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2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Egypt

EGYPT: Tier 2

The Government of Egypt 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 to the previous reporting period; therefore Egypt remained on Tier 2. The government identified more victims through the national anti-trafficking hotline, it updated, implemented, and identified points of contact to better implement the National Victim Referral Mechanism, and it signed an interagency protocol to establish a shelter for trafficking victims. The government continued to prosecute and convict alleged traffickers, and the National Coordinating Committee on Preventing and Combating Illegal Migration (NCCPIM & TIP) continued to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking efforts. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not report referring or assisting the large majority of trafficking victims it identified during the reporting period. The government remained without effective victim identification and referral procedures; as a result, authorities may have penalized identified and unidentified victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration violations. As in the previous reporting period, the government continued to lack appropriate protection services, including shelters, for victims of all forms of trafficking, and it did not provide in-kind support or funding to civil society organizations that provided essential victim care.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement country-wide procedures and guidelines for law enforcement, judicial, and other relevant officials to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care. • Provide protection services to victims of all forms of trafficking, including dedicated shelters, and allocate adequate resources for these services. • Ensure trafficking victims are not treated as criminals for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration violations. • Increase and track investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of sex and labor trafficking, and punish offenders—including complicit officials and child sex tourists—with sufficiently stringent sentences. • Continue to use the specialized trafficking courts and train judicial officials in these courts on the anti-trafficking law and utilizing a victim-centered approach for the treatment of victims and witnesses of trafficking crimes during investigations and court proceedings. • Continue training for all government officials, including police, security officials, judges, prosecutors, and social workers, on implementation of the

anti-trafficking law, victim identification techniques, and victim referral procedures. • Increase efforts to address and reduce the demand for “summer marriages” and commercial sex acts. • Provide a clear legal basis for NGOs to provide services to trafficking victims and populations vulnerable to human trafficking. • Amend the labor law to include labor protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers. • Increase funding and staffing for NCCPIM & TIP to better lead national anti-trafficking efforts. • Improve data collection for human trafficking cases and disaggregate sex, labor, and other forms of trafficking. • Continue ongoing nationwide awareness campaigns.

PROSECUTION

The government demonstrated mixed prosecution efforts. The 2010 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties from three to 15 years’ imprisonment and fines, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. During the reporting period, the government investigated 78 cases of alleged human trafficking crimes, 21 of which were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The 78 investigations represented an increase from 23 in 2017. At the end of 2018, the government referred 44 cases for prosecution involving 60 total alleged perpetrators charged for sex trafficking and child trafficking that involved child marriage, but it did not provide the details of these cases. This compared to the previous reporting period during which the government referred 41 cases for prosecution but did not provide case details. The government reported it secured convictions in 11 trafficking cases in 2018, in comparison to three traffickers convicted in 2017 who received sentences of four to ten years’ imprisonment. In March 2019, the media reported the government convicted 40 individuals, including a government official, for sexual exploitation and smuggling of migrant children; these perpetrators reportedly received sentences of three to 16 years’ imprisonment. NGOs reported that local police, security services, and other governmental personnel continued to lack an understanding of trafficking. Although the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) maintained 27 judges in eight specialized chambers in the courts of appeal in three governorates to prosecute human trafficking cases, NGOs reported these courts were not fully utilized during the reporting period and the MOJ did not share detailed information on the resources, staffing, or responsibilities of these courts.

Although the government had legal guidelines for evidence collection, prosecution of trafficking cases, and victim protection, relevant authorities did not fully implement the guidelines during the reporting period and continued to cooperate with an international organization to update them. In 2018, the NCCPIM & TIP and other governmental agencies—in cooperation with international organizations—provided several trainings to hundreds of police officers, judges, prosecutors, social workers, and civil society representatives. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) continued to include anti-trafficking educational materials as a part of its annual trainings and curriculum for new police officers. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense also included anti-trafficking modules in basic trainings for officials.

