

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Benin

BENIN (Tier 2)

The Government of Benin 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, Benin was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting and convicting more traffickers and identifying a greater number of trafficking victims. The government also developed a new anti-trafficking National Action Plan and allocated increased funding for anti-trafficking activities. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not have adequate protection services, including shelter, for adults. The government did not report referring any victims to services. Observers reported the government employed an insufficient number of inspectors to effectively monitor all sectors and noted efforts were insufficient to combat the scope and magnitude of child trafficking in Benin. Due to inadequate screening, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Formally adopt and implement SOPs for proactive identification of trafficking victims and their subsequent referral to care, and train stakeholders on their use.
- Increase the availability of protection services for all trafficking victims, especially adults, including by partnering with NGOs and international organizations.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Expand training for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, and judicial staff to increase their ability to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including fraudulent labor recruiters.
- Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Establish a hotline that is equipped to receive calls regarding all victims of trafficking.
- Develop an information management system for government agencies – in coordination with international organizations – to improve access and utilization of law enforcement and judicial statistics.
- Increase efforts to proactively screen Cuban regime-affiliated workers and refer potential trafficking victims to services.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts.

Existing laws criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Articles 499-504 of the Penal Code criminalized all forms of labor trafficking and some forms of sex trafficking and prescribed penalties of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment; these penalties were sufficiently stringent, and with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with other grave crimes, such as rape. The 2006 Act Relating to the Transportation of Minors and the Suppression of Child Trafficking (Act 2006-04) criminalized all forms of child sex trafficking as well as labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for other grave crimes, such as rape.

In 2024, the government reported initiating investigation of 22 cases involving 26 suspects – including six suspects for sex trafficking and 20 suspects for forced labor (including one suspect for forced begging) – compared with initiating investigations of 20 cases involving 66 suspects during the previous year. The government reported prosecuting 195 suspects under the penal code – including 43 sex trafficking suspects, 149 forced labor suspects, and three suspects for unspecified forms of trafficking – a significant increase compared with prosecuting 17 individuals during the previous year. Of the 195 suspects, the government reported prosecuting 192 suspects under trafficking laws and three suspects under non-trafficking laws. The government also continued prosecutions of 143 suspects from previous years. The government reported convicting 60 traffickers – including 55 sex traffickers and five traffickers for forced labor – a significant increase compared with no convictions during the previous year; the government reported 27 convictions occurred under human trafficking laws. The government reported sentences ranging from three months to 10 years in prison. Government data may have included other crimes outside the international definition of human trafficking. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes.

A specialized unit for the protection of minors within the Benin police led trafficking in persons investigations with support from additional police units. Observers reported law enforcement efforts were hindered by limited resources and officials did not have a dedicated budget to investigate and prosecute human trafficking crimes. Observers reported judges often did not uniformly interpret the trafficking law, which resulted in traffickers being charged with other crimes. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) noted the lack of an effective data collection system resulted in the need for officials to contact individual courts to obtain case details. Many police stations lacked the technology and capacity necessary to maintain electronic databases; judicial personnel and most courts continued to record cases on paper, creating challenges in compiling and sharing law enforcement statistics. The government continued to partner with an international organization and NGOs to train police and judges on anti-trafficking laws and policies. The government reported cooperating with other governments on some trafficking investigations and prosecutions, although police officials were often unaware of existing bilateral agreements to support transnational investigations.

PROTECTION

The government slightly increased overall efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims.

The government reported identifying 755 trafficking victims (201 men, 68 women, 203 boys, and 283 girls) – including 39 sex trafficking victims, 231 forced labor victims, and 485 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking – a significant increase compared with identifying 504 victims in the previous year. International organizations and NGOs reported identifying at least 110 additional victims. The government did not have standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral to care, although officials used standards for child protection or violence against women and girls to conduct some trafficking screenings. The government began to draft formal SOPs for victim identification, including for adults and children, which remained pending at the end of the reporting year. The Ministry of Health had SOPs to provide health services to individuals in commercial sex that included a presumption that any child involved in commercial sex was a sex trafficking victim; however, screening for trafficking indicators remained inconsistent and there was no corresponding directive or SOPs for adults. Due to inadequate screening, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

The government provided formally identified victims with services – including health care, income generating skills training, psychosocial care, and shelter – through ministries such as the Health Ministry, Ministry of Labor, and Ministry of Social Affairs. The government did not report referring any victims to social services, compared with referring 98 victims to services during the previous year. However, the government reported providing assistance to 228 trafficking victims; international organizations and NGOs operating without government assistance provided services to 50 victims. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance's network of Social Protection One-Stop Centers continued to provide basic services for adult and child trafficking victims in all of Benin's 77 communes. Female trafficking victims had access to services from the National Institute for Women, a government agency that provided overall protection for victims of abuse. The Central Office for the Protection of Minors, MOJ, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various international donors and NGOs coordinated to identify, assist, and repatriate child trafficking victims. The government reported funding the repatriation of 55 Beninese victims exploited in forced labor abroad and referred them to services. The government operated four shelters, primarily for children, that could assist child trafficking victims and provide legal services, medical, and psychological assistance. There were limited shelters available for adult trafficking victims and services for victims in rural areas were insufficient. Some NGO-operated shelters for victims of crime could support trafficking victims. Observers previously noted limited shelter capacity hindered service provision and access to justice for some victims. The government continued implementing its social services data management system to track child protection cases, including child trafficking. Data was publicly available, yet remained incomplete as not all staff were equipped or trained to input data.

