









### Excerpt from the book:

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**Cautionary note:** The terms 'child prostitution' and 'prostituted children' are used in this text to denote children that are sexually exploited and sexually trafficked. The connotative manner in which these definitions are perceived and analyzed may differ due to linguistic, cultural, and perceptual differences.

## NIGERIA

	<b>POPULATION</b> 190,9 million		<b>GDP PER CAPITA</b> 1,968.6 USD
	<b>POLITICAL SYSTEM</b> Federal Regime		<b>HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX</b> 152 <sup>nd</sup> rank among 187 countries
	<b>GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX</b> N/A		<b>CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX</b> 148 <sup>th</sup> rank among 180 countries

A Sub-Saharan crossroads for human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes, at once a country of origin, transit and destination, Nigeria is mainly perceived as a source country for victims from which traffickers and mafias draw ever younger girls to flood Western Europe and the Middle East. Taking advantage of the increase in migration flows, criminal groups smuggle their victims through Italy and Spain, alongside other migrants, in order to exploit them in prostitution upon arrival. Locally, poverty, lack of professional opportunities and basic needs push many young women, sometimes high school students, into prostitution when it is not their own families who encourage them to do so. The most vulnerable are the primary victims of this spiral. The phenomenon does not slow down and pushes many young women into the clutches of procurers and sex buyers who exploit them and take advantage of their situation.

In the north, the impact of the insurrectionary Boko Haram movement has substantially increased the displacement of populations (2.4 million people), and has provoked a serious humanitarian crisis involving many young women being forced into prostitution to support their families.

The kidnapping of several thousand young women and girls, including 276 high school girls from Chibok in April 2014, for ransoms or sexual slavery, had a very high media profile. After being forcibly married to the groups' fighters, some of these women were released in 2018. Several dozen of them died in captivity after being used as human shields during the aerial attacks against the group or as victims of crossfire (*Le Point*, April 17, 2018).

Upon being returned to their families, many of these women were met with stigmatization by their community, as a result of their abduction, in addition to the physical and psychological consequences of

the sexual violence they were subjected to during their captivity, as they leave deep wounds that are difficult to heal.

Within Nigeria, women and children are trafficked and displaced from rural zones to urban centers (Olateru-Olagbegi). Trafficking and sexual exploitation of young girls has been on the rise in these regions, primarily in the innumerable prostitution establishments in large urban centers (on the streets, in hotels or night bars).

Furthermore, despite multiple campaigns since 2016 to reduce these practices, early marriage remains significant in Nigeria. According to *UNICEF*, 44% of young girls are married before the age of 18, and 17% are married before the age of 15. These rates vary significantly from one region to another. Finally, it is necessary to highlight the high prevalence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which particularly affects prostituted persons (14.4% are reportedly infected) (*UNAIDS*, 2018).

There are many trafficking routes from Nigeria. Traffickers take victims to North Africa, where they are exploited through forced labor, domestic work and prostitution. Victims are also brought to Europe, where they are faced with the same fate.

Nigerian networks, which have also established themselves in Libya, are organizing the departure of the young women “recruited” in Nigeria, primarily from the country’s poorest regions, to supply the European prostitution market. The Spanish route, via Morocco, is now abandoned and the victims are currently instead brought to Italy. Traffickers generally use the route through Niger, Algeria and Libya, where their victims are put aboard ships in Tripoli, Misrata or Benghazi in large numbers (*Fondation Scelles*, October 13, 2017).

### **Current legislation**

According to Articles 222-227 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, prostitution is

prohibited in Nigeria. Although procuring is criminalized, the sanctions for forcing an adult or a child into prostitution are relatively light (two years in prison). Some regional specificities of the Penal Code allow more severe condemnations for those who force a child under 18 years of age to engage in prostitution, with penalties of up to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine.

Theoretically, the prostituted person is not criminalized, however the enforcement procedures of the law remain unclear. Several reports cite arrests of prostituted persons.

All trafficking, including sex trafficking, was criminalized in the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act. This law has since been amended several times in recent years to impose harsher sentences on traffickers. The current sanctions for cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation are a minimum of five years’ imprisonment, as well as a USD 5,470 fine. The minimum sentence is increased to seven years if a child is implicated in the offense (*US Department of State*, 2016). These sentences are sufficiently stringent, unlike the sentences concerning prostitution. The Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act also provides for the support and protection for victims through the creation of the *National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons* (NAPTIP), which provides shelter for victims of trafficking across the country.

