



# **THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ANNUAL REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (2021)**

Section 45 of the Trafficking in Persons Act Chapter 12:10 mandates the Minister with responsibility for National Security to lay before Parliament, an Annual Report on Trafficking in Persons in Trinidad and Tobago. This report examines the counter trafficking response of the country for 2021.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a hidden crime that affects the most vulnerable in society. The Covid-19 pandemic (the pandemic) which erupted in 2020 and continued in 2021, worsened existing poverty, and vulnerabilities as the measures implemented to control the spread of the virus in 2020 caused the rapid decline of economic conditions and severe financial difficulties for many in society. As social distancing guidelines led to a virtual existence in both personal and professional life, human trafficking moved to a virtual online platform.

Countries slowly re-opened their borders in 2021 albeit with many restrictions such mandatory Covid-19 testing and travel authorization prior to embarkation. Traffickers responded to the new reality the pandemic created, by increasing online sexual exploitation, recruiting victims and grooming young girls for sexual exploitation on social media and apps such as Tinder, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YOLO, and Lemon. Pornographic imageries online increased significantly along with the sexual exploitation of adults and children which continued in private homes and apartments. The growth of online trafficking in persons severely impacted the detection of victims.

Although the pandemic changed the world, trafficking in persons and the exploitation of vulnerable people continued. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, defines trafficking in persons as *“...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”*

Traffickers adapted to the inconveniences brought about by the pandemic, changing their modus operandi to suit the new reality finding new ways to recruit, manipulate and exploit unsuspecting victims.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CONTEXT

As noted in previous Annual Reports, Trinidad and Tobago became a signatory to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (TIP Protocol) supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and enacted domestic legislation to give effect to the TIP Protocol through The Trafficking in Persons Act (the TIP Act), making the act of trafficking in persons a serious criminal offence in this country. Trinidad and Tobago is considered a source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of men, women and children mainly for sexual exploitation and forced labour, however, based on the data, it is mainly a destination country.

Trinidad and Tobago like the rest of the world was severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The country closed its borders on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, and introduced several control measures to control the spread of the virus. While the government re-opened the border on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to persons vaccinated against the virus and unvaccinated citizens only, foreign nationals continued to enter the country illegally from ports in Venezuela demonstrating a healthy human smuggling network. This potentially undermined health control measures as it was noted that the Brazilian variant of the virus was first detected in Trinidad and Tobago, in a Venezuelan migrant who had entered the country from Venezuela.

Despite social distancing measures and closure of bars, clubs, brothels and other businesses, the demand for commercial sex within the country continued and fueled the sexual exploitation of female migrants. Sixteen (16) victims of trafficking were identified in 2021, fourteen (14) of whom were rescued from forced prostitution. The exploitation of female minors continued as four (4) of the victims were under the age of eighteen.

### **Responding to trafficking in persons**

On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013 the Counter Trafficking Unit (CTU) was established in accordance with Section 11 of the TIP Act to implement the provisions of the legislation and begin investigating cases of trafficking in persons, identifying, and assisting victims, prosecuting offenders, and raising awareness among the populace about the crime. Within the first year of the proclamation of the TIP Act, thirteen (13) victims had been identified and assisted, and nine (9) persons were charged and appeared in court for human trafficking and other related offences.

The National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons (NTFATIP) was established in July 2014 in accordance with Section 5 of the TIP Act. Its mandate is to develop policies, direct the strategic counter trafficking response of the country and measure and evaluate the progress of Trinidad and Tobago in preventing human trafficking, protecting, and assisting victims, prosecuting perpetrators, and assess the effectiveness of public awareness programmes.

### **Reporting Requirements under the Trafficking in Persons Act**

Section 45 of the TIP Act requires that an annual report on trafficking in persons be laid in Parliament by the Minister responsible for National Security. The report and shall include:

- a) The number of identified victims
- b) The number of initiated investigations
- c) The number of persons arrested
- d) The number of commenced prosecutions and their outcomes
- e) Any other pertinent matter which the Minister considers necessary.

The 2021 Annual Report on Trafficking in Persons examines Trinidad and Tobago's counter-trafficking response within the '4-P Framework'—Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnerships. The data findings in this report might be impacted by the following factors: under- or inconsistent identification of victims of human trafficking, confidentiality concerns affecting the reporting of some variables, or general lack of available information.

## 1. PREVENTION

Preventing trafficking in persons includes educating the population about the crime of trafficking, how it affects communities and the guiles employed by the traffickers to enslave individuals. Strategies to alert the citizenry include public awareness campaigns through the engagement of the media-press, radio and television, and formal seminars, workshops, and presentations. It also requires well-trained staff who can recognize vulnerabilities, identify victims of trafficking, and disrupt the operations of the traffickers.

