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2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco

MOROCCO (Tier 2)

The Government of Morocco 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 Morocco remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing prosecutions, implementing the NRM, approving and publishing a victim identification guide, establishing a trafficking-specific hotline, and coordinating with NGOs and international organizations to begin establishing specialized trafficking shelters. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Specialized shelter and services for trafficking victims remained insufficient, and the government did not report providing financial or in-kind support to civil society organizations providing victim services. Due to uneven application of new identification and referral procedures, the government inconsistently referred identified victims to shelter and services. Despite high trafficking risks for migrants and refugees in Morocco, authorities rarely identified or provided services to foreign trafficking victims. Lack of consistent proactive screening and identification measures continued to leave certain populations, such as undocumented migrants, vulnerable to authorities inappropriately penalizing them solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including immigration violations. The national anti-trafficking commission lacked adequate resources and personnel to effectively coordinate government efforts to combat trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Systematically implement procedures to proactively identify trafficking victims, especially among vulnerable populations such as undocumented migrants, and significantly increase efforts to screen for trafficking among

these populations. * Fully implement the NRM and train judicial and law enforcement authorities, as well as civil society and other victim protection actors on its application. * Provide adequate protection services for victims of all forms of trafficking, including but not limited to, shelter, psycho-social services, legal aid, and repatriation assistance. * Increase provision of specialized services for populations vulnerable to trafficking and increase financial or in-kind support to NGOs that provide these services. * Allocate significantly more resources and personnel to the national anti-trafficking commission. * Investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers using the anti-trafficking law, including forced labor cases. * Increase officials' capacity to identify trafficking victims and refer them to care, including internal trafficking cases and cross-border trafficking cases, distinct from migrant smuggling crimes. * Ensure that victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as "prostitution" or immigration violations. * Continue implementing nationwide anti-trafficking awareness campaigns. * Improve law enforcement data collection and disaggregating trafficking data from migrant smuggling data.

PROSECUTION

The government increased overall anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. Law 27.14 criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine between 10,000 and 500,000 dirhams (DH) (\$1,010 and \$50,740) for offenses involving adult victims, and 20 to 30 years' imprisonment and a fine between 100,000 and one million DH (\$10,150 and \$101,470) for those involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent, and regarding sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties for other grave crimes, such as rape.

In 2023, the government investigated 79 new trafficking cases leading to the arrest of 119 suspects. This was similar to the 120 trafficking new cases investigated in 2022. The government initiated the prosecution of 171 alleged traffickers, an increase compared with the prosecution of 149 alleged traffickers in 2022 and the highest reported number of trafficking prosecutions since at least 2011. Of the 171 prosecutions in 2023, 150 were for alleged sex trafficking and 32 for forced labor (including one for forced begging, 12 for "practices similar to slavery," and six for forced criminality); some cases involved multiple forms of trafficking. The government convicted 82 traffickers in 2023, a slight decrease from the conviction of 101 traffickers in 2022. The 82 convictions included 62 sex trafficking convictions and 20 forced labor convictions (including three forced begging convictions and four convictions for "practices similar to slavery"). Courts sentenced all convicted traffickers to at least one year in prison; sentences ranged from one year in prison to 10 to 20 years' imprisonment.

In March 2023, the Department of State suspended for one year the A-3 and G-5 visa sponsorship privileges afforded to Morocco mission members because the government declined to waive diplomatic immunity for U.S. criminal proceedings related to human trafficking and serious mistreatment of domestic workers and has not initiated its own prosecution. In December 2019, a diplomat posted to the Moroccan Mission to the United Nations in New York, his ex-wife, and her brother were indicted for, among other crimes, conspiring to commit visa fraud from 2006 to 2016 to exploit foreign domestic workers from the Philippines, Morocco, and other countries. U.S. authorities arrested the former diplomat's ex-wife in March 2019; she died in 2021 prior to trial. The other two defendants remain at large. The government reported an ongoing judicial investigation into the former diplomat; however, for the sixth consecutive year, it did not report completing a prosecution or other administrative action to hold the former diplomat accountable. Aside from this judicial investigation, the government did not report any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes and did not report updates on past prosecutions initiated. The General Prosecutor continued to ensure there were two prosecutors specialized in handling trafficking cases in every court of appeal across the country, resulting in 44 trafficking-specialized prosecutors across Morocco. The government coordinated trainings, at times in cooperation with international organizations, for prosecutors, border officials, law enforcement, labor inspectors, and other officials on trafficking indicators, investigations, and related topics.

