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# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uganda

## UGANDA (Tier 2)

The Government of Uganda 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, Uganda remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting more trafficking crimes and drafting a new anti-trafficking National Action Plan. The government, in cooperation with an international organization, opened a support center for migrant workers offering pre-departure training to reduce trafficking vulnerabilities. The government's hotline identified a steady stream of trafficking victims, referring those victims to care and initiating criminal investigations, and established two new district level anti-trafficking task forces. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government identified and referred fewer trafficking victims to services. Access to adequate services for some victims, particularly men and individuals in rural areas, remained limited, and the lack of short-term shelter and long-term housing continued to adversely affect the government's ability to protect trafficking victims. Reports of official complicity continued. The absence of policies to provide assistance to victims and witnesses hindered the government's efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Using the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking in Uganda (NRG), systematically and proactively identify trafficking victims by screening vulnerable populations, such as refugees, asylum-seekers, individuals in commercial sex, children in the Karamoja region, and Cuban regime-affiliated professionals, for trafficking indicators and refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services.
- Significantly increase the availability of short-term shelter, long-term housing, and specialized services for all trafficking victims – particularly men and victims identified in rural areas – including by partnering with NGOs that provide victim care.
- Investigate all credible allegations of official complicity in human trafficking and hold complicit officials criminally accountable through prosecution and conviction.
- Develop and implement a victim-witness assistance program to increase protective services for trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization.
- Strengthen the partnership between police and prosecutors to more efficiently and effectively complete the judicial proceedings of trafficking cases, including increasing training on strong evidence gathering and victim-centered investigations.
- Increase protection for Ugandan trafficking victims exploited abroad, including training Ugandan embassy staff to identify and assist victims and assigning more labor attachés to Ugandan embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad.
- Adopt a comprehensive National Action Plan and dedicate resources to its implementation.
- Strengthen the capacity of labor inspectors to identify and report potential trafficking crimes and refer trafficking victims to appropriate services.
- Continue to enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2397.

# PROSECUTION

The government made mixed anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed punishments of up to 15 years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult victims and up to life imprisonment for those involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping.

The Coordination Office to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) remained responsible for compiling law enforcement data. COPTIP continued to report "incidents" related to human trafficking, which ranged from simple inquiries to full police investigations; the government did not provide a breakdown of the various categories that made up an incident or how many incidents resulted in full investigations. In 2024, the government reported investigating 1,055 incidents of human trafficking, compared with 1,006 incidents in 2023. The government reported initiating prosecutions against 967 alleged traffickers in 784 cases, compared with prosecuting 589 alleged traffickers in 494 cases in 2023. Of the 967 alleged traffickers, 602 were charged with sex trafficking, 212 for labor trafficking, and 153 for unspecified forms of trafficking. The government reported it continued 1,874 investigations and prosecutions of 1,980 alleged traffickers from previous reporting periods. Courts convicted 101 traffickers under the 2009 anti-trafficking act in 2024, compared with 130 convictions in 2023. Of the 101 convictions, courts convicted 86 traffickers for sex trafficking, and 15 for forced labor. Courts sentenced traffickers to prison terms ranging from three months to 24 years' imprisonment.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. The government reported it charged nine government officials – including police officers, military officers, and public officials – for potential trafficking crimes; all nine cases remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Two of the nine officials were charged with fraudulently recruiting Ugandan workers for technology jobs in Thailand; the workers were then exploited in forced labor in online cryptocurrency scams in Burma targeting Western audiences. Observers reported that some police officers and prosecutors dropped trafficking cases or downgraded offenses to lesser charges for various reasons, including officer negligence, ignorance of trafficking laws, or complicity with traffickers. Additionally, prior reports noted that police officers and immigration officials, particularly at airports and border crossings, accepted bribes to facilitate trafficking crimes or to warn traffickers of impending operations and investigations. Observers reported allegations that high-level officials owned or were associated with labor recruitment companies suspected of trafficking. A Ugandan High Court Judge was found guilty of exploiting a domestic worker in the United Kingdom (UK); sentencing was pending by the end of the reporting period. The UK government also declared the Ugandan Deputy High Commissioner a persona non grata in October 2024 for facilitating the recruitment and alleged trafficking of Ugandan domestic workers in the UK.

