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2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria

NIGERIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Nigeria does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Nigeria remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting more trafficking crimes and convicting more traffickers. The government identified and referred more trafficking victims to services and increased funding for victim protection and prevention efforts. The government continued robust awareness-raising efforts, and it partnered with an international organization to publish two comprehensive surveys on child and forced labor. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims among vulnerable populations – especially women and children allegedly associated with non-state armed groups, IDPs, and children exploited in begging and domestic work – were inadequate. Due to insufficient screening efforts, the federal and Borno State governments did not take effective measures to prevent the re-victimization or inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including among women and girls allegedly associated with Boko Haram. In some cases, authorities detained or returned victims to their Boko Haram husbands and traffickers. Corruption involving trafficking crimes, including among law enforcement officials and the judiciary, remained significant concerns and contributed to impunity for traffickers. The quantity and quality of shelter services, especially for men, were insufficient.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Investigate credible allegations of official complicity in human trafficking and hold complicit officials criminally accountable through prosecution and conviction.
- Increase efforts to implement and train front-line officials on the SOPs and national referral mechanism (NRM) to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as IDPs, women and children allegedly associated with non-state armed groups, children in religious schools, labor migrants, returning migrants, women in commercial sex, and children in domestic service, and refer all trafficking victims to services.
- In collaboration with Borno State officials and international organizations, develop and implement a screening and protection mechanism for women and girls allegedly associated with non-state armed groups, including trafficking victims, and provide sufficient psycho-social support to all identified victims and prioritize their reintegration.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes – especially labor trafficking – and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Increase training for local, state, and federal judges on the 2015 anti-trafficking law and procedures for transferring trafficking cases to the High Courts.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- In coordination with international organizations, continue implementing the handover protocol on children associated with non-state armed groups and train security forces and other front-line officials on handover procedures.
- Ensure a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to the provision of assistance for all victims identified regardless of participation in criminal proceedings.
- Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Nigerian victims abroad by investigating and prosecuting fraudulent labor recruiters, prohibiting worker-paid recruitment fees, and

- raising public awareness of fraudulent recruitment.
- Strengthen the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons' (NAPTIP's) ability to fully execute its mandate, including by increasing its dedicated funding, personnel, and resources, expanding coordination with the state task forces, and appointing a NAPTIP Board as called for in the 2015 anti-trafficking law.
- Fund and implement the victims' trust fund, as called for in the 2015 anti-trafficking law, to increase victims' access to financial and reintegration support.
- Increase public awareness campaigns in rural communities on all forms of trafficking, especially internal trafficking, in collaboration with civil society.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts.

The Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPLEAA), as amended in 2015, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed a minimum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a fine of 250,000 naira (\$160) for both sex and labor trafficking; the minimum penalty for sex trafficking involving a child was seven years' imprisonment and a fine of one million naira (\$650). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping.

The government reported initiating investigations of 744 cases (293 sex trafficking cases, 203 labor trafficking cases, and 248 cases of unspecified forms of trafficking), compared with 698 investigations in 2023. The government initiated prosecutions of 71 alleged traffickers (33 for sex trafficking, six for labor trafficking, and 32 for unspecified forms of trafficking), and courts convicted 49 traffickers (32 for sex trafficking, five for labor trafficking, and 12 for unspecified forms of trafficking) under the 2015 TIPLEAA. This compared with initiating prosecutions of 48 alleged traffickers and convicting 24 traffickers in 2023. Unlike previous years, the government reported comprehensive sentencing data. Courts issued sentences ranging from one to 15 years' imprisonment. Government data may have included crimes outside the international definition of trafficking.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes, including among designated officials with responsibilities to combat human trafficking, remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action and perpetuating impunity for trafficking crimes. The government initiated prosecution of one National Immigration Services (NIS) official for sex trafficking crimes, compared with prosecuting and convicting three complicit officials during the previous year. Prosecutions of one Civilian Joint Task Force member for alleged sex trafficking remained pending. During the previous reporting period, NAPTIP fired five staff members, including a deputy director, and demoted three staff members for complicity in trafficking crimes, including soliciting bribes and leaking confidential information to trafficking suspects; however, the government did not report initiating any prosecutions of the officials. Observers reported some law enforcement, military, and other government officials reportedly committed trafficking crimes, accepted bribes to facilitate trafficking, or obstructed justice by interfering with investigations. Endemic judicial corruption impeded prosecutions and convictions of most crimes, including human trafficking. Observers previously reported some security officers sexually abused and exploited IDPs, including children, in and around Maiduguri (the Borno State capital).

