



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“You Pray for Death”

Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria



“You Pray for Death”

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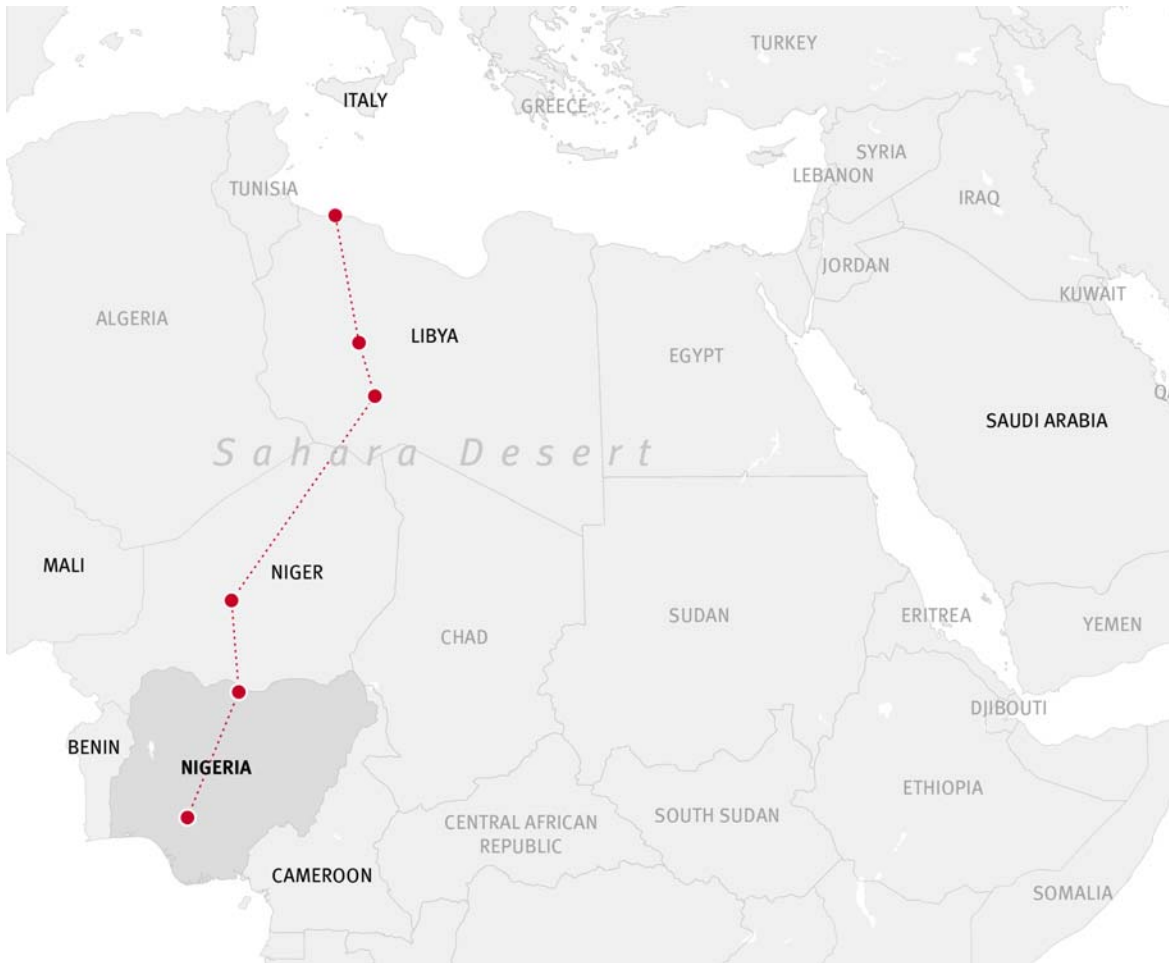
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Map of Nigeria and Destination Countries



A typical journey of a trafficking victim.

Summary

When she was 18 in 2013, Adaura C. met a woman who promised her a job earning 150,000 naira (US\$414) as a domestic worker in Libya. Adaura agreed, and the woman made the arrangements for her to travel from Nigeria to Libya. After a long, dangerous journey through the Sahara Desert, witnessing drivers and other men beat and rape women and girls, she arrived in Libya only to find that she had been deceived. The “madam” (a woman who is part of the trafficking ring and controls women and girls) there told Adaura and her friend Jane V.—Adaura and Jane were recruited by the same woman in Nigeria, but traveled separately—to undress and have sex with clients. “We said, ‘We were told we would be house helps,’” Adaura explained. The madam responded, “This is house help.”

The madam locked Adaura in a room without food for four days and threatened to kill her. She told Adaura and Jane that they each had to pay a “debt” of \$4,000, to cover travel expenses, and made them swear an oath that they would not run away. Adaura and Jane were now under the control of the madam. The madam brought men to have sex with them without condoms. After a month, Adaura discovered she was pregnant, and the madam forced her to have an abortion.

The trauma and exploitation continued. The madam sold Adaura to a Nigerian man in Libya who also sexually exploited her. After she extricated herself and moved in with a man who said he would marry her, she said the extremist armed group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) abducted them, killed her boyfriend, and only spared her life because she was pregnant. They took Adaura to an underground prison and forced her to marry a man who raped her. Three years into this nightmare, Libyan soldiers helped her escape, and International Organization for Migration (IOM) repatriated her to Nigeria. Since then, Adaura has been staying in a shelter run by the national anti-trafficking agency, and then in an orphanage. She described suffering from physical and psychosocial health problems, and that she sometimes thinks of killing herself. She is unhappy at the orphanage, where the food is inadequate, and her future is uncertain.

For years, local and international media have been awash with such horrifying stories of Nigerian women and girls trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation, and of migrants trapped in Libya in slavery-like conditions or dying as they cross the Mediterranean Sea.

These stories reflect the large and, according to some estimates, increasing problem of human trafficking within and from Nigeria in recent years. What these news reports often leave out are the problems trafficking survivors face when they are identified internally or upon return to Nigeria, where the government's efforts to protect and assist them too often fail to respect their rights.

This report documents human rights abuses committed against largely Nigerian women and girls who are trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation within and outside Nigeria. It also focuses on the experiences of non-Nigerian women and girls who are trafficked into Nigeria, most of them for domestic servitude. It shows how some assistance measures are further violating survivors' rights. The report highlights physical, mental, social, and economic impact of these abuses on survivors, and describes significant gaps in, and obstacles to, much-needed support services. It further outlines steps the Nigerian government should take to combat trafficking in persons and provide survivors the medical care, psychological counseling, and financial assistance they need to heal from the trauma and rebuild their lives.

The report is based on interviews with 76 survivors of human trafficking, 20 of them girls between the ages 8 and 17, and with 7 survivors of smuggling, 2 internally displaced persons, and 1 victim of forced marriage. Human Rights Watch conducted the interviews in Lagos (Lagos State), Benin City (Edo State), Abeokuta (Ogun State), and Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), between May 2017 and October 2018. We also interviewed representatives of 21 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) addressing trafficking and assisting victims, officials of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), federal and state government officials, and representatives of bilateral and international assistance agencies.

Like Adaura, thousands of Nigerian women and girls have been trafficked within Nigeria, to other countries in Africa, and to Europe in recent years. Many are escaping dire economic situations at home, where jobs are hard to come by. Some are fleeing violent conflicts driven in part by climate change and a scramble over scarce resources, some have suffered exclusion and discrimination that has left them unable to fend for themselves, while others are vulnerable to exploitation as they seek to escape abusive families.



A Nigerian woman sits in a center in Benin City. After spending a year and three months in captivity in a run-down brothel in Turin, Italy, she was arrested by Italian security forces, and deported to Nigeria. Women lured by traffickers into leaving Nigeria sometimes flee violent conflicts; others are desperate to escape dire economic hardship or abusive family environments. © 2018 Lynsey Addario/Getty Images Reportage

It is difficult to say how many women and girls are trafficked from, into, and within Nigeria, as there is no reliable data. However, Nigeria is routinely listed as one of the countries with large numbers of trafficking victims overseas, particularly in Europe, with victims identified in more than 34 countries in 2018, according to the US State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Most Nigerian trafficking victims in Europe come from Edo State, one of Nigeria’s 37 states, typically via Libya. The numbers of “potential” Nigerian trafficking victims in Italy has shot up in recent years. In 2017, the latest available data, IOM reported a 600 percent increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving in Italy by sea, with most arriving from Nigeria. The organization estimated that 80 percent of women and girls arriving from Nigeria—whose numbers had soared from



A woman from Cameroon sits with her baby in a private shelter in Lagos, Nigeria. When she was eight months pregnant, she was allowed to leave Libya on a flight organized by IOM and the Nigerian government, as humanitarian workers feared for her safety and that of the unborn baby. She told *Time* magazine, “The Libyans understood that if the EU doesn’t want blacks to come, it means we are not valuable as humans... The EU is essentially rewarding these militias for abusing us, for raping us, for killing us and for selling us.” March 2018. © 2018 Lynsey Addario/Getty Images Reportage

1,454 in 2014 to 11,009 in 2016—were potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the streets and brothels of Europe.

Most women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they were trafficked by people they know, who prey on their desperation, making false promises of paid employment, professional training, and education. They are transported within and across national borders, often under life-threatening conditions. Survivors recounted harrowing journeys as traffickers forced them through the Sahara Desert to destinations in Libya, or, in some cases, Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. Their journeys were wrought with death, rape, beatings, fear, theft, extortion, and lack of food and water. The danger of these journeys was captured by one 28-year-old woman who said, “You pray for death. You cry

until you cannot cry any more. People die, faint, are beaten, raped. I would not advise even my worst enemy to travel by land.”

Women and girls said they were exploited in forced prostitution and various forms of forced labor, especially forced domestic work, by their traffickers. They said that every step of the way, traffickers, the “clients” or “customers” who sexually exploited them, the “employers” who extracted forced labor, and the madams in Nigeria and destination countries physically, sexually, and psychologically abused them. Some said they were forced to undergo abortions in unsanitary conditions, and were not given pain medication or antibiotics. Women and girls who ended up in Libya described experiencing racial discrimination, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and difficult conditions in places of captivity. Many had no options and had wished to return to Nigeria.

Madams subjected trafficked women and girls to forced prostitution for long hours with no time to rest; made them have sex with customers when they were ill, menstruating, pregnant, or soon after childbirth or forced abortions. In some cases, madams told them to put unsanitary materials, such as mattress foam or wipes, in their vaginas to block menstrual blood or bleeding from abortions so that they could have sex with customers.

Women and girls who believed they were migrating for high-paying overseas employment as domestic workers, hairdressers, or hotel staff, said they were shocked to learn they were tricked and trapped in exploitation. They were horrified when they realized that they would not be paid what they were promised, or anything at all, and instead had huge “debts” to repay. Often these debts were vague, unpredictable, and constantly growing. Women and girls stated that traffickers used violence, threats, and retaliation against them or their families back home to control them. They also described traffickers’ threats of selling them to other traffickers, surveillance, passport confiscation, confinement, and isolation to keep them trapped and terrified, and to avoid law enforcement detection. Other women and girls said the madams forced them to undergo juju rituals—traditional oath-taking rites that usually involve use of human blood, hair, and clothing—to compel women and girls to pay their debts and not report traffickers to authorities.

Upon return to Nigeria, many women and girls said they struggled with depression, anxiety, insomnia, flashbacks, aches and pains, and other physical ailments that have sometimes



Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti (PIAM) co-founder, Inyang Okokon, was trafficked to Turin from Nigeria in 1999. PIAM is an antitrafficking organization that supports trafficking survivors, and is based in Asti in Italy. Okokon estimates that there are around 700-1,000 sex trafficking victims who need help in the Asti region of Italy. “Everyone talks about the problems of trafficking, but there is no discussion on what happens after a girl is trafficked,” says Okokon. Many trafficking survivors struggle with mental trauma, social exclusion, poverty, and physical ailments that sometimes limit their ability to earn a living and reintegrate into the community. © 2018 Lynsey Addario/Getty Images Reportage

limited their ability to work effectively. They said they struggled to provide financially for their families, lacked adequate food, or struggled to find money to access health care. For some, their suffering is worsened by families who blamed them for the abuses, ostracized them, or complained that they returned without money.

Nigeria has taken some positive steps to address its widespread problem of trafficking. It has taken the important step of ratifying most international instruments on human trafficking. It has also established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and developed an anti-trafficking law that is line with international standards. The agency and the law have helped to improve investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases. With support of international development agencies, Nigeria has also

established shelters, assisted with medical care, and created skills training and economic support programs for trafficking survivors. There is a strong network of NGOs who provide services to trafficking victims, including shelter accommodation, identification and family tracing, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration. However, these efforts are limited, and a number of factors impede a rights-respecting response to trafficking in Nigeria.

A key problem is the government's overreliance on shelters, as opposed to community-based services, as the primary means of promoting safety and providing services to survivors. In fact, the Nigerian authorities are actually detaining trafficking survivors in shelters, not allowing them to leave at will, in violation of Nigeria's international legal obligations. The detentions overwhelmingly affect women and girls, and put their recovery and well-being at risk. Some survivors in the NAPTIP shelters complained about not being able to receive visitors or contact their families, not having clear information about when they would reunite with their families, monotonous daily schedules, or boredom from doing nothing. Those referred by NAPTIP to private shelters were unhappy about poor conditions and services, including inadequate food, lack of soap or body lotion, lack of medical and psychosocial care, and lack of job training. They also expressed concerns about limited communication with NAPTIP officials. These problems are heightened by poor oversight over shelters and assistance programs.

Generally, women and girls were not actively engaged in decisions about their own assistance. Many survivors, including those in NAPTIP shelters and those participating in other reintegration programs, said they were given insufficient and/or unclear information about the kind of services they would receive, or the status of services they were receiving, including on economic, social, and medical assistance, court cases, family tracing, and timing for reunification with families. Some reported long waiting periods without assistance after contact with service providers. Survivors expressed anxiety about not knowing how long they would be in shelters, how long the training would be, or if, and when, they would get money to start businesses after vocational training. Some administrative procedures or requirements by service providers also impede successful reintegration. For example, some survivors and service providers were critical of IOM's livelihoods training programs, saying they were ineffective because most were based on group models that were unsustainable and lacked adequate follow-up.



A 24-year-old Nigerian woman in a shelter in Benin City, Nigeria. She went to Moscow in 2013 knowing she would be obliged to sell sex, but she was unaware that the debt she would have to pay—56,000—was in US dollars, not Nigerian currency, which which would have amounted to just US\$350. After four years she managed to pay off her debt; she decided to return to Nigeria in 2018 because she was pregnant. Her family is ashamed of her because she came back empty-handed. March 2018. © 2018 Lynsey Addario/Getty Images Reportage

Other problems include weak systems for victim identification, currently limited to law enforcement agents and immigration officials, leaving out other actors that could help, such as health workers, educators, communities leaders, church officials, labor officials, social workers, and others; lack of individualized and comprehensive services tailored to survivors' individual needs; failure to provide survivors with real job and employment opportunities and instead overly relying on skills training in professions such as tailoring and hairdressing that risk reinforcing gender stereotypes about the roles of women and girls in society; failure to link survivors to broader programs by government and others where they can get help; and problems with funding, coordination, and evaluation of assistance efforts.

Nigeria has human rights obligations to combat trafficking in persons, and to effectively protect and assist survivors. Nigerian authorities, including NAPTIP officials, should urgently improve implementation of its anti-trafficking laws and policies across the board, placing a high priority on improving assistance and services for internally identified and repatriated survivors. It should revamp its shelter policies and practices to ensure that they respect survivors' human rights. It should ensure that no one is detained in shelters or is being forced to remain there against their will, and allow freedom of movement. NAPTIP should provide survivors with accurate and clear information about assistance on an ongoing basis, ensure that women and girls participate in making such decisions, and develop and implement protocols for informed consent for survivors entering shelters or participating in other NAPTIP programs and services. It should also evaluate its shelter operations, including the impacts of its "closed" shelter approach, with input from survivors, NGOs, and government officials. It should develop a plan to move toward open shelters and expanded community-based services.

Nigerian authorities should take measures to ensure that reintegration services, including counseling, medical care, and livelihood support, are long-term and are tailored to meet the specific needs of women and girls, as well as their families. They should expand options for formal education, including through bridging programs, technical and professional training, and ensure that such programs promote women's equality and do not reinforce traditional gender roles that disadvantage women and girls. The Nigerian government should also improve legal assistance to help survivors pursue charges against and compensation from perpetrators. It should clarify the anti-trafficking mandates of all relevant government ministries and agencies, ensure that they understand their role and how it complements that of NAPTIP, monitor and evaluate their anti-trafficking activities, support training and improvement, and hold them accountable. International donors should support organizations helping victims.

Recommendations

To the Government of Nigeria

- Rigorously implement the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, criminal laws relevant to trafficking, and relevant policies, including the National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons (the “National Policy”) and the Guidelines on National Referral Mechanism for Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria (the “Referral Guidelines”).
- Ensure that the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), relevant ministries and agencies, the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, civil society representatives, and trafficking survivors update and clarify the National Policy and the Referral Guidelines, and improve implementation and coordination, including by publishing detailed guidance for all entities responsible for implementation.
- Support NAPTIP and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to expand open shelters for survivors of trafficking, and ensure that they respect survivors’ human rights.
- Ensure that no one is detained in shelters, that is, being forced to remain there against their will, and that all shelter residents are free to leave and return.
- Ensure that confinement of children in shelters, orphanages, or other facilities is a last resort, and can be justified on the basis of the best interests of the child.
- Ensure that all relevant ministries and agencies understand their anti-trafficking role and how it complements that of NAPTIP.
- Monitor, evaluate, and coordinate the anti-trafficking activities of all relevant ministries and agencies, support training and improvement, and hold accountable any that fail to uphold their duties.
- Develop and provide resources for community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programs for survivors of trafficking. Rehabilitative services should be both individual and collective.
- Provide free, quality, comprehensive, and survivor-centered rehabilitative health services for survivors of trafficking that should:

- Address long-term physical and mental health needs of survivors through medical treatment, including gynecological care, HIV testing and treatment, and voluntary counseling and other mental health services.
- Recognize impediments to accessing such services for marginalized groups, particularly women and girls living in rural areas or living with a disability, and other barriers to care such as stigma and low levels of knowledge about mental health; ensure that measures are in place to reach these victims and provide rehabilitative services to them.
- Provide special support for child survivors, including children born from trafficking-related sexual violence
- Ensure outreach to and participation by a wide range of civil society groups, including those working with survivors at all levels of design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Ensure girls and young women who dropped out of secondary school can go back to school, for example through bridging programs.
- Improve and expand legal assistance to help survivors pursue charges against and compensation from perpetrators.
- Assess and adjust NAPTIP's human, technical, and financial resources to enable it to effectively carry out its mandate.
- Provide financial support to NGOs with a successful track record of providing rights-respecting services to trafficking survivors. Consider establishing a dedicated government fund for this.
- Raise public awareness about safe and legal migration options, and ensure that migration management initiatives respect human rights, including freedom of movement
- Improve national law protections for domestic workers, and ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Worker's Convention, 2011.
- Implement laws and policies that promote gender equality, and address legal gaps.

