

AZERBAIJAN (TIER 2)

Azerbaijan is primarily a source and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Most Azerbaijani victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation to Turkey and the Persian Gulf. Other destinations include Russia, Germany, and Greece. Reports of internal trafficking also continued, as did reports of men trafficked to Turkey and Russia for forced labor.

The Government of Azerbaijan does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government undertook important steps to prevent and combat trafficking during the reporting period. In 2005, the government passed anti-trafficking legislation, appointed a new national anti-trafficking coordinator, fully vetted the staff of an anti-trafficking police unit, nearly completed renovations of a trafficking shelter, and created two new trafficking hotlines. The government should take immediate and tangible steps to improve victim rehabilitation by opening, adequately staffing, and fully funding its shelter for trafficking victims. It should also implement a nation-wide victim referral mechanism so that law enforcement personnel improve identification and protection of trafficking victims.

Prosecution

In 2005, the Government of Azerbaijan adopted its Law on the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and adopted corresponding amendments to the criminal code. The law covers trafficking for both forced labor and sexual exploitation and carries a maximum penalty of 10 to 12 years. Due to the late passage of the criminal code amendments, however, the government continued to use older trafficking-related laws to prosecute traffickers in 2005. During the reporting period, the government opened 160 trafficking investigations and prosecuted 153 cases, resulting in 93 convictions. By the end of the reporting period, 37 traffickers were in prison. The government gave fines to 26 convicted traffickers and gave suspended sentences to 10 convicted traffickers in 2005. During the reporting period, the government completed a thorough vetting process, including conducting exams and background investigations, for its anti-trafficking police unit to ensure the unit meets international standards. The Ministry of Interior worked with customs and border officials to monitor and identify potential trafficking victims at airports, seaports, and land crossings and in January 2006 announced the disruption of a transnational trafficking ring. The Azerbaijani Government cooperated with U.S. counterparts to provide critical information for the prosecution of a U.S. trafficking case involving Azerbaijani victims in 2005. Reports of border guards and law enforcement officials receiving bribes to facilitate trafficking continued. The government established an anti-corruption commission last year to address pervasive corruption.

Protection

The Government of Azerbaijan continued to provide an inadequate level of assistance and support to victims in 2005. During the reporting period, the government failed to develop or implement a formal screening and referral mechanism to identify and assist victims. Although officials informally referred victims to state healthcare facilities, these facilities lack the capacity to provide the required specialized treatment or information for victims of trafficking. Some police referred victims to NGOs; however, a

lack of adequate shelters in Azerbaijan forced NGO workers to use their own homes to shelter victims. The government made significant progress constructing and renovating a new trafficking shelter during the reporting period; the shelter is expected to open in spring 2006.

Prevention

The Government of Azerbaijan established two nation-wide trafficking hotlines in 2005. During the reporting period, the government conducted joint seminars with NGOs on trafficking throughout Azerbaijan, demonstrating increased interaction with civil society on trafficking. The State Committee on Women, Children and Families incorporated trafficking prevention into its education and trainings that targeted women from all sectors of society. The anti-trafficking coordinator led the government's inter-agency task force in coordinating communication among agencies.