NAPTIP investigators and prosecutors in 10 zonal command offices, including its Abuja headquarters, were responsible for investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases. Each NAPTIP zonal office had one prosecutor assigned to six or seven states. The High Courts had jurisdiction over trafficking cases; however, in practice, cases were sometimes tried in state courts, which heard lower-level or misdemeanor crimes. Local judges did not have the same standardized training requirements as federal and state judges, which contributed to corruption and misapplication of the law. Illegal activities of non-state armed groups hindered law enforcement efforts, especially in northern Nigeria.

The government, in collaboration with foreign donors and civil society, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officials, security forces, and service providers. Observers reported law enforcement investigators required additional resources and training on investigative techniques, cybercrime, and financial crimes. The government did not report holding any anti-trafficking trainings for prosecutors or judges, and observers reported a lack of judicial training and awareness of the anti-trafficking law impeded prosecutions. NAPTIP's Judicial Research Center in Abuja provided NAPTIP officers access to resources to strengthen trafficking cases and support prosecution efforts. NAPTIP also maintained a Cybercrime Response Team and a Joint Task Force on Cybercrimes with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the National Police Force Cyber Crime Center. The government had extensive law enforcement partnerships with foreign counterparts in African and European countries, including through INTERPOL, mutual legal assistance requests, MOUs, and bilateral agreements to investigate and prevent human trafficking. The Nigerian-UK Joint Border Task Force carried out international operations focused on disrupting, identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting members of organized crime groups within Nigeria and abroad, including for trafficking crimes.

PROTECTION

The government maintained mixed protection efforts.

The government identified and provided services to 2,058 trafficking victims, including 1,076 sex trafficking victims, 508 labor trafficking victims, and 474 victims where the form of trafficking was unspecified; this compared with identifying and referring to services 1,194 trafficking victims the previous year. Of the 2,058 victims, 812 were women, 768 were girls, 302 were boys, and 176 were men. NGOs also identified an additional 163 victims. The government and partner NGOs provided services to all identified victims.

The government maintained SOPs on victim identification and protection for front-line officials. The NRM provided formal guidelines for law enforcement, immigration officials, and service providers to refer victims to care, including victims with disabilities and in conflict situations. The government continued training front-line officials on the SOPs and NRM. However, observers reported many front-line officials, including law enforcement and security officials, lacked training to appropriately screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators. The government worked in partnership with the Network of Civil Society Organizations Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labor to ensure appropriate referral of victims. The National Policy for Protection and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking provided victim protection and care guidelines; the government also had a disability inclusion plan to better serve victims living with disabilities. NAPTIP's Protocol for Identification, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons provided formal procedures for authorities assisting victims exploited abroad upon identification and during and after repatriation. NIS officers screened departing and returning labor migrants at the airport for trafficking indicators, and the agency worked closely with NAPTIP and an international organization when it identified cases. The government allocated more than 128 million naira (\$83,115) for victim protection and assistance, a significant increase compared with allocating 50.8 million naira (\$32,990) the previous year.