To the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)

On Shelters

- Immediately end the detention of women and girls in shelters. Ensure that survivors living in shelters have freedom of movement, are free to leave and return

to the shelters, and can communicate with their families, receive visitors, and go to work.

- For any exceptional case where it is necessary to detain survivors, e.g. if they are awaiting imminent deportation, ensure all basic rights applicable to detainees are applied, including that all detention is on the basis of clear law, all detainees are held in a lawful detention center, all detainees are brought promptly before a judge to rule on the legality and necessity of their detention, ensure that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, and that they satisfy international legal requirements regarding considerations of necessity, legality, and proportionality.
- Ensure the crime of unlawful detention is explained to residents and administrators of shelters, and that anyone responsible for this crime is prosecuted.
- Ensure that confinement of children in shelters or other facilities is a last resort, and can be justified on the basis of the best interests of the child.
- Ensure the establishment of transparent and effective mechanisms to monitor all shelter facilities used for victims of trafficking, including systems for survivors to provide regular feedback on services offered, and to allow their input on management of the shelters.
- Work with the government to commission an independent evaluation of NAPTIP's shelter operations, including the impacts of its "closed" shelter approach, with input from survivors, NGOs, government officials, and others. Use the information gathered to develop a plan, in consultation with all stakeholders, to move toward open shelters and expanded community-based services.
- Improve communication about and speed of reintegrating survivors initially housed in shelters, especially children, with their families and communities.
- Update shelter policies, rules, and administrative requirements to ensure that they do not violate survivors' rights to freedom of movement and to be free from arbitrary detention, and ensure that confinement in shelters or other facilities is a last resort. Provide ongoing training to staff to ensure compliance with these standards.

On Communication with Survivors and Informed Consent

- Ensure that survivors are provided with detailed and regular information about their cases and services available, including on economic, social, and medical assistance, court cases, family tracing, and timing for reunification with families.
- Develop and implement protocols for informed consent for survivors entering shelters or participating in other NAPTIP programs and services.

On Reintegration and Rehabilitation Assistance

- Conduct detailed needs assessments on an ongoing basis, as victims' circumstances may change.
- Ensure that reintegration services, including counseling, medical care, legal assistance, and livelihood support, are:
 - Tailored to meet the specific needs of women and girls
 - Address the needs of children born from trafficking-related sexual violence.
 - Take into account age, literacy, and disability-specific needs; the economic and psychosocial impact of raising children born from trafficking-related sexual violence; and whether they are in child or female-headed households.
- Ensure that rehabilitative services address long-term mental and physical health needs.
- Ensure that services for survivors address factors that made them vulnerable to trafficking, such as family violence, neglect, and abandonment, or lack of education and poverty; and include measures to prevent and assist women survivors who experience discrimination and abuse as a consequence of trafficking.
- Economic empowerment programs should include income generation for survivors and their families while they are in vocational trainings or shelters, and expand technical and professional training.

On Increasing Awareness about Trafficking and Assistance to Survivors

- Improve outreach to raise public awareness about trafficking prevention and risks, how to report trafficking and related crimes, identifying victims of trafficking, and assistance for survivors.

To the Nigerian Police Force, Immigration Service, and the Federal Airports Authority

- Investigate and appropriately respond, including through suspension, discipline, or termination, to allegations of mistreatment of trafficking survivors, corruption, or complicity in trafficking by police, immigration, or airport authorities.
- Refer cases involving criminal allegations to prosecutors.
- Train such authorities on the human rights of trafficking survivors, and on their duties to identify and protect victims.

To International Donors, especially European institutions and European governments including the United Kingdom; and United Nations Agencies, especially the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, International Organization for Migration, and United Nations Children’s Fund

- Ensure that funding and technical support provided to the Nigerian government includes support for expanding community-based reintegration services.
- Ensure that funding and technical support provided to the Nigerian government includes special support for girls, including support to continue with formal schooling.
- Ensure that funding and other anti-trafficking assistance to the Nigerian government prioritizes victim rehabilitation and reintegration services, not only support for awareness raising and border control measures.
- Ensure that funding and technical support provided to the Nigerian government does not undermine human rights, including individuals’ rights to freedom of movement.
- Ensure that financial and other support provided to the Nigerian government includes support for safe migration options.

Methodology

Human Rights Watch interviewed 76 survivors of human trafficking, 20 of them children, about their experiences of trafficking and reintegration assistance, for this report. Of these, 71 identified as women or girls, and 5 identified as men. We also interviewed seven survivors of smuggling, two internally displaced persons, and one victim of forced marriage. Their experiences provided insight into the vulnerabilities that lead to trafficking, and problems with government services.

We conducted research in Lagos (Lagos State), Benin City (Edo State), Abeokuta (Ogun State), and Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) between May 2017 and October 2018. These locations were chosen because they are believed by NGOs working on these issues to have high rates of trafficking, but also due to accessibility considerations.

Some women and girls we interviewed were unsure about when they were trafficked, but most cases documented in this report occurred in the last five years. Two interviewees said they were trafficked twice. Most survivors were exploited in trafficking for a year or longer, and seven were intercepted at borders or at the airport before leaving the country. Most of the women and girls we interviewed were trafficked for sexual exploitation, but many faced multiple and intersecting forms of exploitation and abuse.

Human Rights Watch observed two NAPTIP shelters, in Lagos and Benin City, Edo state capital, and a private shelter and orphanage in Lagos. We interviewed 21 trafficking survivors who had stayed in these institutions for varying periods of time, from a few weeks to six months. Seven of those in NAPTIP shelters and the orphanage were children below the age of 18. Children interviewed by Human Rights Watch were aged between 8 and 17. Thirteen were Beninese trafficked for domestic labor in Nigeria. Women and girls in shelters were receiving some assistance, such as counseling, vocational training, and education support.

We identified survivors and witnesses with the assistance of NAPTIP and of NGOs providing services to women. Human Rights Watch held most interviews in private, including all interviews in institutions, and took great care to minimize the risk of retraumatization when conducting interviews. In the few instances where it was not

possible to conduct the interviews in private spaces, care was taken to protect the confidentiality of survivors as far as possible. In some cases, adult survivors were interviewed in the presence of their relatives upon their request. Very young children were interviewed in the presence of representatives of NGOs working with them.

In all cases, Human Rights Watch informed interviewees before the start of each interview about the purpose of the interview and the kind of issues that would be covered, that they would receive no personal service or benefit, that the interviews were completely voluntary, and the ways the information would be used. Each participant verbally consented to be interviewed. To protect their privacy and safety, pseudonyms are used in place of names of survivors in this report. In some cases, we have concealed other details, such as the name of the institution where a survivor resided, or details of their trafficker. The identities of some other interviewees have also been withheld at their request.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Interviews were conducted in English without interpretation, and in Pidgin with the assistance of interpreters. Pidgin is an English-based Creole language and arguably Nigeria's real lingua franca. All the translators were females working with an NGO providing reintegration assistance to victims of trafficking who understood the sensitivity of interviewing survivors. Interviewees received no material compensation for participating but were reimbursed for the cost of public transport to and from the interview. Where appropriate, Human Rights Watch provided contact information of organizations offering counseling and reintegration services.

Human Rights Watch interviewed staff of 21 NGOs addressing trafficking and assisting victims. We also met with six officials from NAPTIP zonal offices in Lagos and Benin City, and with government officials from the federal Ministry of Labor and Employment, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, and the Nigeria Immigration Service's anti-trafficking unit. In Edo State, we interviewed four officials from the Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking, and government workers in the Ministry of Youth and Social Development and Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. As part of this research, we reviewed relevant laws, policies, guidelines, official government strategies, and reports by academics, national and international organizations, and United Nations agencies.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed representatives of bilateral and international assistance and development agencies and United Nations agencies. These included the European Union, embassies of the United Kingdom, Norway, Finland, Ireland, Switzerland, and Netherlands; and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and UN Women. International Organization for Migration sent Human Rights Watch written responses to our questions.

This report does not address sex work, which is the commercial exchange of sexual services between consenting adults.

Terminology

In line with international human rights instruments, the term “child” as used in this report refers to a person under the age of 18.

We use the term “trafficking” as defined by the United Nations Trafficking Protocol:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.¹

The Protocol defines trafficking of children as follows: “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons.’”

The term “smuggling” is used in accordance with the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: “Smuggling of migrants” shall mean the procurement, in

¹ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (“Trafficking Protocol”), adopted November 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, annex II, 55 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol. I) (2001), entered into force December 25, 2003, ratified by Nigeria December 13, 2001, art. 3(a).

order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.²

This report uses the terminology “forced prostitution” as it was the term most frequently used by survivors interviewed for this report to describe the involuntary nature of the exploitation. It also uses “trafficked into sexual exploitation,” which is the terminology from the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, as well “sex trafficking.”

² People who are smuggled can be extremely vulnerable to human trafficking, and cases that begin as smuggling can end up becoming trafficking situations. See “Smuggling and Trafficking Human Beings: Questions and Answers,” Human Rights Watch question and answer, July 7, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/07/smuggling-and-trafficking-human-beings> for more information on the differences and intersections between trafficking and smuggling.

I. Background on the Crisis of Human Trafficking in Nigeria

With an estimated population of 200 million, Nigeria in 2017 has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$376.284 billion, the highest in Africa, according to figures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).³ The country has ample natural resources, especially crude oil, which accounts for over 70 percent of its earnings.⁴ Nigeria is Africa's largest crude oil supplier.⁵ Other non-oil exports include cocoa and rubber. Ranking first in Africa in terms of farm output, Nigeria's main agricultural exports are cocoa, peanuts, rubber, and palm oil. Its tech industry is also booming, as startups continue to take center stage.⁶

However, despite the country's huge natural, and considerable human resources, it also faces serious economic and social challenges, including low literacy levels, and lack of access to education, high rates of unemployment, endemic corruption, exclusion and inequality among social groups, including gender inequality.⁷ Ongoing conflict in the northeast with the insurgent group Boko Haram, as well as violent communal clashes in five north central states, among other issues, have led to displacement that has exacerbated women's and girls' vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation by increasing economic desperation, weakening the rule of law, decreasing the availability of social services and family support, leading to displacement. Nigeria also faces serious child protection problems, including having large numbers of children out of school, as well as widespread violence against children. All these issues—compounded by limited avenues for safe migration, and a lack of implementation of existing laws and policies designed to address human trafficking—create an environment where trafficking thrives.

³ Olumide Oyekunle, "The Largest Economies in Africa by GDP, 2019," *African Exponent*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.africanexponent.com/post/9786-top-six-countries-with-the-biggest-gdp-in-africa> (accessed August 6, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ World Bank, "The World Bank in Nigeria, Overview," 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview> (accessed August 6, 2019).

Anti-Trafficking Efforts in Nigeria

Nigeria has made some positive steps to address the widespread problem of trafficking in persons. It has endorsed most international instruments on human trafficking and has played a key role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) anti-human trafficking initiatives.⁸ It has entered into various bilateral agreements and memoranda of agreement on immigration matters with countries within and outside Africa that relate to the problems of human trafficking, forced labor and migration in general. The effectiveness of these agreements in protecting the rights of trafficking victims and other migrants is unclear.⁹

Nigeria has also established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), which has improved awareness, investigation, and prosecution of trafficking cases, and identification, protection, and assistance for survivors. The Nigerian government, through NAPTIP and with the support of international donors, has developed national protocols for referral, protection, and victim assistance. There is also a Victims of Trafficking Trust Fund to provide humanitarian and financial aid for victims of trafficking, although its implementation is unclear.¹⁰

The government of Nigeria is also implementing programs to help survivors of trafficking, including through family tracing and reunification, shelters, counseling, access to health care, skills training, business set-up, and financial support. These programs are largely implemented through NAPTIP, which collaborates with a broad network of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and international donors. There is a strong network of national NGOs offering similar services, including conduct awareness campaigns against human trafficking, shelter accommodation, identification, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration assistance. At the state level, the state governments of

⁸ Aderanti Adepoju et al., “Europe’s Migration Agreements with Migrant-sending Countries in the Global South: A Critical Review,” 2010,

https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/353968/Author_manuscript_Adepoju_van_Noorloos_Zoomers_Europe_migration_agreements.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed August 6, 2019), p. 7.

⁹ For example, Nwogu notes that, “In entering into these bilateral agreements Nigeria has overlooked the importance of negotiating better conditions of admittance and residence for its migrant labourers. The agreements focus mostly on procedures for repatriation of Nigerian nationals.” Ibid.

¹⁰ Funding for the victims trust fund is obtained through direct grant from the Nigerian government, voluntary contributions of NAPTIP partners and confiscated assets of traffickers. See United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “Trafficking in Persons Report” (“2018 TIP Report”), June 2018, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/282798.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2019).

Edo, Delta, and Ondo have formed taskforces against human trafficking.¹¹ The Edo State is also the only state in Nigeria with an anti-trafficking law, which is modelled largely on the national Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act of 2015.

Staff of NGOs and various anti-trafficking actors interviewed by Human Rights Watch acknowledge that these efforts are not comprehensive or sufficient. They also said they are poorly funded by government and international donors to be able to meet survivors' multiple needs for long-term comprehensive assistance. They claim that the number of women and girls trafficked inside and outside Nigeria remains high, and the country faces many challenges in protecting and assisting survivors.

Nigerians are trafficked within the country, as well as to other African countries, especially neighboring west African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon, and Guinea), European countries (including Italy, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom), North Africa (especially Libya, Algeria, and Morocco), and the Middle East (primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).¹² Women and girls are often trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor, including involuntary domestic servitude.¹³ Men and boys are more frequently trafficked into forced and bonded labor in street vending, domestic work, mining, stone quarrying, agriculture, textile manufacturing, and begging (including begging connected with some Almajiri schools of Islamic education).¹⁴

¹¹ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "Trafficking in Persons Report" ("2019 TIP Report"), June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2019), p. 353. The Edo taskforce is involved in the reception and reintegration of all returnees, including survivors of trafficking. It also involved in research, awareness raising, and prosecutions. See "Edo State Taskforce against Human Trafficking (ETAHT)," Edo State Government, <http://etaht.ed.gov.ng/index.html> (accessed August 6, 2019).

¹² See "Fact Sheet 3: Trends in Human Trafficking in Nigeria," National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), undated, <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Fact-Sheet-1.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2019), p. 7; and United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2019 TIP Report," p. 357.

¹³ Fact Sheet 3: Trends in Human Trafficking in Nigeria," pp. 7 and 13.

¹⁴ Almajiri education is an informal system of educating children in Quranic studies. Children are sent away from home to live with religious teachers called *mallams*, who run the schools. The practice is common in northern Nigeria. There are widespread reports of abuse and exploitation of children in the Almajiri schools. For more information on the Almajiri system and links to trafficking see Garba Umaru Kwagyang, "Child Trafficking and Religion: A Case Study of Almajiri Education In Northern Nigeria," *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, vol. 8, issue 4 (2015), <http://ijbel.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/law-35.pdf> (accessed August 5, 2019).

Scale of Trafficking in Persons in and from Nigeria

For years, the media has been awash with horrifying stories of Nigerian women trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation and migrants trapped in Libya in slavery-like conditions or dying as they cross the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁵

These stories reflect the large and, according to some estimates, increasing problem of human trafficking within and from Nigeria in recent years, and the significant numbers of smuggled migrants from Nigeria.¹⁶ Trafficking and smuggling are distinct but related crimes: some trafficked people might start their journey by agreeing to be smuggled into a country, only to then be deceived, coerced, or forced into an exploitative situation.¹⁷

There is no comprehensive data on human trafficking in Nigeria, but it is routinely listed as one of the countries with the largest number of trafficking victims overseas, particularly in Europe. Nigerian trafficking victims were identified in at least 34 countries in four regions in 2018, according to the US State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.¹⁸ The Walk Free Foundation, an organization that works to end modern-day slavery, ranked Nigeria 32 out of 167 countries in their 2018 Global Slavery Index on

¹⁵ See Ali Younes, “A tale of human traffickers and Libyan slave markets,” *Mail&Guardian*, November 29, 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-11-29-a-tale-of-human-traffickers-and-libyan-slave-markets> (accessed August 6, 2019); CNN, “Migrants being Sold as Slaves in Libya,” video report, November 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S2qtGisT34> (accessed August 6, 2019); “116 Nigerians Trapped in Libya Slave Camps - Presidential Aide,” *Premium Times*, August 6, 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/279000-116-nigerians-trapped-in-libya-slave-camps-presidential-aide.html> (accessed August 6, 2019); “Nigeria Flying Citizens From Libya Amid ‘Endemic’ Abuse,” *Al Jazeera*, January 7, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/nigeria-flying-citizens-libya-endemic-abuse-180107185305101.html> (accessed August 6, 2019); Monica Mark, “Inside the Country Where You Can Buy A Black Man For \$400,” *Buzzfeed News*, December 15, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/monicamark/slavery-nigeria-libya> (accessed August 6, 2019); Aryn Baker, “‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants,” March 14, 2019, <http://time.com/longform/african-slave-trade/> (accessed August 6, 2019); Bryan Bowman, “False Promises: Sex Trafficking, Exploitation on the Rise in Africa,” *Globe Post*, January 25, 2019, <https://theglobepost.com/2019/01/25/nigeria-sex-trafficking/> (accessed August 6, 2019); “‘About 170 Migrants Dead’ in Mediterranean Shipwrecks,” BBC, January 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46933724> (accessed August 6, 2019).

¹⁶ IOM, “Increased Number of Nigerian Migrants Fall Victim to Sex Trafficking, Exploitation in Mali,” January 25, 2019, <https://www.iom.int/news/increased-number-nigerian-migrants-fall-victim-sex-trafficking-exploitation-mali> (accessed August 6, 2019).

¹⁷ See Human Rights Watch, “Smuggling and Trafficking Human Beings: Questions and Answers.”

¹⁸ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria,” p. 357. Also see European Asylum Support Office, “Country of Origin Information Report: Nigeria Sex Trafficking of Women,” October 2015, www.refworld.org/pdfid/5631cfoa4.pdf (accessed January 15, 2019). This report noted that Nigerians comprise the biggest African group among trafficked persons in Europe.

prevalence of modern slavery, which by their definition includes human trafficking.¹⁹ It noted that Nigeria, together with the Democratic Republic of Congo, had the highest absolute number of trafficked victims, and the two countries accounted for over one-quarter of all victims of modern-day slavery in the African region.²⁰ Walk Free Foundation estimated that Nigeria has more than 1.3 million people living in modern slavery.²¹

The numbers of “potential” Nigerian trafficking victims in Italy has shot up in recent years, according to International Organization for Migration (IOM), which in 2017 reported a 600 percent increase in the number of potential sex trafficking victims arriving in Italy by sea, with most victims arriving from Nigeria. IOM estimated that 80 percent of girls arriving from Nigeria—whose numbers had soared from 1,454 in 2014 to 11,009 in 2016—were potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the streets and brothels of Europe.²² According to the 2018 and 2019 US Trafficking in Persons Reports (US TIP Reports), most Nigerian trafficking victims in Europe come from Edo State, typically via Libya.²³

There is also no comprehensive, reliable data on the number of smuggled migrants from Nigeria. However, some information is available on estimated numbers of smuggled migrants along certain routes. In 2017, a former Nigerian Permanent Representative to the United Nations said that in 2016 alone, 602,000 Nigerians tried to migrate to Europe via the Sahara Desert. A large number of them died during the journey.²⁴

Nigeria was ranked a “Tier Two”, down from “Tier Two Watchlist” country in the 2019 US TIP Report, meaning that it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of

¹⁹ Walk Free Foundation, “The Global Slavery Index 2018,” https://downloads.globalslaveryindex.org/ephemeral/GSI-2018_FNL_180907_Digital-small-p-1557908833.pdf (accessed May 15, 2019), pp. 140-142. This index “measures the extent of modern slavery country by country, and the steps governments are taking to respond to this issue, to objectively measure progress towards ending modern slavery.” *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² IOM, “UN Migration Agency Issues Report on Arrivals of Sexually Exploited Migrants, Chiefly from Nigeria,” July 21, 2017, <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-issues-report-arrivals-sexually-exploited-migrants-chiefly-nigeria> (accessed April 2, 2019).