### 1.1 National Plan of Action

The National Task Force Working Group Against Trafficking in Persons comprising senior representatives from stakeholder Ministries and non-governmental organizations continued to meet virtually to prepare of the draft National Plan of Action for 2020 and beyond. The plan included measures for the:

- Prevention of trafficking in persons and trafficking of children
- Identification of, assistance to and protection of victims
- Prosecution of traffickers
- Partnerships and collaboration

### 1.2 Public Outreach

As in 2020, very limited initiatives to raise awareness among the public and build capacity among the staff were undertaken in 2021 due to social distancing guidelines still in place and limitations to in-person gatherings.

The Ministry of National Security continued the partnership with the producers of the radio talk show 'Eye on Dependency' to discuss matters on human trafficking and other national security related issues as these could be undertaken virtually. The program was aired every Sunday.

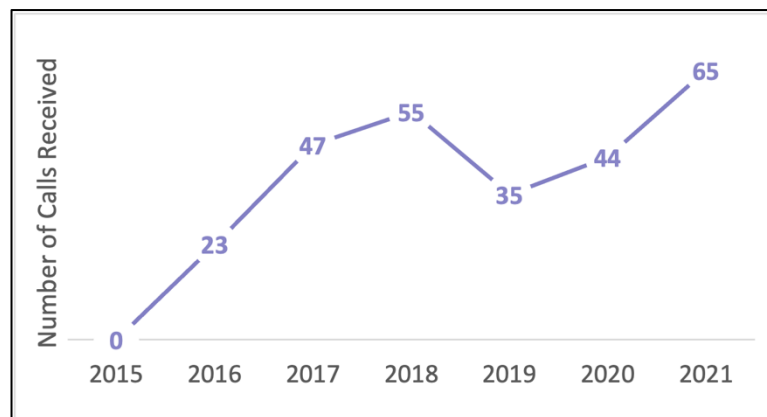
### 1.3 Sensitization Campaigns

Sensitizations sessions were halted in 2021 due to the control measures implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19.

### 1.4 CTU Hotline 800-4CTU

The toll-free hotline 800-4CTU was launched in March 2015 to enable members of the public or victims to report suspected trafficking in persons. Sixty-five (65) calls were received in 2021, compared to forty-four (44) in 2020. The number of calls received since the launch of the hotline is shown in Chart 1:

**Chart 1: Calls Received on CTU Hotline**



### 1.5 Social Media

The use of social media networks has become the main way for people to interact in modern societies. Online platforms are increasingly being used by traffickers to identify, contact, and entrap victims in exploitative scams. In recognition of this fact, the CTU uses some of the following available platforms to disseminate information about human trafficking and provide another avenue for the public and potential or actual victims to contact the Unit:

- **Facebook:** Counter Trafficking Unit TT
- **Twitter:** @CTU\_TT
- **Instagram:** @countertraffickingunit\_tt
- **YouTube:** Counter Trafficking Unit TT
- **Email 1:** [countertraffickingunit@mns.gov.tt](mailto:countertraffickingunit@mns.gov.tt)
- **Email 2:** [countertraffickingunit@gmail.com](mailto:countertraffickingunit@gmail.com)

### 1.6 Staff Training

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the training of staff in 2021.

## 2. PROTECTION

Protection centers on proactive identification of victims, referring them for a comprehensive array of services, directly providing or funding NGOs to provide those services, and supporting the victims as they rebuild their lives. The active detection and identification of victims by first responders and service providers are critically important to government's ability to combat human trafficking. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the trafficking of persons was no less prevalent. New measures were instituted by shelters as potential victims needed to be tested for Covid-19 and quarantined before being accepted into shelters.

### 2.1 Investigating, Screening, and Identification of Victims

In 2021, the CTU received one hundred and two (102) reports of suspected cases of human trafficking from sources such as the Immigration Division, Police Stations, confidential informants, NGOs and the CTU hotline. Six (6) exercises were conducted based on the reports and twenty-nine (29) investigations initiated. During the exercises, nineteen (19) persons were rescued from potentially exploitative situations.

Fifty-two (52) people were screened for human trafficking indicators by the CTU and twenty-three (23) persons—two (2) adult males, and twenty-one (21) females were suspected as being potential victims of trafficking. Table 1 shows the suspected victims by nationality, gender, and type of presumed exploitation.

