

2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: France

FRANCE (Tier 1)

The Government of France fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore France remained on Tier 1. These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, adopting a NAP to guide national-level coordination on all forms of trafficking, and increasing efforts to engage trafficking survivors to inform policy decisions. The government established a specialized cyber investigation unit and continued delivering comprehensive training to a variety of officials. Law enforcement continued participating in extensive international investigations and partnerships, which resulted in the identification of victims and arrest of suspected traffickers. Although the government meets the minimum standards, it initiated fewer investigations, prosecuted fewer suspected traffickers for the fourth consecutive year, and convicted fewer traffickers. While funding for victim assistance increased, it continued to be insufficient and although more victims were identified, government-funded NGOs assisted fewer victims. The government did not report awarding compensation or restitution to any victims and continued to lack an NRM to ensure uniform proactive victim identification and referral to care. Law enforcement authorities continued to arrest and prosecute child victims of forced begging and forced criminality and deport undocumented migrants from Mayotte, an overseas French department, without screening for trafficking indicators. Furthermore, government efforts to address trafficking vulnerabilities on Mayotte, including among the estimated 3,000 to 4,000 unaccompanied Comorian children, remained inadequate.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase efforts to proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including individuals in commercial sex, asylum-seekers, and unaccompanied children in Mayotte, and provide or refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services in all regions and departments, both domestic and overseas. * Allow formal victim identification without requiring cooperation or interaction with law enforcement and by entities other than law enforcement officials, including by civil society, social workers, and healthcare professionals. * Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms, and ensure labor trafficking is pursued as such rather than a labor code violation. * Increase funding and resources for the national rapporteur and overall victim assistance, including services for child victims, and adequate funding for NGOs providing assistance. * Systematically train all front-line officials, including labor inspectors, police, prosecutors, and judges, on cyber techniques and victim-centered approaches. * Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, especially child victims of forced begging and forced criminality. * Adopt an NRM to ensure uniform proactive victim identification and referral to care. * Increase trafficking survivor access to restitution and compensation and increase prosecutor's efforts to systematically request restitution for survivors during criminal trials, including for victims lacking legal status. * Offer the reflection period to all victims, including migrants and victims of forced begging and criminality, especially in overseas departments. * Strengthen international law enforcement cooperation to prevent and investigate extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse and continue to prosecute and convict perpetrators. * Develop and consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable. * Increase the availability of protection services – including short-term shelter, long-term housing, counseling, and medical care – for all trafficking victims, including adult males and children, especially child victims of forced begging and forced criminality.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts. Article 225-4 of the penal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of up to €150,000 (\$165,745) for crimes involving an adult victim and up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to €1.5 million (\$1.66 million) for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

The government did not report comprehensive, including data in overseas territories, or disaggregated data on type of trafficking for investigations, indictments, or convictions. The government provided law enforcement statistics for 2022, the most recent year data was available. The government initiated 250 human trafficking investigations in 2022, a significant decrease compared with 336 in 2021 and 321 in 2020. The government reported referring 205 trafficking suspects for prosecution in 2022, a decrease compared with 215 prosecutions in 2021, 245 in 2020, and 318 in 2019, demonstrating a multi-year downward trend. Courts reported convicting 84 traffickers in 2022, a significant decrease compared with 105 in 2021. In 2022, courts sentenced traffickers to significant sentences of an average of 2.2 years' imprisonment, when trafficking was the primary charge, with 89 percent receiving prison time. Between 2016 and 2022, law enforcement investigated 38 legal entities for human trafficking, proceeded with prosecution for 16, and courts convicted eight; however, six of eight legal entities only received an average fine of €28,000 (\$30,940). The government did not report any convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, the prosecution of an elected municipal official accused of allegedly forcing a potential trafficking victim to participate in commercial sex via coercion and threats of deportation remained ongoing.

