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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sweden

SWEDEN (Tier 1)

The Government of Sweden fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Sweden remained on Tier 1. These efforts included increasing the number of identified victims, including for labor trafficking; introducing a sustainable financial mechanism for consistent funding toward shelters and NGOs supporting victims of violence, including trafficking; and allocating more funds to the national support program (NSP) – a civil society platform representing 20 NGOs assisting trafficking victims. The government also approved and enacted an amendment to the law allowing municipal social welfare boards to apply for a 30-day reflection period on behalf of foreign trafficking victims, giving them the opportunity for assistance and recovery regardless of their cooperation with authorities. In addition, the government updated identification procedures and digitized the NRM, making it more accessible and user-friendly. Furthermore, the government established two regional centers addressing workplace crime, including labor trafficking. In response to the inflow of refugees fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the government established secure registration at Sweden's borders to enable identification and protection for vulnerable refugees, especially children; produced information on preventing and detecting trafficking among adults and unaccompanied children; and operated a support hotline for professionals working with refugees who fled Ukraine. Although the government meets the minimum standards, authorities investigated, prosecuted, and convicted fewer traffickers. Moreover, the government continued to provide inconsistent funding to NGOs for assistance to victims, hindering their ability to comply with obligations and

demand. Finally, the level of assistance to victims was conditional on their cooperation with investigations and prosecutions.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, convict traffickers using the trafficking statute rather than crimes with lesser penalties when possible, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Ensure all victims have full, unconditional access to assistance, regardless of whether they cooperate with authorities.
- Allocate adequate funding to NGOs for victim assistance.
- Proactively identify trafficking victims and screen for trafficking indicators, particularly among vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children.
- Provide clear procedures for identifying child victims and train relevant workers to identify potential victims and recognize trafficking indicators.
- Train investigators and prosecutors on evidence collection and applying anti-trafficking laws and officials involved in judicial proceedings, particularly judges, on understanding all aspects of trafficking.
- Develop procedures for labor inspections, clearly outlining roles and responsibilities for participating agencies.
- Establish specialized housing for trafficking victims, including for male victims.
- Strengthen international law enforcement cooperation to prevent and investigate child sex tourism.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts. Chapter 4, Section 1a of the Penal Code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of two to 10 years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Chapter 4, Section 1b criminalized a lesser crime of "human exploitation," which included the exploitation of individuals for labor or begging, and prescribed penalties of up to four years' imprisonment; these penalties were also sufficiently stringent. Chapter 6, Section 9 criminalized the

purchase of commercial sex acts from a child and prescribed penalties of up to four years' imprisonment. In 2022, police investigated 169 trafficking and human exploitation cases, a significant decrease from 219 in 2021. Authorities prosecuted nine traffickers, compared with 12 in 2021. Courts convicted two traffickers (one sex trafficking, one labor trafficking), a decrease from eight in 2021. One of the convicted traffickers received a sentence of 17 years' imprisonment and a fine, and the other received a suspended sentence. The labor trafficking conviction marked the first use of the "human exploitation" statute since its adoption in 2018; courts convicted a restaurant owner for exploiting two foreign workers from Bangladesh. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking crimes. In 2022, Swedish authorities collaborated with foreign governments on transnational investigations and continued cooperation within the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats. Authorities of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden facilitated international policing efforts and information sharing, including on trafficking-related issues, through Nordic liaison officers stationed at 20 Nordic embassies and consulates around the world. The Swedish Coast Guard, police, and customs officials participated in joint regional intelligence operations in trafficking cases involving travel by sea.

The Gender Equality Agency (GEA), which managed anti-trafficking efforts for the government, maintained specialized regional coordinators throughout the country who assisted police and judicial authorities with trafficking cases, provided direct assistance to victims, implemented training, and conducted outreach work. In 2022, GEA received 13 million Swedish krona (SEK) (\$1.25 million) in supplemental funding, which it used to expand its anti-trafficking efforts and hire additional regional coordinators and staff. The Prosecutor's Office maintained a specialized unit of prosecutors who worked on trafficking cases, among other cases, such as organized or cross-border crime, as well as analysts and accountants who conducted financial investigations of trafficking cases. In addition, the National Police acted as the national trafficking rapporteur, and the Migration Agency maintained a coordinator focused exclusively on leading anti-trafficking efforts. In 2022, the government provided a range of trafficking-related trainings for police, migration officers, labor inspectors, and detention facility employees on identifying cases and understanding policies and laws. The national courts offered training for judges and lawyers on sex trafficking and child victims; however, experts reported some judges continued to lack a sufficient understanding of trafficking cases, particularly labor trafficking, and current laws. An NGO called for educating judges on trafficking to improve sentencing. Additionally, NGOs reported the need for increased prosecutions of labor trafficking cases. Experts highlighted the lack of overall prosecutions, particularly labor trafficking, as one of Sweden's biggest challenges. The Prosecutor's Office reported the high burden of proof required for trafficking cases sometimes led to changing charges against traffickers;