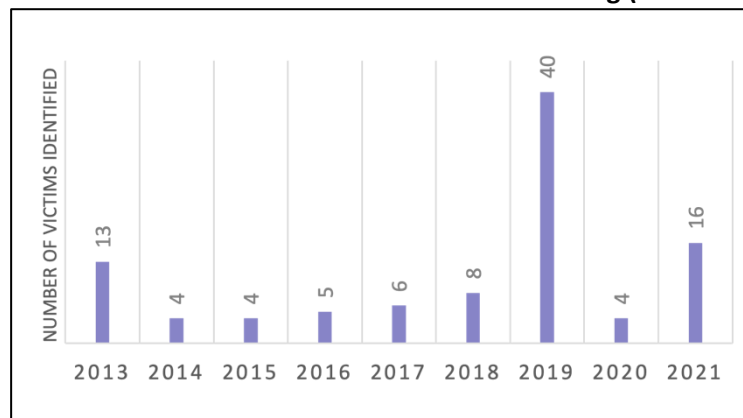
**Table 1: Number of Suspected Victims by Nationality, Gender and Type of Exploitation (2021)**

Country of Nationality	# Male	Type of Exploitation	# Female	Type of Exploitation
India	2	Forced Labour	0	N/A
Venezuela	0	N/A	21	Sexual
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>21</b>	

#### 2.1.1 Victim Identification

In-depth interviews with the suspected victims and intensive investigations led to sixteen persons being verified as victims of human trafficking—two (2) male Indian nationals and fourteen (14) female Venezuelan nationals. Four (4) of the female victims were minors, three aged sixteen and one aged seventeen. The sixteen (16) identified victims in 2021 brought the total number of positively identified victims of trafficking for the period 2013 to 2021 to one hundred (100). Chart 2 shows the number of victims identified for each year.

**Chart 2: Number of Identified Victims of trafficking (2013-2021)**





### 2.1.2 Victim Profile

There is no single profile for victims of human trafficking, however vulnerability is the common underlying trait. Deprivation, poverty, unemployment, family crisis and abuse are the main vulnerabilities that can lead to and increase the chance of victimization. Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of their victims, deliberately targeting people they believe are 'easy to exploit'. They then use the allure of opportunity and provide false promises of lucrative jobs, stability, education, reliable income, or romance to attract the targeted victim. Once in the country of destination, traffickers use different means to subdue their victims including physical abuse, rape, gang rape, starvation, beatings, and forced drug use, threats of violence to the victims and the victims' families, and/or confinement.

### 2.1.3 The Act: Targeting, Recruiting and Transporting Victims

Based on the accounts of the victims detected in 2021, all came from families in poor economic circumstances. They all wanted to work to ease their financial hardships, the two males entered the country legally by air while the females all entered the country illegally.

The victims were recruited by word of mouth where someone they knew told them about a job opportunity in Trinidad; they were offered jobs as bartenders, pub waitresses, domestic workers cooks and handymen. Once they showed interest or agreed, the traffickers in Trinidad communicated with them via WhatsApp or Facebook and made the arrangements for them to travel to Trinidad. On arrival in the country the unsuspecting victims were met and transported to the place where they would be held captive and exploited.

### 2.1.4 The Means: Control Methods

The women told investigators that they were locked up, beaten, raped, their IDs taken away, and forced into prostitution. They were told of a previously unknown 'debt' they had to re-pay for the trip to Trinidad ranging from US\$1500 to US\$2000. They were taken to private houses, and hotels in different parts of the country to perform sex acts with men who paid the traffickers.

### 2.1.5 The Purpose: Exploitation

The purpose of trafficking a person is always the exploitation of the victim in some form, for the financial or other benefit of the trafficker. Globally sexual exploitation and forced labour has been the predominant form of exploitation. The victims in 2021 were trafficked for the purpose of forced prostitution, sexual servitude and forced labour.

The data on trafficking in persons in Trinidad and Tobago from 2013, shows that sexual exploitation has been the dominant form of exploitation. Ninety (90) of the one hundred (100) victims of trafficking, all victims identified in this country have been subjected to sexual exploitation (including forced prostitution and sexual servitude). The other ten (10) victims were exposed to forced labour (including domestic servitude). The disparity between the trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and forced labour is highlighted in Chart 3:

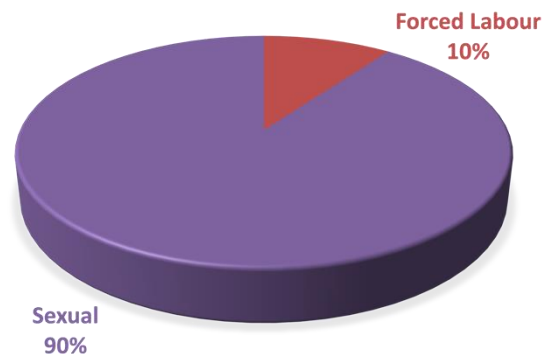
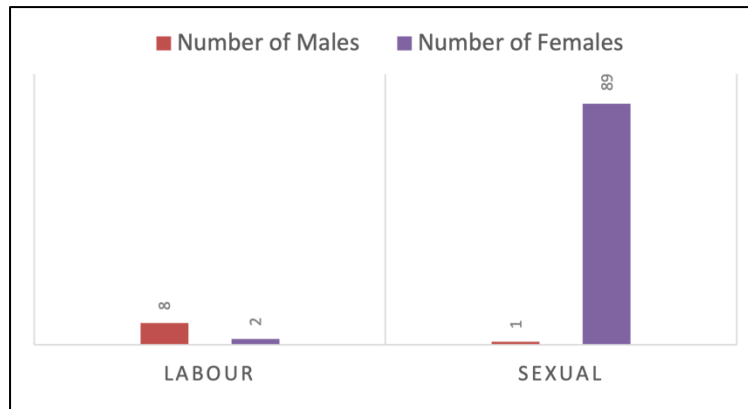


