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USDOS – US Department of State

Trafficking in Persons Report 2018 - Country Narratives - Italy

ITALY: Tier 1

The Government of Italy fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore Italy remained on Tier 1. The government demonstrated serious and sustained efforts by improving coordination among government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs in identification of trafficking victims upon arrival of irregular migrants by sea; increasing funding for NGOs providing shelter and other assistance to victims; providing greater protections for unaccompanied minors; and conducting more investigations of trafficking crimes. Although the government meets the minimum standards, many victims among vulnerable groups went unidentified, especially individuals in prostitution and migrants at reception centers. Government-supported NGOs remained underfunded in light of the need. The government did not take significant action at the national level to reduce demand for commercial sex and did not report on sentences courts gave convicted traffickers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITALY

Implement guidelines under the national plan to improve identification of possible trafficking victims among both migrants and asylum-seekers; increase the level of coordination among national, regional, and local governments toward ensuring adequate funding and support for investigations of trafficking and care of survivors; vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking cases, and convict and sentence traffickers with dissuasive sentences; provide increased language and cultural interpretation for new arrivals, particularly for lesser-known African languages; consistently train law enforcement, migration officers, first responders, and other officials across all regions and localities on identification and referral procedures; improve specialized services and long-term care for child victims; improve the national coordination structure to engage all relevant public bodies and NGOs, and compile comprehensive data on identification of victims, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and sentencing, disaggregated between sex and labor trafficking cases, and disclose the information to the public; increase international cooperation with source and transit countries, especially Nigeria, on information sharing and countering

trafficking rings; increase prevention measures to reduce the demand for commercial sex and vigorously enforce related existing criminal laws at local levels; and expand nationwide awareness-raising activities on all forms of trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. The 2003 Measures Against Trafficking in Persons law criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of eight to 20 years imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious offenses, such as rape. The government did not disaggregate law enforcement statistics involving labor trafficking crimes. Authorities investigated 482 persons for trafficking in 2017, compared with 290 in 2016. Police arrested 133 suspected traffickers in 2017, compared to 58 in 2016. The government indicted 73 defendants under the trafficking law in 2017, compared with none in 2016 and 17 in 2015. Trial courts and appellate courts convicted 28 traffickers under the trafficking law in 2017, compared to 31 in 2016 and 12 in 2015. In 2017, the government also investigated 412 persons under the penal code section for slavery, related to but outside of the definition of the trafficking law, with 108 convictions, compared to 43 convictions in 2016.

The government did not report data on sentences imposed under the trafficking law in 2017 or in years prior, and stated only that convicted traffickers generally received prison sentences ranging from seven to eight years (compared to six to nine years in 2016). For example, in November a Palermo judge sentenced two Nigerian traffickers to prison for eight and seven years, respectively, and required €20,000 (\$24,010) in restitution to their victim. In July, a court in Lecce sentenced nine foreigners and two Italians to prison terms of 11 years each for labor trafficking. In July, a Rome court upheld the 12-year prison sentence of a Romanian for sex trafficking of two minors. Investigators prioritized trafficking syndicates, reflected by the arrest in November of 23 Nigerians in Palermo belonging to the trafficking syndicate Black Axe, the arrest of a network of 28 agricultural labor traffickers during the year prior to November 2017, and the arrest in February by financial police of a gang of seven labor traffickers in Calabria. Some source countries stated collaboration with Italian authorities on investigations was insufficient. Prosecutors cited positive results from increased cooperation with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), as evidenced by the GNA-issued arrest warrants for 200 suspected traffickers in Libya that stemmed from the joint investigation. There were no investigations or prosecutions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses.

