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2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uganda

UGANDA: Tier 2 Watch List

The Government of Uganda does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included identifying more victims and signing the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking in Uganda (NRG). The government increased prosecutions of suspected traffickers and increased training to law enforcement personnel, investigated allegations of complicity in trafficking crimes, and created human trafficking officer positions within the Ugandan Police Force (UPF) and the Criminal Investigative Department (CID). The government increased awareness-raising campaigns and launched, funded, and implemented the National Action Plan for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Uganda 2019-2024 (NAP). However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity. The government did not report referring victims to care for the fifth consecutive year. For the seventh consecutive year, the government did not allocate resources to NGOs that provide protective services to victims. The government did not screen vulnerable populations abroad for indicators of human trafficking. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases and convicted fewer alleged perpetrators. The government suspended international labor recruitment for eight months, due to a lack of strong regulations for labor recruitment enterprises. Therefore Uganda remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implement the NRG to systematically identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care, including by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, such as women in commercial sex, migrants and Cuban medical professionals. • Increase efforts to complete judicial proceedings, while respecting due process and the rights of the accused. • Increase coordination between police investigators and prosecutors of trafficking crimes. • Expand protective services for victims, specifically through partnerships with NGOs, including by allocating resources. • While respecting due process of law, increase efforts to investigate trafficking cases and prosecute alleged traffickers, including allegations of official complicity in trafficking crimes. • Increase training for Ugandan embassy staff on assisting trafficking victims abroad, including victim identification, providing temporary shelter, or identifying local NGO shelters for victim referral, and facilitating the repatriation of victims. • Cease penalization of victims for unlawful acts their traffickers forced them to commit. • Where feasible, assign labor attachés to Ugandan embassies to monitor migrants abroad. • Further prioritize investigating and prosecuting traffickers who exploit children, especially from the Karamoja region, in forced begging and child sex trafficking in brothels. • Implement strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies and improve enforcement, including by continuing to investigate and prosecute those involved in fraudulent labor recruitment. • Increase bilateral negotiations with neighboring and destination country governments on migrant worker rights, including on the release and repatriation of Ugandan migrant workers exploited by employers abroad and on mutually enforceable standard contracts. • Proactively investigate and punish labor recruiters who fraudulently recruit Ugandans and eliminate all worker-paid recruitment fees. • Establish a unified system of documenting and collecting data on human trafficking cases. • Enact witness protection legislation and implement a systematic victim-witness support program. • Increase national awareness-raising efforts, specifically for teachers, parents, and community leaders. • Accede to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained mixed law enforcement efforts. The 2009 anti-trafficking act criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, and it 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 law also criminalized the use of a child in any armed conflict and prescribed penalties of up to the death penalty. The Children Amendment Act of 2016 conflicted with the 2009 anti-trafficking act in some

respects—for example, it defined child sex trafficking to require force, fraud, or coercion, which was inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, and it prescribed substantially lower penalties for the crime.

In 2020, the government reported investigating 214 incidents of human trafficking involving 154 suspects; of these incidents, 118 were internal, 93 transnational, and three unknown. This was a decrease compared with investigating 252 incidents (19 internal and 222 transnational) in 2019. During the reporting period, the government prosecuted 283 defendants for trafficking crimes in 202 cases; of these, 161 cases were domestic and 41 transnational; 140 were sex trafficking cases, 54 were labor trafficking cases, and eight were unknown; and 192 defendants were male, 44 female, 46 unknown, and one was a labor recruitment company. In 2019, the government prosecuted 73 cases involving 87 suspects in court. In 2020, courts convicted 11 traffickers under the anti-trafficking act in nine cases – six for sex trafficking and five for forced labor. This was a decrease compared to convicting 16 traffickers in 2019. Two traffickers received prison terms of seven years; one trafficker received a prison sentence of two years; one trafficker received a sentence of three years' imprisonment and a fine of 1 million Ugandan Shillings (UGX) (\$274); one trafficker received a sentence of 12 years' imprisonment; three defendants received sentences of two years' imprisonment each; and courts gave one trafficker the option of two years' imprisonment or a 2 million UGX fine (\$548). Courts had not yet sentenced two additional traffickers at the end of the reporting period. The penalties imposed in five of these convictions were not in line with the requirements of the penal code as they did not receive the adequate sentencing outlined by the code. The government reported 26 cases remained under inquiry and 129 remained pending in court at the end of the reporting season. A German national charged with multiple counts of human trafficking died in custody; the trafficking case remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Observers reported authorities were more likely to prosecute sex trafficking cases than forced labor cases. NGOs reported the government increased the number of human trafficking trainings to prosecutors.