PROTECTION

The government maintained weak victim identification and protection efforts. The government remained without an effective victim identification and referral system; however, NCCPIM & TIP updated, disseminated, and identified specific points of contact to better implement the national victim referral mechanism during the reporting period. The government did not report referring or assisting the large majority of trafficking victims it identified during the reporting period. The government's anti-trafficking hotline identified 42 potential child trafficking victims, which represented a slight increase from 33 potential victims identified by the hotline in the prior reporting period; however, the government did not report referral of these 42 potential victims to protection services. The government identified 13 trafficking victims during a law enforcement investigation and referred them to protection services. However, ineffective victim identification and referral procedures and policies may have contributed to authorities punishing or penalizing identified and unidentified victims for illegal acts such as immigration violations. For example, while the government waived all visa overstay fees for refugees and asylum-seekers, there was no exemption for trafficking victims. Therefore authorities may have arrested and deported some identified and unidentified victims for illegal immigration or unauthorized employment violations.

The government's provision of appropriate protection services to victims of all forms of trafficking remained weak. The government remained without shelter or other essential rehabilitative services specifically dedicated to the needs of trafficking victims. Thirty-three government-run shelters for other vulnerable populations were reportedly available to adult and child trafficking victims, some of which could serve foreign victims; however, observers reported that shelter services were poor and some were reluctant to place victims in those shelters due to safety concerns and fear of re-traumatizing the victim due to lack of staff training and inadequate assistance available. In October 2018, the government signed an interagency protocol to establish a shelter for Egyptian female and child trafficking victims and requested funding for such a shelter, scheduled to open in 2020. The shelter would not be available for foreign trafficking victims, despite recommendations from civil society to allow foreign victims care at this shelter. The Ministry of Social Solidarity continued to operate 17 mobile units that provided legal, medical, psychological, and social services to street children, a population highly vulnerable to trafficking; in 2018, the units assisted 14,671 children, but the government did not report if the units identified or referred to protection services any potential child trafficking victims among this population. An NGO—in partnership with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM)—reportedly operated a daytime center for the rehabilitation of trafficking victims, but the government did not report if any trafficking victims received care at this center. The government continued to rely on international and civil society organizations to provide and fund victim assistance, but it did not—in turn—provide financial assistance to these organizations, which affected their ability to offer protective services to victims. Moreover, Egypt's Law on Non Governmental Organizations hindered legal approvals and registrations for NGOs operating in Egypt, thereby impeding their efforts to provide essential services to victims.

The anti-trafficking law guaranteed protection of witnesses of trafficking crimes. NCCPIM & TIP reported the MOI allowed foreign trafficking victims residency status, but it did not report providing this status to any victims during the reporting period. During the reporting period, Egyptian authorities coordinated with the Embassy of the Republic of the Congo (ROC) to assist a Beninese child trafficking victim to return home to the ROC. During the reporting period, the government reported the Egyptian embassy in Beirut, Lebanon assisted an unknown number of Egyptian nationals, who were fraudulently recruited and falsely promised employment by a recruitment agency in Lebanon leaving them vulnerable to trafficking. The embassy helped some of them find jobs or assisted in legalizing their status in Lebanon, while the Lebanese government deported some of them back to Egypt; the government did not report if any of those that were deported received reintegration assistance or other social services upon their return to Egypt.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. Lack of financial resources in the government budget remained a significant impediment to implementation of anti-trafficking programs, including prevention efforts. NCCPIM & TIP continued to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking efforts throughout the reporting period; however, NGOs reported NCCPIM & TIP was not fully staffed with trafficking experts, which hindered its ability to lead national anti-trafficking efforts or provide appropriate training for police, judicial officials, and prosecutors. The government reportedly continued to implement and update the 2016-2021 National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons, but the government did not report specific efforts to do so or information on the resources allocated for implementation of the plan. During the reporting period, President Sisi publicly acknowledged the importance of prioritizing the fight against trafficking, and NCCPIM & TIP cooperated with African Union (AU) member states to increase cooperation on human trafficking issues during and after Egypt's presidency of the AU. In December 2018, the NCCPIM & TIP developed a map that identified the governorates and districts in Egypt where trafficking was most prevalent based on prosecution data and complaints reported by the anti-trafficking hotline; NCCPIM & TIP used this map to target training and awareness campaigns. The government conducted multiple awareness raising activities during the reporting period. For example, NCCPIM & TIP distributed anti-trafficking informational booklets to migrant laborers and all Egyptian embassies and diplomats abroad. NCCPIM & TIP and the National Council of Women conducted a media campaign about the treatment of domestic workers, a population vulnerable to trafficking. NCCPIM & TIP—in partnership with international organizations and donors—conducted an awareness campaign on the dangers of illegal migration, but it was unclear if it directly addressed human trafficking issues. The Administrative Control Authority, which investigated official corruption, elevated its involvement in combatting trafficking and highlighted its role in trafficking investigations in promotional material. The government provided Egyptian diplomats guidelines on human trafficking and the protection of victims, as well as human rights training that included anti-trafficking guidance in their pre-departure courses. As reported in the previous reporting period, the government provided mandatory anti-trafficking training

