The Government of the Philippines fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore the Philippines remained on Tier 1. These efforts included improving the coordination of services for returning Filipino migrant workers who were victims of trafficking overseas; convicting and punishing traffickers, including an official complicit in sex trafficking and labor traffickers; increasing assistance to survivors who provide testimony; and increasing the use of prosecution procedures that reduce the potential for further harm to trafficking victims. Although the government meets the minimum standards, it did not vigorously investigate and prosecute officials allegedly involved in trafficking crimes, consistently criminally prosecute fraudulent recruiters and other labor traffickers, or increase support for specialized protection and assistance services for child victims of cyber-facilitated sex trafficking. Community reintegration services, including trauma-informed care, employment training, and job placement for survivors also remained inadequate.

**PHILIPPINES: Tier 1**

Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict complicit officials and labor traffickers. • Strengthen the capacity of local government units to provide reintegration services for trafficking survivors, including trauma-informed care, job training, and in-country employment. • Establish and implement a process to ensure systematic and ongoing input from a diverse community of survivors on the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of anti-trafficking policies and programs. • Provide increased support to government and NGO programs that provide specialized care for child victims of online sexual exploitation. • Increase resources for anti-trafficking task forces to conduct timely investigations, coordinated operations, and prosecutions while providing robust victim and witness assistance services. • Increase efforts to identify and assist child labor trafficking victims. • Provide increased resources for law enforcement units designated to investigate online child sexual exploitation and other cyber-facilitated trafficking crimes. • Consistently implement the coordinated interagency response to providing services to returning Filipinos who experienced sex and labor trafficking overseas. • Create a central database for information on illegal recruiters and human trafficking cases to facilitate interagency coordination in detecting, investigating, and prosecuting traffickers.

**PROSECUTION**

The government increased its law enforcement efforts. The 2003 and 2012 anti-trafficking acts criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 20 years’ imprisonment and fines of between one and two million
pesos ($19,750 to $39,490). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Law enforcement authorities conducted 245 anti-trafficking coordinated operations and investigated 237 cases of alleged illegal recruitment, compared with 462 investigations reported in 2018. This included the investigation of a foreign diplomat for alleged labor trafficking. These actions led to the identification of 546 suspects and arrests of 507 (compared with 689 arrests in 2018); 39 suspects remained at large. The government initiated prosecution of 266 alleged traffickers (227 in 2018); these included 24 labor trafficking defendants (18 in 2018), 239 sex trafficking defendants (195 in 2018), and three defendants charged with using a child for soldiering (one in 2018). The government convicted 89 traffickers under the anti-trafficking act and related laws (77 traffickers in 2018).

Most of the convicted traffickers subjected minors to sex trafficking, including 32 who sexually exploited children online (compared with 27 in 2018); five committed labor trafficking (three in 2018). The courts sentenced nearly all of the sex traffickers convicted under the anti-trafficking act to 15 years’ imprisonment or more and fines ranging from 500,000 to five million pesos ($9,870 to $98,740); 30 received a life sentence and fines of two million to five million pesos ($39,490 to $98,740). The court sentenced three sex traffickers convicted under related cybercrime laws to varying terms of imprisonment: two months, two to four years, and 12 to 17 years with fines ranging from 50,000 to one million pesos ($990 to $19,750). Of the four labor traffickers convicted under the illegal recruitment statute, the court sentenced one trafficker to a prison term of 10 to 12 years and one year to life imprisonment with a fine of two million pesos ($39,490); two traffickers awaited sentencing. The appellate courts affirmed 14 of 15 prior-year convictions.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) continued to oversee and support operations and training for 24 interagency anti-trafficking task forces (a DOJ-led task force, a national interagency task force, 16 regional task forces, and six air and seaport task forces, including the reactivated task force at Manila’s international airport).