The National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH), which functioned as the independent national rapporteur, urged courts to issue more consistent and rigorous sentences to convicted human traffickers, and NGOs reported trafficking sentences were not a sufficient deterrent, especially in cases of labor trafficking. NGOs also expressed concern about the inconsistency of anti-trafficking prosecutions across the country, which varied depending on the level of engagement of local prosecutors. In its 2022 report, GRETA noted many investigators, prosecutors, and judges believed transnational networks or crossing an international border were necessary elements of human trafficking and therefore did not pursue cases as trafficking without these elements present. Furthermore, an NGO asserted police sometimes recorded sex and labor trafficking complaints as crimes with lesser burden of proof and more lenient penalties that did not necessitate an official investigation or failed to register the complaint at all. NGOs also observed judges and prosecutors were sometimes reluctant to formally certify labor trafficking victims because of the protections subsequently granted to them and recommended judges and prosecutors take additional specialized training. The government did not provide trafficking victims the same rights and entitlements, such as residence permits and full compensation, if officials pursued their cases as other crimes. GRETA expressed concern courts convicted trafficking crimes under other statutes and urged the government to rectify this, including through further specialized anti-trafficking training for investigators, prosecutors, and judges.

The government had several bodies responsible for investigating human trafficking. The Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings (OCRTEH), within the National Directorate of the Judicial Police, was responsible for cases of sex trafficking and other crimes, and the Central Office for Combatting Illegal Labor and the Central Office for the Suppression of Irregular Migration and the Employment of Irregular Migrants were responsible for labor trafficking cases and other crimes. OCRTEH was divided into four operational units, including the addition of a cyber unit in 2023; the new unit initiated sex trafficking investigations through cyber surveillance, including of social media and online recruitment sites, and data analysis, with a special focus on children. While the government did not have courts specialized in human trafficking trials, there was a court that could hear complex cases related to organized crime and a specialized trafficking judge in the overseas department of Mayotte. The government and government-funded NGOs continued providing extensive and in-depth anti-trafficking training programs and conferences for various law enforcement officers, prosecutors, magistrates, labor

inspectors, and immigration officials. Though the government reported offering several training courses on conducting cyber investigations in 2023, the CNCDH and others continued to advocate for additional training as many investigators continued to lack adequate techniques to dismantle human trafficking organizations that operated on the internet and through other technologies.

In 2023, the government continued extensive collaboration on international investigations, including with EUROPOL, INTERPOL, and dozens of countries in some of the larger operations, which resulted in the identification of at least 2,081 victims, the initiation of 264 new investigations, and the arrest of at least 233 trafficking suspects in France and cooperating countries. French law enforcement continued to participate with several joint investigation teams to facilitate international law enforcement cooperation with various countries.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. The government remained without an NRM, did not adequately disaggregate data between sex and labor trafficking, and did not provide victim data from overseas territories. In 2022 – the most recent year data was available – police identified 362 human trafficking victims, an increase compared with 331 in 2021, 228 in 2020, and 244 in 2019. Police also identified 45 “victims of exploitation of begging” (31 in 2021 and 23 in 2020), 62 victims of forced labor (compared with 24 in 2021 and less than five in 2020), and 11 victims of “reduction to slavery and servitude” (33 in 2021 and five in 2020). Most of these victims were likely trafficking victims, but it was unclear if some victims from these statistics were also included in the aggregated human trafficking statistics. Overall, identification of labor trafficking victims increased compared with the prior year. In addition, in 2022 police identified 993 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, some of whom may have been sex trafficking victims. This compared with 1,044 victims of commercial sexual exploitation in 2021 and 786 in 2020. In 2022, 43 of 362 identified trafficking victims (12 percent) were children (17 or younger), 72 victims (20 percent) were French nationals, and 30 victims (67 percent) exploited in forced begging were children (10 years old or younger). Between 2016 and 2022, traffickers exploited 74 percent of victims for more than one year before law enforcement formally identified them, and 18 percent of victims were exploited for more than five years prior to identification. Some gaps in victim identification remained, and the government did not report the specific number of victims identified among the asylum-seeking and undocumented migrant populations. The government, experts, NGOs, and GRETA expressed concern regarding the government’s national statistics on victim identification and asserted the scale of human trafficking in France was likely much higher than official statistics. In addition to victims identified by the government, 72 NGOs reported identifying at least 4,363 human trafficking victims (76 percent were sex trafficking victims and 15 percent were labor trafficking victims, including 7 percent for forced criminality and 2 percent for forced begging) and assisting 2,675 victims in 2022, but many of the NGOs did not receive government funding, and the government did not provide further details.