²³ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2018 TIP Report,” p. 331; “2019 TIP Report,” p. 357.

²⁴ Ahmed Idris and Birnin Kebbi, “602,000 Nigerians Migrated to Europe in 2016, says UN ex-envoy,” *Guardian News*, June 6, 2017, <https://t.guardian.ng/news/602000-nigerians-migrated-to-europe-in-2016-says-un-ex-envoy/> (accessed March 21, 2019).

trafficking although it is making progress.²⁵ The progress noted in the report relates to increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, and the report notes that “The government decreased efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims.”²⁶

Poverty and Inequality

Various global ratings point to Nigeria’s economic and human development challenges. Nigeria is ranked 157 out of 186 countries in the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI), with women having lower scores in measures of human development and gender inequality.²⁷ According to a 2018 report by the Brookings Institution, Nigeria overtook India as the country with the largest number of people in extreme poverty in early 2018.²⁸ According to the World Bank, more than half of Nigerians, most of them women, live in absolute poverty.²⁹

Development Finance International and Oxfam placed Nigeria at the bottom of their ranking of countries on their efforts to tackle the gap between rich and poor in 2017 and 2018.³⁰ The 2018 report says Nigeria’s social spending—mainly on health, education, and social protection—is “shamefully low,” reflected in very poor social outcomes for its citizens.³¹

²⁵ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2019 TIP Report,” p. 361. These annual rankings reflect the US government’s assessment of the records of countries around the world in responding to trafficking.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 53 and 55.

²⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Human Development Report 2018,” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI> (accessed August 7, 2019). The Human Development Index (HDI) is “A composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.” *Ibid.* The HDI includes a Gender Development Index and a Gender Inequality Index, and in Nigeria’s case, the indices reveal a variety of gender-based inequalities that disadvantage women. UNDP, “Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update. Nigeria,” 2018, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/NGA.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019).

²⁸ Homi Kharas, Kristofer Hamel, Martin Hofer, “Future Development: The Start of a New Poverty Narrative,” The Brookings Institution, June 19, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/19/the-start-of-a-new-poverty-narrative/> (accessed August 7, 2019).

²⁹ World Bank, “Poverty & Equity Brief, Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria,” April 2019, https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_NGA.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019).

³⁰ The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index ranks the commitment of national governments to reducing the gap between rich and poor citizens by measuring three factors: social spending, tax policies, and labor rights. Development Finance International and Oxfam, “The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2018,” 2018, https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/The_Commitment_to_Reducing_Inequality_Index_2018.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Poverty interplays with other factors such as exclusion, gender inequality, children’s rights abuses, corruption, and violence, to create high levels of vulnerability and desperation that traffickers exploit. Almost all of the survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed said they wanted to leave Nigeria in search of opportunities to support themselves and their families, and saw traveling abroad, especially to Europe, as their only option to escape dire poverty. Many of them thought they would make money quickly in Europe and send remittances to support their families.

Gender Inequality

Women and girls in Nigeria face entrenched exclusion and discrimination, which contribute to risk of trafficking. Nigeria is ranked 157 out of 186 countries in the United Nations’ Gender Development Index³² and the Gender Inequality Index.³³ Most Nigerian women are employed in the agricultural sector, but they earn less than their male counterparts, and more female than male youth are unemployed.³⁴ More males than females are literate in Nigeria, with women in northern part of the country having lower literacy levels. According to a 2017 government survey, the percentage of young people age 15-24 years who can read a short simple statement about everyday life or who attended secondary or higher education was 59.3 percent for women and 79.9 percent for men.³⁵

Nigeria is in many ways a patriarchal society and cultural beliefs and attitudes shape women’s and girls’ everyday experiences.³⁶ Under the country’s pluralistic legal system,

³² UNDP, “Human Development Reports: Nigeria Human Development Indicators,” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA> (accessed August 7, 2019). This index measures gender gaps in human development achievements by accounting for disparities between women and men in three basic dimensions of human development—health, knowledge, and living standards. See “Human Development Reports: Frequently Asked Questions – Gender Development Index (GDI),” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/faq-page/gender-development-index-gdi#t371n2912> (accessed August 7, 2019).

³³ “Human Development Reports: Frequently Asked Questions – Gender Inequality Index (GII),” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/faq-page/gender-inequality-index-gii> (accessed August 7, 2019). This index measures inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market.

³⁴ UNDP, “Human Development Reports: Nigeria Human Development Indicators.” Overall, women fared worse than men in almost all indicators.

³⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, “Nigeria - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5) 2016-17, Fifth round,” p. 5.

³⁶ See Sefinatu Aliyu Dogo, “The Nigerian Patriarchy: When and How,” 2014, *Cultural and Religious Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 5, www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/554883203bc54.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019).

Islamic and customary laws, some of which are discriminatory against women and girls, are applicable alongside statutory laws.³⁷

Violations of Children’s Rights

Nigerian children also face a range of abuses and discrimination that make them vulnerable to trafficking. Millions of children are not going to school, face high levels of violence and exploitation, lack birth registration, and experience inadequate education, social protection, and access to health care. According to a 2017 government survey:

- Only 57 percent of children below 5 years have their birth registered with a civil authority.³⁸
- One-third of children of school-entry age are enrolled in first grade of primary school. Three in five children of primary school age and two in five secondary school age children are currently attending school. About a quarter of children do not complete primary education, and only about one in two children transition to secondary school with more boys than girls transitioning.³⁹
- One in two children are involved in child labor, while 39 percent are working in hazardous conditions.⁴⁰
- About 85 percent of children ages 1-14 were subjected to at least one form of violent discipline.⁴¹

Breakdowns in cultural systems regarding care and fostering of children, violent approaches to discipline, and the low status accorded to children compound their vulnerability. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF):

Abuse in all its forms are a daily reality for many Nigerian children and only a fraction ever receive help. Six out of every 10 children experience some form of violence – one in four girls and 10 per cent of boys have been

³⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria, July 24, 2017, CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, para. 11.

³⁸ National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, “Nigeria - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5) 2016-17, Fifth round,” p. 5. The MISC was conducted between September 2016 and January 2017.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

victims of sexual violence. Of the children who reported violence, fewer than five out of a 100 received any form of support.⁴²

Nigeria has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world according to UNICEF: more than 10 million children, most of them girls, are estimated to be out of school, amounting to one-fifth of the global total of out-of-school children.⁴³ Nigeria also has the world's highest number of children living with HIV.⁴⁴ Moreover, three out of four children in Nigeria are affected by multidimensional poverty, and children make up more than half of the country's internally displaced population.⁴⁵

Child marriage is also widespread. Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa, and the second highest number globally.⁴⁶ Most child brides are from poor and rural communities.⁴⁷ Government estimates show that about two in ten girls and more than one in two marry before their 15th and 18th birthdays, respectively.⁴⁸

Individuals Human Rights Watch interviewed had experienced many of these problems in their childhoods. More than half of the survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed had dropped out of primary or secondary school, mostly because their parents could not afford school fees and related costs, or due to family changes such as divorce. Many young women we interviewed said they stopped studies after secondary school due to lack of

⁴² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Child Protection: Nigeria," undated, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-protection> (accessed August 7, 2019).

⁴³ Ibid., p. 2. See also UNICEF, "Education: Nigeria," undated, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education> (accessed August 7, 2019); "Nigeria Has 'Largest Number of Children Out-Of-School in The World,'" *BBC News*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40715305> (accessed August 7, 2019); Azeezat Adedigba, "Nigeria Now has 13.2 Million Out-of-School Children – UBEC," *Premium Times*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/288344-nigeria-now-has-13-2-million-out-of-school-children-ubec.html> (accessed August 7, 2019).

⁴⁴ UNICEF, "UNICEF Annual Report 2017," https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Nigeria_2017_COAR.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 1 and 2. According to UNICEF, multidimensional child poverty, which it refers to as a multiple overlapping deprivation analysis (MODA), is "a framework that defines and measures multidimensional child poverty, based in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. It shows what dimensions of poverty children are experiencing, helping in programming and policy response." For more information see UNICEF, "Multidimensional Child Poverty," undated, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/multidimensional-child-poverty/> (accessed August 7, 2019).

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also UNICEF, "UNICEF Annual Report 2017," p. 1.

⁴⁷ UNICEF, "Child Protection: Nigeria."

⁴⁸ National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, "Nigeria - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5) 2016-17, Fifth round," p. 5.

money.⁴⁹ Only four interviewees said they had finished tertiary education. Some of them came from large, and/or polygamous families where they faced economic and social problems.⁵⁰ Others said their economic situation had worsened after separation, divorce, or death of parents, limiting access to education and increasing vulnerability to exploitation by traffickers who offer “help.”⁵¹

Human Rights Watch also heard statements indicating that abusive family environments, characterized by domestic and sexual violence, negligence, economic abuse, and alcohol abuse, had pushed women and girls to leave home, putting them at risk of being trafficked. Some children said they were not living with their biological parents at the time they were trafficked, and others said that their parents or other caregivers had abused or neglected them.

Seventeen-year-old Adichie T., trafficked by a woman who deceived her with a job offer in a beer parlor in Lagos, said her father died when she was eight years old. Her mother remarried, and her stepfather abused her:

I was going to school in SS2 [Senior Secondary Two]. My mum was paying the fees. There were problems at home. My stepfather used to beat me like five times a day. He didn’t want me to play with his children. He would deny me food. My stepfather did not want my mum to pay the school fees and told her to send me away. My mum said she cannot chase me away. He told my step-grandmother to send me away. I left and went to my grandfather in Akwa Ibom. I stopped going to school.⁵²

⁴⁹ Nigerian law guarantees free, compulsory, and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age, but related costs such as uniforms and books can add up for many poor families. Government investment is insufficient to achieve universal basic education. See UNICEF, “Education: Nigeria;” Elizabeth Uwandu, “No State in Nigeria Can Boast of Free Education – Soweto,” *Vanguard*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/09/no-state-in-nigeria-can-boast-of-free-education-soweto-2/> (accessed August 7, 2019); Tope Alake, “No Books, No Desks, No Pay: Nigeria’s Education System is Failing,” *Bloomberg*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-12/no-books-no-desks-no-pay-nigeria-s-education-is-failing> (accessed August 7, 2019).

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Joy P., Lagos, July 23, 2017, Everjoyce V., Benin, August 4, 2018, and Akuada J., Benin, August 4, 2017.

⁵¹ See UNICEF, “Child Protection: Trafficking, Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Violence Against Children, Juvenile Justice, Child Injury,” undated, https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/o4_child_protection.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 6.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Adichie T., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

Joy P., 15, told Human Rights Watch how an abusive family environment led her to a trafficker:

My parents separated, and I lived with my dad. [He] is polygamous; my mum is the second wife. My step-mum is wicked; she used to beat me. My dad beat me and complained of everything I did. He was not paying my school fees. [He] did not want me to be with my mum after she left. I agreed to follow the woman [connecting her to the trafficker] because I was not happy at home. I was very happy when she said she will take me to Lagos. I knew they [her father and step-mother] will not notice it, so I left.”⁵³

These pre-existing abuses highlight the need for tailored, comprehensive, long-term mental health care and other support for trafficking survivors, as well as the importance of meeting the assistance needs of families.

Corruption and Porous Borders

Nigeria suffers from significant corruption and governance problems. It ranked 144 out of 180 countries in the 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.⁵⁴ According to a 2017 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “The vast majority of bribery episodes in Nigeria are initiated either directly or indirectly by public officials and almost 70 per cent of bribes are paid before a service is rendered.”⁵⁵ Law enforcement and the judiciary are areas of particular concern according to the study, which also says that roughly 400 billion Nigerian naira (approximately \$1.1 billion) is spent on bribes each year, and that Nigerians consider bribery the third most important problem facing their country.⁵⁶

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Joy P., Lagos, July 23, 2017.

⁵⁴ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2018,” <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018> (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 3.

⁵⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Corruption in Nigeria. Bribery: Public Experience and Response,” July 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Crime-statistics/Nigeria/Corruption_Nigeria_2017_07_31_web.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), pp. 5 and 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The 2018 US TIP Report chapter on Nigeria notes, “Widespread and pervasive corruption affected all levels of government and the security forces and undermined accountability for trafficking offenses.”⁵⁷ The 2019 report said there were “continued reports of, and only insufficient efforts to address, government officials’ complicity in human trafficking offenses.”⁵⁸

Some women and girls told Human Rights Watch that border police received money from traffickers and allowed them to get out of the country without any questioning. Fifteen-year-old Rael Z. said her father removed her from school when she was 11 years old so that she could work and earn money for his medical treatment. Her sister took her to a woman to do domestic work. Rael said police arrested the woman, but it was only after they failed to pay a bribe that the police took her to NAPTIP:

They said you are employing children and you have been warned and never stops. They arrested my sister. Police asked for a bribe to kill the case, but they [her sister and her employer] said they didn’t have money. Police refused to release me to my sister. They brought me and two other girls to a superior, who brought us to NAPTIP.⁵⁹

Two young women told Human Rights Watch that they suspected that their traffickers had paid off airport officials, who appeared to work for the government, to get their help leaving the country. Eighteen-year-old Ebuloluwa E. said her trafficker, who had promised to take her to Russia to work as a model, met with an airport official at a hotel, and she believes, paid him off. The next morning, the airport official helped her with paperwork and got her to a plane. A flight attendant suspected trafficking and contacted the Department of State Services, which took her off the plane—against the protests of the airport official.⁶⁰ Traffickers also exploit Nigeria’s vast and porous borders—and the free movement of people and goods within the ECOWAS—to traffic women and girls.⁶¹ The agreement

⁵⁷ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2018 TIP Report,” p. 328.

⁵⁸ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2019 TIP Report,” p. 353.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rael Z., Lagos, July 27, 2017.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ebuloluwa E., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

⁶¹ The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of eight regional economic communities of the African Union. It comprises fifteen countries in West Africa, and was formed to promote economic integration across the region. See African Union, “Regional Economic Communities’ (RECs),” undated, <https://au.int/en/organs/recs> (accessed June 11, 2019).

stipulates that nationals of the ECOWAS countries must produce a valid travel certificate or an ID when crossing borders.⁶² However, corrupt officials turn a blind eye when people cross without such documents.

Corruption linked to trafficking extends to the judiciary. The 2018 and 2019 US TIP reports note that, “Judges issued fines reportedly due to a lack of familiarity with the 2015 anti-trafficking law and at times due to corruption.”⁶³

Conflict and Insecurity

Ongoing conflict with Boko Haram and intercommunal violence in Nigeria, driven in part by climate change and a scramble over scarce resources, among other factors, has exacerbated women’s and girls’ vulnerability to trafficking.⁶⁴

Human Rights Watch has documented insecurity in Nigeria, and Nigerian authorities’ problematic responses. It reported that at least 1,200 people were killed and nearly 200,000 displaced during 2018 due to the nearly decade-long conflict between Boko Haram insurgents and government forces. Nigerian security forces have also killed scores of people during operations.⁶⁵ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are more than 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Lake Chad region displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency.⁶⁶

⁶² ECOWAS, “Protocol A/P.1/5/79 Relating To Free Movement Of Persons, Residence And Establishment,” http://documentation.ecowas.int/download/en/legal_documents/protocols/PROTOCOL%20RELATING%20TO%20%20FREE%20MOVEMENT%20OF%20PERSONS.pdf, art. 3 (1).

⁶³ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2018 TIP Report,” p. 304; “2019 TIP Report,” p. 354.

⁶⁴ For more discussion on conflicts and climate change in Nigeria see Chukwuma Onyia, “Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Challenge,” 2015, *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, http://www.aijssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_2_April_2015/17.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019); Katharina Nett, Lukas Rüttinger, “Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate: Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups,” Adelphi, October 2016, <https://www.climate-diplomacy.org/file/2988/download?token=NKBhgKxo> (accessed August 7, 2019), pp. 10-19; David Doukhan, “Climate Change Contribute to Boko Haram Uprising,” May 28, 2017, <https://www.ict.org.il/Article/2023/climate-change-contribute-to-boko-haram-uprising#gsc.tab=0> (accessed August 7, 2019).

⁶⁵ “Nigeria: Heightened Insecurity Threatens Rights,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 17, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/17/nigeria-heightened-insecurity-threatens-rights>.

⁶⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Nigeria Emergency,” <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (accessed August 7, 2019).

Boko Haram itself engages in trafficking by forcibly recruiting, abducting, and exploiting children as cooks, spies, messengers, bodyguards, and armed combatants. Its fighters also abduct women and girls in the northern region of Nigeria for domestic servitude, forced labor, and sex slavery through forced marriages to its militants.⁶⁷

Furthermore, decades-old communal conflicts between nomadic herdsman and farmers in Nigeria's Middle Belt intensified in 2018.⁶⁸ At least 1,600 people were killed and another 300,000 were displaced as a result of the violence.⁶⁹

Women and girls in camps for IDPs in northern Nigeria lack adequate food and face severe protection problems, including widespread sexual abuse and exploitation.⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch has documented sexual abuse of women and girls living in seven IDP camps in Maiduguri in northern Nigeria.⁷¹ Government officials managing the camps are alleged to be complicit in these activities. The 2018 TIP Report noted that, "there were ... reports that camp officials and members of security forces, including some individual Nigerian military personnel, used fraudulent or forced marriages to exploit girls in sex trafficking and new reports that the Nigerian military, CJTF [the Civilian Joint Task Force], and other camp officials fraudulently recruited female IDPs for jobs outside of IDP camps but transported them to military barracks for sexual exploitation by Nigerian military personnel."⁷² The 2019 report noted government failure to "take adequate steps to investigate or prosecute military personnel or CJTF members complicit in trafficking in the Northeast, in particular sexual exploitation of IDPs and female detainees."⁷³

⁶⁷ See United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria;" United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2018 TIP Report," pp. 130, 136, 327, 328, 330.

⁶⁸ "Nigeria: Rising Toll of Middle-Belt Violence Urgently Step Up Investigations," Human Rights Watch news release, June 28, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/28/nigeria-rising-toll-middle-belt-violence>.

