

St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Tier 2)

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a source, transit, and destination country for some men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Officials have expressed concern about the possible existence of adults pressuring children under the age of 18 to provide sex acts to men in exchange for money or gifts, a form of sex trafficking. Officials have also raised concerns regarding foreign women engaged in prostitution in or transiting through the country. Other vulnerable groups include foreign workers and children under the age of 16 working in shops.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. During the reporting period, the government initiated both sex and labor trafficking investigations, raised awareness about human trafficking, developed screening forms to help officials proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, and funded the establishment of a crisis center that could assist trafficking victims. The government did not refer any potential victims to the center or launch any prosecutions against trafficking offenders.

Recommendations for St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Refer suspected victims of trafficking to appropriate services; develop a government-wide referral processes for various types of suspected trafficking victims (child, adult, male, female, national, non-national); identify a social worker or NGO who can coordinate assistance, serve as the victim's advocate, and liaise with law enforcement; prosecute human trafficking offenders.

Prosecution

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines demonstrated law enforcement efforts against human trafficking over the last year. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Bill of 2011 prohibits forced prostitution and forced labor, including bonded labor, and prescribes punishments of up to 20 years' imprisonment with fines. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with penalties for other serious crimes, such as rape. During the reporting period, the government's special police unit focusing on human trafficking, sexual offenses, and domestic violence initiated four human trafficking investigations involving both forced labor and sex trafficking. This compares to an absence of any trafficking investigations conducted during the previous reporting period. Like the previous year, the government did not report any prosecutions or convictions of trafficking offenders during the reporting period. There were no reports of public officials complicit in human trafficking-related offenses during the reporting period. The government provided in-kind assistance to an IOM-led anti-trafficking training for officials from the police force, the Immigration Department, the Social Welfare Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Director of Public Prosecution's Office, the Port Authority, the Attorney General's chambers, and local NGOs. The government incorporated trafficking sensitization into the core syllabus for new recruits at the police training school.

Protection

The government made modest progress in victim protection during the reporting period. The government developed screening forms to guide officials in identifying trafficking victims, and proactively identified five potential victims, a positive step that demonstrated a significant effort towards implementing its new human trafficking law. The government had not yet completed guidelines on the referral of victims to appropriate shelter and services and, as a result, the government did not refer any suspected victims to assistance, an important step in victim protection and building cases against trafficking offenders that is currently lacking. In addition, the government did not fund any trafficking-specific assistance programs, though the government funded the opening of a new short-term domestic violence shelter that could also accommodate adult women, men, and child trafficking victims. There were no reports of trafficking victims assisting law enforcement, though the government, per the provisions of its anti-trafficking law, offered incentives to encourage victims' assistance in the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking offenders. The anti-trafficking law also specifically provides alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they would face hardship or retribution, though during the reporting period, no foreign victims received such immigration relief. The trafficking law also protects victims from punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked and there were no reports that victims were inappropriately punished during the reporting period.

Prevention

The government made modest progress in preventing human trafficking during the reporting period. The government completed a human trafficking public awareness campaign that included newspaper articles, a radio call-in show, and a performance highlighting human trafficking at the National Drama Club Festival. The police continued to operate a hotline to report human trafficking cases. The police conducted trafficking sensitization training in schools for 4,130 students and 270 teachers. The police also provided trafficking awareness training to health care workers, police youth clubs, the Coast Guard, a senior citizen facility, staff of the Ministry of Health and the Environment, members of the Red Cross, and to church groups on how to identify and assist victims. The prime minister chaired a ministerial-level national anti-trafficking taskforce, and the government has plans to develop a working level coordination group. The government has not recognized the problem of foreign child sex tourists in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The government reported no efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or forced labor.