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UGANDA (Tier 2)

The Government of Uganda 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, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Uganda remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting more trafficking crimes; convicting the most traffickers ever reported in a single year; and identifying more trafficking victims. The government increased anti-trafficking training for officials and took steps to enhance the capacity of criminal justice personnel by implementing new guidelines for prosecutors and judges. The government continued to improve the ethical recruitment of Ugandan migrant workers, including by investigating, prosecuting, and suspending recruitment companies engaging in fraudulent and exploitative recruitment activities and expanding pre-departure trainings available to migrant workers. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Access to adequate services for some victims, particularly adult males and individuals in rural areas, remained limited, and the lack of short-term shelter and long-term housing continued to adversely affect the government's ability to protect trafficking victims. The government continued to rely on civil society to provide most victim services and did not provide adequate in-kind or financial support to these efforts. The absence of victim-witness assistance policies hindered some investigations and prosecutions; additionally, some law enforcement officials did not take a victim-centered approach in criminal proceedings, potentially discouraging victim participation. The government allocated fewer funds to anti-trafficking activities, and efforts to protect Ugandan trafficking victims exploited abroad, particularly migrant workers, remained minimal.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Significantly increase the availability of short-term shelter, long-term housing, and specialized services for all trafficking victims – particularly adult males and victims identified in rural areas – including by partnering with and allocating increased funding to NGOs that provide victim care.
- Enact victim-witness assistance legislation and implement a systemic victim-witness assistance program to increase protective services for victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization.
- Increase protection for Ugandan trafficking victims exploited abroad, including by training Ugandan embassy staff to identify and assist victims, establishing and implementing additional bilateral labor agreements (BLA) with destination countries, and assigning labor attachés to Ugandan embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad.
- Strengthen the partnership between police and prosecutors to more efficiently and effectively complete the judicial proceedings of trafficking cases, including increasing training on strong evidence gathering and victim-centered investigations.
- Continue to investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers, including complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Using the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking in Uganda (NRG), systematically and proactively identify trafficking victims by screening vulnerable populations, such as refugees, asylum-seekers, individuals in commercial

sex, children in the Karamoja region, and Cuban medical professionals, for trafficking indicators and refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services.

- Continue to enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Strengthen the capacity of labor inspectors to identify and report potential trafficking crimes and refer victims of labor trafficking to appropriate services.
- Approve the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking Department within the Ugandan Police Force (UPF) and allocate sufficient funding to fulfill its mandate.
- Accede to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.
- Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2397.

PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. The Preventing Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed punishments of up to 15 years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult victims and up to life imprisonment for those involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

The Coordination Office to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) remained responsible for compiling law enforcement data. COPTIP continued to report "incidents" related to human trafficking, which ranged from simple inquiries to full police investigations; the government did not provide a breakdown of the various categories that made up an incident or how many incidents resulted in full investigations. In 2022, the government reported investigating 1,200 incidents of human trafficking, a significant increase compared with 421 incidents in 2021. Of the 1,200 reported incidents of human trafficking, at least 526 involved exploitation in Uganda and at least 63 involved exploitation abroad; the remaining incidents involved unspecified forms of trafficking. The government reported initiating prosecutions against 728 alleged traffickers in 589 cases in 2022, compared with prosecuting 537 individuals in 403 cases in 2021. Of the 589 cases filed, 338 involved sex trafficking, 173 involved labor trafficking, and 78 involved unspecified forms of trafficking; 526 involved exploitation in Uganda and 63 involved exploitation abroad. The government withdrew one case due to lack of evidence, while 335 cases remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period; the government reported referring 348 cases to court. Courts convicted 73 traffickers under the 2009 anti-trafficking act, compared with 30 convictions in 2021. Of the 73 convictions, courts convicted 42 traffickers for child sex trafficking, six for child labor trafficking, one for child sex and labor trafficking, two for adult sex trafficking, 11 for adult labor trafficking, and 11 for unspecified forms of trafficking. Courts sentenced the majority of traffickers to significant prison terms; however, courts often sentenced labor traffickers to less significant penalties, including fines in lieu of imprisonment. Courts also convicted three sex traffickers under the penal code statutes for "defilement" of a child. Courts acquitted three traffickers for unspecified reasons.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Observers reported police officers and immigration officials, particularly at airports and border crossings, accepted bribes to facilitate trafficking crimes or to warn traffickers of impending operations and investigations. Media and senior government officials reported high-level officials may have owned or been associated with some labor recruitment companies suspected of trafficking. In 2022, the government investigated seven government officials – including police officers, military officers, and public officials – involved in potential trafficking crimes; all seven cases remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Of the six officials investigated for potential trafficking crimes in 2021, the government referred one official

to court for prosecution, dropped cases of two officials due to lack of evidence, and released three officials on bail.

The Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID) within the UPF and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) maintained anti-trafficking units, which were responsible for responding to trafficking crimes and coordinating between law enforcement agencies. In 2019, UPF announced the creation of an Anti-Trafficking Department within CID; however, the department remained awaiting final approval by the public service commission for the third consecutive year. While awaiting final approval and direct funding, the department relied on the UPF's Department of Sexual Offenses and Children Cases for resources. Officials continued to use an electronic application, set up by ODPP to facilitate communication between police and prosecutors and to share best practices for human trafficking investigations and prosecutions across the country. Law enforcement officials, in partnership with an NGO, continued to implement a mobile phone app to collect and disseminate standardized data pertaining to human trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, enabling government agencies to track trafficking cases and nationwide trafficking trends.

The government, in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, border agents, immigration officials, and community elders on the anti-trafficking law, victim-centered investigation strategies, evidence gathering for successful prosecutions, and victim identification and referral procedures. ODPP continued to increase training for investigators to collect supporting evidence to ensure strong evidence gathering in cases where survivors opted not to testify. The government, in partnership with international NGOs, developed and distributed a judicial bench book, which outlined best practices for judges handling trafficking cases. The government allocated 46 million Ugandan shillings (UGX) (\$12,380) to train officers on prosecution-led investigations of trafficking cases. Despite trainings and new protocols, some Ugandan police and immigration officers continued to lack an understanding of the anti-trafficking law and may have misclassified trafficking cases as other crimes or collected insufficient evidence for trafficking cases to proceed to prosecution. Due to the limited availability of shelters and other protections, the government often quickly repatriated foreign victims before obtaining their testimony, which continued to impede the completion of trials. The government collaborated with the Governments of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan on trafficking investigations and prosecutions. COPTIP and UPF officials, in partnership with an international organization, also coordinated with the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, and South Sudan to conduct trainings on identifying and investigating cross-border trafficking crimes.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. The government reported identifying 2,099 victims in 2022, compared with 710 victims and 305 potential victims identified in 2021. NGOs and international organizations reported identifying and assisting 1,817 potential victims, providing them with various services, including medical care, shelter, counseling, family reunification, vocational training, education, and repatriation assistance. Government officials continued to use the NRG to identify trafficking victims and refer them to services. The NRG provided victim referral guidelines for stakeholders – including police, prosecutors, immigration officials, and NGOs – and described resources and recommendations for victim protection. The government continued to enhance implementation of the NRG, including by distributing copies to stakeholders and training them on its use. The government reported increasing efforts to proactively screen vulnerable populations, such as migrant workers and individuals in commercial sex, and individuals at sites known for transporting trafficking victims, including airports, border crossings, and internal highways, for trafficking indicators.

The government continued to use the NRG, service provider directory, and the country's multi-sectoral victim support system to directly refer and assist victims with care. The government, in

partnership with civil society organizations, provided 551 victims with various protection services, including shelter, medical services, psycho-social counseling, vocational training, and community reintegration, compared with providing 334 victims services in 2021. Additionally, the government reported referring 520 victims to NGO-provided services. The UPF continued to operate a short-term shelter in Kampala. The government provided temporary shelter and support to 324 trafficking victims — 236 adults and 88 children — at the center; as in previous years, officials allowed some victims to stay at the shelter for longer periods of time to participate in criminal proceedings against traffickers. The government reported spending 52 million UGX (\$14,000) on direct victim services in 2022. The availability of victim care remained inadequate to meet the needs of victims and accommodate the number of victims identified – especially outside of the central and eastern parts of the country – and services were primarily for women and children, limiting the services available for adult male victims. Government officials and civil society reported the lack of both short-term shelters and long-term housing available in the country continued to adversely affect the government’s ability to adequately protect trafficking victims. In some cases, police reportedly returned child victims exploited by their guardians to their homes due to the limited availability of shelters or alternative forms of care. The government continued to rely on civil society to provide most victim services and did not provide adequate in-kind or financial support to these efforts. In September 2021, the Cabinet approved the establishment of shelters for vulnerable migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); however, the government did not report progress made to establish these shelters during the reporting period. The government, in partnership with international organizations and local NGOs, continued to provide repatriation assistance to Ugandan victims exploited abroad.

