HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Trends

The Commission observed some positive legal developments in the area of human trafficking during the 2015 reporting year. Nevertheless, China remains a country of origin ¹ and destination ² for the trafficking of men, women, and children, as defined under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN TIP Protocol). Men, women, and children are reportedly trafficked within China's borders for forced labor, including in the construction, manufacturing, brick-making, and home care industries. Women and girls also are reportedly trafficked for forced marriage and sexual exploitation. People with disabilities and children reportedly are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of forced begging.

The Chinese and Southeast Asian governments,⁷ non-governmental organizations (NGOs),⁸ and the United Nations report that cross-border trafficking into China for forced marriage and sexual exploitation appears to be increasing.⁹ A spokesperson for China's Supreme People's Court said the crime of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is "increasingly prominent," and that trafficking of foreign women is increasing in some regions of China.¹⁰ Cambodian and international media reported a growing trend of Cambodian women being trafficked into China for forced marriage.¹¹ The Vietnamese government reported a rise in trafficking of Vietnamese citizens, saying 85 percent of victims were women and children, and 70 percent were trafficked to China.¹² The Vietnambased NGO Pacific Links Foundation also reported an increase in trafficking from Vietnam to China for forced marriage.¹³ Burmese media reported that police in Burma handled more trafficking cases in 2014 compared to 2013, with the majority of these cases involving trafficking to China for forced marriage.¹⁴

Risk Factors

China's ongoing human trafficking problem stems from a variety of economic, demographic, and political factors. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports that China is a major country of origin for migrants smuggled to other parts of Asia, North America, and Europe. Primarily driven by socio-economic factors, these migrants are vulnerable to human trafficking. Within China, domestic migrant workers are reportedly vulnerable to being trafficked for forced labor. The children of domestic migrant workers, who are in some cases unable to migrate with their parents, are at risk of forced labor, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation. Poverty and regional instability on contribute to trafficking from Southeast Asia into China for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Amid wage increases and labor shortages, as some Chinese factories employ illegal foreign migrant workers who reportedly face exploitative conditions and are at risk of trafficking for forced labor.

China's sex ratio imbalance—exacerbated by government-imposed birth limits and in keeping with a traditional bias toward sons ²⁵—has created a demand for marriageable women and may

contribute to human trafficking for forced marriage.²⁶ According to estimates by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2014, China had nearly 34 million more men than women.²⁷ The sex ratio at birth, while lower than previous years, 28 remained high at roughly 116 boys born for every 100 girls. 29 According to demographers, a normal sex ratio at birth is within the range of 103 to

106 boys born for every 100 girls.³⁰
Some Uyghurs from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region reportedly attempt to flee religious and other forms of persecution in China with the help of smugglers in China and Southeast Asia,³¹ putting them at risk of human trafficking.32 According to Reuters, in March 2014, Thai authorities intercepted more than 200 Uyghurs held in camps run by suspected human traffickers in Thailand.³³ Thai authorities subsequently held many of the Uyghurs in reportedly poor conditions in detention facilities.³⁴ In late June 2015, Thai authorities reportedly allowed 173 of the refugees to leave Thailand and go to Turkey,³⁵ but forcibly returned another 109 refugees to China, where many reportedly remained in detention as of August 2015.³⁶ [For more information, see Section IV—Xinjiang.] North Korean refugees who escape into China also remain at risk for human trafficking,³⁷ although border crossings have reportedly decreased in recent years.³⁸ In February 2015, the independent website NK News reported a case of Chinese smugglers forcing North Korean refugees to perform sex acts online for a South Korea-based Web broadcasting service.³⁹ In addition, according to research by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights, the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reportedly sends North Korean laborers abroad, including to China, under conditions that may constitute trafficking. 40

Anti-Trafficking Efforts

During the 2015 reporting year, the Chinese government continued to cooperate with its neighbors to combat human trafficking by signing a new anti-trafficking agreement with the Laotian government in September 2014 41 and by working with the five other member countries of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT)⁴² to draft COMMIT's fourth Sub-Regional Plan of Action, adopted in April 2015.43 The Chinese government also provided logistical support and significant funding for COMMIT-related workshops and activities in 2014, according to the UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons annual report.44

