

Suriname - United States Department of State

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 remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing law enforcement training, developing a formal victim referral process, increasing funding to the national action plan budget, and government leadership committing to anti-trafficking efforts in public speeches. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities investigated fewer cases, initiated no prosecutions for two years in a row, did not have a shelter dedicated to trafficking victims, and inconsistently screened vulnerable individuals, often deporting individuals referred to them, including detained migrants.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Train and support all officials in contact with vulnerable individuals to implement the victim identification and referral protocol to identify trafficking victims, especially among children, migrants from Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti, and other countries. • Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, convict, and sentence convicted traffickers, including officials complicit in sex or labor trafficking. • Provide vulnerable individuals with trauma-informed assistance, reintegration support, and interpretation in their language prior to, during, and after screening for trafficking. • Train judges at all levels of the judiciary in human trafficking and the trafficking law, and sensitize judges and prosecutors to the issue of secondary trauma. • Prosecute child sex and labor trafficking cases under the trafficking statute, and provide specialized child protection services with trained providers. • Conduct trauma-informed training for police and labor inspectors and hire enough staff to conduct targeted inspections in urban, remote interior, and off-coast fishing locations where trafficking is most likely to occur. • Take steps to eliminate recruitment or placement fees charged to workers by labor recruiters and ensure employers pay any recruitment fees. • Increase grassroots outreach to potential trafficking victims among vulnerable groups by building capacity and collaborating with NGOs. • Develop and execute a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for anti-trafficking policies and efforts.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained 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. In January, the government amended the penal code to criminalize the use of electronic communication to schedule sexual encounters with individuals under 16 years old with penalties up to four years in prison with a fine of up to SRD50,000 (US\$6,650). Police reported initiating eight investigations (seven for sex trafficking of both adults and minors, and one for labor trafficking of adults), an increase from three investigations in 2018 and 10 in 2017. The labor inspectorate reported investigating a case of potential labor trafficking. The prosecutor's office did not initiate any new prosecutions during the past two years, compared with four new prosecutions for sex trafficking in 2017. The government reported 18 convictions for human trafficking in 2019 compared with convictions of seven traffickers in 2018 and three in 2017. The government did not report the status of four pending 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 head of the Trafficking In Persons (TIP) police unit conducted training sessions outside the capital with 400 participants from the health, immigration, police, customs and District Commissioners offices. The police TIP unit responsible for investigating cases gained a staff member and authorities provided the unit with a new vehicle for investigations outside the capital. In July 2019, a TIP unit member participated in an overseas trafficking training sponsored by another country. In October 2019, 40 officials from immigration, customs, police, the seaport, and airport authorities participated in trafficking awareness training offered by an international organization.

PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts. The government initially identified five victims (all female, ages between 14 and 35), from Colombia, the Philippines, and Suriname; upon further examination, three of the five were identified as trafficking victims, compared to one child victim in 2018 and five victims in 2017. All three identified victims and one potential victim from Colombia received referral to a shelter and protective services. The government reported there were no formal written procedures to guide officials in proactive victim identification. The Ministry of Justice and Police worked out a referral process for victims of trafficking, moving them to the Bureau of Victim Services for shelter, medical, counseling and other care funded out of their regular budget. Experts reported that the government did not effectively identify victims among children, migrants in the interior, and in brothels emerging in private homes. The Ministry of Social Affairs drafted a new referral protocol, which did not receive approval by the end of the reporting period. The TIP unit, accompanied by a member of the prosecutor's office increased inspections of locations where victims might be working such as massage salons and hair salons.

There is no shelter dedicated to trafficking victims—a domestic violence shelter accepted female and child victims but did not accept male victims. Victims could not leave the shelter unchaperoned and had to stay in the shelter or return to their families or their country of origin. Vulnerable individuals who violated the terms of their stay were deported before being screened for trafficking. Victims could apply for temporary or permanent residency whether or not they assisted with trials, although there were no reported cases of victims using either of these provisions. There was no witness protection program although victims in shelters received police protection. 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 weaken testimony in cases where victims were not given time for rehabilitation before providing testimony.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government reorganized the Ministry of Justice and Police to consolidate anti-trafficking functions and increased funding for the Trafficking In Persons Working Group implementation of the national action plan. In September 2019, the Minister of Justice and Police spoke publicly about ongoing government anti-trafficking efforts, and the government's commitment to combat trafficking. The government implemented an awareness campaign, including putting up anti-trafficking posters and flyers at schools and police stations, points of entry into the country, and billboards, as well as broadcasting radio and television anti-trafficking sketches in languages of the most vulnerable populations including Creole, Chinese, Portuguese, and Spanish. The government did not conduct research on trafficking during the reporting period. The government consolidated the anti-trafficking hotline to the National Command Center with other anti-trafficking units and trained 17 hotline responders in trafficking awareness, including how to question callers and transfer cases. Labor laws require that all employment agencies were licensed before recruiting domestic and foreign employees, and must receive permission from the Ministry of Labor before entering into work mediation with employees. Labor inspectors received training to identify trafficking victims and were legally authorized to conduct inspections outside formal workplaces, but lacked the manpower and capacity to do so. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

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. Traffickers target the increasing influx of migrants into Suriname, 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 at risk for sex trafficking in Suriname, including in brothels, massage and hair salons, and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname's interior. Some Surinamese parents exploit their daughters in sex trafficking. Adult and child migrant workers in agriculture, retail shops, construction, and on fishing boats off Suriname's coast are at risk of trafficking, 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 at risk of 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.