NAPTIP operated 14 shelters across its 10 zonal commands, which provided services to 2,058 victims, primarily women and children. There was only one dedicated NGO shelter for adult male victims; as a result, NAPTIP shelters sometimes accommodated men. The government provided legal, medical, psycho-social, family reunification, and vocational services to victims in its shelters. The shelters could accommodate Nigerian trafficking victims exploited abroad upon their repatriation. Due to security concerns, NAPTIP typically placed victims choosing to participate in law enforcement proceeding against traffickers in its shelters for up to six weeks to conduct an initial investigation before referring them to partner NGO shelters for services; victims who did not face safety concerns could be placed directly with NGO shelters. NAPTIP's shelters did not permit shelter residents freedom of movement, including for children to continue attending school; however, the shelters provided basic education services. Observers reported NAPTIP shelters

lacked adequate resources, and its closed shelter policy, while intended to ensure victims' safety, limited the assistance available; additionally, observers reported the shelters lacked sufficient victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches to care. Additionally, NAPTIP sometimes detained suspects in the same compound as its shelters due to lack of space; as a result, victims and traffickers were sometimes brought together. Officials referred victims who did not wish to participate in law enforcement proceedings directly to Ministry of Women-operated shelters for domestic violence victims or NGO partner shelters for services. Additional government and NGO shelters provided services, including long-term shelter, to child victims; authorities sometimes placed child trafficking victims in foster homes. Observers reported a lack of adequate reintegration support increased victims' vulnerability to re-trafficking. NAPTIP continued implementing minimum standards and guidelines for service providers rendering assistance to trafficking victims, which included licensing and reporting requirements.

The government provided victim-witnesses assistance, including security, victim advocates, temporary immigration relief, and travel and lodging. It also provided victims a six-week recovery and reflection period to decide whether to cooperate with law enforcement proceedings. Victims were able to testify in the judges' private chambers to protect their privacy and safety, and courts sometimes used video testimony. NAPTIP, in collaboration with an international organization, the MOJ, and NGOs, ran legal hubs in Edo, Delta, and Lagos states, intended to improve victims' access to justice through legal aid counseling and representation in court. Several Nigerian embassies, particularly within West Africa, provided funding or in-kind support to repatriate Nigerian trafficking victims exploited abroad, and the government continued coordinating repatriation efforts with foreign governments and an international organization. Foreign victims had the same access to services as Nigerian victims. The government did not have a formal policy to prevent the removal of victims to countries where they would face hardship or retribution, but it could grant temporary residence visas to trafficking victims who had a pending criminal, civil, or other legal action; the government did not report if any foreign victims requested this relief. The 2015 anti-trafficking law established the victims' trust fund, financed primarily through confiscated assets of convicted traffickers; however, the government did not report utilizing the fund to support victims, and observers reported it was not operational. The anti-trafficking law provided for victim restitution and courts awarded restitution in two cases. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but the government did not report whether any victims did so.

NAPTIP continued to partner with an international organization and a foreign donor to implement a screening and sensitization campaign to identify sex trafficking victims in IDP camps. Additionally, NAPTIP officials coordinated with the Ministry of Defense's zonal commanders on protection issues pertaining to IDP camps by funding social workers and raising awareness of the crime among camp residents. The government reported identifying seven potential trafficking victims in IDP camps compared with nine potential victims identified in the previous reporting period. Directed by the governor, the Borno State government continued closing IDP camps and returning IDPs to communities that lacked basic services and were inaccessible to humanitarian actors due to government restrictions and insecurity; observers previously reported the camp closures resulted in an increase of human trafficking cases. Many IDPs who did not return to their communities lived in informal IDPs camps in Maiduguri, where they were vulnerable to human trafficking and other crimes. The state government also repatriated Nigerian refugees from Chad and returned them to insecure communities without providing adequate repatriation or reintegration support, increasing vulnerability to trafficking.

The anti-trafficking law prohibited the penalization of trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including association with non-state armed groups. However, observers reported the government arrested and, in some cases, inappropriately detained for prolonged periods women and children removed from or allegedly associated with Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA), including trafficking victims. The government, in collaboration with an international organization, continued implementing a handover protocol on the transfer of children allegedly associated with non-state armed groups, and officials reported transferring at least 743 children to protection actors in 2024. However, the government continued detaining children whom authorities suspected of being associated with Boko Haram or ISIS-WA, including potential trafficking victims. Under a separate program, Borno State authorities provided