The Coordination Office to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) was responsible for compiling law enforcement data; pandemic-related restrictions limited its ability to collect information from local governments. Authorities suspended court hearings and appearances in March 2020 due to COVID-19 risks and judicial activities did not fully resume until June 2020. NGOs reported court closures and delayed court hearings hindered the ability of judicial officials and prosecutors to remain in touch with victim witnesses waiting for cases to be tried. The government reported insufficient shelter space forced authorities to send victims home, making it difficult for them to provide testimony in court proceedings and consequently impeding completion of trials. CID reported a lack of interpreters also hindered completion of trafficking trials. An NGO reported authorities misreported child trafficking crimes as “defilement” cases. Nonetheless, NGOs reported closed borders allowed law enforcement to shift their focus from transnational to domestic trafficking cases.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. In June 2020, authorities charged an army officer with child sex trafficking after allegations arose that he abducted and sexually exploited a 16-year-old girl; the case remained pending at the end of the reporting period. In September 2020, an international organization launched an investigation into an allegation of the sexual exploitation of a female by an international organization's staff from the Karamoja region at a compound in Moroto. The international organization's investigation concluded the allegation was unsubstantiated. In 2019, the State House Anti-Corruption Unit launched an investigation following complaints of government officials' involvement in human trafficking; however, the government did not publish any reports or arrest officials by the end of the reporting period. In 2018, the government reported investigating security officers at Malaba Border and Entebbe Airport, as well as officials of the Civil Aviation Authority and Ground Handling Companies at Entebbe Airport, for alleged involvement in trafficking crimes; it did not report any updates on these cases, which remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Media and senior government officials reported high-level officials may have owned or been associated with some labor recruitment companies suspected of trafficking. An NGO in 2018 continued to report some complicit immigration officers at border crossings assisted traffickers, and several NGOs alleged some senior police officials in Kampala protected traffickers from arrest and prosecution.

In 2019, UPF announced the creation of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Department within the Criminal Investigation and Crime Intelligence Department; however, the new anti-trafficking department had yet to receive final approval at the end of the current reporting period. In the interim, the anti-trafficking department utilized CID Sexual and Children Offenses Department resources as a short-term solution to implement the department's efforts. In 2020, UPF created seven human trafficking officer positions and the CID established human trafficking desk officers at border posts and at the Entebbe International Airport. The government maintained a trafficking-specific desk in the Director of Public Prosecutions' office responsible for prosecuting trafficking crimes. The government, in partnership with an NGO, designated 136 Trafficking in Persons Focal Prosecutors across the country to gather and track human trafficking data. In response to the pandemic lockdown, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions created and implemented an electronic application to facilitate communication among 350 police and prosecutors and to share resources on effective methods for human trafficking investigations and prosecutions across the

country. The government, in partnership with an NGO, trained 82 police officers, 32 investigators, and 252 prosecutors in 16 regions, compared to zero in 2019. COPTIP reported the training curriculum for both new and experienced police and immigration officers incorporated modules on human trafficking; however, the government did not report how many officials received the training during the reporting period. Ugandan police and immigration officers continued to lack an understanding of the anti-trafficking law and may have misclassified cases or encouraged victims to accept financial compensation from traffickers in exchange for dropping their cases. Law enforcement officials did not always coordinate with the ODPP, frequently resulting in cases that did not proceed to prosecution or that courts dismissed, because the investigations were incomplete and did not comply with protocols for admissible evidence. The government collaborated with Burundi and Kenya to prosecute suspected traffickers; one case involved Karamojong girls exploited in Kenya, and a second case involved Burundian girls sexually exploited in Uganda.

