and misapplication of the law. Terrorist and other illegal armed group activity hindered law enforcement efforts, especially in the North East 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 trafficking cases.

The government, in collaboration with foreign donors and civil society, trained law enforcement officials, security forces, and prosecutors on identifying, investigating, and prosecuting trafficking cases. However, the government did not report holding any anti-trafficking trainings for judges, and observers reported a lack of judicial training and awareness of the anti-trafficking law impeded prosecutions. NAPTIP's Judicial Research Center in Abuja provided NAPTIP officers access to resources to strengthen trafficking cases and support prosecution efforts. In 2023, NAPTIP also established a Cybercrime Response Team (CRT) and a Joint Task Force on Cybercrimes with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the National Police Force Cyber Crime Center (NPF-NCCC); the team conducted trainings for law enforcement officials on child sexual exploitation, open source and social media intelligence, and conducting online investigations. The government had extensive law enforcement partnerships with foreign counterparts in African and European countries, including through mutual legal assistance requests, MOUs, and bilateral agreements to investigate and prevent human trafficking. The Nigerian-UK Joint Border Task Force (JBTF) carried out international operations focused on disrupting, identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting members of organized crime groups within Nigeria and abroad, including for trafficking crimes. Nigerian officials also collaborated with INTERPOL on law enforcement activities.

PROTECTION

The government maintained mixed protection efforts. The government identified and referred to services 1,194 trafficking victims, including 654 sex trafficking victims and 540 labor trafficking victims; this compared with identifying and referring to services 1,384 sex and labor trafficking victims the previous reporting period. Of the 1,194 victims, 856 were women, 176 were girls, 119 were men, and 39 were boys. The government also reported identifying 184 potential victims. The government and partner NGOs provided services to all identified victims.

The government had law enforcement SOPs on victim identification and protection. 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 NRM provided formal guidelines for law enforcement, immigration officials, and service providers to refer victims to care, including victims with disabilities and in conflict situations. 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. The National Policy for Protection and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking provided victim protection and care guidelines; the government also had a disability inclusion plan to better serve victims living with disabilities. NAPTIP's Protocol for Identification, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons provided formal procedures for authorities assisting victims exploited abroad upon identification and during and after repatriation; NAPTIP conducted pre-departure trainings for NIS and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials on the procedures. Stakeholders observed an improvement in officials' use of the referral procedures compared with previous years, but noted additional training and implementation of the NRM was needed. The government allocated more than 50.8 million naira (\$55,830) for victim protection and assistance. This compared with allocating more than 110 million naira (\$120,880) for victim protection the previous year.

NAPTIP operated 14 shelters across its 10 zonal commands, which provided services to 1,587 victims. The government provided legal, medical, psycho-social, family reunification, and vocational services to victims in its shelters. Nigerian trafficking victims exploited abroad were able to stay in the shelters upon repatriation. NAPTIP's 14 shelters operated under a "closed shelter" policy, which restricted victims' freedom of movement while residing at the shelter, including the option for children to continue attending school. If victims chose to participate in law enforcement proceedings against traffickers, NAPTIP placed them in its shelters for up to six weeks to conduct an initial investigation before referring them to partner NGO shelters for services. Observers reported limiting victims' freedom of movement may have re-traumatized and disempowered victims to direct their own recovery. Observers also reported NAPTIP sometimes detained suspects in the same compound as its shelters due to lack of space; as a result, victims and traffickers were sometimes brought together. Officials referred victims who did not wish to participate in law enforcement proceedings directly to Ministry of Women-operated shelters for GBV victims or NGO partner shelters for services. Additional government and NGO shelters provided services, including long-term shelter, to vulnerable children and victims of crime, including trafficking; authorities sometimes placed child trafficking victims in foster homes or orphanages. There were reports some NGO shelters held trafficking victims against their will. In an effort to improve the quality of victim services and ensure uniformity in standards of care, NAPTIP finalized and launched minimum standards and guidelines for service providers rendering assistance to trafficking victims, which included licensing and reporting requirements. As of March 2024, five organizations met the NAPTIP standards to operate shelters.

The government provided victim-witness assistance for victims participating in law enforcement proceedings by providing security, victim

advocates, temporary immigration relief, and travel and lodging assistance; the government reported 40 victims participated in criminal justice proceedings and received services. Victims were able to testify in the judges' private chambers to protect their privacy and safety, and courts sometimes used video testimony. NAPTIP, in collaboration with an international organization, the MOJ, and NGOs, ran legal hubs in Edo, Delta, and Lagos states, intended to improve 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, and the government continued coordinating repatriation efforts with foreign governments and an international organization. Foreign victims had the same access to services as Nigerian victims. The government did not have a formal policy to prevent the removal of victims to countries where they would face hardship or retribution, but it could grant temporary residence visas to trafficking victims who had a pending criminal, civil, or other legal action; the government did not report if any foreign victims requested this relief. The 2015 anti-trafficking law established the victims' trust fund, financed primarily through confiscated assets of convicted traffickers; however, the government did not report utilizing the fund to support victims, and observers reported it was not operational. The anti-trafficking law provided for victim restitution. The government reported courts awarded restitution and that a restitution determination was made in each case that resulted in a conviction. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but the government did not report whether any victims did so.