The variety and number of trainings on trafficking offered to law enforcement and prosecutors increased. The government sponsored several interagency training exercises and simulations on anti-trafficking methods, including a September training with NGO participation. Prosecutors initiated an exchange with 22 African countries to bring prosecutors to work alongside Italian prosecutors for six months of training,

enhancing cooperation between Italy and source countries. The training curriculum for law enforcement agencies included victim identification and investigation of trafficking crimes.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts. The Department of Equal Opportunity (DEO) coordinated protection efforts and reported government-supported NGOs assisted 1,354 potential victims in 2017, a significant increase from 851 victims assisted in 2016; however, this figure did not differentiate between victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation, and thus the actual increase in trafficking victim identification is unclear. Of the total, 176 were victims of labor exploitation and 24 of forced begging. Fifteen percent were men and one percent was transgender. Approximately 71 percent were from Nigeria, and an international organization estimated up to 75 percent of the Nigerian women and unaccompanied children who arrived in 2017 were trafficking victims. Children represented nearly 11 percent of all victims receiving assistance, many being boys forced to beg or commit robbery. The Ministry of Interior formed a working group focused on support for unaccompanied minors at risk of trafficking, and a new law strengthening their protection went into effect. NGOs reported many unaccompanied Nigerian minor victims were 15 to 17 years old, but at the direction of their traffickers routinely declared themselves as 18 or more years old to age-qualify for an asylum application, and then transfer to an adult reception center, giving greater freedom to leave the center unnoticed with their trafficker. NGOs, however, confirmed increased scrutiny by authorities of these age-claims, and authorities sent victims into child protection if unable to confirm adult age-status. NGOs estimated more than 6,000 minors in Italy were victims of sex trafficking in 2017.

The government relied predominantly on NGOs and international organizations to provide shelter and services to victims, which reported overall improvement in coordination with immigration officials at both the arrival points and the longer-term reception centers. The government followed standard UNHCR procedures to screen for trafficking victims among asylum-seekers. However, NGOs charged with meeting migrants on arrival continued to stress the need for longer time periods for interviewing and screening of migrants at the ‘hot spot’ arrival ports in order to accurately determine victim status, although hot spots can also be overcrowded, with little privacy, and not conducive to a stay beyond one or two days. NGOs noted the level of government funding remained insufficient given the significant increase in trafficking victims over current and past years, and also cited the need for a more formal referral mechanism. NGOs and officials alike stressed a critical need for more interpreters of lesser-known African dialects to be available during the initial screening of migrants. One NGO estimated existing reception centers could only adequately accommodate 25 percent of migrant needs. Centers were ill-equipped to address the unique needs of trafficking victims and lacked adequate security against traffickers seeking to recruit victims. The government allotted €22.5 million (\$27 million) exclusively to trafficking victim assistance programs implemented by NGOs in 2017, a significant increase from €14.5 million (\$17.4 million) in 2016 and €8 million (\$9.6 million) in 2015. Local governments

provided additional funds to victim assistance programs, although figures were not available. Government-funded NGOs provided separate facilities for men and unaccompanied children. NGOs commented quality standards for assistance programs were inconsistent, with continued disparity in programming levels between different regions of Italy. However, the government made progress in addressing this disparity through funding 18 assistance programs more equitably spread across all regions of Italy.

Foreign victims were granted assistance for up to six months and were eligible for temporary residency and a work permit. Adult victims could extend their temporary residence permit if employed or enrolled in a job training program. The government granted 418 residence permits to victims in 2017, compared to 340 permits in 2016. Child victims automatically received a residence permit until age 18 and accommodations in a general children’s center or a designated center for trafficking victims who were also asylum-seekers. Children received counseling and enrolled in local public schools with the support of mentors. However, by the end of 2017, an estimated 32 percent of unaccompanied children had left the centers, which increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Victims were not required to cooperate with law enforcement to obtain a residence permit, although some NGOs and international organizations reported authorities sometimes gave preference to those who cooperated.