### **Sex trafficking of Nigerian women and girls**

Nigeria’s economic crisis has worsened in recent years. As a result, the number of young Nigerian women trying to travel to Europe has skyrocketed. To a lesser extent, women are also victims of trafficking to neighboring African countries, many of which have legalized prostitution, making it

even more difficult to assist victims. The percentage of reported cases regarding sex trafficking increased by 204% in 2016, a figure indicating the gravity of the problem (NAPTIP, 2017). Nevertheless, most of these women go to Italy, where the number of Nigerian women has increased eightfold between 2014 and 2016 (Vanguard, April 2, 2017). Other cases of trafficking to Belgium, Spain, the United Kingdom and other Western European countries have also been reported. However, it is important to note that Nigerian women who are victims of trafficking are not only sent to Europe. However, due to the clandestine nature of human trafficking, it is difficult to find reliable and accurate data on the number of victims sent to different parts of the world. It is even more difficult to assess the number of victims trafficked during large scale international events, such as the FIFA World Cup in the Russian Federation where, according to the NGO Women's Consortium Nigeria (WOCON), a large number of Nigerian women were victims of sex trafficking.

In 2016, 11,000 Nigerian women and girls were trafficked to Italy, almost twice as many as in 2015 (The Guardian, January 12, 2017). Due to a demand for younger girls, children as young as thirteen are now making the dangerous journey to Europe. The United Nations (UN) estimated that 80% or more of these underage victims arriving in Europe were victims of sex trafficking (The Guardian, August 8, 2016). Traffickers take advantage of the refugee crises across Africa and the absence of a real government in Libya to send young Nigerian girls across the Mediterranean basin. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the vast majority of Nigerian migrants who arrived by boat to the Italian coast in 2016 came from Benin City in the State of Edo, a

region that accounts for only 2% of the country's population. It is thanks to the money earned by children who have left on the northern shores of the Mediterranean that the city can survive, as it has been severely affected by industrial decline for many years, and is today riddled by human trafficking networks (Fondation Scelles, October 2017).

Located in Southern Nigeria, Edo State is extremely poor. In 2016, the state had the highest number of reports of trafficked girls in the country (NAPTIP, 2017). Benin City, the state's capital, is recorded as Nigeria's largest human trafficking center. The *mama* (sometimes referred to as the "madam") is a key figure in the organization of sex trafficking in Nigeria. Madams seek out young girls and recruit them, while also financing and managing the entire process until exploitation. The number of female traffickers has increased significantly. In the countries of destination, the Madams control and watch over their victims as soon as they arrive. Most of these Madams are former victims who, after repaying their debt from their journey, became procurers in their own right. Some Madams who specialize in recruitment voluntarily return home to search for victims.

The most common way for criminal groups to proceed is to take the victim from Benin City to Lagos, where they hand her over to another trafficker who is responsible for the next step of the journey. The trip can take up to two years.

Nigerian migrants are often told by traffickers and smugglers to travel illegally to Europe to obtain legal documents. Information and services provided by traffickers to victims in Nigeria differ. Some plan the entire journey, including transport to travel documents, while others only provide information on how to migrate to Europe. Traffickers may contact women and

girls' families directly and offer to help their daughters to migrate abroad for a fee of about 10,000 or 20,000 Nigerian Naira (NGN) (between USD 27.8 and USD 55.6). Often, families need to borrow money or sell their properties to pay the requested amount. If the women handle the business themselves, they have to go into debt, thus initiating the spiral of exploitation.

Most victims think they are indebted to traffickers, however they are not informed of the amount of their debt until they arrive in Europe. Others are aware of the actual amount of the debt, but do not necessarily understand how much it represents or what they will need to do in order to repay it. Many women think that the amount of the debt announced in Nigerian was in Nigerian currency. It is not until they reach the country of destination that they are made aware of the sum they owe to be reimbursed is, in reality, expressed in euros.

Traffickers may increase victims' debts as punishment for 'bad' behavior. Abortions or unwanted pregnancies also result in "fines". In addition, air travel is more expensive than maritime travel, as a result of costs of travel documents and airfare. The debt rises again upon the women's arrival in Europe, where the traffickers charge higher interest rates, making reimbursement even less probable. *Mamas* take disproportionate sums of the women and young girls' earnings to pay for their food or lodging. In 2015, the debt contracted for a journey from Nigeria to Europe ranged from EUR 40,000 to EUR 60,000 (USD 44,933 to USD 67,394), depending on the mode of transportation (EASO, 2017).