While China's domestic legislation remains inconsistent with UN TIP Protocol standards, 45 the Chinese government took steps to improve its laws and regulations on human trafficking. In August 2015, the National People's Congress Standing Committee issued the Ninth Amendment to the PRC Criminal Law, effective November 1, 2015,⁴⁶ that included a change to Article 241.⁴⁷ Based on the current version of Article 241, buyers of trafficked women and children can avoid criminal liability if they have not harmed or prevented authorities from rescuing the victim.⁴⁸ The amended law provides that buyers face criminal liability, 49 although they may still receive a lighter punishment.⁵⁰ Additionally, in December 2014, the central government issued an opinion that allows authorities to terminate custody rights of parents who sell their children,⁵¹ and in February 2015, the Supreme People's Court published eight model cases that provided sentencing guidance for traf-

ficking cases.⁵²

In recent years, the Chinese government has undertaken two potentially positive reforms; these reforms, however, did not appear to significantly reduce the problem of human trafficking during the reporting year. In late 2013, the government abolished the reeducation through labor (RTL) system,⁵³ a form of arbitrary detention in which individuals were detained without trial ⁵⁴ and forced to labor,⁵⁵ RTL detainee labor constituted forced labor as defined by the 1930 International Labour Organization Forced Labor Convention,⁵⁶ and constituted trafficking as defined by the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN TIP Protocol).⁵⁷ Since the abolition of RTL, authorities have reportedly continued the use of other forms of administrative detention, including "custody and education" facilities and compulsory drug detoxification centers,⁵⁸ where detainees perform forced labor.⁵⁹ At a press conference in November 2014, the vice minister of China's Ministry of Justice said that the "vast majority" of China's RTL facilities had been converted to compulsory drug detoxification centers.⁶⁰

The second reform, a November 2013 adjustment to China's population planning policy, allowed married couples in which one parent is an only child to bear a second child. Some experts suggested this reform had the potential to ameliorate China's sex ratio imbalance, in turn reducing demand for trafficking for forced marriage. Most couples eligible to have a second child under the new exception reside in cities, and while data from China's 2010 census show that cities have sex ratio imbalances, in 27 out of 31 provincial-level jurisdictions, the largest imbalances were found in townships or villages. Many residents of these areas were already allowed to have a second child under existing policy exceptions. The dean of the Renmin University School of Society and Population and other observers have argued that the 2013 policy adjustment alone is unlikely to reverse China's sex ratio imbalance. See Section

II—Population Control.]

Anti-Trafficking Challenges

In its Concluding Observations on the Combined Seventh and Eighth Periodic Reports of China, issued November 7, 2014, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted its concern over "the lack of clarity as to whether domestic law criminalizes all forms of trafficking "67 The UN TIP Protocol definition of human trafficking involves three components: the action of recruitment, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons; the means of force, coercion, fraud, deception, or control; and "the purpose of exploitation," including sexual exploitation or forced labor. Although the PRC Criminal Law prohibits human trafficking, China's domestic legislation remains inconsistent with UN TIP Protocol standards. For example, the current definition of trafficking under Chinese law To does not clearly cover certain types of non-physical coercion To offenses against male vic-

tims.⁷³ These forms of trafficking are covered under Article 3 of the UN TIP Protocol.⁷⁴ Although the State Council's China Action Plan To Combat Trafficking in Persons (2013–2020), issued in January 2013, revised the Chinese term for trafficking to include all persons (guaimai renkou),⁷⁵ both the current version of the PRC Criminal Law ⁷⁶ and the Ninth Amendment to the PRC Criminal Law refer only to women and children.⁷⁷

The PRC Criminal Law is also overly broad compared with the UN TIP Protocol in that its definition of trafficking includes the purchase or abduction of children for subsequent sale without specifying the end purpose of these actions.⁷⁸ Under the UN TIP Protocol, illegal adoptions are considered trafficking only if the end purpose of the sale is exploitation, such as sexual exploitation or forced labor.⁷⁹ Due to these inconsistencies between China's legal definition of human trafficking and international standards, official reports and statistics do not provide an accurate picture of the number of trafficking cases China's criminal justice system handles.⁸⁰

Representative Human Trafficking Cases Published During the 2015 Reporting Year

- Shanghai municipality. According to Chinese media reports, in October 2014, police rescued 11 girls, aged 13 to 17, from Chongqing municipality and Sichuan province who had been trafficked to Shanghai municipality and forced into commercial sexual exploitation. The youngest victim, aged 13, used a client's cell phone to text her mother for help. Authorities detained eight suspects in connection with the case.
- Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In November 2014, Chinese police disclosed that they had broken up an international criminal trafficking syndicate, rescuing 14 women and detaining 31 suspects. According to media reports, traffickers promised the women jobs or holiday tours and then sold the women into forced marriages in rural China. Eleven of the 14 rescued women were from Burma, 5 of whom were under 18.86
- Anhui province. Chinese media reported in November 2014 that police in Anhui province broke up a criminal syndicate that was targeting women who appeared to suffer from "mental disorders," 87 detaining eight suspects. 88 The traffickers reportedly detained, beat, raped, and sold the women. 89 Police found contracts in one suspect's home promising buyers that the women were able to bear children and were not married. 90 Police believe the syndicate trafficked at least 10 women. 91

Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a transit point and destination for human trafficking. 92 An April 2015 UN report noted that Hong Kong's international airport is an important point of transit for migrant smuggling, 93 and that these migrants are at risk of human trafficking. 94 Migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. 95 These workers often arrive in Hong Kong owing large debts to employment agencies, 96 and employers and placement agencies frequently confiscate the workers'

passports.⁹⁷ In a February 2015 report, Amnesty International estimated that "[t]housands of the approximately 300,000 migrant domestic workers . . . in Hong Kong were trafficked for exploitation and forced labor . . ." ⁹⁸ The anti-trafficking non-governmental organization (NGO) Justice Centre Hong Kong attributed the lack of precise data on the extent of human trafficking in Hong Kong in part to the absence of comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation. ⁹⁹ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as well as domestic and international NGOs expressed concern that Hong Kong's laws do not adequately address human trafficking, ¹⁰⁰ as the definition of human trafficking in Hong Kong's Crimes Ordinance covers only the transboundary movement of persons "for the purpose of prostitution," not forced labor or other forms of trafficking. ¹⁰¹ The Chinese central government has not extended the UN TIP Protocol to apply to Hong Kong. ¹⁰² [For more information on Hong Kong, see Section VI—Developments in Hong Kong and Macau.]

Notes to Section II—Human Trafficking

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draft provided that buyers could receive a light or reduced punishment in cases involving trafficked children, or be exempt from punishment in cases that involved trafficked women.

ficked children, or be exempt from punishment in cases that involved trafficked women.

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56 ILO Convention (No. 29) Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, 28 June 30, 39 U.N.T.S. 55, art. 2. Article 2.1 of the Convention defines "forced or compulsory labour" as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily." Article 2.2 (c) makes an exception for "[alny work or service extracted from any person as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law..." As RTL inmates were detained without trial, this exception did not apply. See also Amnesty International, "'Changing the Soup but Not the Medicine?' Abolishing Re-Education Through Labour in China," ASA 17/042/2013, 17 December 13, 17.

57 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 00, entry into force 25 December 03, art. 3(a). RTL inmate labor can be viewed as constituting trafficking under Article 3(a) of the UN TIP Protocol, as RTL facility authorities engaged in the "harbouring" and "receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force... for the purpose of exploitation." According to Article 3(a), exploitation includes "forced labour." For more information on conditions RTL inmates faced, including "the threat or use of force." see, e.g., Amnesty International, "Changing the Soup but Not the Medicine?": Abolishing Re

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69 PRC Criminal Law [Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xingfa], passed 1 July 79, amended 14 March 97, effective 1 October 97, amended 25 December 99, 31 August 01, 29 December 01, 28 December 02, 28 February 05, 29 June 06, 28 February 09, 25 February 11, art. 240.

70 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UN TIP Protocol), adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 00, entry into force 25 December 03. Topics that need to be addressed in domestic legislation to bring it into compliance with the UN TIP Protocol include protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking (UN TIP Protocol, Article 6.3), addition of non-physical forms of coercion into the legal definition of trafficking (UN TIP Protocol, Article 3(a)), and trafficking of men (covered under the definition of "trafficking in persons" in Article 3(a) of the UN TIP Protocol).

71 PRC Criminal Law [Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xingfa], passed 1 July 79, amended 14 March 97, effective 1 October 97, amended 25 December 99, 31 August 01, 29 December 01, 28 December 02, 28 February 05, 29 June 06, 28 February 09, 25 February 11, art. 240. Article 240 defines trafficking as "abducting, kidnapping, buying, trafficking in, fetching, sending, or transferring a woman or child, for the purpose of selling the victim."

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er acts such as recruiting, providing, or obtaining persons for compelled prostitution are cov-

er acts such as recruiting, providing, or obtaining persons for compense prostution are covered."

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Item 15 of the Ninth Amendment to the PRC Criminal Law revising Article 241 of the PRC Criminal Law refers only to women and children.

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