PROTECTION

The government maintained mixed protection efforts. The government identified 666 victims in 2020 – 497 were transnational, 166 internal, and three unknown; 575 female, 88 male, and three unknown; 222 children and 441 adults, and three unknown. This compares with identifying 455 and 650 victims in 2019 and 2018, respectively. A majority of the identified victims were subjected to forced labor and most transnational cases were identified en route to Kenya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). Authorities reported a significant decrease in victims identified between April to September 2020 due to the government's suspension of internal and international transportation in response to the pandemic, which resulted in a reduced number of screenings for trafficking indicators at these border crossings. Authorities reported the number of victims identified increased in November and December as a result of reopening air travel and the resumption of international travel. An international organization reported identifying 20 Ugandan victims abroad. An NGO reported identifying 150 child labor and sex trafficking victims. Another NGO reported identifying 660 victims—301 female and 359 male—and providing rehabilitative assistance services to 91 victims—25 female and 66 male.

In July 2020, the government adopted the NRG but had not fully implemented it by the end of the reporting period. The NRG provided victim referral guidelines for stakeholders—including police, immigration officials, the prosecution unit, and NGOs—and described social services resources and recommendations for victim protection. Observers reported the NRG lacked identification guidance for vulnerable populations like women and children. The government continued to operate under the implementing regulations of the 2009 anti-trafficking act; these regulations outlined responsibilities for relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement, medical professionals, and civil society members, to combat trafficking.

For the fifth consecutive year, the government did not report how many victims it referred to care or directly assisted. An NGO reported providing shelter, educational, reintegration, and repatriation services to 86 victims. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship Control submitted draft victim identification and referral procedures to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) for review; the procedures remained pending at the end of the reporting period. The government reported a lack of short-term human trafficking shelters limited the ability to provide adequate protection services during raids and law enforcement operations. CID headquarters could only house 10 people at any given time, which was insufficient for the number of victims requiring assistance. Most shelters were located in the central and eastern parts of the country, limiting assistance to victims elsewhere. Authorities reported a lack of shelters, limited government vehicles, and intimidation from traffickers resulted in authorities dropping 75 percent of cases. Due to authorities' inability to place victims in shelters, many child trafficking victims exploited by their guardians were forced to return to live with them. The government did not report allocating resources to NGOs that provide protective services for human trafficking victims. The government continued to collaborate with NGOs to refer identified victims to care and with international organizations to provide the vast majority of victim services via referrals to NGO-operated shelters, which provided psychological counseling, medical treatment, family tracing, resettlement support, and vocational education without contributing in-kind or financial support. Victim care, although high-quality, remained inadequate in quantity, and available services were primarily for children and women, with few NGOs offering shelter for adult males. Adult victims had the option to enter or exit shelters on their own accord; however, law enforcement placed child victims in shelters and restricted their liberties for security and protection purposes. Once deemed secure by shelter staff, probation officers, or local officials, shelters reintegrated children into their home communities. The government reported continuing to fund the resettlement of street children identified by officials. The government reported training law enforcement and police officers on how to conduct child-friendly rescues of children from the street. The government reported difficulty referring victims to services due to the pandemic restrictions during the March to October 2020 lockdown. Due to the pandemic lockdown restrictions, law enforcement held child victims in police barracks, at police officers' homes, or at the homes of local government officials. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the government had difficulty providing food to victims. An NGO reported rotating shelter staff to reduce infection and staff difficulties commuting during lockdown and curfew hours; two of its shelters became quarantine centers for children,

further limiting the care available for trafficking victims. The government and NGOs reported an increase in demand for shelter services due to an increase in domestic trafficking cases and government enforced lockdown and movement restrictions.