Many young women are sexually abused and exploited during their journey to Europe, in addition to what they will suffer upon arrival. Many risk becoming pregnant during the journey after being

raped by their traffickers. Some do not even make it to Europe because they cannot afford the transportation costs between Libya and Italy, or between Morocco and Spain. Consequently, many are held in Libya and forced into prostitution in detention camps until they have the means to pay for the rest of the trip. Some of these women never reach Europe.

Upon their arrival in Italy, the young girls are taken to reception centers for refugees and migrants where they are sheltered, protected from traffickers and informed of their rights. However, most of them are ordered to call a specific individual so that either a *mama* or a trafficker can pick them up once they arrive on Italian territory.

In the meantime, the families of these women expect to receive money regularly from their daughters abroad. However, victims are typically not allowed to send money home until their debt has been repaid in full. Some attempt to hide some of their earnings in different places to send this money back home, unbeknownst to the traffickers. If they are caught in the act, a fine will be added to their initial debt. Even after they have repaid their debt, victims may feel compelled to continue prostituting themselves, as they do not have any other remunerative prospects to continue to live and support their at home. They then remain under the control of a *mama* before becoming a *mama* in their own right, once the debt has been repaid.

### **Aggravating factors**

The main reasons many women migrate to Europe are due to being pressured by their family, or the desire of young women to support their relatives in Nigeria. Families in Edo State, where many young girls are exploited in sex trafficking, are often poor and illiterate (EASO, 2017).

Sometimes, families, and even their daughters themselves, are deceived by traffickers about the purpose and “finality” of their destination. However, even when they do know the cause, they may not fully understand the mortal risks that await them during their journey, and on arrival at their destination. Sending women and young girls abroad has become a symbol of success for some families who pride themselves on having their daughters in Europe earning and sending them money.

### **Manipulation through *juju***

*Juju* remains a widespread singularity in Nigerian trafficking, as it allows traffickers to keep their victims under their control. This traditional practice in West Africa of bewitchments by *juju* priests results in the manipulation of people’s lives. After the *juju* ritual is performed on an altar by the *juju* priest, the victim promises to reimburse their trafficker, to never run away and not to reveal their identity. The victim is told that if they break their oath, terrible things will happen to them or their family.

*Juju* may not always be used as an instrument of intimidation and coercion. It can also be used after recruitment to facilitate the travel and trafficking. *Juju* only becomes a threat when the woman is in a situation of exploitation, and becomes a binding part of the oath if women try to betray it.

If the victim wants to leave the prostitution network, she may experience physical abuse and be threatened with the consequences of *juju*. The purpose of the oath is to prevent the disclosure of the traffickers’ identity or the details of the ritual itself, and to ensure that victims pay their debts as agreed without creating problems.

In addition, the opportunities available to Nigerian women in Italy are very limited,

so much so that they prefer to remain in prostitution as they know that they will not find a job due to their status and lack of language skills. The fear of leaving this situation is easily explained. *Mama*’s are able to contact other traffickers within Nigeria to attack their families.

Young girls who manage to leave their *mama* suffer significant psychological problems because they imagine themselves having to bear the curse of *juju*. It is possible that these psychological consequences may be the result of the trauma they were subjected to. Some survivors show symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In Italy, trafficked individuals can obtain a temporary residence permit if they report their trafficker. However, many Nigerian women claim to not know who the traffickers are, or claim to be unable to identify them. Many young Nigerian girls are afraid of the consequences of their oath. They risk being sent back to Nigeria, where they can fall back into the hands of a network.

### **Female prostitution and exploitation in Nigeria**

Prostitution is very significant within the country itself, with 103,506 prostituted persons reported in 2018 (USAIDS, 2018). With high rates of unemployment (14% according to the National Bureau of Nigerian Statistics), an evident lack of professional opportunities, a moribund economy that is far too dependent on crude oil prices, the main export resource, the state of the country encourages exploitation. Street prostitution, which is the most visible form, remains prevalent in large urban centers. Although brothels are prohibited, these establishments can still be found in all Nigerian cities. There are countless hotels and places of operation “in the streets of Lagos, Ibadan, Owerri, Port

Harcourt or Calabar, in Abuja or Lokoja” (*The Guardian*, April 2, 2018). Money from the sex trade also floods strip clubs and nightclubs in the capital and elsewhere. The wealthy, local elites, politicians, foreigners and all those who own a little more than the rest of the vast majority of the population are the main consumers-exploiters.

