

SURINAME (TIER 2 WATCH LIST)

The Government of Suriname does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government made key achievements during the reporting period; therefore, Suriname was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List. These achievements included establishing a dedicated shelter for women and girl trafficking victims and increasing the number of trafficking convictions. Despite these achievements the number of investigations, prosecutions, and victims identified decreased and courts did not impose sufficiently stringent sentences on convicted traffickers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SURINAME

Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and convict and punish traffickers, with sufficiently stringent sentences; increase efforts to identify victims, including forced labor victims in the interior; hold public officials complicit in trafficking criminally accountable; conduct targeted labor inspections in risk-prone areas, such as the interior of the country; develop and implement formal procedures for the referral of identified victims to care, provide additional training to law enforcement, immigration, health care, labor, and judicial officials to better identify and protect victims; provide reintegration support for all trafficking victims, and offer specialized processes for assisting foreign victims, such as offering translation services; and complete and implement the national anti-trafficking and action plan.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained prosecution efforts. A 2014 criminal code amendment prohibits all forms of trafficking and prescribes penalties of five to 20 years imprisonment, which are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Police reported three investigations for sex trafficking involving four suspects, a decrease from the seven investigations in 2015—six for sex trafficking and one for forced labor— involving 16 suspects, and 15 investigations in 2014—11 for sex trafficking and four for forced labor. The prosecutor's office initiated four new prosecutions for sex trafficking involving five suspects and continued six trafficking prosecutions from 2015, a decrease from the nine prosecutions initiated in 2015. The government convicted three traffickers, an increase from zero in 2015. Convicted traffickers continued to avoid serious punishment as courts issued penalties that were inadequate to deter the crime. The court sentenced one convicted trafficker to 12 months imprisonment with eight months suspended and sentenced two convicted traffickers to eight months and six months imprisonment, respectively, with four months suspended from each. The government did not report any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking offenses; however, the 2015 investigation of Alien Affairs Department staff who sold residence permits to Hong Kong criminal networks that allegedly used the documents to fraudulently bring Chinese workers into Suriname for forced

labor remained open.

Police operated a specialized 14-person anti-trafficking unit (ATU) responsible for investigating cases. During the reporting period, this unit provided training courses on awareness, identification, and management of trafficking cases for several stakeholders; it also trained other specialized police units on the links between trafficking and other crimes. In December, the government signed a cooperative agreement with Guyana to jointly combat cross-border crime, including human trafficking. Justice officials from both countries also exchanged information on cases and potential suspects.

PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts. Police identified five victims of sex trafficking and no victims of forced labor, a decrease from the 12 victims identified in 2015. All five victims received medical assistance and basic services, four victims were provided shelter, and one received counseling. The government did not provide counseling services to all the victims due to foreign language constraints. The government opened a shelter dedicated for women and girl trafficking victims, which occupied a separate annex within an existing domestic violence shelter; the shelter accommodated three adult female victims and one male child victim during the reporting period.

The ATU assisted military police and immigration officials on identifying and interviewing potential trafficking victims. In 2016, the ATU conducted random checks of international flights approximately three times a week and performed random inspections of brothels, looking for trafficking indicators. Health care workers did not screen for trafficking indicators among persons in prostitution. Victim identification efforts in the country's interior were limited. There were no formal procedures to refer victims to care. The ATU continued to have oversight of victim shelter and services, including medical care. The government did not report what funding, if any, it provided to NGOs for victim assistance; however, the anti-trafficking working group had meetings with NGOs to establish protocols for future cooperation on victim assistance and prevention efforts.

The government did not sponsor any programs to facilitate victims' reintegration, such as a witness-protection program or long-term care. Victims had the option of pursuing civil suits against their traffickers but no such cases were reported. To encourage victims to participate in the investigation against their traffickers, courts implemented a policy of obtaining testimony from victims, which can serve as evidence, in the early stages of the judicial investigation, in case victims were not available during the trial process. Foreign victims who gave statements were given the opportunity to return to their countries of origin or remain in Suriname. Foreign victims could apply to receive work or residency permits on the same basis as any foreign citizen. The government did not have legal alternatives to foreign victims' removal to countries

where they would face hardship or retribution. It was unclear whether the government penalized victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. The anti-trafficking working group included representatives from six government agencies and focused on awareness-raising programs, interagency coordination, and developing protocols for victim care. The working group made progress in the development of a national strategy and associated action plan, but inadequate funding for the action plan continued to hamper efforts. During the reporting period, the working group trained a total of 603 individuals including, government officials, civil society, and members of religious organizations on identifying and handling potential cases of trafficking. The ATU remained active in the press and on social media raising awareness and warning parents about the use of social media as a tool used by traffickers to lure child victims. The ATU held awareness sessions for neighborhood organizations, women's organizations, and youth groups. The government continued to operate a child and youth hotline. Calls to the hotline did not lead investigators to any cases during the reporting period. The government hosted a conference on trafficking and smuggling in which the extent of the problem was discussed, including Suriname's responsibility as a member of the international community and how to improve interagency coordination. The conference led to different training sessions throughout the year. Labor inspectors trained to identify trafficking victims were not legally authorized to conduct inspections outside formal workplaces, which rendered those employed in informal sectors invisible to such inspections. During the reporting period, the government reintroduced a visa requirement for Haitian citizens after a steady influx began entering Suriname, whom authorities suspect smugglers or traffickers bring into the country. The government made no discernible efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex or forced labor. The ATU provided anti-trafficking training for diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Suriname is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to sex trafficking and men, women, and children subjected to forced labor. Reported cases of trafficking in Suriname's remote jungle interior, which constitutes approximately 80 percent of the country, have increased in recent years; limited government presence in the interior renders the full scope of the problem unknown. Women and girls from Suriname, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Venezuela are subjected to sex trafficking in Suriname, including in remote and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname's interior. Some Surinamese parents subject their daughters to sex trafficking. Venezuela's deteriorating economy may increase Venezuelan women's vulnerability to sex trafficking in Suriname. The influx of migrants from Haiti is vulnerable to trafficking. A shift towards in-home brothels makes such establishments, and cases of possible sex trafficking, harder to detect.

Migrant workers in agriculture and on fishing boats off Suriname's coast are highly vulnerable to forced labor, as are children working in gold mines and informal urban sectors. Chinese associations, and allegedly some Hong Kong traffickers, recruit and subject Chinese immigrants to sex and labor trafficking in the mining, service, and construction sectors. Surinamese women in neighboring countries engage in prostitution and may be vulnerable to sex trafficking. Traffickers from Suriname exploit Surinamese victims in the Netherlands. Traffickers may transport victims through Suriname's remote interior to bypass official checkpoints. There are reports of corruption and local official complicity in trafficking crimes that may impede anti-trafficking efforts.