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2021 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, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Egypt remained on Tier 2. These efforts included inaugurating a new specialized shelter for female and child trafficking victims, increasing prosecutions, and expanding efforts to train officials and raise public awareness. The government increased convictions, although convictions data included organ trafficking cases. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government reported referring a limited number of victims to services. Shelter and services for male and foreign victims remained insufficient. The government remained without effective victim identification and referral procedures; as a result, at times authorities penalized potential victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration and prostitution violations.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Draft, finalize, disseminate, implement, and utilize country-wide procedures and guidelines for law enforcement, judicial, and other relevant officials to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care. • Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of sex and labor trafficking, and punish offenders—including complicit officials and child sex tourists—with sufficiently stringent sentences. • Provide protection services and shelters to victims of all forms of trafficking—including male and foreign victims—and allocate adequate resources and staffing for these services. • Implement measures to ensure authorities do not penalize trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration or prostitution violations. • Fully utilize specialized trafficking courts and continue to train judicial officials in these courts on a victim-centered approach for the treatment of victims and witnesses of trafficking crimes during investigations and court proceedings. • Continue to train 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. • Provide a legal and regulatory environment that allows NGOs to provide services to trafficking victims and populations vulnerable to human trafficking. • Increase efforts to address and reduce the demand for “summer marriages” and commercial sex acts. • Amend the labor law to include labor protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers. • Improve data collection for human trafficking cases and disaggregate sex, labor, and other forms of trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained uneven law enforcement efforts. The 2010 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties from three to 15 years’ imprisonment and a fine of between 50,000 and 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,190 and \$12,750) for offenses involving an adult victim, and up to life imprisonment and a fine of between 100,000 to 500,000 pounds (\$6,370 and \$31,870) for those involving a child victim. These penalties 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 259 cases of alleged sex and labor trafficking crimes involving at least 373 suspects; this was an increase compared to 154 investigations initiated during the previous reporting period. The 259 investigations included at least 52 adult sex trafficking cases, nine child sex trafficking cases, two domestic servitude cases, 136 child forced begging cases, one adult forced labor case, and two child forced labor cases. In addition, the government investigated 16 forced marriage cases. Despite a three-month partial closure of courts due to pandemic-related restrictions, the public prosecutor referred 41 trafficking cases to criminal courts in 2020, an increase from the 25 alleged perpetrators the government prosecuted during the previous reporting period. The government reported convicting 330 perpetrators for forced labor and sex trafficking in 2020, a significant increase from 67 convictions during the previous reporting period. However, convictions data included organ trafficking cases. Sentences ranged from one-year imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 Egyptian Pounds (\$6,370) to 15 years to life imprisonment (in absentia). The government reported appellate courts heard 125

trafficking cases between January 2019 and February 2021 resulting in 25 acquittals. In addition, the government reported convicting nine officials for child trafficking and organ trafficking in public hospitals but did not provide additional details.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) maintained 8 specialized judicial circuits in the courts of appeal with 30 judges assigned to prosecute human trafficking cases. The government continued to distribute updated legal guidelines for evidence collection, prosecution of trafficking cases, and victim protection to relevant authorities. During the reporting period, the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM & TIP) linked the 10 main prosecution offices to the main prosecution courts in Cairo via videoconferencing equipment to conduct remote capacity-building training in response to COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions. The NCCPIM & TIP, at times in partnership with international organizations, organized at least 24 anti-trafficking training sessions and capacity-building workshops for more than 675 officials, including prosecutors, judges, diplomats, healthcare workers, and aviation officials during the reporting period. Despite these training efforts, NGOs and international organizations reported limited awareness of trafficking and victim-centered approaches impeded government efforts to hold traffickers criminally accountable. NGOs also reported law enforcement and judicial officials overly focused anti-trafficking investigations on transnational cases rather than more prevalent internal forms of trafficking. In addition, local officials often did not consider internal forms of trafficking to be criminal due to cultural acceptance or lack of awareness, and therefore did not consistently pursue investigations or prosecutions in these cases.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim identification and protection efforts but services remained insufficient for male and foreign victims and unidentified victims continued to be penalized for crimes their traffickers compelled them to commit. The government reported identifying 519 potential trafficking victims during investigations in 2020. Of the 519 victims, at least 362 were Egyptian and three foreign nationals; at least 123 were adults (81 men and 42 women) and at least 242 were children (148 boys and 94 girls). The government reported providing assistance to all potential victims but did not specify what that assistance was. The government did not report disaggregated data on the type of trafficking involved. In the previous reporting period, the government only reported victims identified through the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) hotline which identified 49 potential child trafficking victims. Although NCCPIM & TIP reported providing victim identification training to officials, the government did not have standardized victim identification procedures operational. NCCM – in cooperation with an international organization – used standard operating procedures for handling child protection cases, which included instructions on handling child trafficking victims. NCCM also maintained 339 child protection committees around the country and worked with 38 NGOs to identify potential child trafficking cases. Despite these efforts, the government remained without an effective country-wide victim identification and referral system. Although the government maintained a national victim referral mechanism, authorities did not use it consistently throughout the reporting period. While some NGOs reported they received some victim referrals from various governmental entities, NGOs continued to report the referral mechanism was ineffective and underutilized, and various government stakeholders were unaware that it existed.