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. Additionally, NAPTIP officials coordinated with the Ministry of Defense's zonal commanders on protection issues pertaining to IDP camps by funding social workers and raising awareness of the crime among camp residents. The government reported identifying nine potential trafficking victims in eight IDP camps. Directed by the governor, the state government began closing IDP camps in Borno State and returning IDPs to their communities without sufficient return and reintegration assistance. Observers reported the camp closures resulted in an increase of human trafficking cases. A lack of assistance, including educational, vocational, medical, and specialized sexual and GBV services, further increased vulnerability to trafficking. Many IDPs who did not return to their communities lived in informal IDPs camps in Maiduguri, where they were vulnerable to human trafficking and other human rights abuses.

During the previous reporting period, the government, in collaboration with an international organization, adopted a handover protocol on the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups to protection actors within seven days. Officials reported transferring at least 53 children to protection actors for the first time under the handover

protocol in 2023, and stakeholders noted the military was more expeditiously transferring children following the protocol's adoption. Despite its increased efforts to implement the protocol, the government continued detaining some children whom authorities suspected of being associated with Boko Haram or ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA), including potential trafficking victims. The anti-trafficking law prohibited the penalization of trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including association with armed groups. However, observers reported the government arrested and, in some cases, inappropriately detained for prolonged periods women and children removed from or allegedly associated with Boko Haram and ISIS-WA, including women and girls whom insurgents had forcibly married or sexually enslaved. Observers noted some of these victims likely remained in detention and were subject to criminal prosecution for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

The government collaborated with donors to continue the "Operation Safe Corridor" de-radicalization and recovery program for combatants formerly associated with terrorist organizations. Due to poor screening procedures, some noncombatants, who may have included trafficking victims, fleeing the conflict were wrongly labeled militants and inappropriately detained. Reports alleged there were serious abuse and poor conditions in the program's detention centers. Under a separate program, Borno state authorities also provided demobilization and reintegration services to combatants formerly associated with terrorist organizations who turned themselves in; although officials separated unaccompanied children, they sometimes placed girls, including potential trafficking victims, who had been forcibly married to fighters with their husbands in the centers.

PREVENTION

The government modestly increased efforts to prevent human trafficking. NAPTIP continued to lead the federal government's efforts to combat trafficking, and it convened monthly interagency meetings and quarterly meetings with international partners. However, observers reported NAPTIP lacked sufficient resources to fully execute its broad mandate. The government continued implementing its NAP for 2022-2026, and it allocated 47.8 million naira (\$52,530) for prevention activities, including the NAP's implementation. This compared with allocating 172.9 million naira (\$190,000) for prevention activities the previous year. Anti-trafficking task forces in 21 states coordinated local anti-trafficking efforts in collaboration with NATPTIP. The government ran a national, 24-hour trafficking-specific hotline and it received more than 200 calls related to trafficking; the government did not report how potential many victims, if any, it identified as a result of hotline calls.

NAPTIP continued conducting national and state-level awareness raising campaigns, including radio and social media campaigns. NAPTIP 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, and campaign content was community-dependent. Stakeholders noted a need for additional awareness-raising in rural areas most commonly targeted by traffickers. The government provided anti-trafficking training to foreign diplomats in Nigeria on trafficking issues. NAPTIP Sokoto state zonal command conducted awareness activities on child forced begging and protection of Almajiri children. The government did not regulate Quranic schools to prevent child forced begging or abuse.

The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOL) provided specialized training on child labor and human trafficking to all labor inspectors, and it had dedicated child labor and trafficking units; inspectors referred potential trafficking cases to NAPTIP. The MOL conducted 17,068 labor inspections, found 453 violations of child labor laws, and removed 46 children from potential trafficking situations. This compared with removing 475 children from potential trafficking situations during the previous reporting period. The government referred 14 of the 46 children to social services. The government extended labor inspectors' authority to the informal sector, where most forced labor cases occurred. Observers reported a need for additional training for inspectors on providing trauma-informed, victim support. The MOL collaborated with the NIS to increase access to identity documentation for foreign workers. The government regulated private employment agencies and had a licensing requirement for labor recruiters, including sports recruiters. However, both informal and registered recruitment agents continued fraudulently recruiting and exploiting victims; despite reporting that such practices remained prevalent, officials did not report initiating any investigations into fraudulent recruitment or revoking any licenses for exploitative recruitment practices. The government did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. The government made some efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex through public campaigns. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers.