The government reported insufficient funds and a lack of embassies in destination countries hindered its ability to repatriate and provide assistance to Ugandan victims identified abroad during the reporting period. Ugandan embassies registered workers, organized their travel documents, and provided ad hoc shelter and food services to identified victims; however, the government did not have sufficient resources to provide these services to all workers and victims. The government reported repatriating 12 girls from Kenya. The government collaborated with foreign governments, international organizations, and NGOs to repatriate 2,400 Ugandans in 2020 and reported an unknown number were victims of human trafficking; however, the government did not report screening or identifying any human trafficking victims among this population during the reporting period, compared with repatriating four trafficking victims in 2019 and 90 in 2018. An international organization repatriated 38 human trafficking victims from Saudi Arabia and additional NGOs provided services to victims abroad. NGOs reported providing services to repatriated victims as needed. The government did not report using a temporary shelter in UAE or an emergency fund in Saudi Arabia for distressed Ugandan nationals, including trafficking victims. In response to the continued abuse of migrant workers' rights abroad, the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies, a private sector entity, continued to employ a Labor Liaison Office in Saudi Arabia during the reporting period; however, some civil society members expressed concern about possible conflicts of interest between labor attachés and victim assistance due to the nature of the work since labor organizations are often represented by private businesses.

Judicial officers often encouraged trafficking victims to participate in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers to prevent the victimization of others, but some reports indicated that law enforcement's limited capacity and inadequate sensitivity in engaging trafficking victims discouraged many from cooperating in investigations. The absence of victim-witness protection legislation and a protection program hindered some investigations and prosecutions because perpetrators would threaten and blackmail victims and witnesses to discourage their participation in trials. Due to a lack of long-term shelters, victims exploited by their guardians returned to their exploitative situations before authorities completed trials. The government drafted policies that would provide cooperating victim-witnesses with assistance, support, and safety; however, the policies had yet to be finalized at the end of the reporting period. Generally, policies in High Court cases provided victims and witnesses with transportation, physical protection, shelter, interpretation services and legal counsel, but this was ad hoc and inconsistent in practice, and some reports indicated police would temporarily shelter cooperating victims in their homes. NGOs and international organizations reported providing psycho-social support to child victims to ensure protection during court proceedings and sometimes reintegrated victims into their home communities. Ugandan law permitted foreign trafficking victims to remain in Uganda during the investigation of their cases and to apply for residence and work permits, but the government did not report granting any victims such benefits during the reporting period. The law permitted victims to keep their identities anonymous by using voice distortion and video link facilities, but the practice had not yet been implemented at the end of the reporting period. The law allowed victims to file civil suits against the government or their alleged traffickers for restitution compensation; the government did not report courts ordering restitution or compensation during the reporting period.

While the 2009 anti-trafficking act prohibited the penalization of trafficking victims for unlawful acts their traffickers coerced them to commit, NGOs reported cases in which police pursued charges against victims who had used forged paperwork to escape their exploitative situations and cases where recruitment companies sued victims for their breach of contract. In prior years, observers reported police sometimes treated street children as criminals and arbitrarily arrested and detained them in detention facilities. During the reporting period, authorities reported screening 240 children from the streets of Kampala for human trafficking, of which 38 were Karamojong children, and sending 106 children to shelters where they received care and assistance and eventually were returned to their families, compared with 725 children identified and two referred to shelters in 2019. Many NGOs reported the government did not adequately address or prioritize internal trafficking of children from the Karamoja region, including forced begging and child sex trafficking in brothels.

