

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: The Gambia

THE GAMBIA (Tier 2)

The Government of The Gambia 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, The Gambia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing funding for anti-trafficking efforts, conducting more awareness raising activities, and establishing a new shelter for trafficking victims. The government conducted training for front-line officials on a victim-centered approach to combat human trafficking and provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases, and authorities identified fewer victims. Law enforcement and the judiciary lacked specialized training and adequate resources to effectively investigate and adjudicate trafficking cases.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, separately from migrant smuggling cases, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including fraudulent labor recruiters and complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Proactively screen vulnerable populations, including Gambian migrants, domestic workers, individuals in commercial sex, foreign workers (including Cuban regime-affiliated workers), and children in the informal labor sector (including children forced to beg), for trafficking indicators and refer trafficking victims to appropriate services.
- Institutionalize training on the SOPs and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) on victim identification and referral to care for front-line responders and fully implement the procedures throughout the country.
- Increase the availability and quality of protection services for all trafficking victims.
- Train law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges on evidence collection and management for use in trafficking cases.
- Ensure human trafficking cases are resolved through the judicial system rather than extra-judicial or administrative means.
- Increase efforts to prevent exploitation of Gambian workers abroad, including by implementing the 2023 Labor Act to regulate and monitor recruitment agencies, implementing the national migration policy and pre-departure procedures, and eliminating worker-paid recruitment fees.
- Strengthen international law enforcement cooperation to prevent and investigate extraterritorial sexual exploitation and abuse within the tourism sector.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts.

The 2007 Trafficking in Persons Act, as amended in 2010, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of 50 years to life imprisonment and a fine of between 50,000 and 500,000 dalasi (\$714-\$7,143). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. The

Tourism Offences Act additionally criminalized child trafficking crimes committed by tourists, prescribing penalties of life imprisonment and a fine of between 100,000 and 500,000 dalasi (\$1,429-\$7,143).

The government initiated 16 trafficking investigations, compared with 22 investigations during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecution of two alleged sex traffickers compared with prosecutions of six alleged traffickers in the previous reporting period. The government also continued four ongoing investigations and nine ongoing prosecutions from previous reporting periods. The government convicted one trafficker compared with two convictions during the previous reporting period. The court ordered one trafficker, convicted in the previous reporting period, to pay 250,000 dalasi (\$3,571) in restitution. The government maintained MOUs with the Governments of Nigeria and Senegal on combatting trafficking in persons and cooperated on law enforcement activities. The government signed an MOU with the Rwandan government to strengthen coordination on transnational crime, including human trafficking.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. However, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Observers alleged some border authorities did not follow anti-trafficking procedures and solicited bribes from individuals without proper identity documents; in past years, some police officers reportedly requested bribes to register trafficking complaints. Observers also previously alleged some government officials were involved in networks fraudulently recruiting Gambian workers for exploitation abroad.

The government, in partnership with a foreign government, drafted a new police bill to enhance police effectiveness and interagency coordination and promote a victim-centered approach; the bill was not adopted by the end of the reporting period. Front-line officials referred trafficking cases to The National Agency Against Trafficking In Persons (NAATIP)'s specialized law enforcement unit for investigation; the government appointed additional NAATIP police officers to increase its capacity. The police force and immigration department had specially-trained child welfare units that referred potential trafficking cases to NAATIP for investigation. The government provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement, including the police force, customs, and immigration officials. The government trained 150 immigration officials at a border post with Senegal on trafficking indicators. NAATIP trained 250 immigration officers at Banjul International Airport on the use of the NRM and screening for trafficking indicators, including distinguishing between human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Weak case management infrastructure and limited capacity of the justice sector remained concerns, as did limited training and resources for law enforcement and judicial officials. Officials continued to conflate human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Defendants accused of trafficking were eligible for bail and sometimes absconded. According to NGOs and international organizations, sexual crimes, including sex trafficking, were underreported due to cultural taboos and a reliance on informal resolution mechanisms rather than the formal criminal justice system; in some cases, the police or judiciary encouraged parties to settle child sex trafficking cases outside of court. Low confidence in the justice system, lengthy investigations and court proceedings, and a lack of meaningful victim protection also led to underreporting of child trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts.