Designated prosecutors led the task forces with the assistance of prosecutors who worked on trafficking cases in addition to their regular workloads; they were responsible for enhancing law enforcement efforts and ensuring the reporting, referring, and filing of trafficking cases. Acknowledging the need for additional anti-trafficking prosecutors, the Interagency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) Secretariat recommended a 50 percent increase in number of prosecutors assigned to the task forces; the DOJ did not approve an increase during the reporting period. Additionally, with donor support and in cooperation with an NGO, the IACAT established the Task Force Against the Trafficking of Overseas Filipino Workers to coordinate investigative and protective follow up on trafficking cases referred by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) overseas missions. In a sex trafficking case, the task force coordinated information with Bahraini authorities who arrested and prosecuted eight alleged traffickers, including a Bahraini police officer and seven Filipinos, while the DFA assisted the Filipina trafficking victims.

Through continued operation of the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center, known as the PICACC, opened in 2019, the Philippine National Police Women and Children’s Protection Center (PNP-WCPC) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Anti Human Trafficking Division partnered with foreign law enforcement agencies and an NGO to improve the effectiveness of investigations of online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). Following publication of the Anti-Money Laundering Council’s report documenting the link between small amounts of
illicit wire-transferred funds and cyber-facilitated sex trafficking, law enforcement identified 147 suspects in the Philippines for joint investigations of child sex trafficking and money laundering based on an analysis of suspicious money transfers. The PNP led the investigation of most OSEC cases and operated regional WCPC cyber protection units focused specifically on OSEC crimes. Police and prosecutors continued the use of recorded child victim interviews at the inquest stage and in some trials, which reduced the number of times officials interviewed victims and the potential for re-traumatizing children who served as witnesses. The DOJ issued its first advisory on plea bargaining in human trafficking cases and the courts' increased use of such pleas, particularly in OSEC cases, significantly decreased the time to case resolution and further reduced the potential for re-traumatizing child witnesses in trials, many of which involved traffickers who were family members. The IACAT also implemented the new prosecutor's trafficking case management system to monitor case progress and outcomes. Despite these advances, government agencies continued to report the need for more anti-trafficking law enforcement personnel, funds for operations, and equipment for forensic analysis of digital evidence and the extremely high volume of cybercrime tips related to child sexual exploitation the DOJ Office of Cybercrime received each month. Slow moving courts, the need for additional training on handling digital evidence in hearings and trials, and too few prosecutors also hindered the effective and timely prosecution of trafficking crimes.

The government sustained its efforts to provide anti-trafficking training to its officials by supporting 122 capacity-building activities, including 33 training programs organized by the IACAT Task Force and 89 training events the IACAT assisted. Specialized training topics for national and local government officials included the investigation and prosecution of cases involving forced labor and online sexual exploitation of children, as well as trauma-informed care for survivors and multidisciplinary case management. Philippine officials continued to cooperate with 10 other governments on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases. Reports of immigration, police, and other officials complicit in trafficking continued. In a case reported in prior years, the government convicted a police inspector of child sex trafficking in a bar he partly owned. The government initiated prosecution of a police officer who was a member of a regional anti-trafficking task force for cyber-facilitated sex trafficking, investigated and referred for criminal charges nine Bureau of Immigration (BI) officers for facilitating the illegal airport departure of potential trafficking victims, and investigated an IACAT intelligence officer for similar actions. The government also investigated and suspended six overseas employment officials suspected of facilitating the departure of minors and investigated the issuance of fraudulent passports at an overseas consulate.

**PROTECTION**

The government increased protection efforts. The government continued to implement formal procedures to identify potential trafficking victims in the Philippines and overseas, and refer them to official agencies or NGOs for care. The government did not report comprehensive unduplicated protection data. Philippine law enforcement reported identifying 1,443 victims of trafficking, the vast majority of whom were sex trafficking victims, compared with 2,953 victims in 2018. The IACAT Sea/Air Task Forces identified 2,500 potential trafficking victims through operations or deferred departures (820 in 2018). The BI Travel Control and Enforcement Unit (TCEU) identified and referred 337 potential victims of
trafficking and 92 potential victims of illegal recruitment to IACAT task forces (286 in 2018). The DFA foreign missions, primarily in the Middle East and Asia, identified 6,772 potential Filipino trafficking victims (2,591 in the preceding period). The vast majority of these victims reported experiencing forced labor and/or illegal recruitment; fewer than 25 were victims of sex trafficking. The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) Actionline against Human Trafficking received 3,377 calls, and it identified and assisted nine labor trafficking victims, including one minor.