PREVENTION

The government minimally increased prevention efforts. The National Task Force, led by the MIA Permanent Secretary, with COPTIP serving as its secretariat, continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. In July 2020, the government signed and launched the NAP; however, the NAP had yet to be fully implemented at the end of the reporting period. The government reported the NAP mandated that COPTIP should receive annual funding from parliament and complementary funding from government agencies. COPTIP received 168 million UGX (\$46,040) in 2020. COPTIP did not report its budget in 2019.

COPTIP continued to maintain authority to publish an annual report on government and non-government bodies' anti-trafficking efforts, which it published during the reporting period. COPTIP hired a data officer to improve data collection and analysis; however, the government and NGOs reported poor data collection hindered the government's efforts to plan and implement national efforts to combat human trafficking.

Previously, the Parliament passed the Kampala Child Protection Ordinance of 2019, which criminalized giving money, food, or clothing to children on the street; criminalized children loitering in public places, begging, soliciting, vending, or hawking; and banned the sale of alcohol and drugs to children. The law allowed authorities to fine offenders 40,000 UGX (\$10.96), sentence offenders to up to six months' imprisonment, or both. The solicitor general had yet to approve the ordinance by the end of the reporting period, inhibiting its implementation, though if enacted, it had the potential to facilitate the penalization of child trafficking victims. The government did not operate an anti-trafficking hotline during the reporting period; however, the government's child helpline identified 81 potential trafficking victims through calls in 2020. The government reported the hotline was non-operational for periods of time due to the pandemic.

Immigration officials continued to scrutinize travel documents, passports, and reasons for travel before clearing travelers to depart Uganda for work in foreign countries. The government continued to implement its ban on Ugandans traveling abroad to Oman due to ongoing reports of abuse and human trafficking. The government collaborated with the Kenyan government to draft a bilateral labor agreement; however, the agreement remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Uganda maintained two bilateral labor agreements, with Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and one memorandum of understanding with UAE; however, officials acknowledged the agreements with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE did not adequately protect Ugandan workers. The Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development (MGLSD) encouraged Ugandan workers to seek employment only in countries with which Uganda has labor agreements. In 2020, the government established Joint Implementation Committees to implement the bilateral labor agreements; however, pandemic-related travel restrictions limited the committees' activities. The government's external employment management system, which functioned as a "one stop" internet portal where Ugandans could search and apply for all pre-vetted overseas employment opportunities through licensed recruitment companies, remained operational at the end of the reporting period; however, the government reported processing a limited number of work orders due to the pandemic and did not clear any applicants to leave the country during the reporting period. The government reported a lack of labor attachés at embassies abroad significantly hindered the government's ability to monitor the possible labor exploitation of workers abroad.

The 2005 Employment Regulations required labor recruitment companies to register, undergo a thorough vetting process, and maintain a minimum bank deposit and a credit line, to ensure they could repatriate workers. The government reported vetting all labor requests received by local companies and all contracts executed between international employers and Ugandan businesses. The government suspended labor migration due to the pandemic in March 2020 and announced phased reintroduction of international labor recruitment, with the exception of domestic workers, in October 2020. In November 2020, MGLSD approved labor recruiters to begin recruiting domestic workers again. The government investigated and prosecuted one labor export and recruitment company during the reporting period. The government reported an increase in human trafficking amongst labor companies due to the inability of workers to find opportunities abroad. Authorities, the media, and NGOs reported government officials that owned labor companies were complicit in human trafficking. The government lacked worker protection provisions and did not prohibit employers, recruiters, and labor agents from charging worker recruitment fees, confiscating workers' passports or travel documents, switching contracts without workers' consent, or withholding wages as means of keeping workers in a state of compelled service; consequently migrant workers, specifically domestic workers, were vulnerable to traffickers. MGLSD, with financial and technical support from international organizations, reviewed migrant worker regulations and drafted a report with recommendations; however, the report remained under review by legal advisors at the end of the reporting period. MGLSD, in collaboration with an international organization, launched a new project to strengthen internal government mechanisms for safe labor migration, build capacity, develop a grievance reporting and referral tool, and develop ethical practices among labor recruitment companies. Authorities, NGOs, and the media reported government regulations remained insufficient to prevent human trafficking amongst fraudulent labor companies and labor recruitment. Corruption reportedly inhibited oversight of labor recruitment firms, as did insufficient staffing and funding of government oversight agencies and loopholes in the law. In 2018, the government reported unlicensed labor recruitment companies were responsible for trafficking more than 90 percent of the identified victims, although licensed labor recruitment companies were also reportedly involved. The government allowed legal placement fees of 50,000 UGX (\$13.70). In February 2020, the government announced all labor export companies must refund any fees in excess of this amount. The government did not report suspending any labor companies' licenses, excepting the suspension for all labor recruitment companies from March-October, compared with suspending six labor export companies for charging potential workers illegal registration and placement fees during the previous reporting period. MGLSD contracted private companies to conduct mandatory pre-departure training for domestic workers who were traveling to the Middle

