2.2.5. Children victims of trafficking

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An ‘alarming prevalence’ of child trafficking, abduction, and forced labour has been reported in Nigeria during the reference period.[180] According to NAPTIP, the average age of trafficked children in Nigeria is 15.[181] Children are exploited in activities like illegal mining,[182] domestic servitude, begging, street vending and forced labour in areas like textile manufacturing and agriculture.[183] Recruitment often occurs via criminal networks or trafficking groups that exploit vulnerable families, sometimes operating under the pretext of offering support or charitable assistance.[184] Children may also be abducted or unlawfully acquired, particularly from socio-economically disadvantage backgrounds, for purposes like illegal adoption or forced labour.[185] Within the phenomenon of so-called ‘baby-factories’, minor girls are exploited,[186] while infants are trafficked and sold[187] to infertile couples.[188]

Many children are being forced into street begging also by their Quranic school teachers [189] known as *mallams*. They exploit mostly boys from rural areas through forced labour in street begging and seasonal agricultural work, including across borders in Cameroon and Chad. These children often reside in unregulated, makeshift boarding facilities where they face unsanitary conditions, neglect, and exposure to disease. Reports also indicate cases of physical and sexual abuse by some *mallams* and older students. Observers note that rising poverty levels may be contributing to increased enrolment in these schools and heightened vulnerability to forced labour.[190]

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In December 2024, law enforcement authorities dismantled a child trafficking syndicate led by Pastor Dayo Bernard of the End Time Army Ministry, based in the Jos-Bukuru area (in Jos LGA of Plateau State). During the operation, five children between the ages of 2 and 4 were rescued. According to police reports, the pastor allegedly used evangelism as a means to persuade parents to release their children under the false promise of educational sponsorship. He later confessed to abducting and selling a total of 13 children.[191] In January 2025, authorities rescued more than 200 children and dismantled several gangs and human trafficking networks as part of a series of nationwide operations focused on combating child exploitation.[192] Arrests of ‘armed bandits’ were carried out in Kogi, Katsina and Ondo states.[193]

The Chairperson of the Plateau State Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission attributed the increase in trafficking to ongoing insecurity, the rise in orphaned children, and the presence of IDP camps. She noted that some parents, due to lack of awareness, inadvertently hand over

their children to traffickers posing as aid workers. A representative of the National Coordinator of the Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigerian Society (CWEENS), reported that children are typically sold for between 350 000 and 750 000 naira (about 195 Euros and 420 Euros).194

Armed groups, including Boko Haram, subject children to forced labour and sex slavery.195 For more information see also 2.4. Children and 2.10. Individuals targeted by Boko Haram.

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