The government allocated 24.4 million pesos ($481,830) to implement the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) recovery and reintegration program for trafficked persons, a decrease from 25.13 million pesos ($496,250) in 2018. DSWD implemented the national referral system, maintained the national recovery and reintegration database, and continued to operate 44 residential care facilities that provided services to victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Of these facilities, 24 served children, 13 served women, four served older persons, one served men, and two operated as temporary processing centers. The government committed resources for and began construction of three new facilities to address the shortage of short-term shelter facilities to provide comprehensive care for trafficking victims: an IACAT Trafficking in Persons Center in metro Manila, a temporary shelter and one-stop center near a regional international airport, and a shelter for men in region nine where armed conflict continued. DSWD reported serving 2,194 trafficking victims, of whom 1,711 were female and 80 percent were adults, compared with 2,318 victims served in 2018. Of these, the government reported 976 victims of labor trafficking; 669 victims of sex trafficking, including 259 child victims of online sexual exploitation; 181 victims of illegal recruitment; and 311 individuals intercepted before their departure overseas. DSWD provided psycho-social support and trauma-informed assistance to all survivors. Services also included: case management; temporary shelter (599 survivors); livelihood assistance (308 survivors); education/skills training (200 survivors); hygiene kits (602 survivors); referral (134 survivors); victim/witness assistance (104 survivors); airport assistance (57 survivors); transportation assistance (21); home visit (56 survivors); medical assistance (45 survivors); and financial assistance (78 survivors). DSWD referred trafficking survivors to the local social welfare and development office in their community for follow up services, which observers noted often lacked the personnel and resources to provide individualized case follow up. Staff permitted adult victims residing in shelters to leave unchaperoned, provided there were no threats to their personal security or psychological care issues. The government reported a sharp increase in foreign national victims of sex trafficking (185 in 2019; zero in 2018) identified during law enforcement operations, primarily in spas and hotels near offshore gaming operations. DSWD assisted foreign national victims, most of whom were Chinese, including temporary shelter and psycho-social intervention, and coordinated repatriation with the relevant foreign embassies in Manila. The government continued to partner with NGOs for specialized residential care and reintegration services for child victims of online sexual exploitation as well as training for local social workers who provide reintegration and trauma-focused counseling. Such specialized assistance services as well as reintegration follow up services and job training and placement remained inadequate to address the needs of adult trafficking victims.

The government increased its support for victims who served as witnesses during trials by hiring four additional victim-witness coordinators and increasing the number of trafficking victims who received benefits from the witness protection
program, which included housing, livelihood and travel expenses, medical benefits, education, and vocational placement. Six regional task force victim-witness coordinators (two in 2018) provided trauma-informed support and assistance to 291 victims (225 in 2018); 264 of these victims elected to testify as witnesses in criminal proceedings. Forty trafficking victims entered the witness protection program in 2019 (12 in 2018). In addition, the DOJ operations center personnel provided transportation and security that enabled 185 victims to participate in case conferences and hearings and the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) provided legal assistance for at least 20 victims of illegal recruitment. The government’s crime victims’ compensation program reportedly awarded an unknown amount of compensation to 27 victims of trafficking. The government did not report any orders of restitution paid by traffickers to victims of trafficking. In response to continued reports of recruitment and use of child soldiers by non-state armed groups in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the government passed legislation and issued regulations to ensure special protection for children in situations of armed conflict, mandate rehabilitation and services, and prescribe punishments.