The government reported identifying six victims (five sex trafficking victims and one labor trafficking victim). The government also identified six potential victims. The government referred all 12 identified and potential victims to shelter services, including counseling and medical care. This compared with identifying 38 victims and referring 24 victims to shelter services during the previous reporting period. An NGO identified one additional trafficking victim. The government

continued implementing its NRM and SOPs on victim identification and referral to care. Under NRM provisions, front-line officials referred trafficking cases to NAATIP and the Department of Social Welfare, which assigned a case manager and worked with partner service providers in the referral directory to conduct an assessment and develop an individual case plan. NAATIP provided training on the NRM and a victim-centered approach to police officers in 29 police stations.

The government operated one short-term shelter for vulnerable persons, including both Gambian and foreign national trafficking victims, vulnerable children, the elderly, and women and children who were victims of violence. The shelter generally had a 50-person capacity and offered basic services, including medical care and some counseling services. In 2024, NAATIP established a new shelter in Banjul for trafficking victims with a 12-person capacity; nine victims received care at this shelter. Government services offered at the two shelters included counseling, medical care, legal assistance, financial stipends, and reintegration support. Officials also began providing trafficking victims with hygiene kits. NAATIP continued to train shelter staff and social workers on victim-centered, trauma-informed care procedures in service provision. The government provided two additional social workers to increase the availability of counseling services and additional support for trafficking survivors available at the two shelters. Officials previously restricted adult victims' movement outside of its short-term shelter; victims could now choose whether to stay in a shelter while receiving services and were allowed freedom of movement. Observers reported the shelter continued to lack key services, including vocational training and extra-curricular activities. The government and civil society jointly operated daytime centers providing services, including psycho-social, food, and medical assistance, to trafficking victims and vulnerable children. The government allocated 1,350,295 dalasi (\$19,290) to victim protection and assistance in 2024, compared with 977,000 dalasi (\$7,271) allocated in 2023. The government reported one government-registered NGO shelter could also assist trafficking victims. The 2007 anti-trafficking law called for creation of a victim assistance fund; however, the fund was not operational. The government voluntarily repatriated three foreign victims. The 2007 anti-trafficking law allowed foreign victims to obtain temporary residence visas during legal proceedings; the government did not report issuing such status.

Authorities did not condition access to victim services on cooperation with law enforcement proceedings. Authorities reported nine victims participated in investigations and prosecutions of suspected traffickers. The government provided victim-witness assistance to support participation in investigations and prosecutions, including legal aid, psychological services, transportation, the option to provide testimony via video or written statements, and the option to speak with a social worker during investigations. For the first time, the government reported it provided 30,000 dalasi (\$429) to one trafficking survivor participating in the investigation and prosecution of a trafficker. However, some victims were reluctant to cooperate in investigations due to fear of retaliation by traffickers; Nigerian traffickers reportedly often used coercive "curses" to discourage victims from seeking assistance. Gambian law allowed victims to obtain restitution, and a court awarded two victims 250,000 dalasi (\$3,571) each in restitution. However, observers reported traffickers are often unable to pay restitution awarded to victims. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers; however, no victims reportedly did, and many victims were not aware of this option.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts.

NAATIP, an agency under the Ministry of Justice, coordinated the government's day-to-day anti-trafficking response and convened its official task force quarterly. The government continued implementing the 2021-2025 anti-trafficking NAP, which had a four-year budget of 3.6 million dalasi (\$51,429). The government allocated an additional 11 million dalasi (\$156,934) to support NAATIP's activities, compared with allocating 9.4 million dalasi (\$134,286) during the previous reporting period. NAATIP, in coordination with civil society, conducted awareness raising and community outreach campaigns and incorporated a victim-centered approach. For the first time, the government provided anti-trafficking training for 94 Quranic teachers in rural areas (Upper River

Region, Central River Region, and Lower River Region) and continued efforts to raise public awareness of child forced begging. NAATIP signed an MOU with two civil society organizations to support efforts to prevent child forced begging and assist victims. NAATIP also created a website to raise awareness of human trafficking and resources available for victims. NAATIP operated an anti-trafficking hotline; the government reported identifying three victims through the hotline.