The student environment is particularly affected. Every university campus has its own center for prostitution where procurers organize their exploitation (*Pulse*, November 21, 2017). Rapidly perceived as a way to finance their studies, pay their rent and earn money to support their family or buy material goods, prostitution affects all social classes (*Pulse*, January 23, 2017). Sexual acts may be granted to other students in exchange for homework assistance, or even to lecturers for favorable grades (*Pulse*, November 21, 2017).

International trafficking networks seem less active locally, as many young girls reportedly do not have procurers. However, this also means that the government does not consider these women to be victims, and they therefore cannot have access to assistance programs they are entitled to in order to leave prostitution.

Northern Nigeria suffers from another problem. Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist organization, has caused the displacement of more than 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad region, at the crossroads of the borders with Cameroun, Chad and Niger (*Daily Post*, January 6, 2017). Many women, displaced in this way, have been forced into prostitution in order to survive and feed their families. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps within the country. Some government officials in the camps use their status to sexually abuse and exploit

women and young girls. Public officials and camp workers threaten to withhold food rations to obtain sex from the women in the camps. There have also been reports of rape and abuse by these individuals. Traffickers, especially in the Edo region, come to the camps in groups to recruit underage girls to be sent to Italy, where they will be sexually exploited. Some young girls abducted by Boko Haram and who subsequently managed to escape decide to leave to Europe, despite the dangers. After having them take a sedative without their knowledge, some are even murdered on the way to Europe to collect their organs.

### **Male Prostitution**

While not as prevalent as female prostitution, male prostitution still does exist in Nigeria. Under Nigerian law, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by up to 14 years’ imprisonment. The majority of Nigerian population holds a negative view of homosexuals (*Human Rights Watch*, October 20, 2016). Cases of male homosexual prostituted persons who have been abused by the police have been reported. Nigeria offers no protection against discrimination to homosexual individuals, who find themselves vulnerable to attacks due to the very high degree of homophobia in the country. There is no recourse for them if they are victims of abuse. In July of 2017, “40 gay men and boys, some of whom were no more than 13 years old, were arrested in a gay nightclub in a hotel located in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of Nigeria’s economic capital, Lagos” (*ABC*, October 22, 2017).

### **HIV/AIDS**

Nigeria has the second largest rate of HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, with 3.1% of its population affected, or 3.2 million

people living with the disease (UNAIDS, 2015). Social stigmatization is important around HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Among prostituted people and drug users, the rate reaches 32% of new infections in 2015, although they only represent 3.4% of the population (NACA, 2015). 25% of prostituted women and 19% of prostituted men are carriers of HIV/AIDS. These figures are eight times higher than the general population. This highlights the heightened risks associated with prostitution due to exposure to many different individuals, and a lack or inconsistent use of condoms (NACA, 2015). Nevertheless, there is an apparent growing awareness of the importance of condom use, at least among prostituted women, as 93% of them reported to have used a condom during their last sexual encounter, as compared to 55% of prostituted men. This difference in figures may be partly explained by the fact that women fear pregnancy during unprotected sex, which is not the case for men who, moreover, are not very concerned about the risks of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV/AIDS.

### **Early marriages**

Child marriage remains a major problem in Nigeria, especially in the northern regions, where cultural and religious norms push many families to marry off their daughters at a young age. Nationwide, from 2008 to 2014, the rate of marriage for girls under 18 years old was 43% (EASO, 2017). In northern Nigeria, however, 78% of girls are married before they reach 18 years of age, which is the highest rate in the world. In 2003, Nigeria passed the Child Rights Act, which set the minimum age for marriage at 18 years old, and criminalized those who facilitated child marriages with a punishment of up to seven years' imprisonment. However, not all states in the

country have ratified this Act, and others have ratified it but lowered the age to preserve their cultural traditions. In practice, even in states where it has been ratified, the law is not fully enforced and families decide to marry their young daughters at an age they deem appropriate.

Because of widespread poverty in Nigeria, some families sell their daughters mainly by marrying them, as they receive a wedding dowry. Others will marry their young daughters in fear of them having sex before marriage. Boko Haram also abducts young girls in order to force them into early marriage with their fighters. Many of these girls will be stigmatized if they manage to escape and return home, especially if they have a child from these unions.

