

2.2.10. State response in combating THB

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Within the region, Nigeria is reported as the country that has taken most actions to improve the response to modern slavery in the past few years.266 However, challenges in the effective enforcement of anti-trafficking laws persist, primarily due to severe underfunding of government agencies, lack of expertise in the monitoring, investigation, and victim support.267 NAPTIP - the main agency responsible for combating human trafficking in Nigeria - collaborates with other law enforcement bodies, including the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, various NGOs,268 international agencies - such as IOM,269 UNHCR,270 INTERPOL,271 as well as with EU-funded projects.272 The agency reported ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking by strengthening its collaboration also with the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and other law enforcement bodies. Several raids and arrests of traffickers were carried out in 2024, including major operations in Kano273 and Borno states,274 and in 2025, leading to the rescue of several victims.275 Some of the victims were intercepted at Abuja's Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport.276

According to Roland Nwoha, NAPTIP tends to operate more reactively than proactively, often waiting for complaints before acting. Its effectiveness is further constrained by inadequate funding.277 A senior representative at NCFRMI told the EUAA that, although funding is as a challenge in reintegration efforts, a broader issue lies in the lack of collaboration and the fragmentation of efforts across stakeholders.278 Sources also indicated that corruption has hindered investigations and prosecutions of traffickers.279 Director at WOCON noted that court proceedings are often slow, with few successful prosecutions. Access to justice and convictions remain major challenges, largely due to poor implementation and corruption, despite existing legal structures and a trained judiciary.280

These issues are further exacerbated by the reluctance of victims and their families to provide information about traffickers and their networks.281 Dr Adeyinka explained that many victims are discouraged from reporting trafficking or engaging with law enforcement due to both practical and systemic challenges. The process is often perceived as overly complicated and inaccessible. 'Victims are frequently sent from one office to another, with no clear guidance. For instance, they may be told that their case does not qualify as trafficking, or they are redirected repeatedly without receiving support.' This endless referral cycle leads many to abandon the process altogether.282 Similarly, the Director at WOCON observed that families often discourage returned victims from reporting or cooperating with prosecutions, preferring out-of-court settlements. This is also largely due to a prevailing culture of silence, driven by fear of stigma and community embarrassment.283 There is also a 'widespread, though not always

accurate, perception' that law enforcement will not act, with many victims believing police are corrupt and traffickers can buy influence. As a result, victims rarely report directly and typically engage the justice system through NGOs or NAPTIP, who often act on their behalf.284

Additionally, both victims and their families often fear retaliation from traffickers.285 Roland Nwoha stated that 'the fear of retaliation from traffickers is very real,' especially for those who swore oaths of secrecy, through rituals performed by *juju* priests. These individuals live with constant fear, not just of physical harm but also of psychological and spiritual consequences. Many of them believe deeply in the power of these oaths and see the threats tied to them as real and dangerous.286 Dr Adeyinka noted that although oath-taking plays a role (as victims are often forced to swear secrecy, reinforced by threats), fear goes beyond the oath. Traffickers often know where victims' families live, raising concerns for their safety. In addition, fear is compounded by a lack of trust in law enforcement.287 Particularly in Edo State, trafficking victims are often familiar with their traffickers, who may be part of the larger community where remittances continue to sustain families. In this context, victim-witnessing remains a significant challenge for Nigeria's criminal justice system, as victims often perceive their exploiters as closely tied to their material wellbeing.288

As noted by the director at IRARA Nigeria, Roland Nwoha, the government, with international support, has made efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of irregular migration and trafficking. However, the approach remains largely ineffective, as many actors still rely on outdated, top-down methods developed without meaningful community input, resulting in limited local relevance and ownership. In Edo State, especially, the economy heavily relies on remittances, including money sent by trafficking victims, often earned through exploitation and invested locally. 'This economic dependence makes it difficult to convince those benefiting, directly or indirectly, that trafficking is wrong and must stop.'289

A senior representative at NCFRMI told the EUAA that Nigeria takes the issue of human trafficking 'very seriously', with efforts undertaken to link international partners with national agencies and avoid a fragmented response.290 The Nigerian government has prosecuted individuals involved in human trafficking, both in Nigeria and overseas. In its first mutual legal assistance case with a foreign government, Nigeria collaborated with Belgian authorities to prosecute a trafficker, who was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment and fined for recruiting and exploiting Nigerian victims in Belgium.291 NAPTIP reported that 190 convictions took place from January 2022 to August 2024, representing 27.94 % of total convictions for trafficking in human beings secured by NAPTIP in 21 years.292

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