

## **ALBANIA: Tier 2**

Albania is a source and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Albanian women and children are primarily subjected to sex trafficking within Albania, in neighboring countries (Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Greece), and in other European countries. Albanian and some foreign victims are subjected to forced labor in Albania, particularly in the tourism industry. An increasing number of Albanian children, often of Romani or Balkan Egyptian ethnicity, are subjected to forced begging and other forms of compelled labor in Albania and neighboring countries (Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro). Some Albanian girls are subjected to sex trafficking or forced labor following arranged marriages. Some foreign women from European countries, including Ukraine, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Norway, are subjected to sex trafficking in Albania. An increasing number of Middle Eastern and African irregular migrants, particularly Syrians, transit Albania to reach Western Europe and are vulnerable to trafficking, though police have yet to identify any as trafficking victims. Corruption and high rates of turnover within the police force inhibit law enforcement action to address trafficking. Official complicity in trafficking crimes remains a significant concern. A sitting member of Parliament had prior convictions for trafficking-related crimes. The Government of Albania does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government significantly improved law enforcement efforts by prosecuting and convicting more traffickers than in 2013, including some traffickers who forced children to beg. The government and NGOs identified more victims, and the government increased funding to the state-run shelter for trafficking victims. Nevertheless, psychological, medical, and reintegration services at the state-run shelter were inadequate. Government funding to NGO shelters was insufficient, and the only shelter providing specialized services for child trafficking victims closed for several months due to a lack of funds; however, in March 2015, the government allocated funding for staff salaries at two NGO shelters. The government continued to investigate and punish victims for unlawful acts committed as a result of their exploitation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALBANIA:**

Increase funding to NGO-run shelters for trafficking victims and provide funding on a regular basis; provide victims free medical and mental health care per the 2014 law and ministerial decision; improve services provided at the state-run shelter; do not punish victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking; continue to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit officials; fund mobile units operated by civil society groups and law enforcement to identify victims; further train police, labor inspectors, and other front-line officials on proactive identification of victims; encourage victims to assist in the prosecution of their traffickers by facilitating participation in the witness protection program and expanding training for prosecutors dealing with victim witnesses; improve the capacity of border and migration police to screen irregular migrants for trafficking indicators; and continue efforts to screen street children for signs of trafficking.

## **PROSECUTION**

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. Albania's criminal code prohibits sex and labor trafficking under Articles 110(a) and 128(b), which prescribe penalties of eight to 15 years' imprisonment. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and exceed those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The Serious Crimes Prosecutor's Office investigated 39 suspected traffickers in 2014, an increase from 24 suspects in 2013. The government did not disaggregate law enforcement data to demonstrate efforts against both sex trafficking and forced labor. The government prosecuted 18 defendants in 2014, a large increase from three prosecuted in 2013. Courts convicted nine traffickers, a significant increase from two traffickers convicted in 2013. All convicted traffickers received prison sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years. Observers expressed concern authorities sometimes prosecuted traffickers for the lesser crime of "exploitation of prostitution" rather than trafficking because the two laws overlap in some areas. Exploitation of prostitution carries a punishment of two to five years' imprisonment, and up to 15 years' imprisonment under aggravated circumstances. Victims of the crime are not protected from

prosecution for unlawful acts committed as a result of their exploitation. Authorities often applied the lesser charge because it was easier to investigate and prosecute, and some mistakenly only recognized cases involving cross-border movement as trafficking. Border police began screening irregular migrants at Albania's southern border with Greece for trafficking indicators but needed more training on migrant interviewing and translation assistance. During 2014, the government trained 333 judges, prosecutors, and police officers on investigation and prosecution of traffickers and victim identification and protection. High turnover rates hampered the efficacy of police training. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in trafficking offenses.