The government remained without an NRM to ensure uniform, proactive identification and equal assistance to victims across the country. However, most ministries and regions had formal procedures for identifying victims and authorities continued to use an NGO-run referral mechanism. GRETA noted the government remained without a formal identification process for French victims or those from European Economic Area countries. The government assumed the majority of individuals in commercial sex and all foreign adult individuals in commercial sex were trafficking victims, and it systematically screened this population for indicators. However, this assumption could have led to a misunderstanding of sex trafficking and conflation with commercial sex. Authorities continued to mischaracterize victims of forced criminality as delinquents or illegal workers and consequently excluded them from assistance. Given the recent increase in children exploited in commercial sex, which NGOs estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000 predominantly French girls, in 2021, the national rapporteur publicly urged the government to adopt a clear criminal policy against the sexual exploitation of children, including child sex trafficking.

The government continued provided funding for Ac-Se, an anti-trafficking NGO-managed network of 88 partners, including 58 partner shelters; five NGOs that act as reception facilities and specialized service providers; two combined reception and advice centers; and 22 specialized service providers assisting adult victims of sex and labor trafficking. The Ac-Se network provided victims with shelter, legal, medical, and psychological services. However, GRETA reported the network did not cover the entire country or overseas French Departments. While police and NGOs referred victims to Ac-Se, only the police, gendarmerie, and judiciary could formally identify victims, and formal identification required victims to cooperate with law enforcement. NGOs reported formal recognition as a trafficking victim was difficult to achieve; such status offered additional protections and, in practice, was necessary to obtain asylum or a residence permit, healthcare, and housing. The CNCDH urged the government to allow formal victim identification without a requirement to cooperate with law enforcement and also by entities other than law enforcement, including by civil society, healthcare workers, and social workers; however, the government did not report taking concrete steps on this recommendation. The government reported allocating at least €553,000 (\$611,050) in funding to NGOs providing victim assistance in 2023, though this figure was not comprehensive. This was an increase compared with €464,502 (\$513,260) in 2022, but a decrease compared with €704,000 (\$777,900) in 2021. NGOs and GRETA continued to criticize the amount of funding generally provided by the government for victim assistance as insufficient and asserted the government provided little transparency into how much it allocated specifically to human trafficking. NGOs also raised concerns pertaining to the lack of a dedicated budget allocation to NGOs providing assistance to trafficking victims, forcing NGOs to rely on donations from private entities. In its 2022 report, GRETA urged the government to increase funding and resources dedicated to combating human trafficking. While only partial data on victim assistance was available, government-funded NGOs reported assisting a total of at least 330 trafficking victims, including the provision of legal support for 243 victims, psychological assistance for 175 victims, state healthcare application for 75 victims, immigration assistance for 166 victims, employment assistance for 52 victims, and shelter for 79 adult victims in 2022. This was a decrease compared with assistance provided to 362 trafficking victims in 2021. Law enforcement continued cooperating with Ac-Se, under a formalized mechanism, to inform, assist, and protect trafficking victims. This close coordination with civil society and multidisciplinary approach resulted in seamless assistance to trafficking victims identified during operations and allowed NGOs to accompany victims to interviews with law enforcement and ensure local shelters were prepared ahead of time to receive victims.

The law entitled victims to a 30-day reflection period during which they could decide whether to lodge a complaint or participate in criminal justice proceedings against a trafficker; however, some authorities were not familiar with the reflection period and did not offer it. In 2022, the government issued eight temporary residence permits for the reflection period (10 in 2021). Although formal victim identification required law enforcement cooperation, victims who chose not to participate in criminal justice proceedings could still receive free medical attention and access to other services available from Ac-Se. Local governments provided French language classes to victims, and some victims could qualify for subsidized housing and job training programs, but the government did not report the number of victims provided with these benefits. The national employment agency could provide foreign victims with an initial stipend of €350 (\$387) per month; civil society organizations reported while the conditions for granting a stipend were not uniform and varied by region, at least 376 victims received financial aid in 2022.