Chart 3: Type of Exploitation (2013-2021)

### 2.1.6 Exploitation by Gender

Across the world, women and girls are the most vulnerable to human trafficking, mainly sex trafficking. In Trinidad and Tobago ninety-one (91) of the one hundred (100) victims were female- twenty-seven (27) were minors. Of that number two (2) females were victims of forced labour while the other females were sexually exploited. All but one male victim, a minor, were subjected to forced labour, the male minor was the victim of sexual servitude. This disproportionality is represented in Chart 4:

**Chart 4: Type of Exploitation by Gender (2013-2021)**

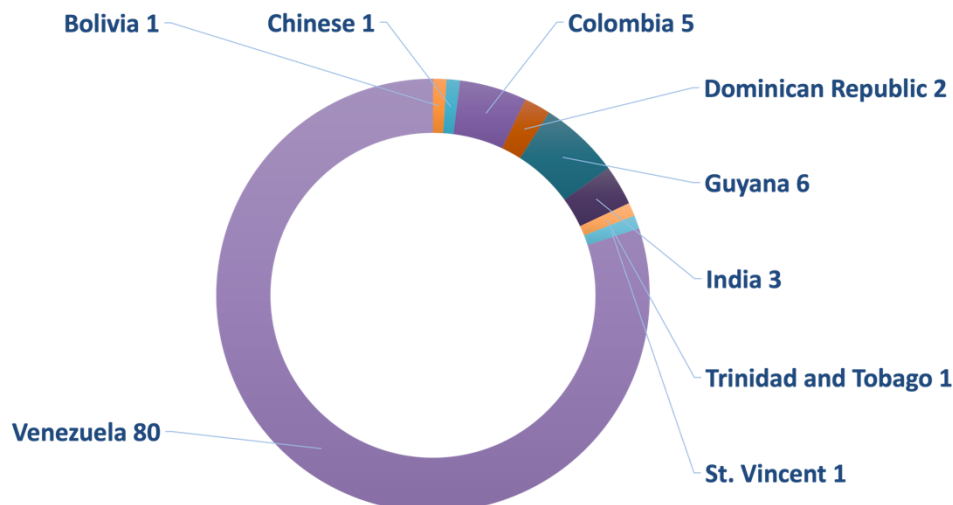


### 2.1.7 Nationality of Victims

Migrants are the most detected victims of trafficking in persons in Trinidad and Tobago. This is consistent with global findings that migrants are most vulnerable to trafficking in the country of destination/detection. In 2021, nationals of Venezuela were again the main identified victims of trafficking; there were two victims from India.

Data from 2013 to 2021 show that ninety-nine (99) of the one hundred (100) identified victims were foreign nationals with Venezuelan citizens being the most exploited in this country, accounting for eighty percent (80%) of all detected victims of trafficking in persons. **Chart 5** shows the nationality of all victims.

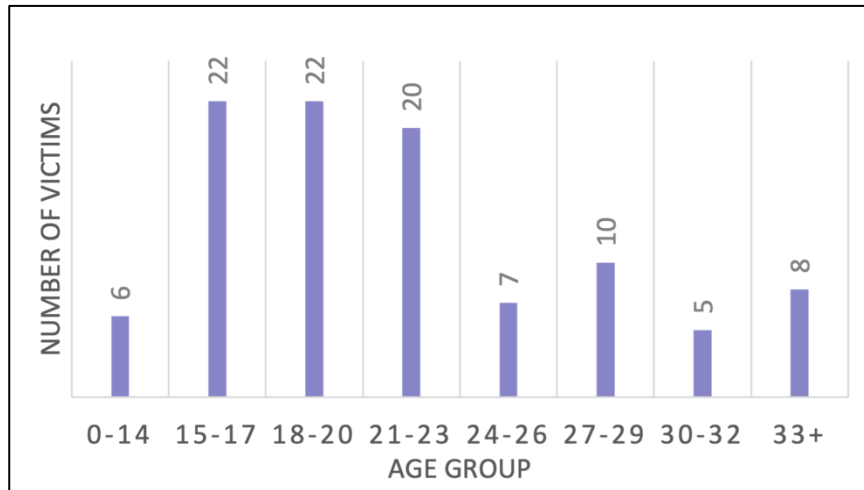
**Chart 5: Nationality of Victims (2013-2021)**



### 2.1.8 Age of Victims

Four of the victims identified in 2021 were under the age of eighteen, three were sixteen (16) years old and one was seventeen (17) demonstrating the continued exploitation of and demand for young women and girls, a worrying trend for this country. Over the period 2013 to 2021, seventy (70) of the one hundred (100) verified victims of human trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago were between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three. Even more concerning is the fact that 28% of all victims were minors. Chart 6 shows the age of the victims.