The government reported an unspecified number of victims participated in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. The government required victims to cooperate with law enforcement proceedings to access witness protection services. The Social Protection One-Stop Centers supported victim-witnesses, although not all victims could access these services, and some service providers lacked adequate training. The

government could assist victims with filing complaints against perpetrators and could provide legal assistance to victims of trafficking. Victims participating in criminal justice proceedings could provide written testimony or testify by video conference. Although the government could offer victim services to foreign victims of trafficking, Beninese law did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of trafficking victims to countries in which victims would face retribution or hardship; the government considered cases involving foreign child trafficking victims for immigration relief on an ad hoc basis. Courts could order restitution, and the government reported ordering 60 traffickers to pay victim compensation.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking in persons.

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission – chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Development and Coordination of Government Action (MDC) – coordinated the government’s anti-trafficking efforts and met regularly. The Minister of State, in charge of MDC’s General Directorate for Evaluation and the Observatory for Social Change, had working level responsibility for the government’s anti-trafficking efforts while the National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection monitored child trafficking cases. Child Protection Committees, comprised of local officials, police, and NGO representatives in each of Benin’s 77 communes, met regularly to discuss strategies to address child protection issues, including child trafficking. The government reported it developed a new anti-trafficking NAP for 2025-2029 with a total proposed budget of 12.3 billion CFA francs (\$19.53 million). The government drafted a national policy to combat trafficking in persons for 2025-2034, which remained pending approval. The government also joined the Alliance 8.7, a global partnership to eradicate human trafficking. The government continued to carry out awareness-raising campaigns in collaboration with international organizations and NGOs. In coordination with an international organization, the Ministry of Social Affairs operated a hotline for child protection and violence against women and girls, which fielded 26,628 calls; the government reported referring five potential trafficking cases. There were no hotlines available to report trafficking cases of adult males.

The government reported conducting 1,968 labor inspections, including prioritizing sectors with high instances of child labor, and reported identifying an estimated 620 instances of violations of child labor laws – compared with 575 in the previous reporting period – resulting in 61 cases being prosecuted and 21 convictions for the worst forms of child labor. The government provided training for labor inspectors on child labor laws. The government incentivized apprenticeship masters who complied with child labor laws and apprenticeship agreements by granting awards following inspections. However, observers reported the government employed an insufficient number of inspectors to effectively monitor all sectors and noted efforts were insufficient to combat the scope and magnitude of child trafficking in Benin. Labor inspectors often lacked basic materials for inspections, including fuel and transportation. The government maintained several labor agreements with other countries, including Kuwait. The government continued to regulate formal recruitment agencies and prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees. Authorities did not take action against informal employment agents who facilitated trafficking.

The government made some efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting awareness activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to train diplomats on human rights issues, including human trafficking. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to Beninese troops deployed as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, an international organization reported there were six open cases of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Beninese peacekeepers deployed to UN peacekeeping missions. The government did not report on accountability measures taken, if any, for the open cases by the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Benin, and traffickers exploit victims from Benin abroad. Trafficking in Benin is predominantly internal and disproportionately affects women and children, especially those from rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Traffickers exploit children in forced labor in agriculture, construction, domestic work, fishing, forced begging, artisanal gold panning, handicraft manufacturing, markets and street vending, mining, quarries, restaurants and bars, and as “apprentices” engaged in various trades and in sex trafficking. Adults are exploited in sex and labor trafficking, including domestically and across borders, due to poverty and precarious conditions in the informal sector. Rising insecurity, particularly in northern Benin, exacerbates vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers. Traffickers increasingly use technology and social media platforms to lure victims into trafficking situations.

Most child trafficking victims are from rural areas and exploited as victims of labor trafficking; children from low-income families and those without birth documents are especially at risk. Some traffickers exploit traditional practices such as *vidomegon*, which involves sending children to wealthier families to perform household services in exchange for educational or vocational opportunities; some families subject these children to forced labor, often in domestic service and open-air markets, or sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit children living in the lakeside areas of Benin in debt bondage. Some Quranic schools in northern Benin exploit their students, or *talibe*, in forced begging. Child marriage remains prevalent nationwide, particularly in northeast Benin, with some families forcing girls into marriages because of generational poverty; these girls may then be subjected to sex trafficking or domestic servitude.

Traffickers fraudulently recruit Beninese and send migrants abroad for work elsewhere in West Africa – especially in Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria – and the Maghreb, as well as Middle East countries, where victims are subsequently exploited in forced labor or sex trafficking. Beninese children are sent to West and Central African countries for domestic servitude and other forms of forced labor. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Benin – 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.

The government previously identified foreign victims of trafficking in Benin, mostly from West and Central African countries. Victims from Thailand have been fraudulently recruited and forced into sex trafficking in Benin. Children from Togo, Burkina Faso, and Niger are exploited in forced begging in northern Benin. North Koreans working in Benin may operate under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor. According to reports, the Government of Benin signed an agreement with the Cuban regime for the provision of Cuban regime-affiliated medical workers. International organizations, NGOs, and experts have raised concerns with Cuba's labor export program, as it has strong indicators of forced labor.