The government continued to fund a shelter, with space for 20 victims, and a small number of emergency apartments through the Ac-Se network, with space for approximately 100 victims; however, NGOs and GRETA continued to express concern regarding the overall limited number of accommodations available to victims throughout the country. Unless victims were in immediate danger or in a highly vulnerable situation requiring geographic relocation, they were not eligible for admittance into Ac-Se's shelter program; NGOs observed the government did not often provide housing to migrants without legal status, which increased their risk of trafficking. There were no accommodation centers dedicated to adult male trafficking victims; officials sometimes referred adult male victims to communal homes or shelters for persons experiencing homelessness, however, these accommodations did not meet the specific needs of trafficking victims. Police referred child victims to the Child Welfare Services (ASE) system, which provided shelter, or a

government-funded NGO-run shelter that could accommodate up to 12 children, including trafficking victims; the shelter offered health, psychological, and judicial support. Authorities noted a significant increase in children exploited in commercial sex over the past five years with traffickers targeting girls in government-run children's shelters. GRETA and the national rapporteur reported a lack of adequate resources for the specific needs of child trafficking victims, especially considering the increase in child victims in recent years.

The law entitled trafficking victims to free legal aid, if requirements were met; victims who did not meet the requirements for legal aid could receive assistance from NGOs. In its 2022 report, GRETA asserted lawyers were often unfamiliar with trafficking and urged the government to ensure all victims – regardless of immigration status – had systematic early access to legal assistance. GRETA expressed concern legal aid was unavailable for undocumented migrants, which may have restricted the rights of some victims' access to justice. Judges heard trafficking cases in private at the victim's request, and remote testimony, including by video, was also available. Courts could allow victims to remain anonymous during their testimony, which the government implemented for the first time in one case in 2023. While victims usually had access to a psychologist during court proceedings – a legal requirement for children – NGOs and GRETA asserted the overall psychological counseling available to victims was insufficient. The government took additional precautions to prevent re-traumatizing children; for example, the law limited the interview of children to one time, law enforcement used child-friendly procedures, and the government had specialized law enforcement officials and courts for child victims. The government had specialized private victim interview rooms for adults and children, but GRETA and NGOs reported law enforcement was often unaware of them or did not use them. In its 2022 report, GRETA urged the government to increase usage of audio-visual equipment to interview victims and specialized interview rooms, especially for children. NGOs and GRETA noted, despite the legal entitlement, the government did not consistently provide interpreters to victims during trials or information in a language they understood, the responsibility of which would then pass to NGOs, often without available government funding.

Officials continued to publish and distribute to police stations and potential victims a standard document, available in four languages, on victim rights, interview steps, and available services. In its 2022 report, GRETA noted front-line officials were not adequately trained on human trafficking and did not routinely inform victims of their rights or anti-trafficking procedures, despite the availability of a standard form on victim rights. In its 2022 report, OCRTEH agreed investigators were often unaware of the specific rights of trafficking victims and because the government did not adequately educate victims on their rights, victims were less likely to choose to participate in criminal justice proceedings. While the government provided police protection for victims during trials, authorities acknowledged the need to allocate additional funding to programs supporting the relocation of trafficking survivors. The CNCDH urged the government to improve assistance provided to victims during trials. In its 2022 report, OCRTEH recommended increased training for investigators and the establishment of partnerships with specialized associations on interview techniques for trafficking victims.

The government issued residency permits only when victims cooperated with police investigations or enrolled in the government's reintegration program, which required suspension of involvement in commercial sex and often required identity documents victims could not obtain. Authorities generally offered permanent residency (10 years) to trafficking victims following a successful conviction. Trafficking victims were also eligible for international protection under refugee status or subsidiary protection status in cases where victims had a credible fear of retaliation, including from public authorities in their country of origin, if returned. However, the government did not make this international protection, along with most other protections for asylum-seekers, available to victims on Mayotte. The government offered a specialized support program for asylum-seekers who were trafficking victims, but it required victims to be formally recognized; the program provided secure lodging, psychological support, and a path to request asylum. The government reported renewing or issuing 453 temporary residence permits (428 in 2021 and 293 in 2020) under asylum laws and 44 permanent (10 years) residence permits (41 in 2021 and 25 in 2020). The government also reported issuing or renewing 818 temporary residence permits for survivors of sex trafficking and individuals ceasing involvement in commercial sex, which likely included potential