**Chart 6: Age of Victims for period 2013-2021**



### 2.2 Assistance

Assistance to and protection of victims of trafficking includes protecting their privacy and identity as well as aiding their physical, psychological, and social recovery. Service providers must consider the age, gender, nationality and cultural background, and special needs of victims, and respect their human rights. The physical and psychological consequences resulting from the abuse and trauma experienced by the victims continue to affect their well-being long after they exit the trafficking situation. From the recounts of the lived experience of the victims detected in Trinidad, corroborated by the investigations conducted by the CTU investigators, there is no doubt that the victims suffered severe exploitation and trauma at the hands of their traffickers, especially those sex trafficked.

The Working Committee for the delivery of care to victims of trafficking continued to meet virtually under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS). The draft manual for the care of victims of trafficking was completed and sent to stakeholders for comment.

### **2.2.1 Accommodation**

Once a victim has been rescued, they must immediately be placed into safe accommodation as the law frowns upon victims being placed in detention facilities. Section 37 (3) of the TIP Act states:

*“In the absence of exigent circumstances, victims of trafficking, once identified as such, shall not be housed in prisons or other detention facilities for accused or convicted criminals.”*

Consequently, suitable accommodation is of utmost importance.

Accommodation for victims and suspected victims, both adult and child, continues to be the greatest challenge for the CTU, the Children’s Authority and Social Workers. Eighteen (18) minors were still in the care of the Children’s Authority in 2021. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) working with the CTU and the CATT, continued to provide accommodation and assistance to fifteen (15) minors aged between fourteen and seventeen and forty (40) victims in total since 2019.

### **2.2.2 Physical and Mental Well-Being**

The victim, upon rescue, must be taken for medical attention and assessment of their immediate personal needs such as food, clothing and intimate supplies. In 2021, all victims had to be tested for Covid-19 and quarantined for the stipulated time set by the Ministry of Health. For the very young victims rescued in 2021 the isolation of quarantine was a difficult time for them. With most victims of trauma, psychological counselling is an essential element of their rehabilitation. The Family Planning Association and Families in Action along with other private professionals who volunteer their services to shelters and NGOs provided medical assistance and psychological counselling to the victims. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFA) also provided psychosocial support to the victims of trafficking.

### **2.2.3 Caring for Foreign-Born Unaccompanied Minors**

Section 44 (1) of the TIP Act mandates the CTU and the CATT provide assistance to ‘victims who are children in a manner that is in the child’s best interest and appropriate to the child’s situation. The increasing number of foreign minors trafficked for sexual exploitation continued to challenge the ability of the Children’s Authority and CTU to appropriately care for these children.

While the CATT encountered obstacles in housing the significant number of children, all the minors were taken for medical and psychological assessment and were continually assessed by Social Workers who visited the home twice per week or as needed. All of the minors were provided with regular counselling sessions, exposed to art therapy and had the opportunity to learn English and other life skills.

### 3. PROSECUTION

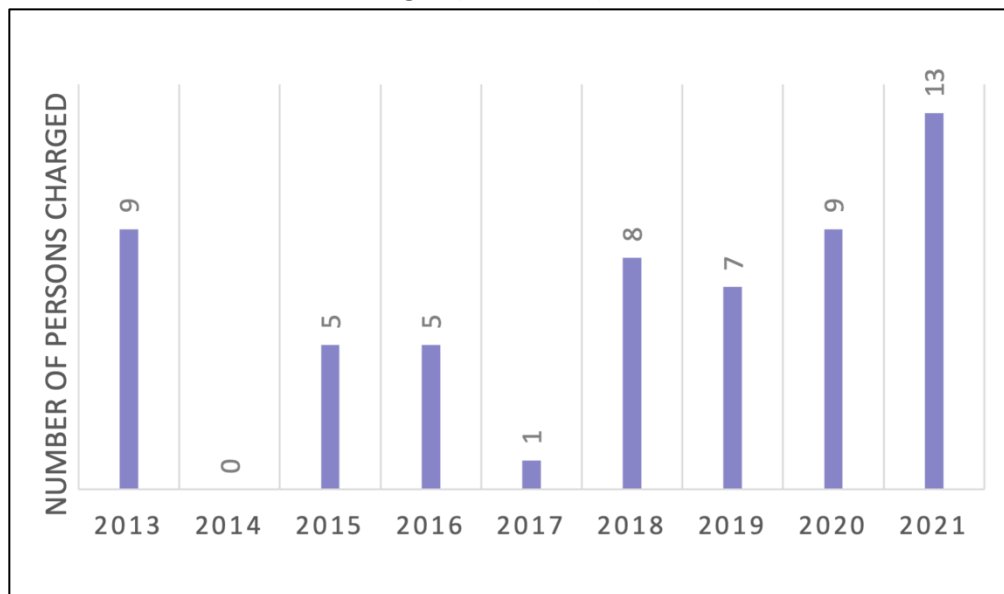
Prosecution focuses on identifying the perpetrators responsible for committing the crime of trafficking in persons and bringing them to justice. Perpetrators can be men and women, intimate partners, complete strangers to the victims, criminal organizations, business owners, peers, family members, diplomats, farm owners, factory operators, large or small companies, or gangs. Thorough investigation leading to the prosecution and punishment of traffickers provides justice to victims and discourages further trafficking crimes.