The UPF Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID) was responsible for trafficking investigations and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) had an Anti-Trafficking Unit with exclusive authority to prosecute all trafficking cases. The Chief Magistrate and High Court had jurisdiction to hear trafficking cases, and the International Crimes Division of the High Court was responsible for child trafficking cases. Law enforcement officials, in partnership with an NGO, continued to use a mobile phone app to collect and disseminate standardized data pertaining to human trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, enabling government agencies to track trafficking cases and nationwide trafficking trends.

The government, in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, trained police, social workers, border agents, immigration officials, and community elders on the anti-trafficking law, victim-centered investigation strategies, and victim identification and referral procedures. COPTIP, in collaboration with NGOs and foreign governments, trained at least 750 officials at various levels of government. Despite training, some Ugandan police and immigration officers continued to lack

an understanding of the anti-trafficking law and misclassified trafficking cases as other crimes or collected insufficient evidence for trafficking cases to proceed to prosecution. Due to the limited availability of shelters and other protections, the government often quickly repatriated foreign victims before obtaining their testimony, which continued to impede the completion of trials. The government lacked resources and personnel to sufficiently address internal and transnational trafficking crimes, with observers reporting that trafficking prosecutions can be delayed for multiple years, negatively impacting evidence gathering. The government collaborated with the governments of Burundi, Kenya, and Malaysia on trafficking investigations and prosecutions. The government collaborated with the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to train border authorities to mitigate human trafficking through ports. Officials from the ODPP, COPTIP, and UPF participated in a regional forum with officials from Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya to collaborate on several security issues, including multilateral efforts to identify trafficking victims and prosecute traffickers.

## PROTECTION

The government decreased victim protection efforts.

The government reported identifying 404 victims in 2024, compared with 1,698 victims identified in 2023. NGOs and international organizations reported identifying an additional 474 victims and providing 3,888 victims, including those identified in previous reporting periods, with various services, including medical care, shelter, counseling, family reunification, vocational training, education, legal support, and repatriation assistance. Government officials continued to use the National Referral Guidelines (NRG) to identify trafficking victims and refer them to services. The NRG provided victim referral guidelines for government officials – including police, prosecutors, and immigration officials – and NGOs, and described resources and recommendations for victim protection. The government continued to distribute copies to officials and trained them on its use. The government, in collaboration with an international organization, had an online directory to connect government agencies and victims of trafficking with NGOs providing services. The government screened vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, such as children and adults in the Karamoja region, at children’s shelters, border locations, schools, and medical facilities. Identified victims were referred to authorities or NGOs for assistance.

The government continued to use the NRG, service provider directory, and the country’s multisectoral victim support system to directly refer and assist victims with care. The government, in partnership with civil society organizations, provided 47 victims with various protection services, including shelter, medical services, psycho-social counseling, vocational training, and community reintegration, compared with providing 442 victims services in 2023. In addition, the government reported referring 120 victims to NGO-provided services, compared with referring 550 victims in the previous year. The government operated short-term shelters in Kampala in partnership with international organizations. The government did not report how much funding it spent on victim services in 2024, compared with 180 million Ugandan shillings (\$47,682) in 2023. The government continued to rely on civil society to provide most victim services but provided some in-kind assistance to partner organizations. The availability of victim care remained inadequate to meet the needs of victims and accommodate the number of victims identified – especially outside the central and eastern parts of the country – and services were primarily for women and children, limiting the services available for adult male victims. Government officials and civil society reported the lack of short-term shelters and long-term housing available in the country continued to adversely affect the government’s ability to adequately protect trafficking victims. In some cases, police reportedly returned child victims exploited by their guardians to their homes because of the limited availability of shelters or alternative forms of care. Because of a lack of resources and the limited availability of short- and long-term shelters, they were often overcrowded. Observers previously reported the government removed hundreds of children who were homeless from urban areas and placed these children in overcrowded shelters; most children were victims of trafficking from the Karamoja region and exploited in forced begging. In September 2021, the Cabinet approved the establishment of shelters for migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and

the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The government reported it established one shelter in Saudi Arabia, which offered limited services; no shelters were operational in Qatar or UAE. The government reported cooperating with the governments of Burma, India, and Saudi Arabia to repatriate Ugandan trafficking victims exploited abroad, though it relied upon international organizations, local NGOs, and victims' families to fund the repatriations.

