

2025 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. Despite making significant efforts to do so, it did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Zimbabwe remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year. Significant efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, investigating officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes, and signing an MOU with an NGO to conduct anti-trafficking training for officials. However, 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 decreased anti-trafficking funding, closed one shelter, and disbanded its six provincial task forces that investigated trafficking and coordinated victim services, hindering overall efforts.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Amend the anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking in line with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.
- Dedicate resources to the Anti-Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (ATIMC) and implement the National Plan of Action.
- Using the SOPs and NRM for Vulnerable Migrants in Zimbabwe for victim identification and referral to care, proactively identify and refer to care trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including orphaned and unaccompanied children, migrant workers, domestic trafficking victims, and Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals, and train stakeholders on the SOPs.
- Increase the availability of protection services, including shelters, for all trafficking victims, including by collaborating with civil society service providers.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including of complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Consistently enforce regulations of labor recruitment companies, including by eliminating worker-paid recruitment fees, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, screening for trafficking during inspections, and implementing SOPs for ethical recruitment.
- Expedite trafficking court cases to eliminate the backlog.
- Adequately fund and provide specialized training to law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges to conduct trafficking investigations and prosecutions, using a victim-centered approach.
- Develop mutual legal assistance treaties and other agreements with foreign governments to facilitate information-sharing.
- 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 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 and 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. With support from an international organization, the government previously drafted a Trafficking in Persons Amendment Bill, which was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In 2024, the government initiated one investigation, compared with 10 in 2023. The government initiated prosecutions of two suspects and continued prosecutions of four suspects from previous years; this compared with initiating eight prosecutions involving an unknown number of suspects in 2023. The government convicted four traffickers, imposing sentences of 10-30 years’ imprisonment; this compared with convicting five traffickers in 2023. A lack of judicial capacity hindered the ability to address court backlogs, including trafficking cases. The Zimbabwe Republic Police’s (ZRP) Criminal Investigation Department (CID) had responsibility to investigate grave crimes, including trafficking. government did not report collaborating with foreign governments on trafficking investigations.

The government reportedly investigated officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes; however, official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a significant concern. The government arrested 20 Ministry of Home Affairs officials for issuing Cameroonian fraudulent passports, which potentially involved trafficking crimes. Some officials accepted bribes to not inspect farms or businesses using exploitative labor practices. Immigration officials reportedly accepted bribes to facilitate unauthorized entry for criminal groups involved in trafficking crimes. Violent gangs allegedly bribed police and politicians to operate artisanal and defunct gold mines in which they used forced labor.

The National Prosecuting Authority and the ATIMC signed MOUs with an NGO to conduct anti-trafficking training for government officials, although no training occurred due to no funding. ZRP recruit training included an anti-trafficking module, but the government did not report training any officers in the reporting period. Observers noted a need for better coordination with foreign governments on investigations. Observers reported the government lacked systematic procedures and the capacity to effectively investigate cases. Insufficient training on victim identification resulted in front-line officials not detecting trafficking crimes; insufficient investigative training resulted in police filing charges as crimes other than trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government made mixed victim identification and protection efforts.

The government reported identifying and referring to services 14 trafficking victims, compared with four in the previous reporting period. In collaboration with an international organization, the government supported the repatriation of some Zimbabwean victims from Sierra Leone. The government relied on NGOs and foreign donors to fund most trafficking victim services; however, organizations struggled to operate without adequate and consistent financial support, and some could only provide short-term care. Observers reported underfunded and understaffed service

providers. The government operated two shelters for victims of trafficking and violence against women and girls in Harare and Bulawayo; however, during the reporting period, the government closed its Mutare shelter. The government reported a need for shelters in the other eight provinces. The government operated 24 vulnerable children's homes that could serve child trafficking victims but did not report if they did. In collaboration with NGOs and international organizations, the government provided trafficking survivors with shelter; food; medical treatment; counseling; and family reunification, reintegration, and income-generating assistance; government social workers facilitated access to government benefits. Shelters and services for trafficking victims were available to Zimbabwean and foreign national men and women, irrespective of victims' participation in legal proceedings. The 2014 Trafficking in Persons Act required the government to establish counseling and reintegration service centers in all provinces, but the government had not done so by the end of the reporting period. The government did not report providing victims with reintegration allowances in the reporting period.

The government continued to use its NRM and SOPs, which outlined procedures for victim identification, referral, and assistance. Some NGOs reported inconsistent NRM and SOP implementation. Due to lack of funding the government disbanded its six provincial task forces that investigated trafficking cases and coordinated victim services.