#### 3.1 Arrests and Criminal Charges

The CTU received one hundred and two (102) reports of suspected cases of human trafficking, conducted six (6) exercises and launched further investigations into twenty-nine (29) matters. Fourteen (14) people were detained for questioning and thirteen (13) persons were subsequently charged with trafficking in persons, trafficking in children and other related offences.

Since the enactment of the TIP Act in 2013, fifty-six (56) persons have been charged for trafficking in persons and other related offences. Chart 7 shows the number of persons charged since 2013.

**Chart 7: Number of Persons Charged (2013- 2021)**



#### 3.2 Status of Cases

As at the end of 2021, eight accused had been committed to stand trial in the High Court, the others remained at the preliminary inquiry stage in the Magistrate's Court. One female Venezuelan pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting two minors to enter the country illegally. None of the matters at the High Court have been completed.

### 3.3 Charges Laid Against the Accused (2013-2021)

While the Trafficking in Persons Act is the main legislation under which charges are proffered for the crime of trafficking in persons and trafficking in children, the offences committed against the victims can constitute a breach of other pieces of legislation including the Children's Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Offences Against the Person Act, the Anti-Gang Act, the Firearms Act and the Dangerous Drugs Act. It was noted that some traffickers are involved in the drug trade and possess firearms, and force their victims, to consume drugs and threaten to shoot them and their family. Table 2 shows the charges proffered against the accused over the period 2013 to 2021.

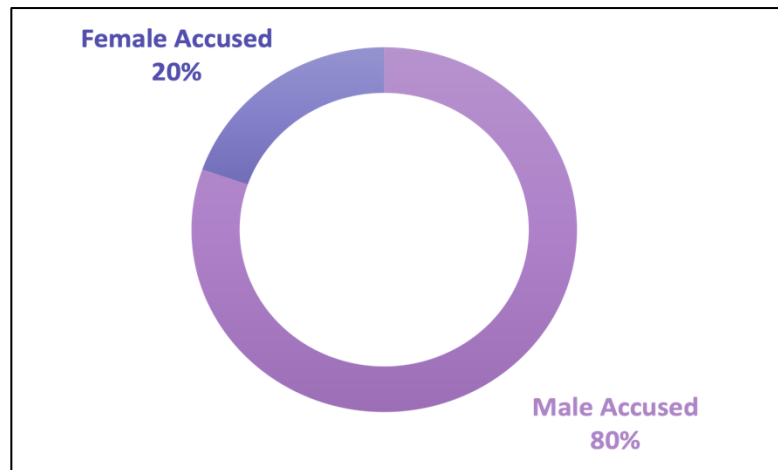
**Table 2: Charges Proffered**

CHARGE	LEGISLATION
Receiving for the purpose of exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 17
Receiving for the purpose of labour exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 16
Harbouring for the purpose of exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 16
Transporting for the purpose of exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 16
Recruiting a minor for the purpose of exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 18
Receiving a minor for the purpose of exploitation	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 18
Receiving a benefit for exploitation of a minor	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 26
Knowingly Receiving a benefit from exploitation of a minor	Trafficking in Persons Act Section 26
Inciting a child to engage in sexual activities	Sexual Offences Act
Sexual Penetration	Sexual Offences Act Section 19
Sexual intercourse with a female without consent	Sexual Offences Act Section 4
Sexual intercourse with a minor	Sexual Offences Act
Sexual penetration of a child	Children's Act Section 18
Grievous sexual assault	Sexual Offences Act Section 4A
Rape and indecent assault	Sexual Offences Act
Common assault	Offences Against the Persons Act Section 30
Assault of virtual complainant	Trafficking in Persons Act section 16
Keeping a brothel	Sexual Offences Act Section 22
Assisting in managing a brothel	Sexual Offences Act Section 22
Procuring a person for the purpose of prostitution	Sexual Offences Act 11:28 Section 17
Unlawful arrangement for adoption of a minor	Adoption of Children's Act Section 9 (2)
Possession of Firearm	Firearms Act- section 5 (1)
Possession of Ammunition	Firearms Act- section 5 (1)
Possession of Cocaine for the purpose of Trafficking	Dangerous Drugs Act- section 5 (4)
Possession of Marijuana	Dangerous Drugs Act- section 5 (1)
Being a Gang Leader, initiated, organized planned, financed directed and managed a gang related activity in the recruitment, transportation, transfer, received and harboured a child for the purpose of exploitation	Anti-Gang Act section 5(1)
Supporting a Gang Leader/gang in the commission of a Gang related activity namely Trafficking in children	Anti-Gang Act section 5(1)
Counselling a Gang Leader/Gang in the commission of a Gang related activity namely trafficking in children	Anti-Gang Act section 5(1)