⁶⁹ "Nigeria: Heightened Insecurity Threatens Rights, Slow Progress on Justice for Security Force Abuses."

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Philip Obaji Jr., journalist, Lagos, October 3, 2018. Obaji runs a campaign against trafficking in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Also see, Phillip Obaji Jr., "Inside the Trafficking of a Boko Haram Rape Victim," *Ventures*, October 3, 2017, <http://venturesafrica.com/features/inside-the-trafficking-of-a-boko-haram-rape-victim/> (accessed August 7, 2019); and United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria." Also see Human Rights Watch, *Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp: Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria*, October 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/27/those-terrible-weeks-their-camp/boko-haram-violence-against-women-and-girls>.

⁷¹ "Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls," Human Rights Watch news release, October 31, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>.

⁷² United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2018 TIP Report," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report/> (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 307. Also see, United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria."

⁷³ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2019 TIP Report," p. 354.

II. Trafficking into Sexual and Labor Exploitation: Abuses and Impacts

Human Rights Watch documented cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation and various forms of forced labor, especially forced domestic work. Trafficking survivors described a range of abuses inflicted by traffickers and others, including deception and exploitation, physical and sexual assault, forced abortion, debt bondage, restrictions on movement and communication, and denial of medical care and food.

Many women and girls recounted harrowing journeys as traffickers forced them through the Sahara Desert to destinations in Libya, or in some cases Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. Their journeys were wrought with death, rape, beatings, fear, theft, extortion, and lack of food and water. The danger of these journeys was captured by a 28-year-old woman who said, “You pray for death. You cry until you cannot cry any more. People die, faint, are beaten, raped. I would not advise even my worst enemy to travel by land.”⁷⁴ UNICEF has said that the “Central Mediterranean route” (the sea journey from North Africa, mainly Libya, to Italy) is one of the “deadliest journeys in the world for children.”⁷⁵ IOM has also noted that “Europe’s Mediterranean border is by far the world’s deadliest.”⁷⁶

Women and girls reported that traffickers used violence, threats, and retaliation against them or their families back home to control them. They also described traffickers’ threats of selling them to other traffickers, surveillance, invoking juju rituals, passport confiscation, confinement, and isolation to keep them trapped and terrified, and to avoid law enforcement detection.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Adankwo W., Abuja, October 9, 2018.

⁷⁵ UNICEF, “A Deadly Journey for Children: The Central Mediterranean Migration Route,” February 2017, https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Child-Alert-2017.pdf?_ga=2.223787037.783833126.1555418976-195103126.1555418976 (accessed August 7, 2019), p.3. According to the report, “The primary hazards encountered include sexual violence, extortion and abduction.” Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁶ IOM, “Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe: A Review of the Evidence,” 2017, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/four_decades_of_cross_mediterranean.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 13.

Trafficking into Sexual Slavery and Forced Prostitution

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 40 women and girls who were trafficked into sexual slavery or forced prostitution. They described how traffickers recruited, transported, transferred, and harbored them in Nigeria, Libya, Italy, and places along this route; how the traffickers threatened and coerced them, using fraud, deception, and abuse of power; and how the survivors endured exploitation in the form of sexual slavery and forced prostitution.

The survivors we interviewed said that traffickers, the “clients” or “customers” who sexually exploited them, and the “madams” in Nigeria and destination countries who recruited and controlled them physically, sexually, and verbally abused them.⁷⁷

Women and girls said that madams made them engage in forced prostitution for long hours with no time to rest. Many told Human Rights Watch that madams made them have sex with customers even while ill, menstruating, pregnant, or soon after childbirth or having undergone forced abortions. In some cases, madams told them to put unsanitary materials, such as mattress foam or wipes, in their vaginas to block menstrual blood or bleeding from abortions so that they could have sex with customers.

In some cases, the sexual exploitation occurred within brothels and hotels, but many women and girls said madams made them solicit customers for forced prostitution in the streets. In a few cases, women and girls were sexually exploited in residential homes, which are more hidden from the scrutiny of the public and law enforcement.

Dayo M. said she wrote her final secondary school exam in Nigeria July 2016 and got admitted to the University of Benin. A few months later, her mother’s friend introduced her to someone who promised to help her find babysitting work in Dubai. She helped Dayo to process her passport and visa. But when Dayo got to Dubai:

She told me I was not going to babysit, but do prostitution. She said I must pay her, or I will die. She said I owed her 600,000 naira [\$1,656]. I told her I cannot do prostitution because she lied to me. She said I have to do it.

⁷⁷ A “madam” is a woman who is part of the trafficking ring and controls women and girls.

Several times she threatened to send people to kill me. She took me to a club and sometimes I would stand in the streets in Dubai. I told her I can look for other work and pay her, but she refused. Even when I fell sick, she made me work. She said, “If you die, you die.” She starved me, she beat me, insulted me. I was not allowed to call home. She took away my passport.⁷⁸

Mary W. told Human Rights Watch that her trafficking experience started out with voluntary migration for agricultural work in Italy, but upon arrival, she was trafficked into sexual exploitation. In 2014, a neighbor promised her and a friend well paid jobs in tomato farms. She traveled by road from Benin to Lagos, and by plane from Lagos to Milan, and then someone drove her to Turin and delivered her not to a farm, but to a madam. She told us:

She [the madam] said we [were] not going to harvest tomatoes; we have to go to the streets to do prostitution.... She had four girls including me. She told me I owed 6 million naira [\$16,563]. I gave her all the money I made. They would search us to see if you were hiding money. You pay for food, but only eat twice a day. [You] pay for light, rent, gas and water separate from the 6 million.⁷⁹

Mary said the madam forced them to have sex with customers when menstruating, and to solicit customers outside during winter. The madam did not give them enough food, and forced them to drink alcohol:

[When] on your period, she tells you to block it. She tells you to use cotton so that it does not come out. If you do not get money, they beat you, quarrel you, or they do not feed you for a day. You are not allowed to be friends with the other girls. If you do not pay, they threaten your family. Once we are home, she does not allow us out in the street. In winter we still go out. But if it is too cold, we do not go. She gave us warm clothes during the day, but at night you go in shorts. She gives you alcohol, gin, to take before you leave; if you don't take you will be calm and not active. She gives us the condoms; some [clients] refuse to use. She gives you some tablets to

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Dayo M., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mary W., Benin, August 3, 2017.

swallow to wash your system [so that you do not get pregnant]. No one got pregnant.⁸⁰

Regarding the “debt” to the madam, Mary told us, “I worked for one year and three months, and paid 2.5 million naira [\$6,900].” The Italian police arrested Mary while she was soliciting on the street one day, and authorities deported her to Nigeria in August 2015.⁸¹

Tambara B. said her friend in Nigeria deceived her into believing that she would help her find work in Malaysia. Tambara ended up in Libya when she was 25 years old and was sexually exploited for almost two years. She told Human Rights Watch:

She [the madam in Libya] made it clear that we were under their rule. They searched us and took everything we had. They [took] our phones. I refused to do the prostitution; she made me cook for the connection house. She was always beating us for anything and everything. I was not allowed to go out.... Eventually I started the sex work. She said I owed her 1.2 million naira [\$3,312]. I got pregnant and got an abortion. She called a nurse who gave me an injection. She gave me two days to recover. Some girls start work almost immediately. It’s all about making money.”⁸²

Promise E., trafficked from Nigeria to Italy in 2002 when she was 25 years old, told Human Rights Watch:

Someone told me if I go to Europe things will be better. They did not tell me it was prostitution work. The madam treated us like slaves. Sometimes they [clients] would remove the condom in the process. Sometimes [they would] remove a gun and say, “do it the way I want.” I know many girls who died; they got HIV ... or were beaten by clients to death. I would get home and cry. She [the madam] sent a [Nigerian] native doctor from Turin to make us swear [an oath] every three months ... [that] if we try to run away, bad things will happen; if you leak information, you will die. Sometimes I tried to run

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Mary W., Benin, August 3, 2017.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Tambara B., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

away. I would hide somewhere and not work, and she would beat me. Sometimes I got sick in the private area ... she would say I buy drugs in the chemist. After one year, police raided our apartment. I [was running away], fell and [hurt] my waist. I spent some weeks in the hospital. They gave me something to wear; I wore it for two years.

Joy P. described being trafficked at age 12 from her home in Anambra State to Lagos State by a woman who deceived her, saying she would help with her education while she took care of her children. The woman forced Joy to clean and cook for two months without pay, then she took Joy to a brothel for forced prostitution. Joy told Human Rights Watch how her trafficker forced her to take what she called “fattening drugs” to make her appear older, beat her, and made her take an oath to force her into prostitution:

One day she ... took me to a hotel. I found one of the girls I met in Anambra there. She went to the owner of the hotel and said, “I have brought another girl.” The man said I was too young to stay there. She took me back to the house and bought drugs for me to make me fatter. After three weeks, she took me back but [he] did not accept me. She took me to another hotel and the owner accepted me. I told her, “This is not what you brought me here for.” She said I have to pay the money she used to bring me to Lagos before I can go back. She brought condoms and gave me [the condoms] and said men will be coming to me. She gave me a room. Different men would come and sleep with me. I lost count of how many. I ran away after two days. My madam sent people to look for me. They found me and took me back to her house. She beat me and said that I had to pay her. She brought me something to drink to make me promise that I will not run away again. She took me back to the first hotel and he accepted me. It was painful. I was crying all the time.⁸³

Joy escaped after a week, and a policeman took her to NAP TIP, which housed her for three months, and helped her to return to school. When Human Rights Watch interviewed her, she was staying at an orphanage as her family was abusive.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Joy P., Lagos, July 23, 2017.

Pregnancy and Forced Abortions

Almost all of the women and girls we interviewed who were trafficked abroad and inside Nigeria for sexual exploitation said they were forced to have unprotected intercourse. Even when madams gave them condoms, they said men would refuse to use them. Some women were using contraception, which they started in Nigeria or got from their madams, but others were not. Levels of use of modern methods of contraception, including long-acting contraception, are low in Nigeria.⁸⁴ In addition, trafficked women and girls had almost no opportunity to access contraception in the trafficking destinations, or to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Women and girls who became pregnant while doing forced prostitution said that the madams forced them to have unsafe abortions, and they were not given pain medication or antibiotics to prevent post-abortion infections.

Forced Abortion: Profile of Adaura C.

Adaura C., from Kogi State, said her mother left her when she was three years old. She went to live with her grandmother in the same state, but she died when Adaura was 16. Her mother, who had remarried, took her back but lied to her husband that Adaura was a domestic worker. Her stepfather abused her. She said: “I stopped going to school.... I would wake up at 4 a.m. I did not eat the same food with them. I would clean the house, sleep at 10 p.m. My stepfather stabbed me here [shows scar on the chest]. That is the day I ran away. I was 18, it was 2013.”

Soon after, a woman told Adaura that she could earn 150,000 naira (\$414) working as a domestic worker in Libya. She accepted. After a long, dangerous journey through the Sahara Desert, she arrived in Libya only to find that she had been deceived. She told Human Rights Watch about being forced into prostitution, an unplanned pregnancy, and forced abortion:

⁸⁴ A 2017 government survey estimated that “One out of 8 women currently married or in union are using contraception (13.4 percent). Unmet need for family planning in Nigeria is 27.6 percent.” National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, “Nigeria - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5) 2016-17, Fifth round,” p. 5.

I met my friend there. She [the madam] told us to undress. We asked, “Why?” She said we had to do sex work. We said, “We were told we would be house helps.” She said, “This is house help.” I refused to remove my clothes, but my friend [did]. She collected hair from her armpits, head and private parts [for oathing that she will not run away and will repay her “debt”]. She took me to an empty room and locked me there. She did not give me food. After four days, I accepted. She said if I do not accept whatever she tells me, she will kill me and throw me away, and I will not be the first and no one will challenge her. She even said she had stabbed one girl in the neck.

I stayed for another two days in the room. On the sixth day they unlocked the door. They removed my clothes and took hair from my head, armpits and private parts. She brought a glass of dry gin, cut my left thumb with a razor, put the blood in the gin, and told me to drink it. She did the same to my friend. She said we repeat after her that if we run away, we will die. She said we will each pay her \$4,000.

She brought men to sleep with us. They were not using condoms. I told her I feared I will get pregnant or get sick. She said she did not care; all she wanted is her money. She brought an exercise book to write [down] all the money we made. At the end of the month, she would divide the total in half; one half [as] her payment, and the other charges for our accommodation and food. The next month I missed my period and told her. She said if she aborts for me, I will pay her double [\$8,000]. She brought me drugs, but I did not abort. She brought a Nigerian doctor. He had an instrument he wanted to put in me; I refused, but she forced me to undergo the abortion. I was not given any [pain] medicine at all or any antibiotics. She said if she buys medicine for me, I will pay double. She charged me \$500 for the abortion.

The next morning, still bleeding and in pain, she said I had to work. She brought baby wipes and put them in my vagina and said it is so that I do not become pregnant. The first day she did it like five times, and then we used to do it ourselves with my friend.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Adaura C., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

Uma K. was trafficked to Libya in 2013 by a man who lived on her street in Benin City. She told Human Rights Watch how a madam held her and other girls in debt bondage and sexually exploited them. Uma said the madam forced her to abort many times, charged her for the abortions, and forced her to work almost immediately after the abortion:

I got sick, she said, “You are a nurse, you can treat yourself.” The woman used to beat me. You eat once a day. You wake up at 4 a.m. She beats you to wake you up, her and her husband. Men sleep with us without condoms. I got pregnant four times. She would do abortions for us.... If she pays the nurse 40 Dinar; she charges you double. Immediately after that day, you will work.⁸⁶

Akuada J., who endured sex trafficking and debt bondage herself, said she witnessed other survivors get pregnant and undergo forced abortions. She told Human Rights Watch:

Some of the girls got pregnant and she [the madam] would bring a doctor to do the abortion. If you do it today, tomorrow you go back to work.... Sometimes she would give us mattress foam or cotton [to] put it inside yourself then you put a condom inside you. But they always came out.⁸⁷

Trafficking into Forced Labor

Many women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed said their traffickers subjected them to forced labor, especially forced domestic work. The traffickers and so-called benefactors or employers in private homes made them work long hours without pay, denied them food, and beat and threatened them. For example, Human Rights Watch interviewed 13 girls from neighboring Benin Republic who were trafficked into Nigeria for forced domestic work. Traffickers recruited most of them through false promises of education, professional training, and paid employment. But their so-called benefactors and employers exploited them, forcing them to do domestic work and other labor. They said their employers refused to pay them, subjected them to heavy workloads and excessively long working hours without rest, insulted or criticized them, accused them of

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Uma K., Benin, October 3, 2018.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Akuada J., Benin, August 4, 2017.

theft, and denied them food. Some said their employers refused to get them medical care when they were sick.

Grace H., 13, is one of her mother's five children. Her father is polygamous with three wives and fifteen children, and separated from her mother. She told Human Rights Watch that her aunt brought her from Benin Republic to a household in Nigeria, where the family exploited her labor:

My parents did not have money. My aunt brought me here to work as a house help. She took me to another place to work in a shop. They were hostile to me; always accused me of stealing. I did housework and washed the car. They accused me of not working well. I pleaded with them not to report me to my uncle so that I can work and help my parents. She said I was not working well, so they will not pay me. I am not sure if they paid my aunt.⁸⁸

Edenausegboye A., 14, also from Benin Republic and trafficked to Nigeria, told Human Rights Watch:

My aunt brought me here. She said she will help me. When I got here, she said I had to work before the apprenticeship. She took me somewhere to work as a house girl.... I was mistreated. She did not give me food; I washed cars, cleaned the house and the compound. My aunt used to collect the money. Their kids were too hostile to me. I decided to leave.⁸⁹

Georgina K., 13, said she had been in Nigeria for four years. She said her mother in Benin Republic did not have money to enroll her in school, and her aunt offered to help:

She brought me here [Nigeria] to work to get money for vocational training. She took me to someone who sells food. I was hawking *amala* [Nigerian food made with cassava or yam flour]. They did not feed me. I ate nothing in the morning; they said I will eat when I return at around 3 p.m. I also did

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Grace H., Abeokuta, July 26, 2017.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Edenausegboye A., Abeokuta, July 26, 2017.

housework. She beat me and abused me verbally. She said I did not work well. I was always working. They paid my aunt, who said she will send the money to my parents. I am not sure she sent the money. I was sick, and they did not treat me.⁹⁰

Debt Bondage

The man said I will pay 50,000 euro. I did not know how much it was. He said it was like 50,000 naira [\$138]. He said we had to swear an oath so that we do not run away or refuse to pay the money.

—Ogan D., Benin, August 1, 2017

After three days the leader called us and said you came here to do prostitution.... I told the man that is not what they told us. I said I could not do it.... He said I owed him about 500 or 700 thousand Naira [\$1,390 or \$1,947].... They locked us in a room, and we could not leave. You had to ask for permission to go pee.

—Ann M., Benin, August 3, 2017

Women and girls who had been assured by traffickers of high-paying overseas employment as domestic workers, hairdressers, or hoteliers said they were shocked to learn that they would not be paid, and instead had huge “debts” to repay. As the cases in this section and above illustrate, often these “debts” were vague, unpredictable, and constantly growing. They kept women and girls trapped in exploitative situations.

Most of the women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch had an idea that they would repay some money to the traffickers, but did not anticipate that amounts would be so high and take so long to pay. Some could not remember how much they had been told they owed. Others said they did not understand the foreign currencies their supposed “debts” were quoted in, and how long they had to work to pay them. Arbitrary charges for food, accommodation, medical care, contraception, or “fines” imposed by traffickers, madams, and others added to their debts, and continually stalled their ability to start

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Georgina K., Abeokuta, July 26, 2017.

making some earnings. Tambara B. said of these so-called debts, “It’s the highest level of exploitation.”⁹¹

Trafficked women said they pleaded with their traffickers to allow them to pay the debts through work outside the sex industry, but the traffickers beat them and forced them into prostitution. A few women and girls said that they begged the traffickers to allow them to contact their families in Nigeria to send them money, but the pleas often fell on deaf ears, or the families could not afford the money traffickers demanded.

Udumele V. said she did not complete her secondary school studies in Nigeria, as her parents could not afford it. When she was 18, a family friend said she was travelling, and Udumele decided to follow her. She said that when they got to Togo: “The madam took us to a house ... she said we [should] prepare to go to work. She took us to a street, bought us some shorts to wear ... and said men would be coming to us, [that] this is the job.”

Udumele refused. “She took me to the house; she beat me with a stick all over the body. I had swellings.” After three days, Udumele begged to call her brother, who pleaded with the madam to let her go. “She said my brother had to pay her 300,000 naira [\$828] before I return. He said he could pay 100,000 naira [\$276]. She said ‘never,’ and [threatened] to sell me in Burkina Faso. She would threaten to kill me. She even beat me with a knife.”

Udumele said she stayed with her trafficker for one month and one week, before she was rescued by NAPTIP.⁹²

In some cases, women said their original traffickers “sold” them to other traffickers, which increased the “debts” they supposedly owed. Some traffickers approached women who were in debt and promised to help, but then exploited them through forced labor.