The government remained without victim-witness legislation or a formal victim-witness assistance program to protect trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization and generally relied on NGOs to provide these services; however, the government took ad hoc steps to protect victims absent standardized procedures, including providing transportation, physical protection, shelter, interpretation services, and legal counsel. ODPP, in partnership with local NGOs, established child-friendly interviewing rooms in four additional offices, bringing the total to eight districts with child-friendly interviewing spaces where law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers could conduct forensic interviews with child trafficking victims. The UPF maintained access to a child-friendly interviewing room at CID headquarters. The absence of formal victim-witness assistance policies likely hindered some investigations and prosecutions due to traffickers’ access to victims, leading to threats to discourage their participation in trials; additionally, some law enforcement officials did not take a victim-centered approach in criminal proceedings, potentially re-traumatizing or discouraging victims from participating. The 2009 anti-trafficking law permitted foreign trafficking victims to remain in Uganda during the investigation of cases and to apply for residence and work permits, but the government did not report the extent to which it provided these services. The law permitted victims to provide testimony via video or written statement or to anonymously provide information, which the government reported routinely implementing. The law allowed victims to seek restitution and compensation in both criminal and civil suits; the government reported courts increasingly ordered restitution and that approximately 15% of criminal judgments in 2022 included restitution to victims. ODPP, in partnership with an international NGO, developed and disseminated new prosecution guidelines to seek restitution and compensation for trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The National Task Force, led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs Permanent Secretary with COPTIP serving as its secretariat, met regularly to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. In July 2022, COPTIP supported the establishment of the first Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (PTIP) District Task Forces (DTFs) in Arua and Kyotera. The PTIP DTFs were chaired by the districts’ Resident District Commissioner and comprised of police,

prosecutors, cultural leaders, and civil society; COPTIP provided the PTIP DTFs with training on trafficking case coordination. The government allocated 242 million UGX (\$65,140) for coordination of anti-trafficking activities, compared with 360 million UGX (\$96,905) in 2021. Observers continued to report COPTIP did not have sufficient staffing or funding to fulfill its mandate, hindering progress on new anti-trafficking efforts. Similar to previous years, COPTIP published an annual report containing general information on human trafficking and a summary of its anti-trafficking efforts. In July 2022, the government published a report analyzing trafficking vulnerabilities among Karamojong children. The government continued to implement its 2019-2024 anti-trafficking NAP, including by seeking input from NGOs and survivors on activities. The government, both independently and in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, held various awareness campaigns for government officials, civil society, community leaders, and the public to educate stakeholders on recognizing trafficking crimes, vulnerabilities to trafficking, and victim protection measures. The government did not operate a trafficking-specific hotline, but it continued to support, in partnership with an international organization, the Uganda Child Helpline (UCHL) to receive calls on crimes against children, including trafficking. UCHL identified 144 potential child trafficking victims and referred all cases to law enforcement or services as needed, compared with 108 potential victims identified through hotline calls in 2021. In July 2022, the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC) launched a 24-hour, toll-free hotline for general information, including to report trafficking crimes. COPTIP provided training to DCIC on trafficking and coordinated on trafficking-related calls; COPTIP reported the hotline received 20 to 30 calls per week related to trafficking inquiries.

The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD) continued to regulate labor migration and other labor-related matters, including labor trafficking, and continued efforts to improve ethical recruitment practices. In 2022, MGLSD suspended four companies' recruitment licenses for engaging in fraudulent and exploitative recruitment activities, compared with 12 suspensions in 2021. Police arrested an unreported number of individuals for fraudulent recruitment, compared with three arrests in 2021. The government reported prosecuting five labor recruitment companies – four for trafficking and one for operating without a license. MGLSD, in partnership with foreign donors, disseminated 500 copies of the Employment (Recruitment of Ugandan Migrant Workers) Regulations of 2021 to recruitment companies to raise awareness of legislative requirements related to migrant worker recruitment. The government's external employment management system, which functioned as a "one stop" internet portal where Ugandans could search and apply for all prevetted overseas employment opportunities through licensed recruitment companies, remained operational. In 2022, MGLSD expanded its mandatory pre-departure training to all Ugandan migrant workers utilizing registered labor recruitment companies; in previous years, MGLSD only required pre-departure training for Ugandans traveling to the Middle East for employment as domestic workers. MGLSD accredited 52 institutions to conduct two-week pre-departure trainings, which included information on employment contracts, laws and regulations, management of health issues, and cultures of destination countries. Despite efforts to improve recruitment practices and enforce regulations, observers noted insufficient funding, staffing gaps, corruption, and the continued operation of illegal recruitment agencies may have limited the effectiveness of MGLSD's overall anti-trafficking efforts. The 2021 regulations continued to allow recruiting agencies to charge migrant workers recruitment fees up to 20,000 UGX (\$5) for administrative costs and various costs for placement fees and travel preparations, such as pre-departure trainings, visa applications, and medical examinations.