### 3.4 Profile of the Accused: Gender, Nationality and Age

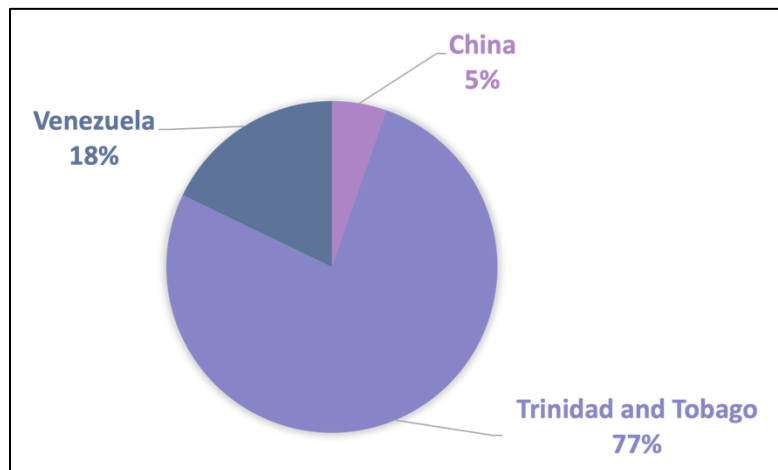
Ten (10) men and three (3) women were charged for trafficking and other related offences in 2021. Of the thirteen (13) accused, five (5) were Venezuelan nationals while eight (8) were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Since 2013, fifty-seven (57) persons—eleven (11) females and forty-six (46) males, have been charged for trafficking and other related offences. Globally men are primarily involved in human trafficking.



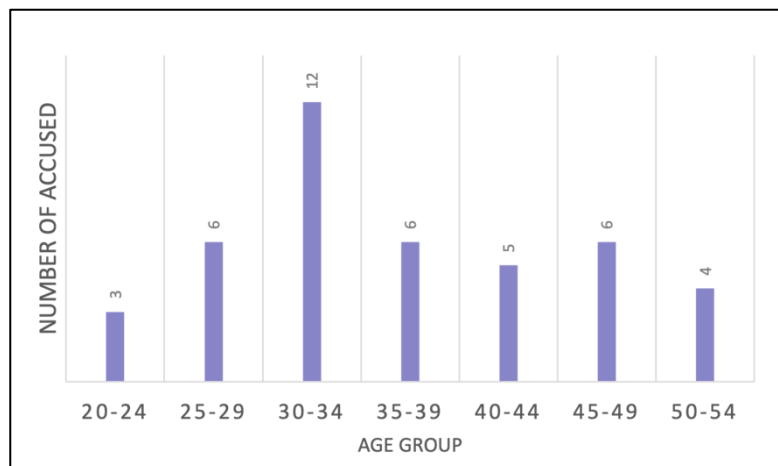
**Chart 8: Gender of Accused (2013-2021)**

Of the fifty-seven (57) accused, three (3) were nationals of China, ten (10) were nationals of Venezuela and forty-three (43) were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Global findings show that persons involved in human trafficking are predominantly citizens of the country where the exploitation of victims is taking place.



**Chart 9: Nationality of Accused (2013-2021)**

All the accused ranged in age from twenty (20) to fifty-two (52) years old (\*based on available data). While the data shows that more persons in their early to mid-thirties have been accused of trafficking in persons and related offences, persons of all age groups have been suspected to be involved this nefarious activity.



**Chart 10: Age of Accused (2013-2021)**

#### 4. PARTNERSHIPS

The CTU continued to partner with local and international organizations to investigate cases of human trafficking, provide accommodation and assistance to victims, facilitate training opportunities, and raise awareness among the population.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) continued to be a key alliance providing accommodation and care packages for victims under a project to aid victims of human trafficking. Between 2019 and 2021, IOM has provided assistance in the form of rent, food and personal supplies to forty (40) victims of trafficking.

The Working Group comprising senior representatives of from Ministries represented on the NTFATIP and representatives from key non-governmental stakeholder organizations continued to meet virtually to draft the National Plan of Action 2021.