NGOs reported victim identification became more challenging due to pandemic-related movement restrictions that inhibited protection efforts and screenings for trafficking indicators. Authorities typically relied on NGO referrals or for victims to self-identify; however, NGOs reported that Egyptian and foreign female victims – particularly those among African migrants and refugees – were hesitant to report or file criminal complaints against traffickers or speak to interpreters due to fear of social stigmas. Ineffective victim identification and referral procedures contributed to authorities potentially punishing or penalizing unidentified victims for illegal acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration violations and prostitution. For example, NGOs reported police officers arrested and detained female victims of sex trafficking on wrongful charges of prostitution or debauchery; judges typically released these victims due to insufficient evidence to support the charges of the crimes. Foreign embassies in Egypt reported the government required foreign victims to pay overstay fees, thus preventing them from leaving the country and potentially hindering them from leaving situations of trafficking.

In November 2020, the NCCPIM & TIP inaugurated a specialized trafficking shelter in Cairo in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), NCCM, an NGO, an international organization, and a foreign government but did not receive victims during the reporting period. The shelter could accommodate 30 women and girls and was staffed by female psychologists, social workers, and medical staff. The government provided 1.25 million pounds (\$79,670) for shelter operations during its fiscal year (July 2020 through June 2021). Foreign victims could not access the shelter, despite recommendations from stakeholders to allow foreign victims care at the shelter. Eight shelters for violence against women (VAW) run by the MoSS could receive female and child trafficking victims; foreign victims could access all eight VAW MoSS shelters; and male victims could access the remaining 45 MoSS shelters throughout the country. Several NGOs stated that MoSS shelters were not appropriate for some trafficking victims due to concerns about security and privacy procedures and a lack of adequately trained staff. In addition, these shelters sometimes required victims to provide identification, creating a significant barrier to access for some victims such as foreign victims whose traffickers had confiscated their identification documents; MoSS bylaws stated victims were able to access the shelters without identification documents for up to three days. Despite the new shelter, the government's ability to provide services to trafficking victims, especially foreign victims, remained limited and the government was dependent on international organizations and NGOs to provide victim services, including repatriation. In some cases, embassies, including the embassies of Philippines and Indonesia, provided shelter to their nationals on a case-by-case basis. Egyptian labor law did not include protections for domestic