Adaora C. told Human Rights Watch how her madam sold her to a man from Nigeria, and claimed that any of the “debt” she already paid no longer counted. She demanded that Adaora start over to pay the full debt. Adaora said she was ill, in pain, and bleeding as her madam left her with this man. She said another man then took control of her and paid the debt to her madam. But he, too, exploited her:

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tambara B., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Udumele V., Benin, August 3, 2017.

There was another Igbo man.... He paid my madam. He said I will work for him. I asked him how much I owed him, he said he will tell me when it is over. He got me treatment for the bleeding. I helped him to sell alcohol and cigarettes, but he was not paying me. I told him I wanted to return to Nigeria. He said he will take me to ... do house help work. I went ... to one of his brothers, but I was doing prostitution.⁹³

In some cases, trafficking survivors were forced to work for years to pay off their “debts.” Gift S. said her friend connected her in 2012 when she was 18 with a woman who promised to get her a job as a hairdresser in Italy. But the woman was a trafficker who exploited her for three years and charged her a huge “debt” before transferring her to others who also exploited her. She said:

When I got to Libya, I saw her there; she was not in Italy. She told me “you have to start working here” and ... said it’s prostitution. I said I cannot do it. She left me for three days without food. Every evening, she and some man beat me with some pipes. I had no choice but to start working. She said I owed her 3,000 [Libyan] dinars [\$2,147]. After one year, I got pregnant. I was still working. I delivered this boy. I continued working one week after delivery. She would hold the baby as I [worked]. I worked for three years and cleared the money. I started looking for money to cross to Italy. I worked for about six months to get the money. She connected me with someone. The man sold me with my kid to another woman in Libya... I was doing housework.... I worked for her for six months and then she took me to the [Mediterranean] crossing and paid. Our boat got spoilt while at sea. The Libya rescue came and took us to prison for a month. I was there with my kid.⁹⁴

Gift returned to Nigeria in October 2017 with the assistance of IOM.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Adaura C., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Gift S., Benin, October 6, 2018.

III. Life in Nigeria after Trafficking

Social Stigma and Family Rejection

At home they said, “Many girls are building houses for their families and you came back with nothing....” Even my friends mocked me that I went abroad and came back with nothing.

—Ogan D., 24, Benin, August 3, 2018

The trauma that trafficking survivors experience does not always end when they return to their country and their families, or when they are identified as survivors of trafficking. Some survivors were staying in shelters and had not yet returned to their families. Although a majority of women and girls we interviewed said they returned to supportive family environments, some survivors said that their families blamed them for returning home penniless. They expressed disappointment or abused, mocked, and ostracized the survivors, compounding the trauma and suffering. Women and girls also said they were humiliated in their communities for returning from abroad with nothing, or for being a victim of forced prostitution.

Some survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch seemed to have internalized these negative community attitudes. These women and girls talked about feeling embarrassed and ashamed for having been trafficked, and for returning home without money.

Akuada J. said that when she returned from Italy penniless, her father tried to make her go back, and chased her from home when she refused:

When I returned only my mum was happy, my dad was not. He told me to return, and I said I will not return there. I explained what had happened, he said I should return, making money is not easy. He was willing for me to go do the prostitution. He said, “Can you not see your mates came back with cars and built mansions?” He chased me from home, and I went to stay with

my mum's sister. He said I could not stay under his roof since I did not want to go abroad and make money.⁹⁵

Beauty L., 13, stopped school in the third year of primary school. Her father had passed away, and her mother is a subsistence farmer and was struggling to take care of her six children. Beauty told Human Rights Watch that she was trafficked together with five other girls, and a madam forced them into prostitution for three months. They managed to escape, and Beauty was taken to NAPTIP. NAPTIP took her to her village to visit her family, and then returned her to the shelter to do vocational training. She said: "In the village they abused me, saying they did not want to take me back because I did not tell them when I was leaving. People said that I came back to the village to do prostitution. I do not want to go back."⁹⁶

Joyce R., 41, said that when she returned in January 2017 after being trafficked to Italy, her family was disappointed that she returned with nothing, even after telling them she was forced into sexual slavery: "My sister made noise at me, asking why I did not send money home."⁹⁷

Uma K. said a friend and a colleague mocked her. Uma said she has not sought counseling support for fear of being ridiculed as a trafficking survivor:

Sometimes my friends mock me. A colleague [fellow nurse] of mine mocked me on Facebook saying I went to do prostitution in Libya.... Sometimes I cry. I think some of my family members are ashamed of me because when we are with people, they do not want to talk to me. Sometimes I feel as if people are mocking me even when I am just walking around. I haven't sought counseling because I am ashamed; I don't know what I will meet. Some people might mock you and not help you.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Akuada J., Benin, August 4, 2017.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Beauty L., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Joyce R., Benin, July 30, 2017.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Uma K., Benin, October 3, 2018.

Sister Patricia Ebegbubulem, a manager at an NGO that runs a shelter for trafficking victims told Human Rights Watch about girls they had rescued who refused to go home due to fear of rejection: “Many do not want to go home; they fear their families seeing them without money.”⁹⁹ Ebegbubulem told us about several cases in which women and girls were ashamed to return to their families without money. She told us about one girl, saying that “Her elder sister came to visit her here and told her not to call her mother because her heart would be broken.”¹⁰⁰

Financial Hardship

Before travelling I had a shop, but now I do not. I did not come back with anything. My children are staying with my husband’s family in Ogun State because we do not have money to take care of them.

—Kesandu W., Lagos, October 3, 2018

Many survivors of trafficking said that since they returned to Nigeria, they have struggled financially and are in urgent need of livelihood support. Almost all those interviewed by Human Rights Watch said their economic situations had worsened after trafficking, and named financial support as an immediate assistance need. Most returned with no money, and had not been able to send remittances home. Many survivors complained about not finding gainful employment, and could not meet their family’s basic needs. They told Human Rights Watch about lack of money to pay for food, their children’s education, or health care. Even survivors who NGOs had helped to start businesses said that they struggled and were not yet making profits. Some NGOs told Human Rights Watch about survivors who had abandoned businesses that they had set up for survivors, and that some of the victims were re-trafficked.

Juliana P., 23, was trafficked to Libya in 2015. She stayed in Sebha in Libya for two weeks, and then spent another three weeks in Tripoli. Soon after, she tried to get to Italy, but she said the boat on which she was traveling was intercepted as it crossed the Mediterranean Sea, and they were taken to prison where they stayed for six months. She was returned to Nigeria by IOM. Back in Nigeria, she struggled financially: “I trained as an auxiliary nurse

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Morenike Omaiboje, programs manager, Women’s Consortium of Nigeria, Benin, May 19, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Sister Patricia Ebegbubulem, Lagos, October 2, 2018.

[an assistant to a qualified nursing practitioner], but I do not have a job. My younger ones [siblings] help me.”¹⁰¹ Joan A. looked pensive and distant when Human Rights Watch interviewed her, and said she sometimes cannot afford food: “I live alone; my aunt gave me the house where I stay ... she buys the food. Sometimes the church gives me food. Sometimes I don’t have food.”¹⁰²

Uma K. told Human Rights Watch about the financial difficulties she was facing since her return to Nigeria in September 2018:

I had left my kids with my mum and sister. I traveled out of the country because of them, but I came back with nothing. My family were happy to see me, but disappointed I had no money. My first daughter is supposed to go to university, but I don’t have money. I told her to go learn hairdressing and I will take her when I have money.¹⁰³

Folade N. explained how, after she returned from having been trafficked to Libya in 2017, she was struggling to find work and take care of her family. She said she had to send her children to stay with her mother because she could not feed them. When Human Rights Watch met her, she was attending an IOM training. She told us, “Sometimes I think about what happened and I cry. But I turn to God and say where there is God there is hope. We borrowed money to come to Ikeja today [for IOM training].”¹⁰⁴

Long-Term Mental and Physical Health Impacts

My health is not good. I am always sick.... I have one thing after another. My family paid for the treatment.... I have pain in my lower abdomen, back, [and] I cannot bend. My waist pains.

—Adaku G., 31, Benin, October 6, 2018, trafficked to Libya for forced prostitution

Trafficked persons may have health problems that are minor or severe, but few individuals are unscathed. Many will experience injuries and illnesses

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Julian P., Benin, October 6, 2018.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Joan A., Benin, October 6, 2018.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Uma K., Benin, October 3, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Folade N., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

that are severe, debilitating and often enduring. Abuse, deprivation and stress-filled or terrifying circumstances are all hallmarks of human trafficking.

—International Organization for Migration, “Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers,” 2009

IOM cites research finding that common post-trafficking symptoms and physical health problems include the following:

- headaches (among the most prevalent and enduring physical symptoms)
- fatigue
- dizziness
- memory loss
- sexually transmitted infections (including HIV)
- abdominal pain
- back pain
- dental problems.¹⁰⁵

In addition, survivors may experience depression, anxiety, hostility, flashbacks, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), flashbacks and re-experiencing symptoms, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, vaginal fistula, unwanted pregnancy, complications from unsafe abortion, substance misuse/dependency, weight loss, eating disorders, sleep disturbance and insomnia, among other problems.¹⁰⁶ Also, chronic conditions that were managed prior to trafficking may have been unmanaged and need attention.¹⁰⁷

The trafficking survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed suffered long-term mental and physical health problems, and many said they struggled to access support and services.

Most of the trafficked women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed described feeling deeply stressed, anxious, ashamed, angry, frustrated, and desperate. They described

¹⁰⁵ IOM, “Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers,” 2009, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/ct_handbook.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ IOM, “Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers,” pp. 19 and 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33 and 129.

symptoms that appeared consistent with trauma- and stress-related disorders, depression, and anxiety. Some said they had suicidal thoughts.

“Sometimes I Feel Like I Am Going to Kill Myself”

Adaura C. told Human Rights Watch about being trafficked into forced prostitution in Libya for about three years, and being abducted by people she said were the Islamic State (ISIS), witnessing executions and bombings, losing her newborn baby, and suffering other traumas. Adaura said that sometime into being trafficked, she met a Ghanaian man who said he would marry her, but things did not go as planned:

A Ghanaian man said he wanted to marry me, and I followed him to his house. I got pregnant and [he] said I should have the baby; he will pay my dowry. It was February 2016. One day we were attacked by ISIS. They asked if we were Christian or Muslim.... They put us [Christians] in a car and took us to the riverside. They killed those who refused [to become Muslims], plus my Ghanaian boyfriend and threw them into the river.

They took us to an underground prison. They asked if we are ready to be Muslim. We said yes. They started teaching us to pray. After one week, they said we don't know the prayer. They took us to the river, killed 15 [people] and left me because I was pregnant. They took me back to the prison. In the evening they brought [some] Egyptian girls they said they [were] Christians.... They brought a doctor to test for pregnancy and only one was pregnant. They slaughtered the other seven girls. We were crying. There were cameras in the room. They asked why we were crying, they stabbed me with a knife on the right breast [shows scar]. They stopped giving us food; they only gave us water. I started vomiting blood. They brought me sugar to put in the water saying, “Jesus will bring you food.”

One afternoon they said we leave. They took us to a storied building ... then ... to another house where there were [about] 50 men. They were Eritrean and Ethiopian. The next day they brought four Nigerians. The Eritreans learned how to pray, and they were not killed. They took us to another place where I gave birth. I went to the clinic of a Nigerian woman and delivered there. After four days there was a bombing and the baby died. They moved

us to another place.

On the second day after I lost my baby, they brought a man and said I should marry him. I did not say anything. I followed him home, dressed in black. I pretended to be nice to the man. He forced me to sleep with him. I started bleeding.... I told him that I wanted to go home. I went back to the house with the Eritreans and Ethiopians. One day during a bombing we managed to escape.¹⁰⁸

Adaura and others were taken by what she said were Libyan soldiers to a correction center and eventually repatriated by IOM back to Nigeria in early 2015. She told Human Rights Watch that she suffers from many health problems, including an ulcer, and is not well mentally:

I was still vomiting blood. NAPTIP took me to hospital and they found [out] I have an ulcer. Last night I was vomiting blood.... It is the first time I experienced war.

Sometimes I don't want to see people. Sometimes I feel like I am going to kill myself. I don't sleep well. I talked to the IOM doctor and he said it is because of the war and I need to take some drugs. I am not taking any drug.¹⁰⁹

Some trafficking survivors described flashbacks, mood swings, and aggression. Ogan D., who was trafficked for sexual exploitation and witnessed sexual violence against other victims, told us, “Sometimes I have flashbacks. I see the different men I slept with. It makes me sad. I feel [I] ... wasted years. I always read the Bible.”¹¹⁰ Lucy F. was twice a victim of sex trafficking, and told Human Rights Watch: “Sometimes I become very violent. I get upset over nothing, or little things. I get provoked easily. I have gone through counseling [and] it's helping.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Adaura C., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ogan D., Benin, August 3, 2018.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Lucy F., Benin, August 1, 2018.

A representative of an NGO working with trafficking survivors and other returnee migrants observed: “They [survivors] do not speak as gentle persons; they shout and are aggressive because of the abuse and harsh conditions they faced. Some do drugs.... Our biggest program here is mind resetting and trauma counseling. There is no time limit. I do it until the person is okay.”¹¹²

Many survivors repeatedly said that seeing people die from hunger and thirst in the Sahara Desert or dying in the Mediterranean Sea haunted their memories. Others talked about the suffering they endured in captivity in Libya, and the negative impact on them. Folade N. commented: “Prison is not easy; there is no food, you drink toilet water, there is no medication. Women labor and give birth with the help of other prisoners. Sometimes they put drugs in food so that we all sleep.”¹¹³ Juliana P. told Human Rights Watch about being stuck at sea and life in captivity:

We stayed in the sea for five days. The food got finished. We did not know where we were. A man died and was pushed into the sea. People were crying, saying they did not know they would suffer this much. We met a group of Arabs; they took us in their boat and took us to prison. We stayed for six months. In prison the food they gave us was bread and chai and spaghetti with water. The water was very salty; it used to peel the skin. We were crying and they would beat us.¹¹⁴

The financial hardship noted above after return to Nigeria also had negative mental health impacts on trafficking survivors. They said that the poverty and lack of livelihood options they faced, and debts they incurred, were distressing. Although many said they were getting some support from their families, they worried about being economically dependent and a financial liability to their families. Tambara B. said she had difficult relations with her family because of lack of money:

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Nosa Erhunmwunsee, president and executive director, NAME Foundation, Benin, October 6, 2018.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Folade N., Benin, October 3, 2018.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Julian P., Benin, October 6, 2018.

I hardly mix up; I don't trust people. I cannot define who I am now.... I am not getting [on] well with my siblings. They look down on me because they do not get what they expect from me as their senior. They never listen to me because I have nothing to offer them.¹¹⁵

Some survivors said they also have physical pains and aches after traffickers beat, raped, and abused them. Forty-four-year-old Patience V. said her traffickers held her in debt bondage and forced prostitution in Italy starting in 2007. She returned to Nigeria in 2013 and volunteers with a local NGO as an advocate against trafficking. She told Human Rights Watch that she still suffers from health problems as a result of the trafficking, and her family is unsupportive:

I am sick every day.... My family is against me. They did not care about me and my health; all they cared [about] was what I had brought them. Even now they mock me. I said, "I am not well;" they did not care. I told them my experience; they did not care. During the rainy season or when it is cold, I feel pain in my back. When I sit for long, I feel pain. I saw people die with my own eyes. They call me stingy and wicked because I did not wait [in Italy to earn money] to help the family.¹¹⁶

Sharon W. said she wanted to go to Italy in 2017, but traffickers trapped her in Libya for three months before IOM repatriated her. She told Human Rights Watch: "I have not been feeling okay since I came back. At the hospital they said it is an ulcer. I have drugs for the ulcer, but without food I do not take them.... I think a lot. I am worried about my family; they need help from me."¹¹⁷ Promise E. said she also still suffers the health impacts of trafficking:

I am on drugs [medication]. If I talk too much, I get palpitations. If it is too cold, I feel pain. I cannot do too much hard work. I have to take breaks between work. Sometimes I cannot even wash my children's clothes. I can

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tambara B., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Patience V., Benin, August 2, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Sharon W., Lagos, July 27, 2017.

clean the house bit by bit. Sometimes I don't even go to the shop. I have no support to buy [some] of the drugs I need.¹¹⁸

Unprotected intercourse and rape put trafficking survivors at a high risk of contracting STIs, such as HIV. STIs can lead to major problems for survivors' sexual and reproductive health, or even death when not properly treated. The risk of HIV infection increases when a woman has multiple sexual partners. It is important that all survivors of sex trafficking are supported to undergo voluntary screening for HIV and other STIs as part of a comprehensive health response for survivors.

According to international best practice, trafficking survivors should receive comprehensive health screening and be referred for treatment where necessary.¹¹⁹ Some women Human Rights Watch interviewed were not sure what post-trafficking medical screening was conducted on them; some said they were tested for HIV, pregnancy, or had vitals such as blood pressure or weight checked. More than half of the women interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they had tested for HIV upon their return in Nigeria, through programs by NAPTIP or NGOs providing services to survivors. All said the tests were negative.¹²⁰ Others said they have not tested for HIV, despite the risk of infection from forced sex work and the dangers of untreated HIV to their health, either because testing services were not offered to them, or because they did not know the importance of testing.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Promise E., Benin, August 2, 2017. Promise said she gets some medications free from the government hospital, but she has to buy others. Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Woman, the NGO assisting her, has placed two of her children in school, but she said she is still struggling financially.

¹¹⁹ IOM, "Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers," 2009, p. 57.

¹²⁰ As most survivors did not have medical documentation, and because of the need for medical confidentiality, Human Rights Watch could not verify these claims.

IV. Inadequate Shelters

Since I have been here, I chop [eat] sleep, chop sleep. A pastor comes every Sunday to preach to us. We do daily prayer and devotion. I have not been doing any vocational training. They have not asked me what I want to do. Yesterday was three weeks here. I have not spoken to my mum. I went to the manager and said I want to speak to my mum to tell her I am here, she asked why I did not tell the JDPC [Justice Development and Peace Caritas Commission], [an] NGO that came to interview us. NAPTIP has my phone. I do not have my passport. I saw it with JDPC. I am so sad, I want to go home. I do not like this place; too many rules. We are forced to wake up with a bell to pray. I have not been told when I will go home.... I have been crying since morning.

—Ebunoluwa E., 18, trafficking survivor in a NAPTIP shelter, Lagos, July 25, 2017

While the Nigerian government, with support of international development agencies, is making efforts to provide or ensure access to shelter accommodation and other services to trafficking survivors, many challenges remain. Key among them is overreliance on shelters as the primary means of providing safety and assistance to victims, lack of sufficient resources, run-down and ill-equipped shelters, excessive restrictions on survivors' freedom of movement, and poor communication and sharing of information with survivors.

Human Rights Watch visited two NAPTIP shelter facilities, in Lagos and Benin City, and observed the physical conditions there. We also interviewed 11 women and girls who had stayed in the shelters for varying periods. In addition, Human Rights Watch interviewed eight survivors of trafficking at a private orphanage and two at a private NGO shelter that house survivors referred by NAPTIP. We were not able to assess the physical conditions in these institutions.

