

U.S. Department of State
Trafficking In Persons Report

Armenia – Tier 1

June 30, 2016

Armenia is a source and, to a lesser extent, destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex and labor trafficking. Armenian women and children are subjected to sex and labor trafficking within the country as well as sex trafficking in United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey. Chinese women have been subjected to sex trafficking in Armenia. Armenian men are subjected to forced labor in Russia and, to a lesser extent, in Turkey. Armenian women and children are vulnerable to forced begging domestically. Some children work in agriculture, construction, and service provision within the country, where they are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Men in rural areas with little education and children staying in child care institutions remain highly vulnerable to trafficking. Conflict-displaced persons, including Syrian Armenians, living in Armenia are at risk of exploitation and have been subjected to bonded labor.

The Government of Armenia fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. A law entered into force in June 2015 establishing standard procedures for the identification, support, protection, and reintegration of suspected and identified trafficking victims across national and local government bodies, NGOs, international organizations, and civil society. It also affords foreign trafficking victims the same rights and services as Armenian citizens, and ensures assistance is provided regardless of a victim's cooperation with law enforcement efforts. The government maintained strong collaboration with anti-trafficking NGOs, local media, donor organizations, and regional partners. The government had dedicated resources for victim services and provided funding to one NGO-run shelter for trafficking victims. The anti-trafficking interagency group met regularly to coordinate activities across the government. The government provided training and materials on victim identification to police investigators and border officials, as well as appropriate human rights training to employees at correctional institutions. The government increased the number of trafficking investigations, but initiated fewer prosecutions and secured slightly fewer convictions. The government continued to lack formal victim-witness protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARMENIA:

Improve efforts to identify victims of forced labor, including by strengthening victim identification training for officials, ensuring labor inspectors are able to conduct regular inspections and identify victims through unannounced visits, and increasing cooperation across law enforcement entities; adopt a new national action plan for 2016-2018; license, regulate, and educate local employment agencies and agents so they can help prevent the forced labor of Armenians abroad; provide sensitivity training to judges and lawyers to improve treatment of victims; work with Russian authorities to identify Armenian forced labor victims and prosecute

labor traffickers; work with NGOs to find ways to identify and assist Armenian victims in Turkey and reintegrate victims; approve legislation to establish victim-witness protection measures; effectively develop and implement new trafficking victim compensation mechanisms; continue awareness-raising campaigns to rural and border communities and to children leaving child care institutions; and continue robust partnerships with civil society groups.

PROSECUTION

The government sustained modest law enforcement efforts, but authorities reported fewer prosecutions and convictions. Articles 132 and 132-2 of the criminal code prohibit both sex and labor trafficking and prescribe penalties of five to 15 years' imprisonment; these are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The government investigated 14 new trafficking cases in 2015, compared with 10 in 2014. Four of the cases involved labor trafficking; of the 10 sex trafficking cases, six were redefined as rape or prostitution charges and one was dropped. Authorities initiated prosecutions against two defendants and courts convicted three traffickers in 2015, compared with seven prosecutions and convictions in 2014. Two traffickers received sentences of 11 years' imprisonment and one received 11 years and six months' imprisonment. Prosecution of labor trafficking cases remained a challenge as most cases happened in Russia, where Armenian investigators continued to have difficulties collaborating with law enforcement. The government provided training on trafficking and victim identification to more than 250 police investigators and new border control employees. The Ministry of Justice continued to include trafficking topics in mandatory human rights training for employees of corrections institutions. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts. The Law on Identification and Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking and Exploitation came into force in June 2015. The law outlines actions for national and local government bodies, NGOs, international organizations, and civil society to identify and support trafficking victims. It also ensures victim assistance is not linked to their cooperation with law enforcement and affords foreign trafficking victims the same rights and services as Armenian citizens. The mechanisms to compensate victims provided by the law were not finalized by the end of the reporting period. The government identified three male and six female trafficking victims in 2015, compared with 11 in 2014; authorities notified all victims of their right to services and five of the victims accepted NGO shelter assistance. The government assisted an NGO to repatriate a male labor trafficking victim from Russia; the victim did not stay at a shelter or testify against his traffickers. The absence of an Armenian embassy in Turkey hindered the identification of Armenian trafficking victims in Turkey. The National Security Service distributed to border control troops 150 manuals on providing assistance to trafficking victims.

In 2015, the government allocated 46,259,000 drams (\$95,000) for assistance to trafficking victims and partially funded one NGO that provided shelter to 18 victims and vulnerable individuals, six of whom were referred in 2015. A short-term shelter operated by another NGO provided support to seven victims. The government and local NGOs jointly provide victims legal, medical, and psychological assistance; housing; and access to social, educational, and employment projects. Victims of trafficking are eligible for free health care through a government program; two victims received this service in the reporting period. Due to security concerns, NGO shelters required adult victims to notify staff when they left shelters unescorted, but victims were free to leave if they no longer wanted assistance. Services were available to female and male victims. There was no special shelter available for child victims; they could be housed in an adult trafficking shelter or referred to a child care institution. As a result of a legal change that suspended the majority of labor inspectorate functions in July 2015, inspectors were unable to conduct regular inspections and thus unable to identify indications of forced labor. During the last several years, victims reported greater trust in law enforcement when assisting investigations and prosecutions; however, observers reported that for various reasons, including fear of retaliation from their traffickers, victims were reluctant to assist in prosecutions. The government continued to lack formal victim-witness protection. In 2014 a draft law establishing victim-witness protection was submitted to Parliament; the law remained pending at the close of the reporting period. There were no reports in 2015 that authorities inappropriately detained identified trafficking victims; the law exempts them from criminal prosecution for crimes they were forced to commit as a result of being subjected to trafficking. However, there was one incident of police providing information on a victim's location at an NGO to her alleged trafficker; an internal investigation resulted in disciplinary action against the police station's leadership.

PREVENTION

The government continued robust trafficking prevention efforts. Government agencies conducted a variety of prevention projects and activities, although the government reported that some observers believed it did not reference trafficking in public awareness campaigns frequently enough. Police transmitted videos and participated in television programs devoted to trafficking issues. Police held awareness-raising discussions at schools, and officials distributed informative materials on the risks of trafficking to individuals crossing the border, as well as Armenians residing in the Middle East and European countries. Government agencies posted trafficking information on their websites, including information on hotlines operated by police and NGOs; hotline calls led to preventive measures and investigations. The Inter-Agency Working Group against Trafficking in Persons met regularly, published reports of its activities, and began developing a fifth national action plan for the period of 2016-2018; a new action plan was not approved by the end of the reporting period. The Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking in Persons only met once during the year due to the resignation of its chair; however, a new chair was appointed by the end of the reporting period. The government provided anti-trafficking

training for its diplomatic personnel and for its troops before deployment overseas on international peacekeeping missions.