

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/01/national/japan-fails-meet-minimum-standards-human-trafficking-u-s-state-department/#.V3hkOqIWKLd>

Japan short of ‘minimum’ standards on human trafficking: U.S. State Department

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The U.S. State Department on Friday credited Japan with making “modestly increased” efforts against human trafficking in 2015, including the identification of some labor-trafficking victims for the first time in two decades.

However, serious shortcomings mean Japan does not meet minimum standards for eliminating the problem, the department said in its annual Trafficking in Persons report.

The report cited failure to prevent the entrapment and trafficking of underage girls in the so-called JK sex industry and said conditions of forced labor persist within the government’s Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), which has “effectively become a guest worker program.”

Within TITP, the report cited ongoing reports of confiscated passports and heavy fines for laborers who try to leave. It urged Japan to pass a TITP reform bill that was submitted to the Diet in March 2015 but has yet to be voted upon.

While the survey contains much that is unchanged from previous years, it notes a number of improvements.

It said the government increased prosecutions and convictions of traffickers during 2015, although nine of the 27 traffickers convicted in the year received only fines.

The report noted that 34 people were recognized as labor trafficking victims, 23 of whom were Filipino. It was the first time the government had identified such victims in 20 years, although the report said the Filipinos may have been trafficked for sex rather than labor.

It said people are often lured into trafficking with promises of a better life.

“Organizations in Japan contact children of Japanese fathers and Filipino mothers to assist them and their mothers to acquire citizenship and move to Japan for a fee; once in Japan, some mothers and children are then exploited in sex trafficking to pay off the debt incurred for the organizations’ services,” the report said.

Repeating criticism from previous years, the report accused the phenomenon of *enjo kosai*, or paid-for dating, and the JK industry, in which men pay for massages or conversation with high school girls, as facilitating the sex trafficking of Japanese children.

“Sophisticated and organized prostitution networks target vulnerable Japanese women and girls — often in poverty or with mental disabilities — in public areas such as subways, popular youth hangouts, schools and online,” it said.

It urged Japan to update its criminal code to prohibit all forms of trafficking as defined by international law, as the existing laws on prostitution, abduction and labor leave wide areas uncovered.

It pointed out that the Child Welfare Act is particularly weak on child sex trafficking, as it does not criminalize the recruitment, transport and receipt of victims. It said offenders who are convicted of prostituting children may escape with a fine of only ¥1 million.