workers, which continued to create greater vulnerabilities to trafficking among this population. The government continued to rely on international and civil society organizations to provide and fund victim assistance, but it did not provide financial assistance to these organizations, which affected their ability to offer protective services to victims. The government did not report efforts to support victim assistance in investigations and prosecutions aside from basic services; female victims of domestic servitude or sex trafficking reported a reluctance to cooperate in pursuing trafficking charges against their traffickers due to the fear of social stigma and retaliation. However, in at least one case, the government assigned an NCCM expert to provide child victims and their families with psychological support throughout the prosecution, including during their questioning by prosecutors. In addition, the government piloted a courtroom in Giza specialized for child victims of crime, including trafficking, which included video conferencing, separate waiting rooms for child victims, and a barrier allowing children to give testimony while protecting their identity and privacy. Article 27 of the 2010 anti-trafficking law provided for a victim compensation fund but the government did not report establishing the fund. The government did not report whether prosecutors could pursue restitution in trafficking cases. Victims could file civil suits against their traffickers; however, the government did not report whether any victims received damages from civil suits during the reporting period.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. The government continued to implement the 2016-2021 National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Persons; the strategy was implemented using the budget allocated to NCCPIM & TIP and the 29 member agencies of NCCPIM & TIP. NCCPIM & TIP continued to coordinate inter-ministerial anti-trafficking efforts throughout the reporting period. The government allocated 3.6 million pounds (\$229,450) to NCCPIM & TIP's budget during its fiscal year (July 2020 through June 2021 for technical staff's salaries and allocated an additional 20 million pounds (\$1.27 million) to anti-trafficking public awareness campaigns in 2020. This represents an increase from NCCPIM & TIP's budget in 2019 of 2.6 million pounds (\$165,710). NCCPIM & TIP's mandate to address both smuggling and trafficking crimes may have impeded the government's overall efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking as a distinctly different crime. NCCPIM & TIP and other governmental entities continued to conduct multiple awareness-raising activities throughout the reporting period, which included some campaigns in partnership with international organizations; one such campaign was a panel during the Cairo International Film Festival that reportedly reached millions of online viewers. The government also partnered with international organizations to produce and widely distribute to the public videos featuring former league champions of the Egyptian national handball team to raise awareness of sex and labor trafficking crimes in Egypt. During the reporting period, NCCPIM & TIP also continued distributing an anti-trafficking manual for Egyptian diplomatic missions and Egyptian laborers abroad. NCCPIM & TIP submitted semi-annual reports on its anti-trafficking efforts to the Prime Minister during the reporting period. In November 2020, the NCHR launched a trafficking-specific hotline; the National Council for Women (NCW), NCCM, and Administrative Control Authority also operated hotlines to which the public could report trafficking cases. NCCPIM & TIP reported the hotlines received 61 potential trafficking cases during the reporting period but did not report if any victims were identified or referred to protection services as a result. The government did not report whether Egyptian law prohibited employers, recruiters, or labor agents from switching contracts without workers' consent or withholding wages, and labor laws did not include protections for domestic workers. In March 2021, the Parliament introduced draft labor legislation to improve protections for Egyptian and foreign domestic workers; the bill was pending at the end of the reporting period. In the absence of labor law protections for domestic workers, the government continued to promote a voluntary labor contract that employers of domestic workers could choose to use, which offered some protections for Egyptian domestic workers, but the voluntary labor contract did not provide protections for foreign domestic workers. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, the government investigated one Egyptian peacekeeper serving in the UN peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic for potential sexual exploitation involving transactional sex in an incident from April 2020 with trafficking indicators; the investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

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. Traffickers subject Egyptian children to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service, street begging, drug trafficking, quarrying, and agricultural work in Egypt. Traffickers, including some parents, force Egyptian children to beg in the streets of Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria, or exploit girls in sex trafficking. NGOs report the lack of economic and educational opportunities cause family members, including parents, husbands, and siblings, to subject women and girls to sex trafficking to supplement family incomes; in some cases, family members rape women and girls to coerce or force them into prostitution. 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; the victims' parents and marriage brokers, who profit from the transaction, often facilitate these arrangements. Traffickers reportedly exploit Egyptian children in sex trafficking and forced begging in Europe. Traffickers subject Egyptian adults to forced labor in construction, agriculture, domestic work, and low-paying service jobs in the region.

Traffickers subject men and women from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa to forced labor in domestic service, construction, cleaning, and begging, as well as sex trafficking. In 2017, observers reported an increase in West African trafficking victims, although it was unclear if this was the result of increased victim identification or an

actual increase in numbers. Male refugees and migrants are vulnerable to exploitative labor practices, including forced labor. Foreign domestic workers – who are not covered under Egyptian labor laws – primarily from Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Sri Lanka are highly vulnerable to forced labor; employers at times require them to work excessive hours, confiscate their passports, withhold their wages, deny them food and medical care, and subject them to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Some employers file false claims of theft to further exploit domestic workers. 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 Colombian nationals were smuggled into Egypt to work in the entertainment industry, and in 2019, an NGO reported that employers in resort towns, such as Sharm El Sheikh, sexually exploit dancers from Colombia. Refugees from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen who live in Egypt are at risk of trafficking. For example, increasingly traffickers target Syrian refugees who have settled in Egypt for forced child labor, sex trafficking, and transactional marriages of girls that can lead to sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking and forced labor. NGOs reported in January 2020 that unaccompanied minors (UAMs) among the African migrant population are increasingly at risk of trafficking in Egypt; Sudanese gangs reportedly target UAMs to force or coerce the children to sell drugs or commit other petty crimes. Irregular migrants and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa, who transit Egypt en route to Europe, are increasingly at risk of trafficking along this migration route. During the reporting period, there were reports trafficking networks fraudulently recruited women from Guinea for employment in Egypt; the traffickers then exploited the women in domestic servitude or sex trafficking.

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