PROTECTION

The government modestly increased overall efforts to protect trafficking victims. The government began implementing the NRM approved in March 2023; as part of the implementation, the government drafted and approved a guide for identifying potential victims in April 2023 and published it online. The government also published a guide to identify child victims for criminal justice practitioners in April 2023; the government did not report how widely these identification guides were socialized with front-line responders or implemented. In 2023, the government identified 169 trafficking victims, compared with the identification of 166 victims in 2022. Of the 169 victims, 128 were sex trafficking victims and 42 forced labor victims (including two forced begging victims, 25 victims of "practices similar to slavery," and seven forced criminality victims); numerous victims experienced multiple forms of exploitation. The identified 169 victims included 52 men, 28 boys, 44 women, and 45 girls. Ten identified victims were foreign nationals; the government identified 10 foreign victims in 2022. The government provided shelter for 11 victims, medical assistance for three victims, and other unspecified measures for 39 victims; the government did not report what services it provided to the other 116 victims aside from legal assistance. In 2022, the government referred all 166 identified victims to

government, NGO, or international organization shelters and services. Each branch of the National Security Directorate maintained a support unit for women victims of violence to ensure a more victim-centered approach to sensitive cases, including cases involving female trafficking victims, and their referral to services.

The government did not provide shelter or psycho-social services specific to the needs of victims of all forms of trafficking and the lack of shelters and protection services for victims continued to impede overall protection efforts. The government continued coordinating with NGOs, international organizations, and foreign donors to establish four specialized shelters for trafficking victims in 2024 – including for women and children in Tangier-Tetouan and Fez-Meknes, and for an unspecified demographic of trafficking victims in Marrakech – with plans to eventually establish specialized shelters in all 12 provinces; the shelters were not operational at the end of the reporting period. In the meantime, the government continued to provide services to female and child victims of violence – including potential trafficking victims – at 40 reception centers staffed by nurses and social workers at major hospitals, as well as in Ministry of Justice (MOJ) protection units in Moroccan courts. Moroccan law enforcement agencies reportedly continued to utilize focal points to work directly with these reception centers and MOJ units, and they continued to use a list of NGO service providers to whom authorities could refer trafficking victims for care. The government reported these services were available to adult male victims but acknowledged the shelters were more difficult for male victims to access. Prosecutors in the courts of first instance and the courts of appeal – in coordination with the Ministry of Health (MOH) – had the authority to order trafficking victims placed in the care of a hospital or civil society organization. The government also reported it designated an unspecified number of officials responsible for identifying and referring trafficking victims to psycho-social support, medical services, and legal aid in courts throughout the country, but did not report whether these officials or prosecutors referred any victims to protection services. The government continued to rely heavily on NGOs and international organizations to provide assistance to victims and provided some financial assistance to organizations assisting child labor and child trafficking victims but did not otherwise report providing financial resources to organizations assisting trafficking victims. However, the government solicited proposals in February 2024 to fund up to 25 civil society organizations – with a \$200,000 combined budget – to protect victims and prevent trafficking; proposals were not finalized at the end of the reporting period. The government continued to encourage victims to cooperate in investigations against traffickers, including through protecting victims' privacy and providing legal assistance and physical security; the government did not report the number of victims who did so during the reporting period, beyond providing initial statements to law enforcement nor did it report if victims received restitution from traffickers. Courts ordered suspects to not contact victims in seven cases.

Victims filed 160 civil cases in 2023; courts awarded an unreported number of victims a total of 1,890 dirhams (\$190) through civil actions. The government assisted in the voluntary repatriation of three foreign trafficking victims. The government did not report providing legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims of trafficking to countries where they might face retribution or hardship, aside from coordinating with international organizations on asylum and refugee cases and authorizing foreign victims to remain in Morocco until the end of judicial proceedings; the government did not report how many temporary residence permits it issued to trafficking victims during the reporting period.

The Ministry of Interior continued to lead the government's National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum, which aimed to regularize the legal status of refugees and asylum-seekers, including trafficking victims. Under this strategy, foreign trafficking victims could benefit from various services, including reintegration assistance, education, vocational training, social services, and legal aid. However, the government did not report proactively identifying potential trafficking victims during these regularization efforts or how many foreign trafficking victims, if any, benefited from these services. Due to the lack of proactive screening and identification measures, some foreign trafficking victims may have remained unidentified. Furthermore, foreign trafficking victims – especially among the sub-Saharan African undocumented migrant population – remained vulnerable to penalization solely for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Undocumented migrants reported they feared arrest and deportation and therefore were reluctant to report trafficking or other types of crimes to the police.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. The national anti-trafficking commission, which was administered by MOJ and included two representatives from civil society, coordinated the government's efforts to combat trafficking. However, civil society and international organizations reported the anti-trafficking commission had inadequate resources and personnel to effectively coordinate the government's anti-trafficking efforts. The government began implementing the 2023-2030 national strategy and an accompanying 2023-2026 implementation plan – approved in March 2023 – in coordination with international organizations; funding to implement the strategy and implementation plan came from individual ministries' budgets. The anti-trafficking commission continued partnering with an international organization to develop a comprehensive database to track law enforcement actions, judicial proceedings, trafficking trends, protection measures, and other information on the government's efforts; the database was pending full operationalization for the second consecutive year at the end of the reporting period. The government launched a study on money laundering and human trafficking. The

government conducted public awareness campaigns, including television ads, billboards, art exhibits, and social media outreach, at times in coordination with international organizations. The government established a 24 hour toll-free hotline to report potential trafficking cases which was staffed by social workers in July 2023; the hotline received 1,780 calls, 17 of which were referred for investigation. However, international organizations reported the hotline was inactive for at least three months of the reporting period.