East and utilizing registered labor recruitment companies. The weeklong residential training, paid for by the recruitment company, trained 60-70 women each week, including on domestic work, contract appreciation, understanding of the bilateral agreements, how to contact help, and worker rights. To mark World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the government conducted two awareness raising campaigns via Kampala radio stations discussing methods to reduce human trafficking and partnered with international organizations to share human trafficking awareness newspaper articles and television broadcasts. The government, in collaboration with NGOs, also hosted public sensitization campaigns via newspapers, radio, television, and social media that focused on human trafficking trends, safe migration, and protection of vulnerable children. As mandated by the 2015 Registration of Persons Act, the government continued to register its citizens and provide them with national identification numbers. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government reported an increase in demand for commercial sex due to the pandemic lockdown and restricted movement; law enforcement reported a shift in commercial sex from bars and brothels to residential homes. 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. Ugandan children as young as seven are exploited in forced labor in agriculture, fishing, forestry, cattle herding, mining, stone quarrying, brick making, carpentry, steel manufacturing, street vending, bars, restaurants, gold mining, and domestic service. Traffickers exploit children in commercial sex. Women, children, internally displaced persons, and migrants may have been victims of forced labor or sex trafficking, and Cuban medical personnel working in Uganda may have been forced to work by the Cuban government. The pandemic and the government's lockdown measures, including closure of international airports and land borders, a curfew, restrictions on travel, restricted movement between districts, and closure of all schools, workplaces, and government offices, shifted trafficking trends. Authorities and NGOs reported the closure of international airports and land borders decreased international trafficking due to migrant workers unable to get to their destination; at the same time, domestic trafficking, including child sex trafficking increased. In 2020, Kenyan authorities identified Ugandan victims en route to Nairobi.

Recruiters target girls and women aged 13-24 years for domestic sex trafficking, especially near sports tournaments and road construction projects. In 2018, an international organization estimated there are between 7,000 and 12,000 children exploited in sex trafficking in Uganda. An international organization and an NGO reported most internal trafficking victims are Ugandans, many of whom are from the northeastern and eastern region, specifically Karamojong children whom traffickers exploit in forced begging and commercial sex in brothels. In 2020, the government and civil society reported traffickers sold children from Karamoja at markets in the eastern region for 20,000-50,000 UGX (\$5.48- \$13.70); traffickers exploited them in forced labor as beggars, domestic workers, and in commercial sex. Consequently, in 2021, NGOs reported traffickers adjusted their methods to avoid apprehension and had children travel alone to meet traffickers in other towns or at international borders, where they organized the markets. In 2020, researchers reported an increase in child labor in the sugarcane industry. In 2019, an NGO reported local authorities' efforts to remove domestic child trafficking victims from the streets caused children to move to work as vendors in markets where they are vulnerable to exploitation. In prior years, researchers reported there were approximately 3,800 children living on the streets of Kampala and three other major towns and an additional 11,700 children working on the streets but sleeping elsewhere. Reportedly, traffickers, called "elders," force some street children to beg and exploit girls in commercial sex. The "elders" are a well-organized network of traffickers; NGOs alleged complicit officials allow the practice to continue. A local organization reported traffickers required parents in the Acholi subregion in northern Uganda to have their children work on farms to repay debts. In 2018, an NGO alleged traffickers recruited children from Napak district, northeastern Uganda, and then sold them as domestic workers for 20,000 UGX (\$5.48). Media reported some parents sell their children to traffickers who resell the children for approximately 30,000 UGX (\$8.22). In 2018, an international organization reported separating four Ugandan children from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In 2018, observers reported the government detained and placed on bond some trafficking victims, including children, in an attempt to compel them to cooperate with and periodically report to law enforcement in support of criminal investigations. In 2017, child trafficking victims in need of immediate shelter often stayed at police stations, sometimes sleeping in impounded vehicles, or at a juvenile detention center while awaiting placement in more formal shelters.