The government remained without victim-witness legislation or a formal victim-witness assistance program to protect trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization and generally relied on NGOs to provide these services. ODPP, in partnership with local NGOs, continued to operate child-friendly interviewing rooms in Kampala where law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers could conduct forensic interviews with child trafficking victims. The absence of formal victim-witness assistance policies hindered some investigations and prosecutions, especially as traffickers continued to be in communication with victims, leading to threats to discourage their participation in trials; in addition, some law enforcement officials did not take a victim-centered approach in criminal proceedings, potentially re-traumatizing victims or discouraging victims from participating. The 2009 anti-trafficking law permitted foreign trafficking victims to remain in Uganda during the investigation of cases and to apply for residence and work permits, but the government did not report the extent to which it provided these services. The law permitted victims to provide testimony via video or written statement or to anonymously provide information. The law allowed victims to seek restitution and compensation in criminal and civil suits. At least six traffickers were ordered to pay restitution to victims with amounts ranging from 300,000 shillings (\$82) to 250,000,000 shillings (\$68,045). Observers reported concerns that restitution payments were often delayed or ignored due to limited enforcement mechanisms.

## PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts.

The National Task Force, led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with COPTIP serving as its secretariat, met regularly to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. COPTIP, in partnership with a foreign government, supported the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (PTIP) District Task Forces (DTFs) in Arua and Kyotera, and established two new task forces in Kasese and Tororo during the reporting period. The PTIP DTFs were chaired by the districts' Resident District Commissioner and comprised of police, prosecutors, cultural leaders, and civil society; COPTIP provided the PTIP DTFs with training on trafficking case coordination and held trafficking-awareness workshops. The government initiated development of a new five-year anti-trafficking NAP as its 2019-2024 NAP concluded; the NAP remained pending by the end of the reporting period. The government reported ministries requested funds to implement the NAP as part of the general budget. Observers continued to report COPTIP did not have sufficient staffing or funding to fulfill its mandate, hindering progress on anti-trafficking efforts. COPTIP again did not publish an annual report containing general information on human trafficking and a summary of its anti-trafficking efforts. The government, independently and in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, held various awareness campaigns for government officials, civil society, community leaders, and the public on recognizing trafficking crimes, vulnerabilities to trafficking, and victim protection measures. The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD), in partnership with an international organization, operated a trafficking-specific hotline to identify potential victims, refer victims to care, and initiate criminal investigations; the government reported receiving an average of 24 trafficking case referrals per month. The Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC) continued to operate a 24-hour toll-free hotline for general information, including to report trafficking crimes. An NGO, in collaboration with the government, provided training to social workers, helpline operators, and law enforcement officials on trauma-informed care for the identification and assistance of trafficking victims.

The MGLSD continued to regulate labor migration and other labor-related matters, including addressing cases of forced labor, and continued efforts to improve ethical recruitment practices. The

government maintained an external employment management system, which functioned as a “one-stop” internet portal where Ugandans could search and apply for all pre-vetted overseas employment opportunities through licensed recruitment companies. In March 2025, the MGLSD, in cooperation with an international organization, opened a support center for migrant workers to serve as an information hub offering pre-departure training, including on workers’ rights, legal assistance, destination countries’ laws and cultural practices, and required documentation. The government also reported streamlining the passport and visa application process for migrant workers to limit risks associated with labor brokers through an online passport application and payment portal. MGLSD accredited private training institutions to provide pre-departure training sessions for Ugandan migrant workers registered through labor recruitment companies. The two-week mandatory pre-departure trainings for all Ugandan migrant workers utilizing registered labor recruitment companies included information on employment contracts, laws and regulations, health management, and cultures of destination countries. Despite efforts to improve recruitment practices and enforce regulations, observers noted insufficient funding, staffing gaps, corruption, and the continued operation of illegal recruitment agencies hindered the effectiveness of MGLSD’s efforts. The 2021 regulations continued to allow recruiting agencies to charge migrant workers recruitment fees up to 20,000 UGX (\$5) for administrative costs and various costs for placement fees and travel preparations, such as pre-departure trainings, visa applications, and medical examinations.