During the reporting period, the Office of the President's Office of the Senior Presidential Advisor on Diaspora Affairs expanded its role in regulation and oversight of labor recruitment, including by verifying labor recruitment companies' licensures, convening with destination governments, monitoring migrant worker conditions in Saudi Arabia, and establishing an office in Entebbe International Airport to support the travel of Ugandan migrant workers departing or returning to Uganda. Unlike previous years, the MGLSD did not employ labor attachés in Ugandan diplomatic missions abroad, hindering the government's overall ability to monitor migrant worker conditions abroad. The government previously employed labor attachés in Ugandan diplomatic missions in Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. In March 2023, MGLSD signed an updated BLA with Saudi Arabia that included stronger protections for domestic workers, including standardized

employment contracts, prohibition of salary deductions, and mechanisms to resolve labor disputes and renew contracts.

Labor inspectors overseeing working conditions in the country received training on identifying trafficking cases and routinely reported potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement; however, labor inspectors continued to focus primarily on child labor violations. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. Uganda was not a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Uganda, and traffickers exploit victims from Uganda abroad. Traffickers exploit Ugandan adults and children in labor trafficking in various industries, including agriculture, fishing, mining, street vending, hospitality, and domestic work. Traffickers increasingly use local radio and social media to advertise fraudulent job opportunities in Kampala to lure adults and children from rural areas into exploitative situations. Traffickers also exploit women, girls, and boys in sex trafficking throughout the country, particularly in Kampala and other urban areas, in brothels, bars, residential homes, rental properties, and on the street. Children from the Karamoja region, particularly from Napak district, are especially vulnerable to trafficking due to lack of economic and educational opportunities in the region; NGOs estimate the majority of child sex trafficking victims in Uganda are ethnically Karamojong. Traffickers, sometimes known as community “elders,” also exploit children from the Karamoja region in forced begging and domestic servitude; in some cases, traffickers force children to meet them at international borders, where they organize markets to sell the children into domestic servitude or sex trafficking. In some cases, parents knowingly send their children to exploitative situations to send remittances back to the family or force their children to beg to supplement family income. In response to the pandemic, most schools closed from March 2020 to January 2022; despite the reopening of schools, observers report many children did not return to school and remain vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers continue to exploit children not attending school in sex trafficking, including online commercial sexual exploitation, and labor trafficking in domestic work and forced begging. Observers report slow-onset climate change events, such as drought and rising temperatures, increased poverty, food insecurity, and loss of work in the Karamoja region; individuals in these situations are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Employment agencies based in Uganda and abroad, both legal and fraudulent, recruit Ugandans to work in the Middle East — particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, and Oman — where, at times, traffickers exploit them in forced labor in domestic work, hospitality, or construction; Ugandans who voluntarily migrate in search of employment opportunities are also vulnerable to exploitative conditions. In one research study, an NGO estimates 89 percent of Ugandans working in the Middle East experience conditions indicative of forced labor, including non-payment of wages, physical abuse, passport confiscation, and excessive working hours. Reports indicate traffickers in Saudi Arabia regularly sell and “trade” Ugandan domestic workers using an online marketplace. To circumvent the 2016 government ban on migrant worker travel to Oman, some licensed and unlicensed agencies send Ugandans through Kenya and Tanzania, increasing their vulnerability to debt bondage due to higher recruitment and travel fees. Traffickers also exploit Ugandans in forced labor and sex trafficking in neighboring African countries, Asia, and North America. Ugandans abroad who experienced loss of employment during the pandemic remain vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers target university graduates with the promise of high-paying jobs abroad; however, upon arrival in the destination country, traffickers exploit these individuals in domestic servitude. Children experiencing homelessness or using the streets as a source of livelihood are particularly vulnerable to trafficking abroad. Kenyan business owners and employers exploit Ugandan girls, particularly from the Karamoja region, in sex trafficking and

forced labor in Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood. Observers report ISIS-DRC may unlawfully recruit, sometimes with parental knowledge, Ugandan children to join the non-state armed group. In previous years, criminals involved in terrorist networks lured and recruited Ugandan adults and children to Somalia via Kenya to join non-state armed groups – primarily al-Shabaab – sometimes with fraudulent promises of lucrative employment.

In 2022, local NGOs identified foreign victims from Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia exploited in Uganda. Uganda hosts more than 1.5 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan and the DRC. Traffickers exploit refugees, both in village settlements and urban areas, in labor and sex trafficking. Uganda continues to serve as a transit point for migrants seeking work in the Middle East; traffickers exploit this transiting population in forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers pose as recruitment agencies to facilitate the placement of former trafficking victims, primarily from Burundi, by falsely advertising employment in the Middle East; instead, traffickers often exploit these women in Uganda before transporting them to Kenya for further exploitation. Traffickers exploit children from neighboring East African countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania, in labor trafficking, primarily in agriculture and domestic work, and sex trafficking in Uganda. Cuban medical professionals working in Uganda may have been forced to work by the Cuban government. Democratic People's Republic of Korea nationals working in Uganda may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.