

2.2.4. Women victims of trafficking

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Women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation throughout countries in Europe, including Austria, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Malta and Denmark.[156] Black Axe has been involved in the trafficking of Nigerian women for sex exploitation in Italy and France.[157] Organised crime networks also transport Nigerian women and girls to mining regions within Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire for sexual exploitation.[158]

Between 2017 and the first quarter of 2024, IOM facilitated the voluntary return of 4 877 Nigerian victims of trafficking; women and girls accounted for nearly 88 % of returnees across various age groups. In the first quarter of 2024, 167 victims were returned to Nigeria under the IOM programme, of whom 81 % were women and 19 % men. Of these 4 877 returned individuals, 86 % were from the Southern part of Nigeria, mostly from Lagos (1 125), Edo (938), and Delta (425). These women were mostly subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labour. Without providing further details, IOM also pointed out that states such as Kano show a reverse pattern, with a higher number of male victims; however, the overall figures in these areas remain relatively low compared to other states.[159]

Domestically, traffickers recruit and force women, particularly from rural Southern regions into sex trafficking and forced labour into urban centres.[160] During the reference period, sources reported on a surge in the phenomenon of so-called 'baby-factories'[161] - facilities disguised as orphanages, religious centres, maternity homes[162] or private medical clinics, where young women are lured, impregnated and held until they give birth to infants, who are then sold[163] and trafficked.[164] (For more information see 2.2.5. Children victims of trafficking). Citing data issued by a local human rights association, media outlets reported that over 200 underground so-called 'baby factories' have been discovered and shut down by security agencies in the last five years; however new facilities have opened to replace the closed ones. The practice is especially prevalent in southern states such as Abia, Lagos, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.[165]

Most of the victims of the so-called 'baby-factories' are minors,[166] teenage girls, unmarried young women.[167] Poverty, ignorance, dysfunctional family structures, social stigma on childlessness, and weak law enforcement are identified among the root causes of this phenomenon.[168] Traffickers often kidnap victims and keep them[169] against their will,[170] rape and force them to carry and deliver children.[171] Victims often receive money or something else for giving birth to a child.[172] In some cases, families facilitate the involvement of girls, while in other cases victims themselves engage voluntarily for financial reasons.[173] Some victims of so-

called ‘baby-factories’ are recruited by traffickers through online platforms.174 Behind this industry there is an ‘organised and highly coordinated commercial network of criminal activities’.175 Various raids were conducted during 2024176 and 2025, uncovering so-called ‘baby factories’ and trafficking syndicates across the country.177 A thriving market exists for infants among couples experiencing difficulties with childbearing. These individuals are often willing to pay between 1 million naira (576 EUR) and 2 million naira (1 152 EUR) to acquire a baby. Demand is generally higher for male infants, who are typically sold at a higher price compared to female infants.178

In general, young women victims of trafficking in Nigeria – as in other African countries - are recruited into sex work through forced abduction, by pressure from their parents and through deceptive agreements between their parents and traffickers, including ‘unrecognized representatives’ of criminal groups. In some cases, Nigerian women victims of trafficking often do not see themselves as victims. Some actively seek out traffickers or are introduced by relatives or friends in pursuit of economic opportunity. Poverty, conflict, poor education, social pressure and cultural norms are key factors that make women vulnerable to traffickers.179

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