

2.2.2. Domestic and cross-border trafficking

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Trafficking in human beings occurs internally within Nigeria as well as transnationally, with individuals taken from Nigeria to African and European countries.113

Domestically, traffickers predominantly recruit victims - often children and women - from rural areas in southern regions for sex trafficking, forced labour in cities,114 and for the purpose of the so-called 'baby-factories';115 but victims can also originate from other regions.116 Traffickers also exploit foreign nationals, including individuals originating from West and Central Africa (including Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Mali, and Senegal) and to a lesser extent, East and Southern Africa, in forced labour agriculture within Nigeria. Traffickers also operate in refugee and displacement settings, recruiting vulnerable Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees for exploitation across Nigeria and abroad.117 In the North-East region, extremist groups like Boko Haram forcibly recruit, abduct, and exploit children and women as labourers, soldiers, or sex slaves.118

Organised trafficking networks, both international and domestic traffickers, transport Nigerian women and girls to other parts of Africa as well as to Europe, mainly for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, often using deception and coercion, including ritual oaths119 (for more information see 2.2.3. Traffickers, recruitment and modus operandi and 2.2.4. Women victims of trafficking). Globally, Africa continues to be the continent with the highest rates of cross-border trafficking. Sub-Saharan African victims have been detected in multiple countries across the world, with primary concentrations within the region itself, as well as in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. In recent years, the identification of Sub-Saharan African victims in Western and Southern Europe has declined, while detections in the Middle East have shown an upward trend.120

As per latest available data, the European Commission (EC) reported that Nigerians rank first among the top five nationalities of trafficking victims identified within the European Union. Most of the victims are women primarily trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.121 Between 2017 and the first quarter of 2024,122 the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) facilitated the voluntary return of 4 877 Nigerian victims of trafficking. Individuals were returned from 37 host or transit countries, mostly from Libya (54 %) and Mali (25 %). Of these, 86 % originated from the southern part of Nigeria, mostly from Lagos, Edo and Delta.123

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  EC, Report from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human beings (Fifth Report), {SWD(2025) 4 final}, 20 January 2025, url

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IOM conducted an analysis of the profiles of Nigerian victims of trafficking based on data they collected from 2017 until Q1 2024 and derived from individuals assisted by the IOM, who have been identified as victims of trafficking. See IOM, Profile of Nigerian Victims of Human Trafficking since 2017, 31 March 2024, url, p. 3

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  IOM, Profile of Nigerian Victims of Human Trafficking since 2017, 31 March 2024, url, pp. 4, 6, 7

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