The government increased its robust services for Filipino victims abroad. The DFA, in collaboration with the IACAT and its member agencies, implemented new whole-of-government procedures to ensure interagency coordination of services for repatriated Filipino trafficking victims. IACAT member agency representatives met arriving repatriation flights from the Middle East and Asia and coordinated individualized assistance for 1,143 trafficking victims. The government continued to deploy DSWD social workers in Philippine diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, South Korea, Qatar, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. New legislation established social welfare attaché positions within the DFA. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) overseas labor officers continued to review overseas Filipino workers’ (OFW) labor contracts and assist them with labor contract violations and allegations of abuse. DFA allocated one billion pesos ($19.75 million) for the Assistance to Nationals Fund (ATN), which covered assistance such as airfare, meal allowance, shelter, medical care, and other needs of OFWs. The DFA provided nine Philippine overseas missions with funds to support shelters or temporary accommodations for Filipino trafficking victims awaiting the resolution of their cases or their repatriation. The DFA reported only partial expenditures from the ATN totaling $4.86 million for the reporting period; these funds primarily supported services for Filipino trafficking victims in the UAE. The DFA did not report expenditures under its Legal Assistance Fund for OFWs, to which it allocated 200 million pesos ($3.95 million) for legal assistance. The DFA reported assisting all of the 6,772 potential trafficking victims identified by overseas missions (2,591 in the previous reporting period). The DSWD social workers, responsible for assisting distressed overseas Filipinos and their families, assisted 2,788 victims of trafficking or illegal recruitment, a reported 68 percent increase from the previous year, and nine percent the total number of Filipinos assisted (32,557). Social workers assisted many of these trafficking victims in Malaysia prior to their deportation as undocumented migrants and at the DSWD processing center in Zamboanga for returning Filipinos. Social services provided to OFW trafficking victims included coordination with the host government, contract buy-out, shelter, provision of personal necessities, medical aid, financial assistance, payment of legal fees, repatriation, and referral to appropriate agencies.

**PREVENTION**
The government increased its efforts to prevent trafficking. The IACAT, the lead coordinating body responsible for overseeing and monitoring implementation of the government’s anti-trafficking efforts and which the secretaries of DOJ and DSWD chaired and co-chaired respectively, convened four regular and two special-topic meetings during the reporting period to share information and coordinate policies. Three NGOs participated as members of the IACAT, which also involved additional NGOs, private sector representatives, and survivors in technical working groups and other fora. The government increased the IACAT Secretariat’s budget to 92.9 million pesos ($1.83 million) from 80.39 million pesos ($1.59 million) in 2018. The IACAT also convened its member agencies, local government officials, NGOs, and other stakeholders at symposia focused on discussion of progress in addressing trafficking issues including OSEC. The IACAT, its member agencies, and anti-trafficking regional task forces continued to lead national, regional, and local-level trafficking awareness raising events. In cooperation with NGOs, the Department of Information and Communications Technology developed and implemented the CyberSafePH awareness campaign and capacity building program with a three-year roadmap geared toward combating OSEC and cyberbullying. To deploy its new children’s online safety campaign, the Department of Education trained 600 teachers and school personnel in 11 regions to conduct cyber safety lessons. The Department of Interior and Local Government reported that 57 provinces, 127 cities, and 1,237 municipalities with anti-trafficking/violence against women committees enacted over 500 anti-trafficking ordinances and more than 700 reported conducting anti-trafficking education and information campaigns. National and local government leaders, private sector partners, and an NGO conducted job fairs for nearly 650 Filipinos, some of whom were survivors of trafficking overseas. The POEA held 31 seminars on illegal recruitment and trafficking in provinces, cities, and municipalities nationwide benefiting 3,556 participants (3,239 in 2018) and forged 64 memoranda of understanding (MOU) related to recruitment with local government authorities. The CFO operated a hotline and the DFA Office of Migrant Workers Affairs maintained a HELP Facebook page for OFWs in distress and their families to request assistance. The PNP-WCPC also launched a hotline and text line for reporting and routing of OSEC cases to proper authorities. The government’s interagency child labor quick action teams removed 36 children from hazardous and exploitative work situations in 2019, but the government did not identify any child victims of internal labor trafficking. The DOLE closed three establishments where investigations led to the identification of child sex trafficking victims.

The lack of a centralized database tracking illegal recruitment and human trafficking continued to hamper the government’s efforts to prevent trafficking and hold traffickers accountable. After investigation, NBI and POEA officials recommended 129 cases of alleged illegal recruitment for filing in the courts (123 in 2019). The POEA also filed 1,107 administrative charges against licensed recruitment agencies for disallowed practices (1,432 in 2019), resulting in the cancellation of 16 agencies’ licenses (40 in 2019). The BI-TCEU continued to screen departing passengers and deferred the departure of 31,211 passengers (24,753 in 2018) due to incomplete or suspicious travel documents or misrepresentation. The BI stopped 136 foreign registered sex offenders from entering the country. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. POEA reviewed 21 bilateral and multilateral labor agreements with other countries and signed three new bilateral agreements, including an MOU with Bahrain, aimed at protecting OFWs’ rights and reducing their vulnerability to trafficking.