The DCIC continued efforts to regulate labor recruitment, including investigating complaints against labor recruitment companies illegally holding migrant workers’ passports: UPF closed 16 labor export companies during the reporting period. The government reported the conviction of a labor recruitment company related to the death of a Ugandan migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. The MGLSD did not employ labor attachés in most Ugandan diplomatic missions abroad, hindering the government’s overall ability to monitor migrant worker conditions abroad. However, the MGLSD employed a labor attaché in the Ugandan embassy in Saudi Arabia to investigate migrant worker complaints. In November 2024, MGLSD repatriated 146 Ugandan migrant workers, without determining whether any were trafficking victims, under its bilateral labor agreement (BLA) with Saudi Arabia; existing BLAs with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates continued. The MGLSD signed a new BLA with Qatar that formalized recruitment practices for skilled, semi-skilled, and domestic workers and began discussions with the government of Oman to establish a BLA for Ugandan migrant workers. Some labor inspectors overseeing working conditions in the country received training on identifying trafficking cases and utilized field guides to report potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement; however, NGOs reported limited knowledge and training gaps continued to hinder overall effectiveness. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, including by cooperating with international law enforcement officials to arrest buyers of commercial sex and reported convicting at least one foreign national of related crimes.

## 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 Ugandan adults and children in labor trafficking in various industries, including agriculture, fishing, mining, street vending, hospitality, and domestic work. Traffickers also exploit women, girls, and boys in sex trafficking throughout the country, particularly in Kampala and other urban areas, in brothels, bars, residential homes, rental properties, and on the street. Children from the Karamoja region, particularly from Napak district, are especially vulnerable to trafficking because of a lack of economic and educational opportunities in the region; NGOs estimate the majority of child sex trafficking victims in Uganda are ethnically Karamojong. Traffickers, sometimes known as community “elders,” also exploit children from the Karamoja region in forced begging and domestic servitude; in some cases, traffickers force children to meet them at international borders, where they organize markets to sell the children into domestic servitude or sex trafficking. In some cases, parents knowingly send their children to exploitative situations to send remittances back to the family or force their children to beg to supplement family income. Traffickers exploit children

not in school in sex trafficking, including online commercial sexual exploitation, and labor trafficking in domestic work and forced begging. Traffickers use in-person connections and social media to advertise fraudulent job opportunities in Kampala to lure adults and children from rural areas into exploitative situations. Observers report drought or heavy rainfall and rising temperatures increased poverty, food insecurity, and loss of work; individuals impacted by these situations are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Employment agencies based in Uganda and abroad, legal and fraudulent, recruit Ugandans to work in the Middle East – particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, and Oman – where, at times, traffickers exploit them in forced labor in domestic work, hospitality, or construction; Ugandans who voluntarily migrate in search of employment opportunities are also vulnerable to exploitative conditions. Reports indicate traffickers in Saudi Arabia regularly sell and “trade” Ugandan domestic workers using an online marketplace. To circumvent the 2016 government ban on migrant worker travel to Oman, some licensed and unlicensed agencies sent Ugandans through Kenya and Tanzania, increasing their vulnerability to debt bondage because of higher recruitment and travel fees. Traffickers also exploit Ugandans in forced labor and sex trafficking in neighboring African countries, Asia, and North America. Several NGOs and the MGLSD reported a trafficker scam lured Ugandans to Thailand and then transported the victims to Burma where they were exploited in cyber scam operations. Traffickers target university graduates with the promise of high-paying jobs abroad; however, upon arrival in the destination country, traffickers exploit these individuals in forced labor. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Uganda – 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.

Children who are homeless or using the streets as a source of livelihood are particularly vulnerable to trafficking abroad. Some Ugandan girls, particularly from the Karamoja region, are exploited in Kenya by business owners and employers in sex trafficking and forced labor. NGOs report 34 percent of Ugandan girls are involved in early or forced marriages, increasing to 50 percent for girls in the Karamoja region. Traffickers exploit adolescent boys from the Karamoja region in cattle raiding. Observers report ISIS-Central Africa may unlawfully recruit, sometimes with parental knowledge, Ugandan children to join the non-state armed group.

Uganda hosts more than 1.8 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Traffickers exploit refugees in village settlements and urban areas in labor and sex trafficking. Uganda continues to serve as a transit point for migrants seeking work in the Middle East; traffickers exploit this transiting population in forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit children from neighboring East African countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania, in labor trafficking, primarily in agriculture and domestic work, and sex trafficking in Uganda. Chinese national workers may be exploited on worksites affiliated with Chinese national-owned companies and China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated professionals in Uganda, including teachers and medical personnel, to work. Democratic People’s Republic of Korea nationals working in Uganda may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.