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 more prevalent, with Nigerian traffickers commonly recruiting victims from rural areas, especially the country's southern regions, for exploitation in sex trafficking and forced labor in cities. However, authorities identified Nigerian trafficking victims – often

exploited by Nigerian traffickers – in countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Traffickers exploit children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including in granite quarries and artisanal mines, domestic work, begging, street vending, textile manufacturing, and agriculture. Traffickers exploit adults and children in forced labor on cocoa farms. Impoverished families send children as young as 5 years old to work as domestic workers, sometimes through labor brokers, for better access to education and economic opportunities; some traffickers exploit the children in domestic servitude and subject them to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Some corrupt Quranic school teachers “mallams” exploit children, mostly boys from rural areas, in forced labor in begging and seasonal agricultural work, including in Cameroon and Chad. The children live in unregulated, makeshift “boarding schools” and are exposed to disease due to neglect and unsanitary living conditions; some mallams and older students physically and sexually abuse younger students. Observers report worsening poverty may have increased enrollment at these schools and vulnerability to forced labor.

Traffickers exploit Nigerian victims in sex trafficking and forced labor, primarily domestic servitude, throughout West and Central Africa—including Cabo Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Mali, and Senegal – and to a lesser extent, East and Southern Africa. Organized trafficking networks transport Nigerian women and girls to mining regions in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d’Ivoire for exploitation in sex trafficking. In some states, families “sell” women and girls into forced marriages to older men to repay family debt in the traditional practice of “money marriages,” increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Nigerian victims in online scam operation centers in Ghana. Traffickers exploit victims from West and Central Africa in forced labor in agriculture in 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.

Illicit actors operate “baby factories” often disguised as orphanages, maternity homes, or religious centers – where traffickers hold women against their will, rape them, and force them to carry and deliver a child. They then sell the children, sometimes with the intent of exploiting them in forced labor and sex trafficking. Government and NGOs describe the factories as a widespread criminal industry 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.

Highly organized criminal groups, sometimes linked to Nigerian cult organizations or confraternities, fraudulently recruit and exploit Nigerian women and girls in sex trafficking in countries throughout Europe,

including Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Traffickers fraudulently recruit Nigerian victims for employment abroad, and subsequently exploit them primarily in domestic servitude, but also sex trafficking, in the Middle East and Gulf states. Before departure for work abroad, many Nigerian women participate in a traditional ceremony with a juju priest; some traffickers exploit this tradition and tell the women they must obey the 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, traffickers continually performed the juju ceremonies as a coercion method. Traffickers often threaten victims' families in Nigeria to maintain control. Some victims' parents encourage them to obey traffickers and endure exploitation to earn money. 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. Traffickers exploit undocumented migrants in forced labor and sex trafficking at multiple stages of their journey through North Africa to Europe, especially in Libya. Traffickers are increasingly using social media to identify and recruit potential victims.

There are more than 3.3 million IDPs in the country and more than 380,000 Nigerian refugees in neighboring countries; many of these IDPs and refugees are vulnerable to trafficking due to their limited access to economic opportunities and the formal justice system. Insecurity throughout much of the North exacerbated vulnerability among IDPs and limited the government's ability to respond to cases. Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continue recruiting, abducting, and using – including through force, fraud, and coercion – child soldiers as young as 12 years of age as cooks, domestic workers, spies, messengers, bodyguards or guards at checkpoints, "morality police," armed combatants, as well as human shields and suicide bombers in attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger; these children are subjected to physical and sexual abuse and forced drug use. The groups continue to abduct women and girls in the northern regions of Nigeria, some of whom they exploit in 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. Girls and young women who return to their communities with children as a result of forced marriages or sexual violence are subjected to severe discrimination and marginalization, further increasing their vulnerability. Criminal gangs in the south also recruit and use children in forced criminality, including kidnappings and robberies, and exploit them in sex trafficking. Observers report Nigeria's security forces continue to use some children for domestic chores.

Reports indicate government officials, as well as security officers, 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. Traffickers recruit children in IDP camps for exploitation in domestic servitude. An NGO previously reported children detained for association with armed groups in the Maiduguri maximum security prison were confined with adult inmates, who allegedly exploited the children in sex trafficking rings in the prison. During a previous reporting period, an NGO alleged soldiers sexually exploited female detainees in a Borno State military detention center. IDPs migrating to cities such as Gombe and Kano, and to neighboring countries such as Niger, are vulnerable to forced labor. In a previous reporting period, an international organization reported traffickers fraudulently recruited women and girls from IDP camps for employment in Europe, and subsequently exploited them in sex trafficking in North Africa, the Gulf, and Europe.

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