trafficking victims, (515 in 2021 and 411 in 2020). In its 2022 report, GRETA noted while trafficking survivors with residence permits were permitted to work, they often faced language barriers, lacked necessary training, and were in need of further psychological assistance. GRETA and a large collective of anti-trafficking NGOs believed the 2018 law on asylum and immigration, which eased restrictions on migrant deportation, limited victims' ability to receive temporary residence due to time-bound restrictions on permit applications and more stringent approval criteria. In its 2022 report, GRETA cited instances where trafficking victims in the asylum system had numerous interactions with law enforcement but were never identified as victims, and where NGOs had identified trafficking victims, but law enforcement disagreed or deported the victim despite the victim having lodged a complaint.

The government did not uniformly screen undocumented migrants on Mayotte for trafficking indicators prior to their deportation, which may have left some trafficking victims unidentified. Of the 3,000 to 4,000 unaccompanied Comorian children at risk for sex and labor trafficking in the French department of Mayotte, the government reportedly provided only approximately 40 children per year with accommodation and education; it did not address the protection needs, including medical care, shelter, or education, of the remaining children. A 2023 study released by the government on Mayotte reported, between 2019 and 2021, front-line officials identified at least 83 children exploited in commercial sex; many of whom were likely child sex trafficking victims.

The government continued to lack comprehensive statistics on compensation, restitution, and damages awarded to trafficking victims. The government has not reported granting compensation to any trafficking victims since 2021. While not systematic or mandatory, criminal courts could order traffickers to pay restitution to victims who were citizens of France or the EU, when the act was committed on French territory, or the victim had legal immigration status. The government did not report awarding restitution to any victims in 2023; this compared with restitution issued for one case in 2022, and no restitution issued in 2021. Victims who were citizens of France, the EU or had legal immigration status could also bring a civil suit against a trafficker for damages; however, authorities did not report whether any victims filed such suits in 2023. GRETA and NGOs reported victim restitution remained rare and amounts for compensation and restitution, when issued, were small. GRETA previously reported when courts ordered traffickers to pay restitution or damages, victims often did not receive payment because courts did not fully enforce the payment, and traffickers often declared bankruptcy. Victims of sex trafficking may have had difficulty in claiming restitution or damages because they did not have a legal form of employment. Victims lacking legal status were ineligible for restitution or damages, potentially increasing their vulnerability to further exploitation. The government could provide confiscated assets from traffickers to victims or associations providing care; however, the government has not reported doing so since 2020. GRETA reported if prosecutors charged a suspect with a labor law violation instead of labor trafficking, victims would receive less compensation. In its 2022 report, GRETA urged the government to better guarantee effective access to compensation, restitution, and damages; increase training for frontline officials; and use the confiscated assets from traffickers for victims.