police concurred, noting insufficient evidence collection led to authorities charging traffickers with procurement for sexual purposes instead of sex trafficking. Police also noted authorities lacked experience and expertise in human exploitation cases and rarely charged traffickers with such crimes. Furthermore, police noted the redistribution of resources resulted in fewer authorities working on trafficking cases at the national and regional levels. In 2022, the government tasked the National Police to focus on sex-related crimes, including crimes against children and trafficking, and report the results of investigations, as well as any regional differences in investigations. The Prosecutor's Office received a similar task in 2022 to focus and report on sex-related investigations.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. In 2022, the Migration Agency identified 515 potential victims among asylum-seekers, nearly twice as many as 261 in 2021. The agency attributed the difference to a sharp increase in suspected labor trafficking cases; of the 515 cases, 397 were labor trafficking (150 in 2021). Authorities identified 21 child victims, the same as in 2021. Separately, GEA maintained statistics on identified victims. In 2022, GEA regional coordinators identified 367 potential victims (174 sex trafficking, 169 labor trafficking, 24 unspecified), a decrease from 481 in 2021 but proportionate with previous years (320 in 2020, 404 in 2019). Of the 367 potential victims, 54 were children. Double counting likely occurred across agencies. Experts noted authorities overall did not proactively identify potential victims among vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children. Police noted they did not have routines in place for proactive identification of unaccompanied children, but the Swedish Migration Agency, which was primarily responsible for unaccompanied children, had a process in place for identifying such victims. Authorities and front-line professionals utilized the existing NRM to identify victims and refer them to services. However, only authorities involved in legal investigations, such as police, could officially identify trafficking victims. NGOs asserted some police, particularly border guards, needed further training on identifying trafficking indicators and potential victims and on the subsequent implementation of victim services. In 2022, GEA updated identification procedures and digitized the NRM, making it more accessible and user-friendly. The NRM outlined the responsibilities of each authority throughout the various phases of the case process and provided details on referring victims to services.

Municipalities, in collaboration with NGOs and other government agencies, were the primary providers of victim services, including medical and psychological care, shelter, and social assistance. While undocumented migrants, who made up the vast majority of identified victims, could obtain emergency medical care, additional assistance

opportunities for victims and their families through municipalities were conditional on victims cooperating with authorities. Municipalities funded assistance and appropriate services, and the government subsequently reimbursed the expenses. Statistics on funding by the municipalities were unavailable. Although the country lacked shelters dedicated solely to trafficking victims, some municipalities ran shelters offering services to sex trafficking victims. Adult female trafficking victims could receive services at women's shelters for victims of domestic and honor-related violence. Male adult victims were eligible for group protected housing. Authorities referred child victims to social services officials who placed them in foster care or group housing. Child victims could receive support at Barnahus – multidisciplinary centers offering a coordinated, child-sensitive approach to preventing re-traumatization during investigations and court proceedings. GEA led a network of approximately 40 NGO-run safe houses. From 2022 onward, the government permanently allocated 150 million SEK (\$14.44 million) annually toward women's and girl's shelters and NGOs supporting victims of violence, including trafficking. Additionally, in 2022, GEA allocated 2.5 million SEK (\$240,710) to the NSP, an increase from 2.04 million SEK (\$196,450) in 2021, and the most funding allocated to the NSP since it was initiated in 2016. The NSP offered the only effective unconditional assistance provided to victims and complemented the support services offered under the NRM. The program focused on victims who, in their current state, did not have a right to assistance through the formal system and provided a 30-day reflection period to encourage victims to report crimes to police. In 2022, the NSP supported 60 victims (35 adults, 25 children), compared with 39 in 2021; the majority were sex trafficking victims. NGOs continued to criticize that funding of the NSP was insufficient for the number of victims. GEA also funded a voluntary return and reintegration program and allocated 5.7 million (\$548,820) in 2022 to an international organization facilitating the program.

The Aliens Act entitled foreign victims without residence to a 30-day reflection period to contemplate cooperation with authorities, during which they were eligible for assistance and emergency financial aid. In 2022, the government approved and enacted an amendment to the Act, allowing municipal social welfare boards to apply for a 30-day reflection period on behalf of foreign victims. Previously, investigators or prosecutors could only apply for residence permits, limiting availability to victims already in contact with authorities. Since access to victim services depended on residential status, GEA anticipated the amendment would provide more victims access to services and facilitate participation in investigations and prosecutions. The government tasked the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Equality Authority to support municipal social welfare boards in using the new legislation. In 2022, 85 trafficking victims received temporary residence permits (63 in 2021); temporary residence permits allowed foreign victims to seek employment. The government assigned a legal representative to provide