**TRAFFICKING PROFILE**
As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the Philippines, and traffickers exploit victims from the Philippines abroad. An estimated 10 million Filipinos work outside the Philippines in nearly 170 countries, approximately three percent of whom work without a contract. The government processes approximately 2.3 million new or renewed contracts for Filipinos to work overseas each year. A significant number of Filipino migrant workers become victims of sex trafficking or labor trafficking in numerous industries, including industrial fishing, shipping, construction, manufacturing, education, home health care, and agriculture, as well as in domestic work, janitorial service, and other hospitality-related jobs, particularly in the Middle East and Asia, but also in all other regions. Traffickers, typically in partnership with local networks and facilitators and increasingly using social networking sites and other digital platforms, recruit unsuspecting Filipinos through illegal recruitment practices such as deception, hidden fees, and production of fraudulent passports, overseas employment certificates, and contracts to exploit migrant workers in sex and labor trafficking. Using tourist visas available in Middle East countries where many Filipinos work in household service jobs, traffickers lure minors from remote areas of Mindanao and other regions then sell them to employment sponsors who exploit them. Traffickers also use student and intern exchange programs, and fake childcare positions as well as porous maritime borders to circumvent the Philippine government and destination countries’ regulatory frameworks for foreign workers and evade detection. Traffickers exploit Filipinos already working overseas through fraudulent employment offers to work in another country. Forced labor and sex trafficking of men, women, and children within the country remains a significant problem. Traffickers exploit women and children from rural communities, conflict- and disaster-affected areas, and impoverished urban centers in sex trafficking, forced domestic work, and other forms of forced labor in tourist destinations and urban areas around the country, and exploit men in forced labor in the agricultural, construction, fishing, and maritime industries.

Law enforcement information indicates that the Philippines is one of the largest known sources of online sexual exploitation of children, in which traffickers sexually exploit children, individually and in groups, in live internet broadcasts in exchange for compensation wired through a money transfer agency by individuals most often in another country, including the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The traffickers are often parents or close relatives who operate in private residences or small cyber cafes and many child victims, girls and boys, are younger than 12 years. Identified hotspots for this form of sex trafficking in Luzon and Visayas include Iligan, Lapu-Lapu, Pampanga, Quezon City, Malabon, Pasig, Taguig, and Caloocan. Traffickers increasingly exploit Chinese and other Asian women in commercial sex in locations near offshore gaming operations that cater to Chinese nationals. Sex trafficking also occurs in tourist destinations, such as Boracay, Angeles City, Olongapo, Puerto Galera, and Surigao, where there is a high demand for commercial sex acts. Although the availability of child sex trafficking victims in commercial establishments declined in some urban areas, child sex trafficking remains a pervasive problem, typically abetted by taxi drivers who have knowledge of clandestine locations. Many sex tourists in the Philippines are convicted or charged sex offenders or pedophiles in their home countries and are most commonly citizens of Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with an increasing number of reports from Japan, Morocco, Iraq, and Denmark. Filipino men also purchase commercial sex acts from child trafficking victims. Non-state armed groups operating in the Philippines, including the New People’s Army, Maute Group, the Moro National Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf...
Group, and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, recruit and use children, at times through force, for combat and noncombat roles. The Islamic State reportedly subjects women and girls to sexual slavery. Traffickers subject indigenous and displaced persons in Mindanao to trafficking through the promise of employment. Officials, including those in diplomatic missions, law enforcement and immigration agencies, and other government entities, allegedly have been complicit in trafficking or allowed traffickers to operate with impunity. Some corrupt officials allegedly accept bribes to facilitate illegal departures for overseas workers, operate sex trafficking establishments, facilitate production of fraudulent identity documents, or overlook illegal labor recruiters. Reports in previous years asserted police conduct indiscriminate or fake raids on commercial sex establishments to extort money from managers, clients, and victims. Some personnel working at Philippine embassies reportedly withhold back wages procured for their domestic workers, subject them to domestic servitude, or coerce sexual acts in exchange for government protection services.