

Sweden - United States Department of State

SWEDEN: Tier 1

The Government of Sweden fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore Sweden remained on Tier 1. These efforts included investigating more trafficking cases, particularly suspected cases among asylum-seekers, and amending legislation to increase the minimum penalty for the purchase of commercial sex acts from children. Although the government meets the minimum standards, authorities prosecuted and convicted significantly fewer traffickers, and the government neglected to provide funding to NGOs for victim services.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase efforts to prosecute and convict traffickers using the anti-trafficking statute. • Ensure adequate financial support for victim services, including funding NGOs for victim assistance. • Proactively identify trafficking victims, including among asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children. • Improve coordination within the government, particularly the Gender Equality Agency, to ensure the allocation of adequate financial resources to the implementation of the national action plan. • Train officials involved in judicial proceedings, particularly judges, on all aspects of trafficking and understanding current anti-trafficking laws. • Enhance awareness efforts to educate asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children on the risks of sexual exploitation, forced criminality, and forced begging. • Establish specialized housing for trafficking victims, including for male victims.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts, but strengthened anti-trafficking laws. Chapter 4 Section 1a of the Penal Code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, and prescribed penalties of two to 10 years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Chapter 4 Section 1b criminalized a lesser offense of "human exploitation," which included the exploitation of individuals for labor or begging, and prescribed penalties of up to four years' imprisonment; these penalties were also sufficiently stringent. Through a 2019 amendment to the penal code, Chapter 6 Section 9 increased the penalties for the purchase of commercial sex acts from a child from a fine or up to two years' imprisonment to a maximum of four years' imprisonment. In 2019, police investigated 272 trafficking cases (106 sex trafficking, 67 labor trafficking, 99 unconfirmed) and 47 human exploitation cases, compared with 214 and eight, respectively, in 2018. Authorities prosecuted and convicted four traffickers, compared with 17 prosecutions and 15 convictions in 2018. Sentences ranged from eight months' to four years' imprisonment. The government did

not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses. According to the migration agency's trafficking coordinator, a restructuring of the agency, the lack of government funding, and the de-prioritization of training adversely affected its work in 2019. Nonetheless, the agency published a manual for migration agents, providing guidance on how to detect potential trafficking cases, and in 2019, the agency reported 481 suspected cases of trafficking among asylum-seekers, an increase of approximately 25 percent from 2018 (384 cases). Of the new cases, 202 were sex trafficking. During the reporting period, Swedish authorities collaborated with foreign governments on transnational investigations, including a pan-European case led by Europol involving child trafficking, which resulted in 34 arrests.

The National Police offered an online course for police officers and an annual advanced training course for all trafficking police officers and prosecutors. The police trafficking rapporteur conducted training for police and judges. The national courts offered training for judges and lawyers that included sections on sex trafficking and child victims; however, experts reported some judges lacked a sufficient understanding of trafficking cases and current trafficking legislation. The Swedish Coast Guard, police, and customs officials participated in joint regional intelligence operations in trafficking cases involving travel by sea.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts. NGOs identified 162 victims in 2019, and 122 in 2018. Reports indicated tightened migration policy curbed the inflow of asylum-seekers, allowing authorities more time to process and screen applicants for trafficking indicators. Nonetheless, the number of migrants and unaccompanied children seeking asylum remained high (approximately 902), and experts noted that many unaccompanied children were either at risk or victims of trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation and forced criminality. Of the 481 suspected trafficking cases among asylum-seekers, 92 involved minors—an increase of 44 cases from 2018. Experts noted shortcomings in the proactive identification of unaccompanied children and expressed concern that the number of reported cases misrepresented the real scale of child trafficking in Sweden.

Municipalities, in collaboration with NGOs and other government agencies, provided victim services, including medical and psychological care, shelter, and social assistance. In 2019, the newly created Gender Equality Agency did not fund the national support program (NSP), a civil society platform representing 20 NGOs that provided assistance to victims; funding for the program has fluctuated in previous years—800,000 krona (\$86,010) in 2018; no funding in 2017; and 500,000 krona (\$53,760) in 2016. The Gender Equality Agency, in its first year amid growing pains and lack of coordination, inadvertently neglected to fund the NSP. Experts expressed concerns the cessation of the NSP's operation meant that Sweden no longer fulfilled its international commitments regarding assistance to victims because the NSP offered the only effective unconditional assistance provided to victims. Assistance opportunities to victims and their family through municipalities were contingent on victims cooperating with authorities. Municipalities funded assistance and appropriate services. The government subsequently reimbursed the expenses; however, statistics on the costs incurred by the municipalities were unavailable. Although the country lacked shelters dedicated solely to trafficking victims, some municipalities ran shelters offering services to sex trafficking victims. The

Gender Equality Agency led a network of approximately 40 NGO-run safe houses, and adult female trafficking victims could receive services at women's shelters for victims of domestic and honor-related violence. Authorities referred child victims to social services officials, who placed child victims in foster care or group housing. There was no protected housing available to male trafficking victims.

The Aliens Act entitled victims to a 30-day reflection period to contemplate cooperation with law enforcement, during which they were eligible for emergency financial aid; however, only an investigating police officer or prosecutor could file the application, limiting availability to victims already in contact with law enforcement. Victims in trafficking cases who cooperated with authorities received temporary residence permits, which allowed them to seek employment. Forty-four trafficking victims received permits in 2019 (54 in 2018).

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. The government implemented its national action plan; however, experts raised concerns regarding the lack of resources dedicated to the plan as demonstrated by the cessation of the NSP. The Gender Equality Agency organized awareness campaigns focusing on safe travel, and authorities conducted or funded awareness training for taxi, hotel, and restaurant staff to detect trafficking at their places of work. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. In 2019, the government allocated 18 million krona (\$1.9 million) to strengthen labor market regulation compliance efforts and review compliance developments. Authorities conducted mandatory interviews with foreign workers employed in at-risk sectors and seeking to extend their work permits. The migration agency conducted background checks on companies employing foreign workers and occasionally denied work visas in cases where employment contracts did not meet the necessary requirements. Multiple agencies carried out joint workplace inspections as part of a major EU effort against unfair labor exploitation.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Sweden, and, to a lesser extent, traffickers exploit victims from Sweden abroad. Most traffickers are the same nationality as their victims and are often part of criminal networks engaged in multiple criminal activities, although an increasing number of reported cases involve traffickers who are family members or have no ties to organized crime. Most sex trafficking and labor trafficking victims originate from Eastern Europe, Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East. Reported cases of labor trafficking increased. Victims of labor trafficking, who largely originate from Eastern Europe, East Asia, and West Africa, face exploitation in the service, cleaning, private delivery, and construction industries. Cases among seasonal berry pickers have decreased significantly in recent years; however, individuals mostly from Bulgaria, face exploitation in the agricultural sector. Roma, primarily from Romania and Bulgaria, remain vulnerable to forced begging and criminality and, to a lesser extent, sex trafficking. Asylum-seekers, particularly those from Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and South America, as well as many stateless individuals, are subjected to human trafficking. In recent

years, traffickers subjected Moroccan boys and young men to forced criminal activity, though reports indicate a decline in the number of victims in 2019. Unaccompanied children are especially vulnerable with a majority of suspected child trafficking victims arriving in Sweden as unaccompanied minors, primarily from Africa and the Middle East. Approximately 902 unaccompanied foreign children applied for asylum in 2019.