victims with support and assistance throughout criminal proceedings. However, legal aid was only available to individuals whose annual income did not exceed 260,000 SEK (\$25,030) and did not already have insurance that covered the dispute in question. Swedish law entitled victims to request restitution from traffickers as part of criminal proceedings, as well as file civil suits for financial compensation. In 2022, courts ordered 3.9 million (\$375,510) in restitution, a significant increase from 469,704 SEK (\$45,230) in 2021.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. GEA was the national coordinator against human trafficking and responsible for implementation of the NAP, which focused on combating and preventing commercial sex and trafficking and providing better protection and support for those vulnerable to trafficking. NGOs raised concerns about the lack of targeted funding dedicated to implement the NAP and recommended the government update the NAP to establish strategic objectives with specific assignments, budgets, and deadlines and a greater focus on labor trafficking. In addition to the NAP, the government continued to implement its comprehensive action program to prevent and combat men's violence against women, including trafficking. In 2022, the government tasked a special investigator to develop a 10-year unified national strategy to prevent and combat violence against children, including trafficking. The government maintained a working group, with representatives from several ministries, to coordinate domestic and international anti-trafficking policy. The government also maintained a national anti-trafficking taskforce, comprising about 20 representatives from authorities on trafficking issues, to function as a strategic resource developing and streamlining cooperation between government agencies and other stakeholders. The task force created relevant educational material, conducted training, and managed, in cooperation with an international organization, a program for the safe return of trafficking victims.

In 2022, the government tasked a group of experts to strengthen identification, protection, care, and outreach efforts for sex trafficking victims and assess how Sweden fulfills its international commitments. Sweden and France continued to conduct joint campaigns raising awareness on trafficking. GEA updated its online campaign on safe travel abroad with new information on the risks of sex trafficking and allocated 630,000 SEK (\$60,660) toward it. GEA operated a national helpline for authorities, municipal workers, and NGOs to receive guidance on trafficking and exploitation. Separately, a Swedish university operated a 24-hour national women's helpline that supported victims of violence, including trafficking, and received 8 million SEK (\$770,270 million) from

the government in 2022. NGOs noted the need for a 24-hour national hotline dedicated to providing information to trafficking victims and those vulnerable. In 2022, the National Police published an annual report on the extent of trafficking in Sweden, including recommendations on preventing and combating the crime. The government maintained a website with information on child sex trafficking, resources available to victims, and a way to report suspected cases. The National Police's Department of National Operations handled investigations involving Swedish citizens suspected of child sex tourism and assisted police departments throughout Sweden on matters of child sex trafficking. The National Police's specialized cybercrime unit maintained a child protection team that trained travel agencies to detect and report child sex tourism. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for participation in international sex tourism by its citizens, despite allegations of such actions by its citizens.

The Ambassador to Combat Trafficking in Persons focused on international cooperation with an emphasis on sex trafficking and reducing demand. In 2022, the government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by increasing the minimum penalty for purchasing commercial sex and continuing to implement its law criminalizing the purchase of sexual acts from a child (Chapter 6, Sections 9 and 11). Authorities also investigated numerous cases of the procurement and purchase of commercial sex. In March 2023, the government held a conference on legislative models to address the demand for sex trafficking, illustrating how Sweden and other countries with similar legislation have used it to combat sex trafficking. The conference brought together foreign government representatives, authorities, and experts from civil society to discuss experiences of reducing demand with a focus on Ukraine. GEA maintained a program with counseling and treatment centers for buyers of commercial sex, which municipal social services managed in seven locations around the country, and, in 2022, conducted a study on the centers. The study showed a decrease in purchases of commercial sex and improved health among clients in one center. GEA continued the study across all seven centers, assessing potential long-term effects of counseling and documenting methods and themes used in treatment, with an end date of 2025. The government allocated 900,000 SEK (\$86,660) to the program in 2022. In addition, GEA began developing a campaign, which encouraged boys and men to share their experiences of procuring commercial sex, to prevent demand.

Authorities and NGOs acknowledged labor trafficking was an increasing problem, especially for seasonal workers, such as berry pickers, and vulnerable migrants. Experts recommended increased awareness among the public and better interagency coordination to facilitate the identification of labor trafficking cases, as no one agency was responsible for the issue and the current structure among agencies was somewhat