The government had a labor law regulating foreign labor recruitment and requiring recruitment agencies to obtain a license from the Ministry of Labor. The government, in partnership with an international organization, developed new ethical recruitment guidelines that prohibited charging worked-paid recruitment fees. The Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment had pre-departure training manuals, ethical recruitment materials, and other resources for Gambian migrant workers; however, it did not take steps to implement the resources. The government signed a new bilateral labor agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that included protections for Gambian migrant workers. Officials ratified an existing agreement with the United Arab Emirates that included requirements for Gambian workers to be hired through licensed and accredited government recruitment agencies and established repatriation assistance. The government signed a labor agreement with Spain to send a limited number of Gambian migrant workers to work seasonally on farms. Observers voiced concerns about the agreement with Spain, citing potential hidden loopholes that could be used to exploit workers.

The labor inspectorate had dedicated, specially trained child labor inspectors, and NAATIP held a specialized anti-trafficking training for 12 inspectors. The government did not report identifying any trafficking victims as a result of inspections. The government made some efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex, including by conducting awareness activities. The government also conducted awareness-raising activities on extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse, including by training Tourism Security Units. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel, including on the use of the NRM; however, the ability to identify and assist trafficking victims within diplomatic missions, especially among honorary consuls, remained limited. The government did not report whether it provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, there was one open case (submitted in 2018) of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Gambian personnel deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia from 2013 to 2015. As of the end of the reporting period, the government had not yet provided the UN the information it needed to complete its investigation.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking as reported over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in The Gambia, and traffickers exploit victims from The Gambia abroad. Traffickers exploit women, girls, and boys in sex trafficking and forced labor in street vending and domestic work. Some corrupt Quranic school teachers exploit Gambian boys in forced begging, street vending, and agricultural work in The Gambia and neighboring West African countries, especially Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, and exploit boys from neighboring countries in The Gambia. Child marriage remains prevalent, with some families allegedly falsifying ages to force girls into early marriages; these girls may then be subjected to sex trafficking or domestic servitude. Traffickers fraudulently recruit women and girls from West African countries, especially Nigeria, for jobs in tourism, and subsequently exploit them in sex trafficking. European tourists, primarily from the United Kingdom, reportedly travel to The Gambia for the purpose of exploiting children in sex trafficking. Observers noted organized sex trafficking networks use European and Gambian travel agencies to promote The Gambia as a destination for commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse, and traffickers promote commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse to tourists, especially in the Senegambia Strip, once they arrive. Some families encourage their children to enter the tourism industry or seek relationships with tourists for financial gain. Observers report traffickers also host tourists in private residences or local compounds outside the commercial tourist areas and hotels, making the crime harder to detect. Sex

traffickers also exploit men and boys; however, due to social stigma, cases involving male victims are underreported. Individuals without birth registrations, especially children of single mothers and those in rural areas, are vulnerable to exploitation. There were Cuban regime-affiliated workers in The Gambia, including medical professionals and teachers. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated professionals in the Gambia to work.

Traffickers exploit Gambian men and women in forced labor and sex trafficking in the Middle East. An international organization reported informal agencies use fraudulent or predatory contracts; agents charge migrant workers en route to the Gulf recruitment fees between 5,000 and 40,000 dalasi (\$71-\$571). The Gambian Honorary Consul in Lebanon reportedly denied assistance to and returned 38 Gambian trafficking victims exploited in domestic servitude to their traffickers in 2020; fraudulent recruitment agents provided the women with false contracts, facilitated their travel to Lebanon, and seized their documents upon their arrival.

Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including The Gambia – 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. Gambian migrants, particularly young men from impoverished backgrounds, attempting to illegally travel to Europe are vulnerable to trafficking and abuse. Gambians were especially vulnerable to online forms of exploitation and false job advertisements. Gambian migrants in Libya are vulnerable to exploitation, where there are widespread reports of officials subjecting detained migrants to violence and abuse, including trafficking. Female migrants, especially Sierra Leoneans, transit The Gambia en route to the Middle East, where traffickers exploit them in domestic servitude. Organized criminal networks fraudulently recruit Gambian boys to play professional soccer in North Africa or Europe; once they arrive, they are vulnerable to forced labor.

In December 2021, the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Committee (TRRC) issued its final report, which found former government officials had procured women through fraud and coercion to engage in sex acts with former President Jammeh while he was in office from 1997 until 2017. The report also concluded Jammeh exploited government employees and citizens in forced labor on his farm, and high-ranking officials coerced some of the victims to engage in sex acts.