GRETA reported the lack of a specific provision in French law protecting victims from being inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked left victims vulnerable to penalization, especially child victims of forced criminality and forced begging. The Minister of Justice requested prosecutors avoid prosecuting children for forced criminality, but this continued to leave adult victims vulnerable, and this request was not codified in law. In its 2017 and 2022 reports, GRETA expressed concern police continued to arrest and prosecute child victims of forced begging and forced criminality without screening for trafficking indicators. NGOs and the Inter-ministerial Mission for the Protection of Women against Violence and the Fight against Human Trafficking (MIPROF) reported in 2021, 76 percent of forced criminality victims identified by NGOs were children and of those victims, the government prosecuted 53 for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked; in the cases where NGOs were aware of the outcome, courts convicted 98 percent of the victims. GRETA and NGOs expressed concern the convictions for formally recognized trafficking victims could not be expunged, which could prevent some victims from accessing employment.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. MIPROF continued to coordinate national anti-trafficking efforts, and the anti-trafficking steering committee included national, regional, and local governments, as well as NGOs. In addition to weekly meetings with most stakeholders, the government reported MIPROF held 15 plenary meetings with various anti-trafficking stakeholders to discuss trafficking data, survey results, and methods for monitoring and evaluating the new NAP. Though personnel in the trafficking unit in MIPROF increased in 2023, civil society continued to urge the government to increase resources allocated to the office. Civil society continued to note an overall decrease in the government's engagement with NGOs and the national rapporteur on national coordination efforts. The government established two new steering committees in 2023; one committee focused on coordinating intelligence and judicial services, and the second focused on child sex trafficking in urban areas. The CNCDH continued to serve as the independent national rapporteur for trafficking, but resources remained insufficient. In consultation with civil society, the government adopted a new 2024-2027 NAP for sex and labor trafficking, including forced criminality and begging, with a special focus on children. The NAP included plans for a monitoring committee, but did not have a defined implementation timeframe, a dedicated budget for implementation, detailed measures, or include a role for civil society; experts previously urged the government to address these same flaws from the prior NAP ahead of adoption. Additionally, the government continued to implement a NAP specifically addressing child sex trafficking, which included a dedicated budget for implementation. In partnership with a short-term rental platform, the government launched a national trafficking awareness campaign ahead of the 2024 Summer Olympics, and a government-funded NGO and the national rapporteur both carried out various awareness raising efforts throughout 2023. Following a 2023 criticism from the national rapporteur, MIPROF invited several trafficking survivors to share their experiences to help inform policy decisions and to present at the release of the new NAP. In January 2023, the government established an inter-ministerial research group of specialized law enforcement officers to address trafficking in Mayotte, though the focus appeared to be on migrant smuggling.

The government did not report having a licensing or accreditation process for labor recruiters, and there was no law prohibiting or criminalizing recruitment companies from charging recruitment or placement fees to workers. Passport withholding, contract switching, and wage withholding were illegal, and workers could pursue legal recourse. Fraudulent labor recruitment and the prevalent use of subcontractors, especially in agriculture, remained a concern. The government made efforts to hold labor recruiters accountable by arresting suspected traffickers, but efforts were not comprehensive nor proportional with the suspected scale. Between 2016 and 2022, 20 percent of offenses recorded by labor inspectors involved trafficking, some of which were referred for prosecution. In 2022, labor inspectors referred five cases to prosecutors and at least 171 labor potential trafficking victims to police, which resulted in the conviction of several perpetrators. The CNCDH recommended increased training for all front-line officials to ensure labor trafficking cases were correctly categorized and not deemed as crimes with lesser penalties or administrative violations such as labor code violations, undeclared work, undignified work conditions, or employing undocumented migrants, which decreased deterrence. In 2022, GRETA recommended the government increase its efforts to combat labor trafficking, including by increasing labor inspections of high risk sectors and raising awareness among migrant worker populations. Labor inspectors could identify trafficking victims during inspections and refer the cases to police, but continued to lack the authority to formally identify trafficking victims. In its 2022 report, GRETA recommended authorizing labor inspectors to formally identify victims. Labor inspectors also continued to lack the authority to inspect private homes, thereby limiting identification of domestic servitude. French law required companies with more than 5,000 employees to enact due diligence measures to identify risks and prevent serious harm to human rights, including labor exploitation and trafficking, by subcontractors and suppliers. In 2023, a human rights group filed a complaint with French law enforcement against a major textile company regarding forced labor in their supply chains, specifically of the Uyghur population in the People's Republic of China (PRC); no additional details regarding subsequent law enforcement action were available. In its 2022 report, GRETA encouraged increased implementation of the due diligence law.