Traffickers compel some children from Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and South Sudan into forced agricultural labor and sex trafficking in Uganda. South Sudanese children in refugee settlements in northern Uganda are at risk of trafficking. In 2017, individuals from Rwanda and Somalia, including a Somali refugee from Nakivale Refugee Settlement, were victims of internal trafficking. In 2018, there were several media reports of alleged complicity of police officers in the sex trafficking of child and female refugees.

Young women remained the most at risk for transnational trafficking, usually seeking employment as domestic workers in Kenya and the Middle East; at times traffickers fraudulently recruited Ugandan women for employment and then exploited them in sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ugandans in forced labor and sex trafficking in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. In 2020, victims from Burundi, Kenya, and South Sudan transited Uganda en route to other countries, notably, the Middle East. In 2020, school closures and financial struggles of caregivers increased the vulnerability of children to human trafficking, specifically child sex trafficking, during the pandemic lockdown. The pandemic increased child sacrifice—a human trafficking crime delineated under the Ugandan anti-trafficking law. In 2019, media reported traffickers sold girls from markets in Katakwi district and transported the girls to Nairobi where they were exploited as domestic workers; some of the girls worked for Somali immigrants in Nairobi and were further transported to Somalia where they were exploited by the Al Shabab terrorist group. In 2018, media and government officials alleged Ugandan girls were being sold in a “slave market” in the UAE.

Extremely high labor recruitment fees sometimes led to situations of debt bondage. To circumvent the government ban on migrant work in Oman, some licensed and unlicensed agencies send Ugandans through Kenya and Tanzania. Official complicity may have hindered government oversight of labor recruitment agencies. In 2018, COPTIP reported that traffickers appear to be increasingly organized and some may have formed regional trafficking networks. The government and an NGO reported an increase in victims with university degrees as traffickers target graduates with the promise of skilled jobs abroad. The government and NGOs reported cases involving victims that were recruited by licensed companies in which victims paid high administrative fees based on promised high-paid jobs abroad; however, upon arrival, they found themselves locked into contracts in low-paid domestic work. Traffickers used local radio to announce fraudulent job opportunities in Kampala to target children and young people to lure them into exploitative situations. NGOs reported that traffickers are frequently relatives or friends of victims or may pose as wealthy women or labor recruiters promising vulnerable Ugandans, frequently from rural areas, well-paid jobs abroad or in Uganda’s metropolitan areas. Reportedly, pastors, imams, and local leaders at churches and mosques in Uganda have also assisted in the recruitment of domestic workers abroad, mostly for Middle Eastern countries; these leaders encourage female domestic workers to take these jobs and in turn, receive a fee per worker from recruiters. Some traffickers threatened to harm the victims’ family or confiscated travel documents. In 2020, due to a government ordinance that penalizes giving food and money to child beggars, traffickers moved children from the streets to work in markets instead.

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