An NGO noted significant improvements in interagency cooperation in the past year, citing lessons learned over several years of responding together to the migrant crisis, particularly in coordinated screening of asylum applicants for trafficking. They cited continued challenges in adapting to changing trafficking dynamics and methods, and the related need for improved coordination among ground-level local NGOs, international organizations, and the national government. NGOs also noted victim assistance from the EU was insufficient in light of the large numbers of continued arrivals by sea. NGOs, prosecutors, and local officials praised the contribution of trained cultural mediators hired by the government or provided by government-funded NGOs, for their skill in communicating with migrants and victims.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. In October, the government launched an interagency working group to coordinate continued implementation of the 2016-2017 national action plan. The DEO, as coordinator of the interagency steering committee on trafficking, oversaw protection and prevention programs. Labor officials inspected 160,347 sites, compared to 94,025 sites in 2016, including 7,265 agricultural companies, and identified more than 48,000 unregistered workers, compared to 30,000 workers in 2016. The government did not report the extent to which it screened or identified potential trafficking cases in the inspections. The government launched a nationwide public awareness anti-trafficking campaign, including a video broadcast on national television publicizing the trafficking hotline. Local authorities and NGOs continued to distribute brochures, posters, bumper stickers, and media advertisements

providing information on victim assistance. The DEO's hotline for victims of trafficking received more than 4,033 calls for information, compared to 2,900 in 2016, of which 487 were potential trafficking cases. Some municipalities supported education campaigns led by NGOs and implemented fines on individuals in prostitution and purchasers of commercial sex for violating rules on street prostitution, although it was unclear to what extent the police screened for trafficking. There was no coordinated national government effort to reduce the demand for commercial sex. Italian diplomats received anti-trafficking training, as did troops prior to deployment with international peacekeeping missions. The government did not address the demand for global child sex tourism or prosecute Italian citizens who participated abroad.

Internationally, Italy implemented an agreement for joint operations and training with the Libyan Coast Guard through Operation Sophia aimed at reducing the flow of irregular migrants crossing the central Mediterranean. The Italian government provided patrol vessels and training for the Libyan coast guard to more effectively interdict smugglers and traffickers and rescue migrant vessels. However, some European and international NGOs criticized this coordinated effort of turning migrant boats back to Libya and stopping other migrants from attempting the crossing to Italy, citing poor security and human rights conditions inside Libya and an increased risk of trafficking for migrants forced to remain in Libya. Italy and the Libyan GNA also maintained agreements on judicial cooperation and extraditions. Italian police began a two-year training program in March 2018 for 360 law enforcement officials from 22 African countries on immigration and border control, based in Egypt, including training on combating trafficking. The government implemented a communication program across the Horn of Africa and West Africa to inform potential migrants of the risks of trafficking.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Italy is a destination, transit, and source country for women, children, and men subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Victims originate primarily from Nigeria and other African countries, China, and Eastern Europe, and include ethnic Roma. Nigerians represented 36 percent of the victims who received residency permits in 2017, primarily women and girls subjected to sex trafficking through debt bondage and many coerced under threat of voodoo rituals. Men are victims of forced labor in agriculture in southern Italy and in construction, house cleaning, hotels, and restaurants in the north. Chinese victims work in textile factories in Milan, Prato, Rome, and Naples. Nigerian gangs have expanded and reportedly receive protection from Italian crime networks. Chinese criminal elements also forced victims to work in apartments and in massage parlors.

The dramatic flow of African migrants and asylum-seekers across the Mediterranean continued, albeit at a lower rate. Italy received 119,310 irregular arrivals by sea in 2017, compared to the 181,436 arrivals in 2016 and 154,000 arrivals in 2015, nearly all coming via Libya. Most migrants rely on smugglers in their country of origin and many become subject to trafficking en route to Italy or upon arrival. Unaccompanied children are at

high risk, including boys forced to work in shops, bars, restaurants, bakeries, or in forced begging. According to UNHCR, 15,731 persons arriving in 2017 were unaccompanied children, compared to 25,846 arriving in 2016, mostly boys, the majority from Africa. Asylum-seekers are allowed to work two months after their applications are submitted, although many migrants later seek illegal employment in informal sectors, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Many also attempt to depart for other European countries.

ecoi.net summary:

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