## **PROTECTION**

The government continued to identify and assist victims but did not provide adequate funding for victim services. The government and NGOs identified 125 potential victims of trafficking in 2014, compared with 95 in 2013. Of these, 37 received official victim status after agreeing to undergo a formal interview with authorities required to obtain official victim status. The government identified 64 victims and NGOs identified 61. About half (62) of all identified victims were minors and 108 were female. Seventy-eight victims were subjected to forced prostitution, and one victim was subjected to forced labor. Twenty-three victims were forced to commit petty crimes, and 13 were forced to beg. Ten victims were subjected to both sex trafficking and forced labor, including forced begging. Victims could access assistance at four shelters comprising the National Shelter Coalition, three of which were operated by NGOs and one of which was state-run. NGO shelters assisted 74 victims, and the state-run shelter assisted 42. The government provided 19,770,000 lek (\$198,000) to the state-run shelter in 2014, compared with 18,240,000 lek (\$182,000) in 2013. The government did not provide adequate funding to NGO shelters, allocating 2,757,200 lek (\$27,800) strictly for food expenses, of which NGOs reportedly received 1,903,512 lek (\$19,000). NGO shelters operated under severe financial constraints throughout 2014. The government did not disburse funds from its Special Fund for Crime Prevention, which held at least 25 million lek (\$250,000), even though the law

stipulated these funds be used to support trafficking victim service providers. The only shelter providing specialized services for child trafficking victims, run by an NGO, closed for several months due to lack of funds, though the government gave 1 million lek (\$10,000) in January 2015 to enable the shelter to reopen for three months. In March 2015, the government appropriated funds to pay for several staff member salaries at two NGO shelters. Observers noted the state-run shelter needed renovation and its staff provided inadequate psychological, medical, and reintegration services. Foreign victims had access to the same services as domestic victims, including legal assistance. Male victims were accommodated in apartments. The government amended the law in October 2014 to provide free healthcare to up to 200 trafficking victims per year and passed a decision in November 2014 to provide victims free mental healthcare. Victims did not yet benefit from the changes, however, because service providers awaited implementation guidelines from the government. The government ran a program that incentivized companies to hire former trafficking victims, but observers reported some companies forced former victims to work without proper compensation.

A law enacted in July 2014 explicitly gave police the responsibility to ALGERIA identify and refer victims to assistance. The government increased the number of law enforcement and social worker child protection units to 196 in 2014; the units had a direct role in identifying child victims and ensuring their protection, although they remained underfunded and understaffed. NGO-operated mobile units identified 57 potential trafficking victims in 2014, but two of the three units shut down due to lack of funding, while the third was scheduled to cease operations in April 2015. The government trained 75 police officers, social workers, healthcare practitioners, and labor inspectors on victim identification and referral. NGOs reported authorities did not proactively identify victims in general. Victims who testified against traffickers had access to the witness protection program, but no trafficking victims participated in the program. Eight victims testified against traffickers. Prosecutors outside Tirana lacked training on working with victim witnesses. Albanian law provided foreign victims a three-month reflection period with temporary residency status and authorization to

work for up to two years, though the government had yet to grant this status to a victim. Victims could obtain restitution from the government or file civil suits against traffickers, but no victims received restitution in 2014. Albanian law exempts victims from punishment for crimes committed as a result of their exploitation, but NGOs reported one victim was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for prostitution, while other victims were investigated for prostitution and theft.

## **PREVENTION**

The government maintained considerable efforts to prevent trafficking. The government adopted a 2014-2017 national strategy and action plan to combat trafficking in November 2014. The government provided the national anti-trafficking coordinator's office 4.7 million lek in 2014 (\$47,000). The national coordinator published regular activity reports on its website and regularly convened stakeholders belonging to the national referral mechanism. However, a special taskforce formed in 2013 to improve anti-trafficking coordination between police, prosecutors, and judges did not meet. Twelve regional antitrafficking committees comprised of local officials and NGOs worked on finalizing local action plans on prevention and victim assistance. The national coordinator's office, the state police, and the State Labor Inspectorate signed a memorandum of understanding to identify forced labor cases. Local NGOs and international organizations conducted a study of street children, one-third of whom said their parents forced them to work. Based on this study, the government launched a pilot program to combat child begging in Tirana, which led to the placement of 11 children in social care institutions; police charged five suspects with exploitation of children for begging, and two parents were prosecuted for child exploitation. The government co-established a free hotline and a mobile application for citizens to report suspected trafficking cases. The government conducted a week-long campaign on trafficking, including media and billboard ads and discussions with secondary and university students. The government co-sponsored two trainings to sensitize hotels and tour operators on sex and labor trafficking. The government did not demonstrate efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex or forced labor. The government provided anti-trafficking guidance for its

diplomatic personnel. The national coordinator briefed Albanian diplomats stationed in seven cities on human trafficking regulations.