siloe. In 2022, GEA and the Work Environment Agency launched an awareness campaign informing the public about the risks of labor trafficking and work-related crime. To combat work-related crimes, including labor trafficking, the government maintained a national task force that collaborated with unions and trade organizations, provided training on how to recognize victims, developed educational outreach, and conducted workplace inspections. Experts noted labor inspections were convoluted and involved multiple different agencies, none of which were social services. Experts also noted the Labor Work Authority did not take the lead on inspections and there was no clear labor trafficking mandate. In 2022, the government introduced a national strategy with 45 measures to combat labor trafficking and work-related crime. Through the strategy, the government established regional centers against work-related crime, which involved the cooperation of nine agencies. Two centers were operational in 2022 with five more opening in 2023. Additionally, the government initiated changes to legislation, which remained in process at the end of the reporting period, to improve labor protections for third-country nationals working in Sweden by strengthening regulations that would ensure employers fulfilled worker agreements and did not charge illegal recruitment fees. Furthermore, in 2022, GEA collaborated with the Council of Baltic Seas States to launch a project educating foreign workers from Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine on the risks of labor trafficking via a video on social media platforms and websites and allocated 1.1 million SEK (\$105,910) toward the project. Authorities continued to conduct mandatory interviews with foreign workers employed in at-risk sectors who were seeking to extend their work permits. The Migration Agency conducted background checks on companies employing foreign workers and occasionally denied work visas in cases where employment contracts did not meet the necessary requirements. The agency also provided training on trafficking and a manual to assist migration agents in detecting trafficking cases. The government commissioned multiple agencies to develop joint processes to counter fraud, rule violations, and work-related crimes, including labor trafficking.

In response to the inflow of refugees fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the government established secure registration at Sweden's borders to enable identification and protection for vulnerable refugees, especially children. The government provided GEA with 4 million SEK (\$385,130) to combat trafficking among refugees and strengthen coordination. GEA produced information on preventing and detecting trafficking among adults and unaccompanied children. The information included links to a website GEA built specifically for Ukrainians about trafficking. GEA also operated a support hotline for professionals working with refugees who fled Ukraine. In addition, GEA conducted regular coordinating meetings that allowed government agencies, regional coordinators, and civil society organizations to exchange vital information on trends, observations, and actions taken, which facilitated cooperation

and expedited responses. From the meetings, GEA created and shared a comprehensive analysis of the refugee situation used by other stakeholders in their response in assisting vulnerable Ukrainians. The national coordination against commercial sex and trafficking at the Equality Agency strengthened its collaboration between authorities and civil society to bolster the ability to prevent, detect, and prosecute trafficking as well as offer help and support to vulnerable refugees. The Migration Agency reported nearly 50,000 Ukrainians had arrived and received residence permits in Sweden since the start of the war. An observer noted there were very few clear cases of trafficking, while the Prosecutor's Office confirmed a few preliminary investigations involving Ukrainian refugees.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Sweden, and, to a lesser extent, traffickers exploit victims from Sweden abroad. Vulnerable groups include children with previous experiences of sexual abuse; individuals experiencing intellectual disabilities, mental health conditions, or addiction; and members of the LGBTQI+ community. Most victims originate from Africa, East Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Typically, traffickers are the same nationality as their victims and are often part of criminal networks engaged in multiple criminal activities, although an increasing number of reported cases involve traffickers who are family members or have no ties to organized crime. Traffickers increasingly use the internet and social media to recruit victims. Most sex trafficking cases involve women and children from West Africa and Eastern Europe. Since 2010, there has been an increase in labor trafficking cases. Victims of labor trafficking, who largely originate from Eastern Europe, East Asia, and West Africa, face exploitation in the forestry, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, automotive repair and maintenance, and cleaning sectors. In some labor trafficking cases, employers or contractors providing labor seize the passports of workers and withhold their pay. Other reported incidents include deteriorating conditions for foreign workers in the construction sector, such as low salaries, lack of official employment contracts, and poor living situations. In 2022, investigative reporting uncovered a Swedish home goods store indirectly sourced materials from forced labor in Belarusian prison colonies. The Migration Agency notes increased exploitation in the private delivery industry, such as messengers and food delivery drivers who work under conditions that violate Swedish labor laws. Police report citizens of Thailand working in nail salons and massage parlors are exploited in trafficking. Berry picking remains an issue among individuals, mostly from Asia and Bulgaria, facing exploitation. In 2022, authorities and civil society representatives identified a large group of seasonal Thai berry pickers and a group of 10

children from Bulgaria as potential victims. Cases of forced begging and criminality among Roma, primarily from Bulgaria and Romania, have decreased; however, individuals remain vulnerable. Asylum-seekers, particularly those from Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and South America, as well as many stateless individuals, are at risk of trafficking. In recent years, traffickers subjected Moroccan boys and young men to forced criminal activity, though reports indicate a decline in the number of victims. The Migration Agency reported receiving 16,825 applications (630 from unaccompanied children). Unaccompanied children are especially vulnerable to trafficking, with a majority of suspected child trafficking victims arriving in Sweden primarily from Africa and the Middle East. Authorities and NGOs report Swedes traveling abroad, primarily to East Asia, for the purpose of child sex tourism is prevalent. Thousands of refugees, predominantly women and children, who are fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and seeking sanctuary in Sweden, remain highly vulnerable to trafficking.

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