### **Progress and recommendations**

The Nigerian government continues its efforts against human trafficking and sexual exploitation. However, as demonstrated by its demotion in Tier 2 Watch List in the 2017 US Department of State report on Trafficking in Persons, there is still much progress to be made. *NAPTIP* grants increased in 2018 by NGN 1.5 million (USD 4,170) compared to 2017 (US Department of State, 2018). The government has trained over 200 officials in the fight against trafficking in 2017. It also identified and referred more than 1,000 victims of trafficking in the same year and referred them to *NAPTIP* (US Department of State, 2018). The government has collaborated with numerous other countries to prosecute Nigerian traffickers abroad. Compared to 2017, *NAPTIP* investigated, prosecuted and convicted more traffickers (US Department of State, 2018). Lastly, in March 2017, the government introduced a law that would increase the fine for illegal migration from about USD 1 to over

USD 3,000, in an attempt to stem the flow of thousands of illegal migrants from leaving the country (*Deutsche Welle*, March 21, 2017). The Nigerian government should consider several options when fighting against trafficking and sexual exploitation, including developing the enforcement of its anti-trafficking law and continuing to work with foreign governments in search of Nigerian networks trafficking women and girls abroad. In addition, it could also increase the insufficient sentences for individuals who lead adults and children into prostitution, as they currently lack stringency.

The government should ensure that victims of trafficking are able to resume a normal life in Nigeria, without the constant threat of violence they experienced when they were victims of trafficking. A victim reintegration scheme would be essential in these circumstances, as well as means to raise awareness of the nature of human trafficking in order to reduce the isolation victims may face upon their return. For example, the Italian NGO *Slaves No More* is helping Nigerian women who are victims of trafficking to return to their country and find economic alternatives to rebuild themselves. The Nigerian government should raise awareness about the reality of sex trafficking abroad, as increased awareness could potentially discourage girls from leaving the country. A victim reintegration scheme and protection program should be able to limit the power of traffickers over their victims.

Finally, the aim would be to enforce, throughout the country, a law criminalizing child marriage and to apply a zero tolerance policy for reports of sexual abuse and rape in camps for internally displaced persons. Poverty reduction throughout the country, economic development, strengthening gender equality, promoting cultural changes that

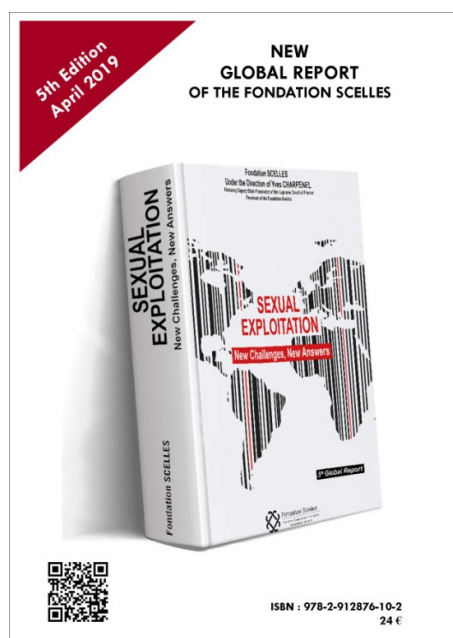
respect the human rights of women and children are essential to hope for long-term improvement, at least locally. Even if progress has been made in the fight against sexual exploitation, the magnitude of the phenomenon would require a real change of scale that the current government does not seem able to provide. The development of international cooperation (agreements between states, Interpol, etc.) also appears to be essential to curb this “exportation of prostitution” which only enriches criminal networks, accentuates corruption at all levels of society, hurts victims and delays economic development in a country that has significant assets.



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The Global Report is produced by the International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation, in collaboration with internal and external experts (magistrates, lawyers, social workers, NGO leaders...), and the support of local NGO correspondents or international researchers.



The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles**, recognized as a public utility since 1994 and as a consultative status with ECOSOC, is an independent, non-profit organization based in Paris (France) dedicated to fight the system of prostitution and the exploitation of prostituted persons, through information, analysis, advocacy, trainings, awareness initiatives and legal actions. The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles** is a co-founding member of the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International) which was launched in 2013 and today brings together 28 abolitionist NGOs from 22 countries.

The **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** (Observatoire international de l'exploitation sexuelle) is a worldwide hub which allows for information exchange on the system of prostitution. The hub is regularly consulted by French and foreign experts including NGOs, institutions, journalists, lawyers, researchers and those involved in the defense of human rights. The goals of the **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** are:

- to analyze all the aspects of the phenomenon: prostitution, sex tourism, procurement, child pornography, sex buyers, human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation...
- to encourage reflection and to take a stand
- to inform the public who are interested in these issues

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