The government reportedly continued to implement Law No. 19.12, adopted in 2018, which required protections for foreign domestic workers including valid work contracts that meet national labor standards in order for a work visa to be granted. Law 19.12 also banned the use of intermediaries to negotiate recruitment of domestic workers on behalf of the intended employer and recruitment agencies in order to reduce vulnerability to fraudulent recruitment. Article 480 of the Labor Code prohibited all worker-paid recruitment fees. The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. Moroccan peacekeeping forces received anti-trafficking training and operated under a “no tolerance” standard for troops involved in UN peacekeeping missions. Although not explicitly reported as trafficking, an international organization reported receiving four sexual exploitation allegations with potential trafficking indicators against Moroccan peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2023, two allegations in the Central African Republic in 2021, and one allegation in the DRC in 2021; the allegations were pending investigation and review at the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Morocco, and traffickers exploit Moroccan victims abroad. Traffickers, including parents and other intermediaries, exploit Moroccan children in Morocco for forced labor, domestic work, begging, and sex trafficking. Some Moroccan boys endure forced labor while employed as apprentices in the artisanal, textile, and construction industries and in mechanic shops. Although the incidence of child domestic workers has reportedly decreased in Morocco since 2005, girls are recruited from rural areas for work in domestic service in cities, and some become forced labor victims. NGOs and other observers anecdotally reported a significant number of girls work as domestic help in Moroccan households, but it is difficult to determine the scale of this occurrence because of authorities’ inability to access this population. Drug traffickers reportedly compel children to participate in the production and transportation of drugs in Morocco. Some family members and other intermediaries exploit Moroccan women in sex trafficking. Observers reported severe drought in rural areas increased vulnerability of

Moroccans of lower socio-economic means to exploitation by sex and labor traffickers as they sought other income sources. Some foreign nationals, primarily from Europe and the Middle East, engage in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse in major Moroccan cities. Following the September 2023 Al Haouz earthquake, traffickers allegedly exploited children affected by the earthquake in sex and labor trafficking.

Documented and undocumented foreign migrants, especially women and children, are highly vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking in Morocco and as they transit through Morocco to reach Europe. Traffickers exploit undocumented migrants who voluntarily use smugglers to enter Morocco. In 2022, the government tightened border restrictions with Europe which observers reported increased the vulnerability of undocumented migrants in Morocco to exploitation and trafficking. Sub-Saharan and Moroccan undocumented migrants clandestinely crossing from Morocco to the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta or the Canary Islands and further into Europe are at risk of trafficking in Morocco and Europe. For example, traffickers exploit some female migrants while seeking assistance at “safe houses” in Morocco, which usually are run by individuals of their own nationality. Some female undocumented migrants, primarily from sub-Saharan Africa as well as a small but growing number from South Asia, are exploited in sex trafficking and forced labor in Morocco. Criminal networks operating in Oujda on the Algerian border and in northern coastal cities, such as Nador, exploit undocumented migrant women in sex trafficking and forced begging; networks in Oujda also reportedly exploit children of undocumented migrants in forced begging. Some female undocumented migrants, particularly Nigerians, who transit Oujda are exploited in sex trafficking once they reach Europe. International organizations, local NGOs, and migrants report women and unaccompanied children are highly vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in Morocco; the victims are typically the same nationality as the traffickers. Some women from the Philippines, Indonesia, and francophone sub-Saharan Africa are recruited for employment as domestic workers in Morocco, but upon arrival, employers force them into domestic service through non-payment of wages, withholding of passports, and physical abuse. Media reported young Nigerian men and women were fraudulently recruited for soccer or other sports opportunities in Morocco before being exploited in sex or labor trafficking.

Traffickers exploit Moroccan adults and children in forced labor and sex trafficking, primarily in Europe and the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf states. Traffickers force Moroccan women into commercial sex abroad where they experience indicators of trafficking, including restrictions on movement, threats, and emotional and physical abuse. As in past years, media continued reporting Moroccan workers in Spain’s agricultural sector were subjected to forced labor and, at times, sexual abuse.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and
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(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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