



COVID sees New Zealand remain at 'Tier 2' anti-trafficking ranking for a second year in the 2022 TIP REPORT

The Trafficking in Persons Report 2022 acknowledges that the NZ Government is making significant efforts, but still does not yet “fully meet the minimum [international] standards for the elimination of trafficking”.

New Zealand remains in a 'Tier 2' ranking by the US Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in its 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report (an annual report issued by the U.S State Department which reviews the issue of human trafficking in all countries and assesses what steps are being taken to address it by the relevant government, ranking the efforts accordingly).

The 2022 Report acknowledges the NZ Government has “demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity” **it still does not meet the minimum [international] standards for the elimination of human trafficking**. Therefore, New Zealand remained on Tier 2.

The Human Trafficking Research Coalition (HTRC) agrees with the finding that Government efforts have been stepped up over the past year but more needs to be done in New Zealand to counter human trafficking, particularly in the areas of modern slavery in supply chains and child sex trafficking.

We consider that steps to implement the recommendations in the report need to be taken as a matter of urgency. Trafficking has no place in New Zealand, and the Tier 2 ranking is a wake-up call that more needs to be done, without delay.

“We’ve seen some real efforts by some Government agencies and departments over the past year to address trafficking, but this has been quite inconsistent and we need to see a genuine all-of-government approach to countering trafficking in New Zealand” - Eleanor Parkes, spokesperson Human Trafficking Research Coalition.

“It’s been encouraging to see the robust consultation that has taken place over the past 12 months to begin the process of forming a Modern Slavery Act for New Zealand. Steps have

been taken in the right direction and we urge the government to continue to prioritize implementing a law to hold companies to account for modern slavery and work exploitation in supply chains.” - Claire Gray, spokesperson, Human Trafficking Research Coalition.

Human trafficking in New Zealand

The report highlights instances of exploitation that many would not realise constitute trafficking, such as forced commercial sex work, which it acknowledges is likely “under-reported and under-detected” in New Zealand.

We have heard many case studies and anecdotes over the years of this type of exploitation in New Zealand from children and social workers. *“I ran away when I was 16 after being abused at home. I had no money, so I hitchhiked to Hamilton, but I was sexually abused by the person I rode with. No one would listen to me. Hamilton police said take it to Auckland and the Auckland police told me to go to Hamilton. Then from there everything went downhill. I figured I'd been taken advantage of three times now... so it's not like I had my virginity anymore. That's when I began selling sex, because I needed the money. I'd be shit-scared because I knew I'd be totally at their mercy”* - Case Study from the Update Report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children - Aotearoa New Zealand, November 2021, ECPAT NZ.

“Some victims are coerced into commercial sex through drug dependencies or threats by family members. One service provider reported a notable proportion of its clients reported being forced into commercial sex by their partners in order for their partners to purchase or obtain drugs and other substances” TIP Report 2022.

“It’s good to see the TIP Report highlighting domestic trafficking as something that needs urgent attention as there’s still a strong misconception, even within some government departments, that trafficking involves the crossing of borders and mostly impacts migrant workers, whereas in fact New Zealand citizens can be victims of human trafficking right here” - Eleanor Parkes, spokesperson Human Trafficking Research Coalition.

One major gap highlighted is that New Zealand’s anti-trafficking legislation does not criminalise all forms of child sex trafficking, as it requires a demonstration of deception or coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense. This is inconsistent with international law and the Human Trafficking Research Coalition maintains it amounts to inadequate child protection efforts.

HTRC response

The Human Trafficking Research Coalition agrees with and endorses the recommendations listed in the report. Further, the HTRC recommends that the Government invest resources and effort to research the risk of and occurrence of exploitation in high-risk sectors and the risk to and exploitation of individuals from vulnerable communities. We also recommend the Government collect and share data on key trends and risks identified. We consider that the lack of research into trafficking within New Zealand and limited data collection is hindering New Zealand’s efforts to combat trafficking.

It is positive that New Zealand has taken some steps to combat trafficking, particularly efforts by MBIE, DIA and OCEANZ, but as the TIP report clearly sets out, there is far more work that urgently needs to be done to prevent and address human trafficking in Aotearoa.

“The Trafficking in Persons Report 2022 is right to draw attention to the gap in the Government’s response around the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. This extreme type of sexual abuse uses children as commodities and urgently needs to be addressed in New Zealand” - Eleanor Parkes, spokesperson Human Trafficking Research Coalition.

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