demobilization and reintegration services to combatants formerly associated with ISIS West Africa and Boko Haram who turned themselves in; although officials separated unaccompanied children, they returned some girls and young women who had been forcibly married to fighters, including trafficking victims, and their children to their husbands in the centers, increasing the likelihood of re-trafficking. Observers reported there was no formal reintegration program for girls and women allegedly associated with Boko Haram, including trafficking victims. Civil society reported the government did not screen these women and girls for indicators of human trafficking, nor did they provide them with psycho-social support before being questioned by security officers. Observers reported the government sometimes used the girls, including trafficking victims, as a bargaining chip in convincing Boko Haram fighters to surrender in exchange for remaining with their wives. One NGO report highlighted two cases in which sharia courts fined girls who had escaped Boko Haram for refusing to return to their husbands to whom they had been forcibly married.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking.

NAPTIP continued to lead the federal government's efforts to combat trafficking, and it convened regularly. However, observers reported NAPTIP lacked sufficient resources to fully execute its broad mandate. The anti-trafficking law called for a NAPTIP board, including two civil society representatives; however, the government has never appointed a board. The government continued implementing its 2022-2026 NAP, and it allocated 58.8 million naira (\$38,180) for prevention activities, including the NAP's implementation. This compared with allocating 47.8 million naira (\$31,040) for prevention activities the previous year. Anti-trafficking task forces in 23 states coordinated local anti-trafficking efforts in collaboration with NATPTIP. The government's national, 24-hour anti-trafficking hotline received more than 100 calls and referred 66 potential victims to services.

NAPTIP continued conducting national and state-level awareness raising campaigns, including in town meetings, schools, market places, religious centers, and airports, and it had a dedicated public outreach department to coordinate public awareness efforts. It also conducted a monthly social media program to discuss trafficking topics with targeted audiences. Awareness campaigns were conducted in all three major Nigerian languages and used print, electronic, and social media. Some policy documents were available in braille. The government had all campaign materials reviewed by trafficking experts, including survivors, and it employed survivors in key anti-trafficking positions. However, stakeholders noted these campaigns did not reach rural communities, and internal trafficking, especially child domestic servitude and forced begging, was often misperceived as a cultural practice rather than a trafficking crime. The National Bureau of Statistics worked with an international organization to publish two comprehensive surveys and analysis on forced labor and child labor in Nigeria. The forced labor survey estimated more than 617,00 adults are exploited in forced labor, with highest prevalence in the agriculture and service sectors. The Ministry of Education's Almajiri and Out-of-School Children Education Commission provided support to children in Quranic schools; however, the government did not regulate Quranic schools to prevent child forced begging or abuse.

The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOL) provided specialized training on child labor and human trafficking to all labor inspectors, and it had dedicated child labor and trafficking units; inspectors referred potential trafficking cases to NAPTIP. The MOL conducted 7,610 labor inspections, found 11 violations of child labor laws, and referred five children to social services. This was a significant decrease compared with conducting 17,068 inspections, identifying 453 violations of child labor laws, and referring 14 children to social services during the previous reporting period. Observers reported a need for additional training for inspectors on providing trauma-informed victim support. The MOL collaborated with the NIS to increase access to identity documentation for foreign workers. The government regulated private employment agencies and had a licensing requirement for labor recruiters, including sports recruiters. However, both informal and registered recruitment agents continued fraudulently recruiting and exploiting victims; despite

reporting that such practices remained prevalent, officials did not report initiating any investigations into fraudulent recruitment or revoking any licenses for exploitative recruitment practices. The government did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. The government maintained bilateral labor agreements with foreign governments, which included protections for migrant workers; however, observers reported it did not consistently implement or enforce the agreements. The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel during the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Nigeria, and traffickers exploit victims from Nigeria abroad. Internal trafficking is more prevalent, with Nigerian traffickers commonly recruiting victims from rural areas, for exploitation in sex trafficking and forced labor in cities. However, authorities identified Nigerian trafficking victims – often exploited by Nigerian traffickers – in countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Traffickers exploit children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including in granite quarries and artisanal mines, domestic work, begging, street vending, textile manufacturing, and agriculture. Traffickers exploit adults and children in forced labor on cocoa farms. Impoverished families send children as young as 5 years old to work as domestic workers, sometimes through labor brokers, for better access to education and economic opportunities; some traffickers exploit the children in domestic servitude and subject them to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Some corrupt Quranic school teachers (“mallams”) exploit children, mostly boys from rural areas, in forced labor in begging and seasonal agricultural work, including in Cameroon and Chad.