The government made efforts to reduce the demand for extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse by including warnings on its website for travelers to destinations with higher incidences, like Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Madagascar, the Philippines, and Thailand. In May 2022, French law enforcement charged and prosecuted a French national for child sex trafficking in France; the allegations also included instances of child sexual abuse in Morocco, and Moroccan law enforcement began a simultaneous investigation, but the government did not report further information on this case. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex by fining 1,160 purchasers of commercial sex annually, though efforts were inconsistent throughout the country. OCRTEH continued cooperating with a major online short-term rental platform, which allowed law enforcement to inform rental hosts of indicators their property was being used to facilitate commercial sex and sex trafficking, including a special tab on the platform that allowed investigators to facilitate information requests. Ac-Se continued to operate a hotline for trafficking victims, which received 1,897 calls in 2022, and the government continued to operate hotlines for victims of GBV and children in abusive situations, including trafficking; however, the government did not report the number of trafficking-related calls received. GRETA recommended the government establish a dedicated national human trafficking hotline. NGOs noted there was insufficient follow-up by the government to prevent trafficking among domestic workers employed by foreign diplomats in France.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit foreign and domestic victims in France. Previous NGO reports estimate one-third of sex traffickers were close family members of victims. The government estimates the majority of the 40,000 to 50,000 individuals in commercial sex in France, about 90 percent of whom are foreign nationals, are likely trafficking victims. Authorities note the number of French girls identified as sex trafficking victims, as well as in the number of child victims continues to increase; NGOs estimate between 10,000 and 15,000 French teenagers are victims of child sex trafficking. In suburban areas, “lover boys” schemes continue to increase, whereby traffickers coerce vulnerable girls and women into sex trafficking through a sham romantic relationship. Traffickers target girls in government-funded shelters and exploit these children in sex trafficking. Commercial sex occurs almost exclusively in hotels and short-term apartment rentals, known as the “uberization” of commercial sex, and sex traffickers increasingly use online platforms to recruit and exploit victims. Officials estimate 84 percent of commercial sex encounters were initiated or occurred online in 2021. Officials noted the evolution of sex trafficking to online platforms has increasingly made victims more difficult to identify and assist, as the technology creates an additional barrier preventing direct law enforcement contact with potential victims and increases victim isolation.

The ring leaders of trafficking networks are often located outside of France, leaving only the drivers or collection agents within French borders, and complicating law enforcement efforts. Traffickers encourage foreign victims, particularly from Nigeria, to claim asylum to obtain legal residency and facilitate further exploitation. Sex trafficking networks, controlled by Bulgarian, PRC nationals, French, Hungarian, Nigerian, Romanian, and South American traffickers, exploit women through debt bondage, physical force, and psychological coercion, including the invocation of voodoo and drug addiction. OCRTEH previously reported an increase in Latin American organized trafficking networks in France. Nigerian gangs associated with sex trafficking and linked to the Black Axe, Arobaga Vikings, the Maphite, and the Eiye syndicate continue to grow more sophisticated, organized, and violent, but authorities note the gangs have begun to branch out to other crimes and decreased their focus on human trafficking. PRC-national criminal networks also use as many as 400 massage parlors as fronts for the purchase of commercial sex, continuing to raise concerns about sex trafficking. Members of the LGBTQI+ community, especially from South America, are vulnerable to trafficking, and traffickers increasingly exploit transgender victims in sex trafficking. Refugees, predominantly women and children, fleeing Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine are vulnerable to trafficking. French citizens sometimes engage in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse abroad.

Labor trafficking most frequently occurs in domestic work, followed by construction, small commerce, agriculture, fishing, and livestock. Expansive criminal networks force children to commit crimes; most victims are from Romania and North Africa, many of whom are addicted to controlled substances. Seasonal migrant workers are vulnerable to labor trafficking while harvesting grapes for winemakers in the Champagne region and are often hired through subcontractors using fraudulent job descriptions and wages. Roma and unaccompanied children in France are vulnerable to forced begging and forced theft; Romani parents often exploit their children in these crimes. Traffickers exploit persons with intellectual disabilities in forced labor in agriculture and begging. The estimated 3,000 to 4,000 unaccompanied Comorian children on the island of Mayotte, a French department, remained at risk for trafficking. Protection services, such as medical, shelter, and education, are not available to unaccompanied children on Mayotte, exacerbating their risk. Increasingly, women from Madagascar travel without legal status to Mayotte, seeking economic opportunity; many of these individuals become involved in commercial sex and are highly vulnerable to sex trafficking. Government-affiliated Cuban medical professionals who worked in Martinique, a French department, during the COVID-19 pandemic may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.