The government reported it could provide victim-witness assistance during the criminal justice process but did not do so in the reporting period. Experts noted police unfamiliarity with trafficking crimes often re-traumatized trafficking victims. The government did not report if any trafficking victims participated in criminal justice proceedings in the reporting period. Twenty-two dedicated courts had designated rooms for victims to testify separately from their alleged perpetrators, and victims could choose to testify via video or written testimony; however, the government did not report if victims used these services. Observers reported limited access to equipment necessary for video testimony in some courts, especially in rural areas. The law allowed judges to order traffickers to pay victim restitution, but the government did not report any restitution awarded in the reporting period. The government maintained a victim compensation fund but did not provide any compensation to trafficking victims in the reporting period. The government did not have legal alternatives to removing foreign victims to countries where they would face retribution or hardship. Due to inadequate screening, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including among foreign nationals and children exploited in forced criminality.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking.

The ATIMC coordinated the government's anti-trafficking activities and met once during the reporting period. The government did not fund the ATIMC in the reporting period, hindering overall prevention efforts. The government had in place its 2023-2028 NAP. The government conducted anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, including through exhibitions at a trade fair, at an agricultural fair, and with church organizations. The government continued to use a hotline for violence against women and girls to identify and refer trafficking victims.

The government did not demonstrate political will to decrease child and forced labor, particularly in agriculture and mining. The government did not train labor inspectors on identifying trafficking. Fuel and vehicle shortages limited inspectors' effectiveness. Observers reported inspectors did not inspect informal mines.

The government did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees or effectively enforce its labor recruitment regulations. In collaboration with an international organization, the government took steps toward establishing a labor migration agreement with Qatar to improve migrant workers' protections. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training to diplomats. The government did not report making efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking 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. Child labor occurs in agriculture, including on tobacco, sugarcane, and cotton farms, and on small, unregulated farms, as well as in forestry and fishing. Observers reported unaccompanied children are at risk of exploitation. Traffickers force into domestic servitude women and girls from rural areas who move to cities for work. Economic hardship increased child sex trafficking and child labor, particularly in agriculture, domestic service, informal trading, begging, and artisanal mining. Observers reported traffickers exploit children, including those with disabilities, in forced begging. Some traditional practices make girls vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking, including trading daughters for food or money and for *ngazi*, a reconciliation process in which a family gives a relative to another family to make amends for a murdered relative.

Traffickers may exploit in forced labor children working as panners and ore couriers in gold and diamond mines. 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 them and prevent their escape. Traffickers also exploit women and children in sex trafficking around mines, sometimes in exchange for money or food. Sex traffickers exploit some children who sell goods or offer cooking and cleaning services to miners. Traffickers exploit women and girls in towns bordering South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia in forced labor, including domestic servitude, and in sex trafficking in brothels catering to truck drivers. Sex traffickers recruit girls as young as 11 from areas surrounding Chiredzi.

Traffickers and fraudulent recruiters use false promises of scholarships or employment, particularly in nursing and teaching, including through social media, to lure Zimbabweans into sex trafficking, domestic servitude, forced labor, and forced marriage in neighboring countries, particularly South Africa, and Kenya, Uganda, China, and the Middle East. In South Africa, traffickers exploit Zimbabweans in forced labor in agriculture, construction, factories, mines, information technology, domestic work, and the hospitality industry. Zimbabweans abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland, trick some Zimbabweans into traveling abroad under the pretenses of tourism or legitimate employment then force them into domestic servitude. Traffickers recruit Zimbabwean girls for marriage then once married 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, en route to South Africa. Zimbabwe is also a destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers subject some Mozambican children to forced labor in street vending, including in Mbare, Harare's largest informal market. Mozambican and Malawian children working on relatives' farms in Zimbabwe who cannot enroll in school are vulnerable to trafficking. Refugees and asylum-seekers experience difficulty accessing banking and obtaining identification, which limits employment opportunities and increases their vulnerability to trafficking.

Traffickers force some Chinese nationals to work in restaurants in Zimbabwe. Construction and mining companies owned by Chinese nationals or Chinese 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. Chinese parastatal tobacco enterprises exerted political influence to exempt themselves from labor laws and regulation, including mandates pertaining to child and forced labor. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Zimbabwe – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human

trafficking. North Koreans working in Zimbabwe displayed indicators of forced labor; they may have worked under exploitative conditions. The Cuban regime may force the 17 Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals in Zimbabwe to work.