The Working Committee for the delivery of care to victims of trafficking also continued to meet virtually to draft a Manual for the care of victims of human trafficking.

##### 4.1 The US Department of State Annual Trafficking in Persons Report

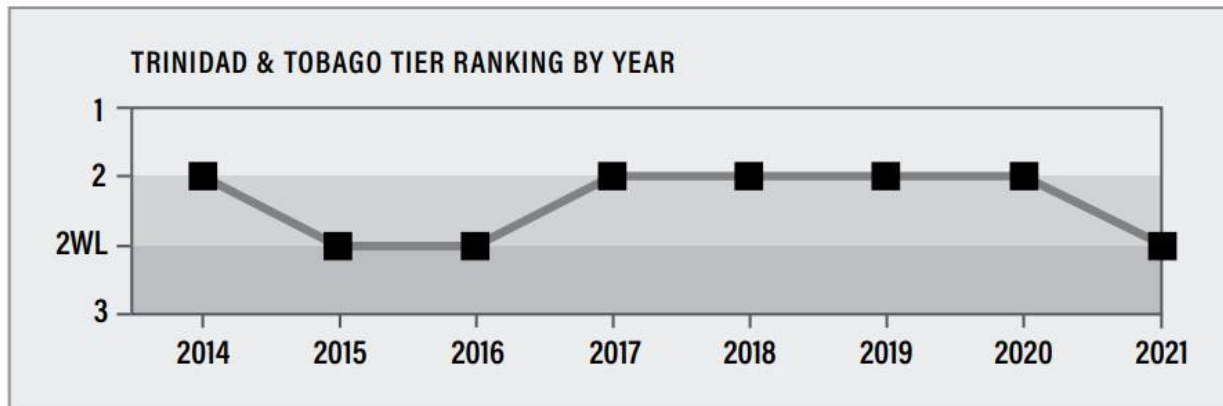
The Trafficking in Persons Report, or the TIP Report, is an annual report issued since 2001 by the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (USDOS TIP Office). The USDOS TIP Office assesses countries' perceived efforts to acknowledge and combat human trafficking during the period April to March and ranks governments based on their findings. The report places countries into tiers based on their compliance with standards outlined in the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). These tiers are:

<b>Tier 1:</b>	Countries whose governments fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards
<b>Tier 2:</b>	Countries whose governments do not fully comply with all of TVPA's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.
<b>Tier 2 Watchlist:</b>	<p>Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or</li> <li>▪ There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or</li> <li>▪ The determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.</li> </ul>
<b>Tier 3:</b>	Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.



Trinidad and Tobago was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in 2021 TIP Report. It was noted in the Report that ‘... the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity. The government conducted fewer investigations, identified fewer victims, and has never convicted a trafficker under its 2011 anti-trafficking law. Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns. Victim identification and services remained weak. Therefore, Trinidad and Tobago was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List’. Chart 11 shows Trinidad and Tobago’s Tier ranking from 2014 to 2021.

**Chart 11: Trinidad and Tobago Tier ranking (2021)**



Source: USDOS TIP Report 2021

The Report listed the following recommendations specific for Trinidad and Tobago:

- Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit officials and staff.
- Increase proactive victim identification, screening, and protection among migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, especially Venezuelans.
- Implement a formalized protocol and a functioning and active coordinating committee for victim care.
- Approve and implement the antitrafficking national action plan.
- Improve the quality of victim care, especially for children, and increase access to certified bilingual social workers, counselors, shelter staff, lawyers, and health care workers.
- Provide adequate funding for robust trafficking investigations and victim services, including accommodations.
- Train law enforcement and prosecutors in proactively identifying, obtaining, preserving, and corroborating evidence of trafficking.
- Ensure victims are not penalized for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit.
- Improve cooperation between the Counter Trafficking Unit (CTU), prosecutors, judiciary, and NGOs to increase the number of cases that proceed to trial.
- Strengthen oversight, regulation, and inspections of private labor recruitment agencies and domestic work locations.
- Increase trauma-informed training on trafficking for NGO, shelter, social services, and law enforcement staff to improve their ability to identify and care for potential trafficking victims and increase civil society representation on the anti-trafficking task force.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Covid-19 pandemic continued well into 2021 pushing more people into vulnerable situations as businesses closed and restrictive control measures implemented to mitigate the spread of the virus. Despite this, trafficking in persons continued to exist in Trinidad and Tobago realized by sixteen victims recovered from their trafficking situation. Trafficking for sexual exploitation remained at elevated levels as fourteen of the victims were trafficked for forced prostitution. The CTU continued to respond to reports of human trafficking and assisted the victims by referring them to rehabilitation services offered by civil society organizations, the Children's Authority and the Ministry of Social Development.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the elimination of human trafficking.