Traffickers exploit Nigerian victims in sex trafficking and forced labor, primarily domestic servitude, throughout West and Central Africa and to a lesser extent, East and Southern Africa. Organized trafficking networks transport Nigerian women and girls to mining regions in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d’Ivoire for exploitation in sex trafficking. In some states, families “sell” women and girls into forced marriages to older men to repay family debt in the traditional practice of “money marriages,” increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Nigerian victims in online scam operations in Ghana and in southeast Asia, and traffickers exploit foreign victims in online scam operations in Nigeria. Traffickers exploit victims from West and Central Africa in forced labor in agriculture in Nigeria.

Illicit actors operate “baby factories” – often disguised as orphanages, maternity homes, or religious centers – where traffickers hold women against their will, rape them, and force them to carry and deliver a child. They then sell the children, sometimes with the intent of exploiting them in forced labor and sex trafficking. The government and NGOs describe the factories as a widespread criminal industry most prevalent in the southern part of the country. Experts state the phenomenon is driven by poverty and a lack of opportunity for young girls as well as the demands of the illegal adoption market.

Highly organized criminal groups, sometimes linked to Nigerian cult organizations or confraternities, fraudulently recruit and exploit Nigerian women and girls in sex trafficking in countries throughout Europe, including Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Traffickers fraudulently recruit Nigerian victims for employment abroad and subsequently exploit them in domestic servitude and sex trafficking in the Middle East and Gulf states. Before departure for work abroad, many Nigerian women participate in a traditional ceremony with a juju priest; some traffickers exploit this tradition as a coercion method and tell the women they must obey the traffickers or a curse will harm them, discouraging victims from seeking assistance or cooperating with law enforcement. Poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and displacement caused by insecurity and extreme flooding increase Nigerians’ vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit

undocumented migrants in forced labor and sex trafficking at multiple stages of their journey through North Africa to Europe, especially in Libya. Traffickers increasingly use social media to identify and recruit potential victims. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Nigeria – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.

There are more than 3.3 million IDPs in the country and more than 380,000 Nigerian refugees in neighboring countries; many of these IDPs and refugees are vulnerable to trafficking due to limited access to economic opportunities and basic services, including food assistance. Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continue recruiting and using – including through force, fraud, and coercion – child soldiers as young as 12 years old as cooks, domestic workers, spies, porters, messengers, bodyguards or guards at checkpoints, “morality police,” armed combatants, human shields, and suicide bombers in attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger; these children are subjected to physical and sexual abuse and forced drug use. These non-state armed groups continue to abduct women and girls in the northern regions of Nigeria, many of whom they exploit in forced labor, including in domestic servitude, and in sexual slavery. Boko Haram has kidnapped and subjected thousands of women and girls to forced marriage, including for the purposes of sexual slavery and forced labor; Boko Haram punishes girls, including for refusing to marry, by forcing them to be suicide bombers. In many cases, the government coerces victims of forced marriage, including trafficking victims, to return to their Boko Haram husbands in Borno State demobilization centers. Criminal gangs in the south recruit and use children in forced criminality, including kidnappings and robberies, and exploit them in sex trafficking. Criminal gangs in the north west also exploit victims in forced labor in agriculture and mining.

Reports indicate government officials, as well as security officers, have sexually exploited victims in government-run IDP camps, informal camps, and local communities, including around Maiduguri. Traffickers recruit children in IDP camps for exploitation in domestic servitude. During a previous reporting period, an NGO alleged soldiers sexually exploited female detainees in a Borno State military detention center. In previous years, there were reports traffickers fraudulently recruited women and girls from IDP camps for employment in Europe and subsequently exploited them in sex trafficking in North Africa, the Gulf, and Europe.