to Egyptian nationals deployed abroad as part of peacekeeping missions. NCCM continued to operate an anti-trafficking hotline to receive reports about potential human trafficking cases and upgraded the hotline in May 2018, allowing it to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and added a capacity-building program for the hotline agents to better handle child trafficking cases. The National Council for Women also continued to operate a hotline that received reports of potential trafficking crimes.

The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, but it reported that it began to develop a strategy to stop forged marriage contracts in order to reduce the incidents of “summer marriages” of girls by foreign tourists for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The government continued efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor. During the reporting period, the government issued 6,663 formal warnings for labor violations and filed 602 violation reports. Concerning Egyptian nationals employed abroad, the government reported it investigated 139 labor complaints, inspected 817 recruitment agencies, and filed 155 reports of labor violations. In the absence of labor law protections for domestic workers, authorities implemented a labor contract—approved in February 2018—that employers could choose to use, which offered some protections for Egyptian domestic workers, but it did not provide protections for foreign domestic workers.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Egypt, and traffickers exploit victims from Egypt abroad. Egyptian children are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service, street begging, drug trafficking, and agricultural work. Traffickers, including some parents, force Egyptian children to beg in the streets of Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria or exploit girls in sex trafficking. NGOs reported lack of economic and educational opportunities are risk factors for parents to exploit their children, especially girls. Child sex tourism occurs primarily in Cairo, Alexandria, and Luxor. Individuals from the Arabian Gulf, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates purchase Egyptian women and girls for “temporary” or “summer marriages” for the purpose of commercial sex, including cases of sex trafficking, as well as forced labor; these arrangements are often facilitated by the victims’ parents and marriage brokers, who profit from the transaction. Traffickers subject Egyptian men to forced labor in construction, agriculture, and low-paying service jobs in neighboring countries.

Traffickers subject men and women from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa to forced labor in domestic service, construction, cleaning, and begging. In 2017, observers reported an increase in West African migrant trafficking victims, although it was unclear if this was the result of increased victim identification or an actual increase in numbers. Foreign domestic workers—who are not covered under Egyptian labor laws—from Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka are highly vulnerable to forced labor, experiencing excessive working hours, confiscation of passports, withheld wages, denial of food and medical care, and physical and psychological abuse. Traffickers subject women and girls, including refugees and migrants, from Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East to sex trafficking in Egypt.

In 2018, an international organization reported a new trend of Colombian nationals who are smuggled into Egypt to work in the entertainment industry; these individuals may be vulnerable to sex trafficking. Syrian refugees who have settled in Egypt remain increasingly vulnerable to exploitation, including forced child labor, sex trafficking, and transactional marriages of girls—which can lead to sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking, and forced labor. Irregular migrants and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa, who transit Egypt en route to Europe, are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation along this migration route.

From 2007 to 2017, criminal groups in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula subjected thousands of African migrants to forced labor and sexual servitude, smuggling, abduction, and extortion. According to victim testimonies collected by an Israeli NGO, between November 2015 and April 2016, Bedouin groups forced approximately 61 Sudanese asylum-seekers to work in agriculture, tree lumbering, and marijuana growing; these groups physically abused the victims, including beatings and deprivation of food and water, and extorted money from them for their release. International organizations based in Egypt observed the flow of migrants into the Sinai declined substantially in 2015, due in part to Egyptian military operations, and Israeli NGOs reported the flow of African migrants arriving in Israel from the Sinai stopped in 2017.

ecoi.net summary:

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