

Suriname (Tier 2)

The Government of Suriname 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 to the previous reporting period; therefore Suriname was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included approving a new action plan, developing a new formal victim referral process, convicting more traffickers and imposing significant prison terms, and launching a new trafficking hotline and campaign. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities investigated and prosecuted fewer cases and identified fewer victims amid inadequate efforts to screen vulnerable individuals, including detained migrants prior to deportation.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and convict and punish traffickers with significant prison terms. • Increase efforts to identify victims, particularly in the interior and in brothels. • Continue to prosecute child sex trafficking cases under the trafficking statute and protect children in those cases as victims. • Increase efforts to screen vulnerable populations for trafficking, particularly undocumented migrants. • Hold public officials found complicit in trafficking criminally accountable. • Conduct targeted labor inspections with an aim of identifying forced labor. • Provide additional training and resources 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.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased prosecution efforts. Article 334 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to nine years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 Surinamese dollars (SRD) (\$13,300) for offenses involving a victim 16 years of age or older, and up to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 SRD (\$13,300) for those involving a victim under the age of 16. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Police reported three investigations (one for sex trafficking of

a child, one for sex trafficking of an adult, one for labor trafficking of an adult), a decrease from 10 in 2017. The government launched trafficking investigations when discovering cases of children exploited in prostitution, including in cases where the parents were the traffickers. After evidence was burned in a fire, the government terminated the 2015 investigation of Alien Affairs Department staff who sold residence permits to criminal networks allegedly using the documents to exploit Chinese workers in forced labor. The prosecutor's office did not initiate any new prosecutions in 2018, compared with four new prosecutions for sex trafficking in 2017. The government convicted seven traffickers in two cases of sex trafficking, an increase from three traffickers in 2017, with prison sentences ranging from one to five years. The court ensured that convicted traffickers stayed in prison after pre-trial detention to serve their full terms of three and five year sentences. The government did not report the status of four prosecutions involving 12 suspected traffickers initiated in previous years. The government did not report any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses.

The dedicated police anti-trafficking unit (ATU) responsible for investigating cases lost three of 15 staff as part of staff turnover, which affected their ability to provide training and pursue cases. All incoming police recruits received basic trafficking training. One ATU member, one staff from the prosecutor's office, and two immigration officers participated in an international training on trafficking sponsored by another country. An international organization provided training to 34 officials from the police and prosecutor's office, promoting cooperation between units. The ATU provided training to 265 persons from within the police organization as well as members of the military and healthcare providers. The police attaché at the Brazilian embassy met with the government to plan bilateral cooperation against trafficking. Authorities extradited a Haitian to Brazil who was wanted on sex trafficking charges.

PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts. The government did not effectively identify victims among migrants in the interior and in brothels emerging in private homes. Police identified one child Surinamese victim of sex trafficking, compared with five victims identified in 2017. The female victim received counseling, medical assistance, specialized services as necessary, and the option to use the

state-run female victim shelter. The victim opted to return home after counseling and assisting with the prosecution. Police determined a second case initially investigated as a child sex trafficking case was not trafficking and transferred it to the police youth affairs department. Police also screened 21 other potential trafficking victims in two other cases, which they later determined not to be trafficking. The government developed and funded a new formal referral process to refer all victims to the Bureau of Victim Services for shelter, medical assistance, counseling, and other care. Health care workers did not have a protocol for victim identification and assistance. The government worked with the Guyanese embassy and Haitian consulate to investigate the increasing numbers of vulnerable Haitians who entered the country through the border with Guyana. The government also worked with the Haitian consulate to reunite a vulnerable group of Haitian minors with their families after authorities found them transiting Suriname en route to Brazil or French Guiana.

The ATU continued to perform regular inspections of brothels and screen for trafficking victims, although authorities did not adequately screen other vulnerable populations, such as undocumented migrants applying to legalize their status with the government. The government increased its efforts to screen migrants in their languages with the assistance of foreign embassies, consulates, or with bilingual government staff. As part of the screening process, the government assessed whether foreign victims wanted to return home or stay in country and guided victims through the process of applying for residency for those who wanted to stay. Victims had the option of pursuing civil suits against their traffickers, but the government reported no such cases during the year. There was no witness protection program. Courts implemented a policy of obtaining testimony from victims in the early stages of judicial investigations in case victims were not available during the trial process, although this could hamper law enforcement in cases where victims did not have time to rehabilitate before providing testimony. The government did not report whether it screened migrants who overstayed their visas and may have deported unidentified trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government renewed the mandate of the inter-ministerial Trafficking in Persons Working Group for three years, and approved a new national action plan in January 2019. For the first time,

the plan included partnering with civil society, using metrics for specific goals, and receiving dedicated funding from the Ministry of Justice and the police budget. Police provided trafficking awareness training to 20 diplomats for the first time since 2016. The working group organized and funded a nationwide campaign that encouraged the public to report potential trafficking cases and held a conference training civil society, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and the media on how to identify and report trafficking jointly with a foreign embassy. The working group translated the campaign materials into the languages of vulnerable populations and placed them at points of entry into Suriname, as well as in high risk areas and schools. The government launched a new 24-hour trafficking hotline but did not report any calls during the reporting period. The police youth affairs department included trafficking information on the youth hotline in its outreach campaign to schools but reported that there were no investigations resulting from hotline calls. Suriname passed the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labor Convention of 1930, which required governments to develop a plan of action to strengthen labor inspections and suppress forced labor. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or forced labor.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Suriname, and traffickers exploit victims from Suriname abroad. 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. The increasing influx of migrants, particularly those from Haiti and Venezuela, as well as those from Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Guyana, are vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers. Migrant women and girls are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking in Suriname, including in remote and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname's interior. Some Surinamese parents exploit their daughters in sex trafficking. Migrant workers in agriculture and on fishing boats off Suriname's coast are highly vulnerable to forced labor, as are children working in agriculture, small construction, gold mines, and informal urban sectors. Chinese associations, and allegedly some Hong Kong traffickers, recruit and exploit Chinese immigrants in sex and labor trafficking in the mining, service, and construction sectors. Surinamese women in neighboring countries are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Traffickers may transport victims through routes in Suriname's

interior that bypass official checkpoints. There are reports of corruption and local official complicity in trafficking crimes that may impede anti-trafficking efforts.