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Trafficking in Persons Report 2016 - Country Narratives - Iran

IRAN: Tier 3

Iran is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Accurate information on human trafficking in Iran is difficult to obtain. Organized groups reportedly subject Iranian women, boys, and girls to sex trafficking in Iran and in Afghanistan, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, and Europe. Iranian girls between the ages of 13 and 17 are targeted by traffickers for sale abroad; younger girls may be forced into domestic service until their traffickers consider them old enough to be subjected to child sex trafficking. An increase in the transport of girls from and through Iran en route to other Gulf States for sexual exploitation has been reported from 2009-2015; during the reporting period, Iranian trafficking networks subjected Iranian girls to sex trafficking in brothels in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The media reported Kurdistan Regional Government officials were among the clients of these brothels. In Tehran, Tabriz, and Astara, the number of teenage girls exploited in sex trafficking continues to increase. Organized criminal groups kidnap or purchase and force Iranian and immigrant children to work as beggars and street vendors in cities, including Tehran. These children, who may be as young as 3, are coerced through physical and sexual abuse and drug addiction; reportedly many are purchased for as little as \$150.

In January 2016, an international organization reported the Iranian government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) coerced male Afghans resident in Iran, including migrants and refugees, to fight in military brigades deployed to Syria by threatening them with arrest and deportation to Afghanistan. Afghan boys in Iran are vulnerable to sexual abuse by their employers and harassment or blackmailing by the Iranian security service and other government officials. Traffickers subject Afghan migrants, including boys, to forced labor in construction and agricultural sectors in Iran. Trafficking networks smuggle Afghan nationals living in Iran to Europe and force them to work in restaurants to pay off debts incurred by smuggling fees. Pakistani men and women migrants in low-skilled employment, such as domestic work and construction, are targeted by organized groups and subjected to forced labor, debt bondage, restriction of movement, non-payment of wages, and physical or sexual abuse. Increasingly, despite labor code protections for registered foreign workers, employers seek adjustable contracts which make workers vulnerable to exploitative work practices such as coerced overtime and denial of work benefits.

The Government of Iran does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. As in previous reporting periods, the government did not share information on its anti-trafficking efforts. Public information from NGOs, the media, international organizations, and other governments indicates the Iranian government is not taking significant steps to address its extensive trafficking problem, particularly with regard to the protection of trafficking victims. Furthermore, during the reporting period,

allegations arose of complicity by Iranian officials in the coerced recruitment and use of Afghan men for combat in Syria.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRAN:

Cease coerced recruitment and use of Afghan men for combat in Syria by IRGC-organized and commanded militias; while respecting due process, investigate and prosecute sex trafficking and forced labor cases; increase transparency of anti-trafficking policies and activities; ensure sex and labor trafficking victims are not punished for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking; institute procedures to identify trafficking victims, particularly among vulnerable populations such as persons in prostitution, children in begging rings, and undocumented migrants; offer specialized protection services to trafficking victims, including shelter and medical, psychological, and legal assistance; develop partnerships with international organizations to combat trafficking; and become a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

PROSECUTION

The government did not report anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts and was reportedly complicit in trafficking crimes during the year. Iranian law does not prohibit all forms of trafficking. A 2004 law prohibits trafficking in persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abuse of power, or abuse of a victim's position of vulnerability for purposes of prostitution, slavery, or forced marriage. The prescribed penalty under this law is up to 10 years' imprisonment for the trafficking of adults and capital punishment for offenses against children. Both penalties are sufficiently stringent. The penalty for the trafficking of adults, however, is not commensurate with penalties prescribed under Iranian law for rape. In 2015, there was no new information about previous government claims that the anti-trafficking law was under review for amendment, including specific provisions to improve the effectiveness of the law. The constitution and labor code prohibit forced labor and debt bondage, but the prescribed penalty of a fine and up to one year's imprisonment is not sufficiently stringent. Iranian courts accord legal testimony by women only half the weight accorded to the testimony by men, therefore restricting female trafficking victims' access to justice. Moreover, female victims of sexual abuse, including sex trafficking victims, are subject to prosecution for adultery, which is defined as sexual relations outside of marriage and is punishable by death. The government did not report statistics on investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of trafficking offenders. The government also did not report investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in trafficking offenses, despite reports that such complicity was widespread. The government did not appear to provide anti-trafficking training to officials during the reporting period.

PROTECTION

The government made negligible efforts to protect trafficking victims. There was no indication the government provided protection services to any trafficking victims, including repatriated Iranian victims. The government reportedly continued to punish sex trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking, such as adultery and prostitution. The government did not distinguish between trafficking victims, those seeking refugee status, and undocumented immigrants, and held foreign trafficking victims in detention centers and jails until their deportation. The government and NGOs operated a small number of multipurpose shelters for women, largely in major cities, which trafficking victims could access. There were no reports of shelters for male trafficking victims. The government did not appear to provide other social or legal protection services for trafficking victims, and it was not clear if it provided support to NGOs providing limited services to victims. The government did not appear to encourage trafficking victims to assist in the investigation or prosecution of traffickers, and did not provide witness support services. It did not provide foreign trafficking victims a legal alternative to removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution.

PREVENTION

The government did not make sufficient efforts to prevent human trafficking. The government did not improve transparency on its anti-trafficking policies or activities, nor did it make discernible efforts to forge partnerships with NGOs or international organizations to combat human trafficking. The government made no discernible efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, forced labor, or child sex tourism by Iranian citizens traveling abroad. The government did not implement anti-trafficking awareness campaigns. During the reporting period, an amendment to the citizenship laws to allow Iranian citizenship to be passed down through mothers was submitted, but the parliament did not pass it; children with foreign fathers continued to lack documentation and remained vulnerable to exploitation. The government did not register or provide residence permits to new Afghan refugees and coerced many to serve in combat brigades deployed to Syria. There was no indication the government provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel. The government has not ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, despite previous reports the parliament was reviewing the convention. Iran is not a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.