NAPTIP runs 10 transit shelters in the entire country for women and girl survivors of trafficking, with a capacity of only 334 beds.¹²¹ Adults and children are housed in the same

¹²¹ United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "2019 TIP Report," p. 355.

shelters. NAPTIP officials said they have no shelters for male survivors.¹²² The government usually does not provide accommodation or housing support for trafficking survivors outside of shelters. NAPTIP provides a range of services through these shelters, including counseling, medical, legal aid, family tracing and reunification, and vocational training.

Most of the women and girls in NAPTIP shelters interviewed by Human Rights Watch are Nigerian nationals, although foreign survivors, who have returned from trafficking situations abroad or are victims of trafficking within Nigeria, are also accommodated there. A smaller number are victims of other forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Adult women and girls are accommodated in the same shelters.

Entry Eligibility, Length of Stay, and Mixed Populations

There are no clear criteria for determining which trafficking survivors are eligible to be admitted into NAPTIP shelters. The question of eligibility is important because it is linked to who gets assistance, as NAPTIP only offers comprehensive victim support through shelters.

Official responses to who is eligible to be admitted into shelters have been unclear and contradictory, and has included denial, justification, and misrepresentation, including downplaying the problem. NAPTIP official told us that they only house “deserving” victims in shelters, which they determine from initial interviews with counselors.¹²³ A manager at a NAPTIP shelter described their loose approach to determining eligibility for entry:

It’s been a bone of contention here; we have discussed it at a higher level.... You assess if the person belongs in a shelter or not. Some its security considerations, others have no home to go back to, for example orphans, or people with special needs upstairs.¹²⁴

¹²² Human Rights Watch interviews with Kehinde Akomolafe, Head, Public Enlightening, and Deputy Zonal Commander, NAPTIP Lagos Command, Lagos, July 27, 2017; and Barr Nduka, NAPTIP Benin Zonal Commander, Benin, October 5, 2018.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (details withheld upon request), NAPTIP shelter, August 2, 2017.

The NAPTIP Benin Zonal Commander told Human Rights Watch, “All victims should be put in a shelter.... It depends on individual circumstances.”¹²⁵

While the NAPTIP website says that length of stay in its shelters is limited to six weeks, and this is reinforced by the National Policy on Protection and Assistance To Trafficked Persons, NAPTIP officials reported varying time limits for survivors staying in their shelters.¹²⁶ Some NAPTIP representatives said that the limit is six weeks, while others said it ranges from two weeks to three months. Several said the time limit is up to NAPTIP’s discretion, taking into account things like family problems.¹²⁷ NAPTIP refers victims who require longer stays to NGO shelters or to foster care and orphanages.

Some NAPTIP shelters house not only trafficking survivors, but also other victims of violence. NAPTIP has a very broad protection mandate, including implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015. Operating mixed shelters poses challenges, including how to tailor services to the specific needs of trafficking victims. Some trafficking survivors may also face stigma from other survivors in mixed shelters due to attitudes about their experience of forced prostitution, hurting their rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

The UN special rapporteur on trafficking in persons has raised concerns about NAPTIP’s mixed shelters:

I have also been informed that in Abuja and Lagos, NAPTIP has been mandated to provide assistance both for victims of trafficking under the 2015 Anti-Trafficking Act and victims of other forms of abuses covered by the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015. In this regard, while visiting Abuja NAPTIP shelter, I noted that out of 43 persons and 4 babies accommodated, only 3 or 4 were victims of trafficking. While implementation of this Act is urgently needed, NAPTIP, in cooperation with its partners, may consider assessing how to carry out the mandate given by

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch with Barr Nduka, August 3, 2017.

¹²⁶ “National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” p. 10. The policy notes that one of the implementation strategies on sheltering is to “provide adequate shelters for TPs for a period not exceeding six weeks.”

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Kehinde Akomolafe, July 27, 2017, Barr Nduka, October 5, 2018, and with (details withheld by Human Rights Watch), NAPTIP shelter, August 2, 2017.

this Act in a way that does not have negative repercussions on the specialized services for trafficked persons.¹²⁸

Arbitrary Detention and Denial of Freedom of Movement

I have been here for almost six months.... I eat and sleep and shout. They do not open the gate.... I told NAPTIP I do not want to stay here; I want to go home. They said they will allow me to go. I do not feel okay being here. I cannot stay here doing nothing.

—Obioma K., Benin City, August 2, 2017

NAPTIP says on its website that it “operates transit and closed shelters because of the peculiarity of the Agency.”¹²⁹ It does not offer further explanation. The NAPTIP shelters in Lagos and Benin that Human Rights Watch visited are located far from the major towns. The shelters were surrounded by high walls and barbed wire, and the metal gates manned by security guards. Some women and girls we interviewed in NAPTIP shelters said they were not free to leave, and many had no clarity about when or how they would be reunited with their families. “Protection” cannot be an excuse to arbitrarily detain women and girls and deprive them of their liberty and freedom of movement.¹³⁰

A number of women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed said they did not want to remain in the NAPTIP shelters. They complained about shelter conditions, especially the restrictions on movement, being locked up behind gates, and not being able to communicate with or be visited by family members. Most of them expressed concerns about not being in control of their lives.

¹²⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “End of Visit Statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children,” September 10, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23526&LangID=E> (accessed August 7, 2019).

¹²⁹ See “Counselling and Rehabilitation,” undated, https://www.naptip.gov.ng/?page_id=142 (accessed August 7, 2019). The website does not explain the distinction between “transit” and “closed” shelters.

¹³⁰ The term “detention” as used in this context reflects international law, which defines it as “any person deprived of personal liberty except as a result of conviction for an offence.” It can cover a wide range of situations in which victims of trafficking are held in prisons, police lockups, immigration detention facilities, shelters, child welfare facilities, and hospitals. See OHCHR, “Human Rights and Human Trafficking,” 2014, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS36_en.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p.18, and UN General Assembly, “Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment,” resolution 43/173, 1988.

Ebunoluwa E., 18, told Human Rights Watch that she had been in a NAPTIP shelter for three weeks, and wanted to leave but had no information about when that would happen:

After two weeks here the zonal commander came.... I said I want to go home. He smiled and said, “You will surely go home.” He said he will look into it, but never called. I told the other girls that if I do not leave here next week, I will kill myself.¹³¹

Oluchi A. said NAPTIP intercepted her and other victims before traffickers got them out of the country. She told Human Rights Watch about first being held in an office and then staying in a NAPTIP shelter for about a month without being allowed to leave. She said she “begged NAPTIP” to release her, but they didn’t.

Gladness K., a 24-year-old trafficking survivor, also told Human Rights Watch about being kept in NAPTIP shelters without information about when she would go home:

I want to go to my mum.... In Lagos they said I should be happy to come back because many people suffer and are exploited. They asked if I want to learn work, and I said I wanted to go home. They have not told me when I am going home; I called my mum this afternoon and I am not sure when she is coming to pick me.¹³²

Julianne R., staying at the NAPTIP shelter in Lagos, said NAPTIP had refused to let her go home and had not told her why. She commented: “I do not know if keeping girls here is right.”¹³³

A 2017 ethnographic study on the NAPTIP shelter in Lagos described the shelter as follows:

There were padlocks on the doors and barbed wire on the fences, and women were allowed out of the building only to collect water, which rarely was pumped up from the wells due to infrequent electrical supply. They had

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ebunoluwa E., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Gladness K., Benin, August 2, 2017.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Juliane R., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

no contact with friends or families, reportedly to keep them safe from traffickers while their cases were investigated.¹³⁴

The study also noted: “To be certain, women at the shelter protested their detention, loudly and persistently.... They readily expressed outrage at their detention in the shelter, often declaring it a prison.”¹³⁵

Another study on the experiences of trafficked children in NAPTIP shelters noted how the children complained about being held in the shelters and not receiving clear information from shelter managers about when they would be allowed to go home:

Coming into the shelter each day ... I sat back and waited for the upsurge that followed; this will be a sea of children coming to voice their complaints about the confinement, the endless waiting and the lack of understanding of what is delaying their case and preventing them from going home.... It was the lack of concrete answers that children found even more frustrating and confusing about living in the shelter.... It appears that “you will be going home” constituted an indefinite number of days.¹³⁶

Under international standards, “the placement of a person in a public or private custodial setting which that person is not permitted to leave at will by order of any judicial, administrative or other authority” is a form of deprivation of liberty,¹³⁷ and the facility in which they are held is a place of detention regardless of its name or stated purpose.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Stacey Vanderhurst, “Governing with God: Religion, Resistance, and the State in Nigeria's Counter-Trafficking Programs,” 2017, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/27693/Vanderhurst_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed August 7, 2019), p.6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹³⁶ Ifenyiwa Mbakogu, “Understanding Child Trafficking From the Point of View of Trafficked Children: The Case of ‘Rescued’ Children in Nigeria,” December 2015, http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1565186247123~309 (accessed August 7, 2019), pp. 250-251.

¹³⁷ Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), adopted December 18, 2002, G.A. res. A/RES/57/199, [reprinted in 42 I.L.M. 26 (2003)], entered into force June 22, 2006, art. 4(2). Nigeria acceded to the optional protocol on July 27, 2009.

¹³⁸ Underscoring the reality that a facility intended for care and protection may amount to a place of detention if it meets the criteria set forth in the optional protocol to the Convention against Torture, a forthcoming UN study on the deprivation of liberty of children will include an examination of institutions established for the stated purpose of children’s care and protection. See OHCHR, “Children Deprived of Liberty—the United Nations Global Study,” undated, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/StudyChildrenDeprivedLiberty/Pages/Index.aspx> (accessed August 7, 2019).

Deprivation of liberty is not an appropriate means of protecting people who have been trafficked—even in the case of children.¹³⁹ A 2006 UNICEF guide on child trafficking in Europe recommends separate shelters for children and adults.¹⁴⁰ This would allow for a more child/adolescent-centered approach in the care, counseling, and other support provided. It would also help to appropriately respond to trafficked children with special needs, such as pregnancy or disability, that require particular types of treatment.

Putting trafficked children in shelters or orphanages should be the last resort and only happen for a brief period before finding a longer-term solution. The UNICEF guide finds that:

In principle it is desirable to minimise the length of a child’s stay in residential care, to avoid children becoming ‘institutionalised’. However, a period in residential care can also be helpful for trafficked children, to provide them with appropriate care and give them an opportunity to recover.... Children’s stay in residential care is unlikely to be positive if they feel they are being kept in captivity or being subjected to a paternalistic or patronizing regime.¹⁴¹

Women and girls in NAPTIP shelters are not free to leave at will; they are subjected to arbitrary detention, in violation of Nigeria’s obligations under international law.¹⁴²

Impact of Detention and Lack of Information

Detention of victims in shelters and lack of information about prospects for survivors to return home to their families, or the kind of services they will receive can have serious

¹³⁹ For example, addressing state responses to trafficking of children, the Separated Children in Europe Programme (a joint initiative of Save the Children and the UN High Commissioner on Refugees) has advised: “Separated trafficked children must not be held in detention facilities in order to protect them from those who have trafficked or who wish to exploit them. Alternative secure measures such as safe houses should be developed in conjunction with child welfare authorities. In order to establish safeguards, care workers in reception centres and residential homes need to be made aware of the problem of trafficking of children for the purposes of sexual or other forms of exploitation.” Separated Children in Europe Programme, Statement of Good Practice, 4th revised edition (Copenhagen: Separated Children in Europe Programme, 2009), Part D8.1.3, <http://www.scepnetwork.org/images/18/219.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2019).

¹⁴⁰ UNICEF, “Reference Guide on Protecting the Rights of Child Victims of Trafficking in Europe,” 2006, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49997af7d.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 65.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁴² Arbitrary detention is prohibited under the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, art. 6; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 9(1); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 37(b), among other treaties to which Nigeria is a party.

repercussions, particularly for children. It can undermine trafficking survivors' recovery and reintegration into families and communities, weaken trust in service providers, and prevent victims from seeking urgently needed protection and assistance. But since NAPTIP only provides services to trafficking survivors if they are in shelters, many feel they have no choice but to trade their liberty and freedom of movement for the services and assistance. Human Rights Watch interviewed some women and girls who declined assistance because they did not want to be in a shelter.

Jane O. was trafficked by her boyfriend to Italy, where she was forced into prostitution. She managed to run away after two months. She said IOM took her to NAPTIP shelter after returning to Nigeria. She described confusion and mixed feelings about wanting NAPTIP's help, but also a desire to be with her family. She said she wanted hairdressing training from NAPTIP, but did not want to remain in the shelter. "I told them I do not want to be here," she said, "and they said I should wait."¹⁴³

Aisha V. had spent about three months in a NAPTIP shelter, where she ended up after she was trafficked to Libya and endured two years of forced prostitution. She told us that while she wanted to learn work skills from NAPTIP, she was not in a frame of mind to learn while detained in the shelter. She said, "I just want to go home."¹⁴⁴

One NGO representative described several cases in which survivors of trafficking refused NAPTIP shelter placements, explaining, "Once they are out of trafficking, they want to be free from bondage, not in a shelter."¹⁴⁵ Other NGO staff complained about NAPTIP's closed shelters and secret locations, saying this sometimes makes their reintegration work more difficult. One suggested that NAPTIP wants to "own" the victims, and commented:

Before taking them to NAPTIP shelters, we also counsel them. We do not know where the shelters are and where they are taken; we just hand them over to NAPTIP. They take them from the shelter and bring them to us if they need more counseling. Once we hand them over to NAPTIP, we do not have

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Jane O., Benin, August 2, 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha V., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Morenike Omaiboje, director of programs, Women's Consortium of Nigeria, Benin, May 19, 2017.

much control; it's like begging to speak to your people [whom] you have bonded with.¹⁴⁶

Detaining victims in shelters also denies them the opportunity to find employment and meet their immediate financial needs, which, as discussed in section IV, is a big source of stress for many survivors.

The UN special rapporteur on trafficking in persons commented about NAPTIP's closed shelters:

[W]hile visiting NAPTIP shelters I noticed with concern that they are “closed shelters”, infringing the freedom of movement of survivors and perpetuating the false assumption that victims of trafficking have to be locked up for their security, even though they have not committed any crime.¹⁴⁷

NAPTIP said they do not hold any victims in their shelters against their will, and defended the closed shelter model, pointing to victims' security, the need for family tracing, problems with victims' families, or criminal investigations that need the testimony of victims. Kehinde Akomolafe, head of public enlightening department and deputy zonal commander at NAPTIP in Lagos, told Human Rights Watch:

In shelters we monitor them from time to time for their well-being and improvement. Shelter is not a proper home. They can contact families. In our shelters they [family] cannot come, but others [shelters] they can go. Where we see no threat to the victim, we take them to our partners where they can lead a normal life.¹⁴⁸

The Benin Zonal Commander told us, “All people in the shelter deserve to be there. You cannot force a victim to stay in the shelter, but we operate a closed shelter.”¹⁴⁹ Human

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Lagos, July 25, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ OHCHR, “End of Visit Statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.”

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Kehinde Akomolafe, July 27, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Barr Nduka, August 3, 2017.

Rights Watch asked about the criticism by the special rapporteur on trafficking in persons on the harm of closed shelters. He responded: “I do not agree with her. She gave a recommendation without considering the local environment. When we finish our investigation, we release them. We are not interested in keeping victims a day longer than is necessary.”¹⁵⁰

Another NAPTIP official admitted that they do not provide regular information to victims about when they will leave: “Because of logistics, we do not give them precise information on when they will go home. Sometimes we are doing investigation on traffickers or we may need them for court cases.”¹⁵¹

While NAPTIP detains survivors in shelters, alternative means of looking after trafficked persons in open shelters exist and appear to function reasonably well. The special rapporteur on trafficking noted the irony in NAPTIP keeping victims in its closed shelters but referring some to open shelters run by NGOs:

I would like to stress that shelters managed by civil society organisations are open and are in fact used by NAPTIP itself to refer its victims after the six-week period of stay in NAPTIP shelters has expired. This shows that operating open shelters for victims of trafficking is possible and does not imply major security problems.¹⁵²

Inadequate Care in Orphanages and Private Shelters

Human Rights Watch interviewed eight young women and girls who had been referred to an orphanage by NAPTIP. Four were going to school, and four were undergoing vocational training in hairdressing. Most of them looked fearful and spoke in low tones when Human Rights Watch interviewed them. We also interviewed two women who had been referred by NAPTIP to a private NGO shelter.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Barr Nduka, October 5, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), NAPTIP shelter, August 2, 2017.

¹⁵² OHCHR, “End of Visit Statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.”

“I Do Not Like It at the Orphanage”

Adichie T., 17, was trafficked by a boy who asked whether she would work for his sister in a beer parlor in Lagos. But when she arrived in Lagos, “She took me to a hotel. I saw many small [young] girls like me. It was April 2017. She said I will do prostitution.” Adichie refused: “She said I should refund the transport money she sent me. She forced me to do prostitution.” Adichie ran away that night and a woman helped her contact NAPTIP. She stayed in the NAPTIP shelter for two months, and was then transferred to an orphanage. She said she was unhappy at the orphanage:

I do not like it at the orphanage. I stay at the rehab for adults. I feel better now, but not really okay. At the rehab they do not cook for us. We have to cook before going to work. We do not eat there. We bring the food to eat at work. We eat in the morning and do not eat anything else until in the evening.... We wake up at 5 a.m., start work at 8 a.m. with no lunch break, and work until 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. We are not paid.

Since we came here, we do not have proper medical care; they just give us paracetamol. I get stomach pain, chest pain, sometimes I get pain when I breathe. They took us to test for HIV.... A nurse did the HIV test. There was no counseling; she just said, “give me your hand.” She did not tell us the results; she gave the papers to the matron.... The matron said we do not have HIV and we should keep calm.

They do not feed us well here. NAPTIP said they are looking for the woman [trafficker]... I am not sure if they did. They do not give us the phone to call home. Since I have been here, I have only called my uncle. I told him that I am here, and he said okay. I want to speak with my family. The gateman is the one who helps us to call. The matron ... warned him against helping us to call our people.

Since June NAPTIP has not come to see me. I do not know how I can reach them. We are not allowed to go to NAPTIP. If we say we want to go and see them, she [orphanage director] says later, later. They have not told us we will get money to start a business.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Adichie T., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

Women and girls told Human Rights Watch about poor conditions and services in the orphanage and shelter, including restrictions on movement and communication with families, inadequate food, and lack of hygiene supplies, medical care, and job training.

Betty C., 17, said her parents died when she was young, and her elderly grandmother took care of her. Her uncle sexually abused her, and she dropped out of secondary school. A friend connected her with a trafficker who tried to force her into prostitution, but she called NAPTIP, which took her to their shelter and then an orphanage. Betty expressed mixed emotions when we interviewed her. She said about the orphanage, “I am not okay. I do not have access to my phone. She took it away. I am wearing rags. I do not want to be here.”¹⁵⁴

Adaura C. said that when she came back to Nigeria after being trafficked, she could not go home to her abusive mother. She stayed at the NAPTIP shelter, and then they brought her to an orphanage. She told us:

We have a problem of food. Today they gave us one [loaf of] bread for the three of us.... We complained about the food and the matron said I should manage. I should not eat strong, hard food because of my ulcer, but if they cook, I have to eat. We do not have body lotion. We trek in the rain. They give us a 100 naira [\$0.27] for transport [to work]. We are not given any food at the salon. NAPTIP came here two weeks ago and they have not come back.¹⁵⁵

Tujuka C. was trafficked to Libya, a journey she described as “the worst experience,” and upon return to Nigeria, stayed at a NAPTIP shelter and then an open NGO shelter. She told Human Rights Watch about being at the private shelter for over a month without them starting a training they had promised.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Betty C., Lagos, July 23, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Adaura C., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Tujuka C., Lagos, July 27, 2017.

V. Problems with Survivor Services

Nigeria’s Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons spells out the need for “the restoration of the victims of TIPs [trafficking in persons] and exploitative/hazardous child labor to the state of physical, psychological, social, vocational, and economic wellbeing through sustainable assistance programmes.”¹⁵⁷ It notes the importance of a holistic approach to protection and assistance of survivors.¹⁵⁸ But despite this policy and other guidelines, many trafficking survivors told Human Rights Watch that Nigerian agencies and NGOs did not provide them with comprehensive, adequate, and long-term care. Most of the NGO staff and survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that the Nigerian government, and international agencies that fund anti-trafficking efforts, focus more on short-term assistance for survivors than long-term, comprehensive assistance and care.

To end trafficking and break cycles of exploitation and suffering, survivors should be supported to heal from the trauma of trafficking, and to make a decent living in Nigeria. Effective rehabilitation and reintegration require a holistic package of support that addresses the multiple factors which contribute to the risk of trafficking and exploitation. But rehabilitation and reintegration efforts in Nigeria are plagued by a lack of individualized and comprehensive services, weak victim identification, and problems with funding, coordination, and evaluation.

Weak Victim Identification

It is important to identify trafficking survivors accurately and in a timely manner to link them with the help they need. A failure to do so can lead to denial of assistance and exposure to further harm. If survivors are not identified at all, or are incorrectly identified as a criminal or a smuggled migrant, it harms their ability to access assistance and services.

¹⁵⁷ “National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

NAPTIP has some guidelines for identifying victims of trafficking.¹⁵⁹ However, Human Rights Watch interviewed some NAPTIP officials and immigration officials who were not aware of them. In addition, victim identification in Nigeria is mostly conducted by law enforcement and immigration officials; it should be expanded to include other trained actors such as health workers, educators, community leaders, church officials, labor officials, social workers, and others. Staff in Nigerian embassies abroad should also be trained to identify and assist victims of trafficking.

The UN special rapporteur on trafficking has noted that the identification of victims should be:

[P]re-emptive in circumventing situations of exploitation that may increase susceptibility to trafficking. Instead, a meaningful due diligence approach broadens the scope of identification to address a wider class of potential or presumed victims, as part of a comprehensive approach to prevention rather than a solely reactive or post-hoc due diligence measure. A wider and more pre-emptive approach necessarily involves a broader range of actors beyond law enforcement or border officials in identification. Good practices in this regard include involving actors such as labour and health and safety officials in identification of trafficking victims. Another good practice is for States to assign labour attachés to the staff of diplomatic missions, particularly in those countries that receive the largest number of a State’s migrant workers. In order to facilitate victims’ trust and identification — and subsequent protection and assistance — firewalls between certain areas (e.g., between enforcement of immigration laws and enforcement of labour laws) will often be necessary.¹⁶⁰

Lack of Individualized and Comprehensive Services

IOM report cited previously notes that the goal in caring for trafficked persons is to ensure that all care is:

¹⁵⁹ National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁰ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, A/70/260, August 3, 2015, <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/70/260> (accessed May 20, 2019), para. 25.

- Adapted to the individual’s needs
- Supportive and avoids judgmental statements or actions
- Integrated and holistic, treating the trafficked person as a whole person, not just a list of clinical symptoms
- Empowering, ensuring that the patient’s rights to information, privacy, bodily integrity and participation in decision-making are respected
- Supportive of healing and recovery through a patient-centred treatment plan.¹⁶¹

Some of the women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed described positive and helpful assistance from NAPTIP and NGOs. However, many of them did not receive a comprehensive set of services tailored to their individual needs and situations.

Mental Health Care

Most of the women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed who were in NAPTIP shelters said that NAPTIP had provided or arranged for counseling and medical treatment. However, the women and girls said it was not always of good quality, or provided in a timely manner. In some cases, counseling appeared to be little more than a pep talk. Adaura C. said of her counselors: “They just told me everything will be okay.”¹⁶²

Counseling in NAPTIP shelters is generally limited to the six weeks victims are kept there. The UN special rapporteur on trafficking in persons has critiqued this limitation:

Six weeks is a very short period compared to the intensive counseling required to ensure rehabilitation of survivors.... Reintegration and rehabilitation of trafficked victims in Nigeria has proven to be particularly challenging, especially following important returns from Libya and other countries in the last few months. While I commend NAPTIP efforts in dealing with such challenges, more concerted efforts should be dedicated into providing returnees with valuable job opportunities other than life-skill

¹⁶¹ IOM, “Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers,” p.33.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Adaura C., Lagos, July 24, 2017.

trainings and professions of sewing, tailoring and make up, traditionally associated with women's role in society.¹⁶³

Despite the apparent six-week limit, NAPTIP officials said they sometimes do extend the counseling period. An official of NAPTIP in Lagos Zonal Office informed Human Rights Watch: "We do counseling for as long as possible. Some are in bondage for three years; others their cases are not serious. In our shelter the time accepted is six weeks counseling, but it can be more. We transfer such kinds who need long-term counseling."¹⁶⁴ Another official in the Benin Zonal Office told us, "We come up with a plan for each victim; it varies from person to person. We work with our standard operating procedures that say victims should stay in shelters for six weeks. If they need counseling beyond six weeks, if we can handle it, fine."¹⁶⁵

Representatives of NGOs told Human Rights Watch that they have provided counseling to victims who had left shelters and were living with their families. NGOs also noted difficulties such as survivors changing phone numbers or being unreachable, or not having money for transport to counseling. Most said they limit counseling support to six months, unless there is an exceptional case.

The professional qualifications of staff who counsel trafficking victims is also unclear. NAPTIP told Human Rights Watch that their staff were trained counselors or social workers.¹⁶⁶ Some NAPTIP shelters have agreements with hospitals to refer more severe mental health cases.¹⁶⁷

The trafficking survivors repatriated to Nigeria by IOM who were not in NAPTIP shelters told a very different story about counseling. Most said that IOM had not provided or referred them to any meaningful mental health care, including counseling. IOM does provide a four-day skills training program for all returnees (smuggled migrants and trafficking survivors). According to IOM:

¹⁶³ OHCHR, "End of Visit Statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children."

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Kehinde Akomolafe, July 27, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), NAPTIP shelter, August 2, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Kehinde Akomolafe, July 27, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Barr Nduka, October 5, 2018.

The business skills management trainings aim to equip returnees with basic knowledge and skills on how to prepare themselves for the next steps, including psychologically, and setup and manage small businesses including a specific focus on the psychosocial aspect of the reintegration process. Additionally, the trainings also serve as opportunities for returning migrants to meet one another sharing experiences as well as consider pooling together their in-kind assistance, skills, and resources to establish more sustainable businesses through community and collective reintegration projects. It is an intensive 4-day workshop aimed at psychological first aid, business development, and includes modules such as: how to start your business, how to develop a business plan, record keeping, value chain and supply chain, business partnership and cooperatives.¹⁶⁸

Survivors who have attended the program said it included little or no counseling. Tambara B., who attended an IOM training in 2018, told us, “I have not had any counseling. There is no counseling during the four-day training.”¹⁶⁹ Uma K. said, “IOM counseled us the first day; they gave us some advice.”¹⁷⁰ A smuggling survivor said that the IOM program he attended did include a discussion of psychological impacts with a doctor, but there was no follow up.¹⁷¹ An NGO manager said that the only IOM psychosocial care she is aware of happens in group settings.¹⁷²

In a written response to Human Rights Watch, IOM said that the four-day skills training program includes aspects of psychosocial assessment and care, which is also integrated throughout their assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) program. They said follow-up care depends on the individual circumstances of survivors:

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Jorge Galindo, public information officer at IOM, to Human Rights Watch, August 6, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tambara B., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Uma K., Benin, October 3, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Phil J., Lagos, October 3, 2018.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Roland Nwoha Chigozie, project coordinator, Idia Renaissance, Benin, October 6, 2018.

The well-being and protection of victims of trafficking are the main concerns during the whole AVRR process. Depending on the specific situation of each individual, victims of trafficking may face on-going security concerns in the host country, be at heightened risk in their country of origin, or require specialized assistance. At the post-arrival stage, the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Unit, comprising of psychologists and a psychiatrists, conduct vulnerability assessments to assess the needs and level of follow-up care of returnees. Further follow-up care and/or referrals are conducted throughout the reintegration process. The IOM response team starting from the point of identification includes a psychosocial needs assessment.¹⁷³

Spiritual guidance is considered part of counseling support in NAPTIP shelters. Survivors and some private NGO shelter staff said survivors in NAPTIP shelters attended daily prayer sessions, or pastors came in to speak to them.¹⁷⁴ The NAPTIP shelter staff did not mention facilitating contact with leaders from religions other than Christianity.¹⁷⁵ Some survivors complained that shelter staff woke them up early in the morning to pray.¹⁷⁶

There is no comprehensive information on availability of mental health care in Nigeria, including for sexual violence survivors, but most studies agree that services are limited. Services are mostly available in large government psychiatric hospitals located in urban areas. According to one study:

There are eight Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospitals and a similar number of university teaching hospital psychiatric departments, for a population of 170 million people. Nigeria has around one psychiatrist per 1 million population and four psychiatric nurses per 100,000 people.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Letter from Galindo, August 6, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ According to the National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria, one of the objectives of keeping victims in shelters is “To offer cultural, spiritual and vocational guidance.” NAPTIP, “National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” p. 10.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld upon request), NAPTIP shelter, August 2, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Ebonuwa E., Lagos, July 25, 2017, and Juliane R., Lagos, July 25, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Julian Eaton et al., “Interventions to increase use of services; Mental Health Awareness in Nigeria,” 2017, *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, Vol. 11, Issue 6, <https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s13033-017-0173-z> (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 1. According to another study, “There are 8 neuropsychiatry hospitals throughout the country. Each of the accredited medical schools and the attached teaching hospitals has a psychiatry department. There are also six state-owned mental hospitals financed and managed by various state governments.” UK Home Office, “Country Policy and

The study also notes that there are limited initiatives to provide community mental health services, although access is hampered by “low levels of knowledge about effective treatment of mental disorders ... [meaning] that even where it is available, a very small proportion of people receive appropriate care;” and calls for interventions to increase service use.¹⁷⁸ Another study found that lack of health insurance hinders access to mental health care in Nigeria, including services related to sexual violence:

[T]he National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) covers only about 5% of the population, and has minimal coverage of mental health conditions. Thus, the majority of health care services, including mental health, can only be accessed through out of pocket payments. Furthermore, interventions such as conditional cash transfer incentives, which exist for reproductive health programmes, are not available for mental health conditions, thus reducing financial access to care.¹⁷⁹

Lack of Adequate Financial Assistance and Misdirected Skills Training

NAPTIP and NGOs are implementing programs to help victims of trafficking build financial stability and gain employment and livelihood skills. However, many survivors said they are languishing in poverty, and have not received any money or other support to be able to earn a living. Only four of the individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they had been assisted by NGOs to set up successful businesses. Many complained about going through training but not being assisted to set up businesses. They said the agencies or NGOs that helped them originally rarely followed up.

There are many problems with the current approach of NAPTIP and some NGOs to survivor empowerment, and a key one is an overemphasis on short-term skills training. NAPTIP’s skills training is short term, and survivors said they did not attain a sufficient level of

Information Note, Nigeria: Medical and Healthcare,” issues August 28, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736479/Nigeria_-_Medical_and_Healthcare_-_CPIN_-_v2.o__August_2018__Ext.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ Julian Eaton et al., “Interventions to increase use of services; Mental Health Awareness in Nigeria,” p. 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ J. Abdulmalik et al., “Mental Health System Governance in Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies for improvement,” 2016, *Global Mental Health*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5314752/pdf/S205442511600029a.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 6.

professional skills and competency to find employment or run successful businesses. In addition, many organizations offer a limited standard package of trainings, which are not tailored to survivors' individual needs, situations, interests, or capacities.

It is also unclear whether NAPTIP and other organizations have surveyed the skills market, in order to offer training in marketable skills. Organizations are implementing reintegration and skills programs do not systematically seek survivors' feedback and input. Also, as the special rapporteur on trafficking has noted, the types of skills trainings offered by NAPTIP and other groups risk reinforcing gender stereotypes about the roles of women and girls in society.

Several survivors complained that livelihood support programs that supported groups, rather than individuals, were ineffective. Jos G., a trafficking survivor, said that she did an IOM training in 2018 and was assigned to a group of five people to set up a business. "I cannot get some of the people in my group on phone, and I do not know their homes," she said. "We were paired on the day of training. IOM has not called us since the training; never spoken to us again. I was hoping to start my own business so I can assist my kid and grandma and not be a liability to them."¹⁸⁰

Adaku P. was similarly critical of IOM's group empowerment training model:

I did the IOM training in March 2018. We were put in a group, but I do not like it. They are not responsive. We have not done the proposal. They hardly pick calls. I told IOM and they said if I want, I can change the group. I do not like the way they are doing it. I prefer individual empowerment. I do not have much interest.¹⁸¹

Another NGO manager commented on the disconnect between the IOM livelihoods training and job placement. "They do not help people get jobs," he said, adding that the training organizers seemed more interested in meeting formal training numbers quotas than in seeing that returnees were, in fact, empowered to turn their lives around.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Jos G., Benin, October 6, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Adaku P., Benin, October 6, 2018.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview (details withheld by Human Rights Watch) Benin, October 6, 2018.

Human Rights Watch asked IOM whether, considering the criticism from survivors and service providers, they would consider an evaluation of the effectiveness of the “group empowerment” model used in Nigeria to better address individual survivors’ needs. IOM responded:

IOM does not require VoTs [victims of trafficking] to form groups as part of their reintegration assistance. VoTs receive individual reintegration assistance. Similar approaches are adopted across the region and where other programs are implemented.... [O]ur M&E [monitoring and evaluation] unit also monitors the program implementation across all activities implemented throughout the AVRR process with a focus on returnees’ perceptions of and feedback on the quality of the services provided by IOM throughout the first phases (outreach, pre-departure, travel, reception, and reintegration).¹⁸³

Problems with Funding, Coordination, and Evaluation

Inadequate Funding for National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Nongovernmental Organizations

Government officials, NGO staff, and donor representatives Human Rights Watch interviewed, all said that NAPTIP is underfunded, and that increased funds should be allocated to its reintegration services. NAPTIP is overwhelmingly funded by international development agencies.¹⁸⁴ It also significantly relies on the services of NGOs that get no government funds and only limited international donor funds.

A representative of an NGO offering reintegration support to trafficking survivors told Human Rights Watch, “Lack of funding is our main problem. We do not have a good donor base as we used to. NAPTIP relies too much on NGOs. NAPTIP will say, ‘We do not have fuel,’ and we have to use our bus to go get the victims.”¹⁸⁵ Another manager at an NGO that

¹⁸³ Letter from Galindo, August 6, 2019.

¹⁸⁴ The main donors are the European Union and its member countries, including UK government, IOM, and the United Nations Agency on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC). According to the 2019 TIP report, the Nigerian government, “[D]id not fully disburse the budget allocated to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons....” United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “2019 TIP Report,” p. 353.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (details withheld upon request), May 19, 2017.

collaborates with the Edo Task Force against Human Trafficking said, “They [NAPTIP] call NGOs to help them, but they do not pay us.”¹⁸⁶

The special rapporteur on trafficking has called on the Nigerian government to provide a “dedicated budget at the federal and state level to provide for appropriate resources to CSOs [civil society organizations] working with trafficking victims and survivors.”¹⁸⁷

Poor Coordination, Unclear Roles

For anti-trafficking efforts to be effective, all relevant government ministries and agencies, including the ministries of women’s affairs, justice, health, labor, youth development, and immigration, as well as the police, national planning commission, and national commission on refugees, need to cooperate efficiently. They need to coordinate at various levels, including planning, training, data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and resource allocation.

Nigeria has an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking and Child Labour comprised of representatives of federal government ministries and agencies. NAPTIP published “Guidelines on National Referral Mechanism for Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria” in 2014, which sets out some responsibilities and coordination mechanisms. However, Human Rights Watch learned of poor coordination and lack of clarity about responsibilities among government ministries and agencies. Some federal and state officials that Human Rights Watch interviewed appeared to lack information, and even interest, about trafficking, and kept referring us to NAPTIP.¹⁸⁸

A manager of an NGO that collaborates with NAPTIP commented about coordination in Edo State: “The Ministry of Women Affairs is not working well with the commissioner and the Ministry of Justice. There is confusion about the role of ministries, NAPTIP and the taskforce. There is no new coordination between them; there is duplication and

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview (details withheld upon request), Benin, October 7, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ OHCHR, “End of Visit Statement, Nigeria (3-10 September) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.”

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with several officials (details withheld) in 2017 and 2018.

overstepping of mandates.”¹⁸⁹ The manager also noted, “The [Edo] taskforce is not working well with NAPTIP. You do not know whether they are coming from or going.”¹⁹⁰

Failure to Monitor and Evaluate Anti-Trafficking Programs

Although there are many programs being implemented by the Nigerian government and NGOs to protect and assist trafficking survivors, few of them have been evaluated to assess their effectiveness. Proper evaluation of existing programs—with the participation of trafficking survivors—would provide a strong evidence base for comprehensive, long-term interventions, resulting in real rehabilitation and economic empowerment of survivors.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), the body responsible for monitoring and reporting on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in its recent review of Nigeria called on the government of Nigeria to “[c]onduct an assessment of the adequacy of shelters and the services that they provide, including legal, medical and psychosocial assistance.”¹⁹¹

Lack of Community-Based Services

There is little information available about community-based anti-trafficking assistance in Nigeria, i.e., programs to support survivors who are not in shelters. Such programs present important, cost-effective opportunities for fostering reintegration, reducing stigma, and providing long-term assistance for survivors. The Nigerian government should prioritize development of community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programs, with input and participation from NGOs and survivors, and monitor and evaluate their effectiveness.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview (details withheld), October 6, 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ CEDAW Committee, Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria, July 24, 2017, CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, para, 28 (e).

VI. Legal Obligations

Nigeria is obligated under international, regional, and national law to combat trafficking in persons.¹⁹² It must also realize the rights to nondiscrimination and freedom from violence, guarantee that survivors can access remedies, and ensure compliance of labor and migration laws with human rights standards. The government of Nigeria is responsible for the fulfillment of human rights obligations at all levels of government, and must protect against human rights abuses committed by private actors.

Nigerian National Laws and Policies

Laws and Policies on Trafficking in Persons

Nigeria's constitution does not expressly prohibit trafficking, but provides that "no person shall be held in slavery," and guarantees the rights to personal liberty, dignity of every person, and redress.¹⁹³ The Criminal Code, applicable to southern states, establishes offences against liberty, including "slave-dealing." It states that:

- Any person who—
 - unlawfully imprisons any person, and takes him out of Nigeria, without his consent; or
 - unlawfully imprisons any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to a court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned; is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for ten years.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime ("Trafficking Protocol"), adopted November 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, annex II, 55 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol. I) (2001), entered into force December 25, 2003, ratified by Nigeria December 13, 2001, art. 3(a); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, ratified by Nigeria April 19, 1991, art. 35; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted December 18, 1979, G.A. Res. 34/180, 34 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, entered into force September 3, 1981, ratified by Nigeria June 19, 1985, art. 6.

¹⁹³ Constitution of Nigeria, arts. 34(1b), 35, and 46 (1).

¹⁹⁴ Nigeria Criminal Code Act, art. 364.

- Any person who unlawfully confines or detains another in any place against his will, or otherwise unlawfully deprives another of his personal liberty, is guilty of a misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for two years.¹⁹⁵

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act was adopted in 2003, which was repealed and replaced with an updated version in 2015. This Act seeks to: a) provide an effective and comprehensive legal and institutional framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of human trafficking and related offences; b) protect victims of human trafficking; and c) promote and facilitate national and international co-operation.¹⁹⁶ It established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons, including for sexual exploitation, procurement or recruitment of person for use in armed conflicts, organ harvesting, buying or selling of human beings, forced labor, and employment of a child under the age of 12 as a domestic worker. It guarantees a number of rights for trafficked persons, including the right to compensation and restitution, and includes penalties for offenders.¹⁹⁷

The Act defines trafficking in as follows:

“[T]rafficking or traffic in persons” means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person or debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the person whether for or not in involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., art. 365.

¹⁹⁶ Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, art. 1.

¹⁹⁷ The act prescribes a minimum penalty of five years imprisonment and a million naira (approximately US\$2,790) for both sex and labor trafficking, but the minimum penalty for sex trafficking increases to seven years of imprisonment when a child is involved.

reproductive) in forced or bonded labour, or in slavery-like conditions, the removal of organs or generally for exploitative purposes.¹⁹⁸

Exploitation is defined to mean, “at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, deprivation of the offspring of any person, forced labour or services or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”¹⁹⁹

The Child’s Right Act 2003 prohibits trafficking and a range of related offences, including slavery, debt bondage or serfdom, dealing in children for the purpose of hawking or begging for alms, sexual abuse and exploitation, child marriage, and forced or compulsory labor.²⁰⁰ It also provides that no child should be willingly separated from their parent, except, “for the purpose of his education and welfare; or ... in the exercise of a judicial determination in accordance with the provisions of this Act, in the best interest of the child.”²⁰¹

The National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria, 2008, is the guiding policy document for NAPTIP officials, government departments, NGOs, and others working to protect and assist trafficking survivors. The policy aspires to “the restoration of the victims of TIPs [trafficking in persons] and exploitative/hazardous child labor to the state of physical, psychological, social, vocational, and economic wellbeing through sustainable assistance programmes.”²⁰² It notes the importance of a holistic approach to protection and assistance of survivors through “reception, identification, sheltering, counseling, family tracing, return/repatriation, integration, empowerment, follow-up/aftercare, and disengagement.”²⁰³

The 2015 Guidelines on National Referral Mechanism for Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria are anchored in human rights and recognize the importance

¹⁹⁸ Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, art. 82. This definition is similar to that in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, explained below.

¹⁹⁹ Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, arts. 5, 6, and 82.

²⁰⁰ Child Rights Act, 2003, arts. 28, 29, and 30. This act only operates in the federal capital territory, Abuja. States have the power to enact their own laws. Only 24 out of 36 states have passed versions of the Child Rights Act.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, art. 19.

²⁰² NAPTIP, “National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” 2008, p. 4.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

of a multisectoral approach and comprehensive services for survivors of trafficking. They aim to ensure effective implementation of the National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria. The guidelines categorize support under four broad categories: protection, prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration.²⁰⁴ They call for individualized care plans designed with the consent and participation of survivors, offer guidelines on minimum requirements for service delivery, call for use of standardized tools to maintain accuracy, efficiency, and consistency, and recommend regular monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

Laws on Gender Equality and Violence against Women

Nigeria's constitution recognizes the right to nondiscrimination on the basis of sex²⁰⁵ and of equality before the law.²⁰⁶ However, the constitution falls short of international human rights law on nondiscrimination,²⁰⁷ and has language that legitimizes child marriage and conflicts with the national Child Rights Act.²⁰⁸ Section 29, which states that a woman is deemed to be of full age upon marriage, contradicts the National Child Rights Act that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years, and legitimizes child marriages. It also provides a subjective standard of maturity that can prevent girls who are married from enjoying their full protection under the law as children.

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, aims to “eliminate violence in private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders.” The law

²⁰⁴ These are the services to be provided under the four categories: protection (identification, rescue, reception, security, safety); Prevention (awareness raising, advocacy, vocational, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, mentoring for vulnerable groups); rehabilitation (victim referral, psycho-social support, micro credit and grants, shelter provision, health care, legal support, literacy and education, vocational, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, life skills building, mentoring, development of risk assessment plan); reintegration (family tracing, home investigation and social enquiry, family counselling, reunion, embassy and consular liaison support for non-Nigerian victims, vocational, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, micro credit and grants, life skills building). “Guidelines on National Referral Mechanism for Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria,” 2014, https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria//NRM_Guideline_final_2015.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019).

²⁰⁵ Constitution of Nigeria, art. 41(1).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, art. 17(1a).

²⁰⁷ CEDAW defines discrimination against women as: “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” CEDAW, art. 1.

²⁰⁸ Constitution of Nigeria, art. 29(4d).

prohibits gender-related abuses including rape, female genital mutilation, “wife battery,” subjecting widows to harmful traditional practices, emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, and economic abuse.²⁰⁹ It also recognizes a survivor’s right to rehabilitation and reintegration, including medical assistance, legal aid, and material assistance.²¹⁰

Labor and Migration Laws

Forced labor is prohibited under the Labour Act, which also penalizes the ill-treatment or neglect of workers, and coercive, deceptive or fraudulent recruitment.²¹¹

The National Policy on Labor Migration and the National Policy on Migration establish coordination and implementation frameworks on labor migration and migration in general.²¹² The National Policy on Labor Migration aims to promote good governance, protect and promote migrant workers’ welfare, and optimize the benefits of labor migration for national development. The National Policy on Migration provides a framework to manage internal and external migration, and addresses issues such as border management, treatment of migrants, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers, the role of civil society in migration management, and monitoring and data collection. Both policies note the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to managing migration, the centrality of human rights including of trafficked persons, and the need to provide reintegration support for all returnee migrants.²¹³

The National Migration Policy has specific objectives on addressing trafficking in persons, and on support for trafficked persons. It notes the need to:

Provide adequate protection and assistance to victims of trafficking through the establishment of reception centres, as well as through return

²⁰⁹ Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, arts. 1-25.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, art. 38.

²¹¹ Labour Act, arts. 73-75.

²¹² See “National Migration Policy,” 2015, pp. 81-86; and “National Policy on Labour Migration,” 2014, 33-35. Both policies were developed with financial and technical support from the European Union and the IOM Development Fund. See IOM, “Nigeria Launches National Labour Migration Policy,” August 19, 2016, <https://www.iom.int/news/nigeria-launches-national-labour-migration-policy> (accessed August 7, 2019); “Nigeria Adopts National Migration Policy,” May 22, 2015, <https://www.iom.int/news/nigeria-adopts-national-migration-policy> (accessed April 14, 2019).

²¹³ “National Migration Policy,” pp. 66-67; “National Policy on Labour Migration,” pp. 7, 9, 10, “National Policy on Labour Migration,” pp. 7 and 30-31.

and reintegration assistance, such as resettlement grants and skills acquisition programmes and employment counseling, and through enhancing the capacities of NAPTIP in running shelters, making them user-friendly and compliant with international standards.²¹⁴

Nigerian laws appear to fail to consistently define the age of who is considered a child. There is no specific law to regulate domestic work, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation, violence, forced labor, and trafficking. Nigeria has not ratified the International Labour Organization Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers.

International and African Regional Law

The government of Nigeria has obligations under international and regional human rights treaties that it has ratified to combat trafficking in persons and fulfill the rights of women and girls.²¹⁵

Trafficking and Victim Assistance

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Trafficking Protocol) requires states parties to prevent and combat trafficking in persons.²¹⁶ It defines trafficking in persons as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ “National Migration Policy,” p. 38.

²¹⁵ The Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking recognize that: “Violations of human rights are both a cause and a consequence of trafficking in persons. Accordingly, it is essential to place the protection of all human rights at the centre of any measures taken to prevent and end trafficking. Anti-trafficking measures should not adversely affect the human rights and dignity of persons and, in particular, the rights of those who have been trafficked.” OHCHR, “Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking,” 2002, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Traffickingen.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2019).

²¹⁶ Trafficking Protocol, art. 2.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

The Trafficking Protocol defines trafficking of children as: “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation” regardless of whether the means set out in the general section are present.²¹⁸

Exploitation is defined as including “at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”²¹⁹

The Trafficking Protocol obligates states parties to “protect and assist the victims of such trafficking, with full respect for their human rights,” and to cooperate to combat trafficking.²²⁰ Under article six, such protection and assistance include:

- Measures to provide for the physical, psychological, and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, including, in appropriate cases, in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society
- Appropriate housing
- Counseling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights, in a language that the victims of trafficking in persons can understand
- Medical, psychological and material assistance
- Employment, educational and training opportunities
- The physical safety of victims of trafficking in persons
- Measures that offer victims of trafficking in persons the possibility of obtaining compensation for damage suffered.

It requires that in applying these protection and assistance provisions states parties take into account the age, gender, and special needs of survivors, in particular the special needs of children.²²¹ It provides guidelines for the return and repatriation of trafficking

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., art. 3(a).

²²⁰ Ibid., art. 2.

²²¹ Ibid., art. 6(4).

survivors, including the obligation of states parties to ensure that return is done without undue or unreasonable delay, has regard for their safety, and is preferably voluntary.²²² CEDAW requires states to take “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.”²²³ In its General Recommendation on Women Migrant Workers, the CEDAW Committee, the body responsible for monitoring and reporting on CEDAW, called for comprehensive socioeconomic, psychological, and legal services to facilitate the reintegration of women who have returned.²²⁴ In its most recent review of Nigeria in 2017, it called upon the Nigerian government to:

- Intensify its efforts to rescue all women and girls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents, ensure their rehabilitation and integration into society and provide them and their families with access to psychosocial and other rehabilitative services.
- Address the root causes of trafficking in women and girls and ensure the rehabilitation and social integration of victims, including by providing them with access to shelters, legal, medical and psychosocial assistance and adequate income-generating opportunities.
- Intensify awareness-raising efforts aimed at promoting the reporting of trafficking and related crimes and the early detection of women and girls who are victims of trafficking and their referral to appropriate social services.
- Allocate adequate human, technical and financial resources to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons to enable it to effectively undertake its activities.

The UN Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking point to the importance of providing victims with full information about assistance, based on informed consent:

²²² *Ibid.*, art. 8.

²²³ CEDAW, art. 6.

²²⁴ CEDAW Committee, “General recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers,” U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/2009/WP.1/R, December 5, 2008, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_2009_WP-1_R_7138_E.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), para. 24(i). The Committee noted that many elements of the general recommendation are also relevant in situations where women migrants have been victims of trafficking.

A human rights approach requires that the provision of care and support should be both informed and non-coercive. For example, victims of trafficking should receive information on their entitlements so they can make an informed decision about what to do. As discussed above, care and support should not be made conditional on cooperation with criminal justice authorities. Victims should also be able to refuse care and support. They should not be forced into accepting or receiving assistance.²²⁵

In terms of regional law, under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), Nigeria has specific obligations to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women; adopt measures to ensure the prevention, punishment, and eradication of all forms of violence against women; prevent trafficking, protect women most at risk, and prosecute perpetrators of trafficking; and protect women from exploitation by their employers.²²⁶

The Right to a Remedy

Remedies are an important part of the international legal response to trafficking. States, including countries of origin, transit, and destination, are obliged to provide or facilitate access to remedies to all trafficked persons within their respective territory.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC), which monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), established that the duty to provide an effective remedy to victims of human rights violations, whether at the hands of public officials or private individuals, includes the obligation to “exercise due diligence to prevent, punish, investigate, or redress the harm caused by such acts.”²²⁷ The HRC emphasized that states must ensure “accessible and effective remedies” for human rights violations and to take into account “the special vulnerability of certain categories of

²²⁵ UNOCHR, “Human Rights and Human Trafficking: Factsheet No. 36,” p. 36.

²²⁶ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted by the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, Maputo, September 13, 2000, CAB/LEG/66.6, entered into force November 25, 2005, ratified by Nigeria on February 18, 2005, arts. 2, 4.2(b), 4.2 (g), and 13(d).

²²⁷ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 31, Nature of the General Legal Obligation on States Parties to the Covenant, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 (2004), para. 8. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 200A(XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc A/6316 (1966) 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, ratified by Nigeria July 19, 1993.

person,” further noting that “a failure by a State Party to investigate allegations of violations could in and of itself give rise to a separate breach of the Covenant.”²²⁸

States have an obligation to provide special measures of protection and care to trafficked children. The realization of the right to an effective remedy for trafficked children should be guided by the general principle of “the best interests of the child,” as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”²²⁹ Accordingly, before deciding on the type of remedy or assistance to be provided, the child’s best interests should be paramount. This means that, for example, states cannot prioritize other considerations, such as those related to criminal investigations, over the best interests of a child victim of trafficking.

Reparations for human rights violations, including for trafficking, include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition.²³⁰ Nigeria’s rehabilitation and reintegration programs should be guided by the UN Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, and the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.²³¹

Detention in Shelters

International law prohibits the discriminatory detention of victims, including detention that is linked to the sex of the victim. Routine detention of survivors of trafficking in NAPTIP shelters for prolonged and indeterminate periods, which also overwhelmingly affects women and girls, violates a number of fundamental principles of international human

²²⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 31: Nature of the General Legal Obligation on States Parties to the Covenant, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add/13 (2004), para. 15.

²²⁹ CRC.

²³⁰ For example, see General Assembly, “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law,” Resolution 60/147 (2006), A/RES/60/147 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RemedyAndReparation.aspx> (accessed August 7, 2019).

²³¹ *Ibid.*

rights law and is therefore unlawful. It violates the right not to be deprived of liberty and the prohibition on arbitrary detention.

Article 9 of the ICCPR provides that everyone has the right to liberty and security of person and “[n]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except in accordance with procedures that are established by law.”²³² Article six of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights states “... no one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained.” Detention is considered arbitrary if it is illegal or if manifestly disproportionate, unjust, discriminatory or unpredictable.²³³ A detention which was originally not arbitrary, might become arbitrary if it continues over time without proper justification. ICCPR also explicitly recognizes and protects a right to freedom of movement.²³⁴

Detention will be arbitrary if it is not based on clear domestic law, including that people are only detained in locations authorized under domestic law to host detainees. Basic rights for detainees include that everyone should be brought promptly (normally within 48 hours) before a court or equivalent judicial body to rule on the legality and necessity of detention.²³⁵

According to the UN Trafficking Principles and Guidelines: “Detention of victims is inappropriate and (implicitly) illegal. Under its provisions, States are required to ensure that trafficked persons are not, in any circumstances, held in immigration detention or other forms of custody.”²³⁶ The guidelines note as an example of such detention cases where:

Victims [of human trafficking] are identified correctly and placed in a shelter or other welfare facility which they are unable to leave. Common

²³² Ibid.

²³³ See, “Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Compilation of Deliberations,” undated, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/CompilationWGADDeliberation.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2019), pp. 16-17.

²³⁴ ICCPR, art. 12.

²³⁵ ICCPR, art. 9, and UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No.35 - Article 9: Liberty and Security of Person, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/GC/35 (2014), para. 23.

²³⁶ OHCHR, “Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Trafficking: Commentary,” 2010, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Commentary_Human_Trafficking_en.pdf (accessed August 7, 2019), p. 133.

justifications offered for this form of detention are the need to provide shelter and support; the need to protect victims from further harm; and the need to secure their cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers.²³⁷

Rights to Equality and Nondiscrimination

Trafficking in persons is a form of gender-based discrimination that distinctively and disproportionately affects women and girls, and negatively impacts the realization of their rights.

Nigeria has obligations under international and regional human rights law to ensure women's rights to equality and nondiscrimination. As they implement measures to prevent or respond to trafficking, including measures to assist victims, states should not discriminate against the survivors. The link between discrimination and vulnerability to trafficking is recognized in the Trafficking Protocol. It states:

The measures set forth in this Protocol shall be interpreted and applied in a way that is not discriminatory to persons on the grounds that they are victims of trafficking in persons. The interpretation and application of those measures shall be consistent with internationally recognized principles of non-discrimination.²³⁸

²³⁷ OHCHR, "Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking," 2002, p. 133.

²³⁸ Trafficking Protocol, art. 14(b).

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Many survivors of sex and labor trafficking in Nigeria, desperate to escape dire economic situations or abusive family environments, struggle with mental trauma, social exclusion, physical ailments that have sometimes limited their ability to work effectively and reintegrate into the community.

“You Pray for Death,” based on interviews with 76 women and girls survivors of human trafficking, documents how traffickers, most of them known to their victims, prey on these women and girls, often luring them with false promises of paid employment, professional training, and education. They transport them within and across national borders where they face death, rape, beatings, fear, theft, extortion, lack of food and water, and various forms of exploitation, including forced prostitution and forced labor, especially forced domestic work.

The report finds that many survivors are unlawfully detained in shelters in Nigeria and that efforts by authorities to rehabilitate them are undermined by the failure to provide rights-respecting, comprehensive, and long-term medical care and psychosocial support. This report documents the impacts of trafficking on survivors, and outlines steps the Nigerian authorities should take to provide survivors the medical care, psychological counseling, and financial support they need to heal from the trauma and to rebuild their lives.

Human Rights Watch calls on Nigerian authorities to ensure that programs to prevent and respond to trafficking respect the rights of survivors, are geared toward promoting women’s equality, and are comprehensive, long-term, and tailored to meet the specific needs of women and girls, as well as their families. Authorities should also end all detention of survivors in shelters and strengthen oversight over shelters and assistance programs.

(above) Nigerians arrive from a plane in Lagos in March 2018. They tried to make their way to Europe, but ended up enslaved and trapped in Libya. The International Organization for Migration facilitates most of these returns from Libya. Women and girls who ended up trapped in Libya described experiencing racial discrimination, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and difficult conditions in places of captivity. Many found their situation so unbearable that they had wished to return to Nigeria.

(front cover) A woman who tried to make her way to Europe sits with her child in a shelter in Benin City, Nigeria. Nigerians who attempt the journey to Europe often end up enslaved, beaten, assaulted, and trapped in Libya. March 2018.

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