

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Libya

LIBYA (Special Case)

Libya is a Special Case for the 10th consecutive year. The Libyan Government of National Unity (GNU), established through a UN-facilitated process in March 2021, did not effectively govern or control large swaths of Libyan territory. The judicial system was not fully functional, as courts in major cities throughout the country have not been operational since 2014. Disparate armed groups committed various human rights abuses, including unlawful killings, abuse of migrants and refugees, forcible recruitment, forced labor, and sex trafficking. Impunity by those committing abuses against civilians was pervasive. There were continued reports of criminal networks, armed groups, government officials, and private employers systematically exploiting migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in cycles of sex and labor trafficking. Endemic corruption and armed groups' influence over government ministries contributed to the GNU's inability to effectively address human trafficking.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

Lack of institutional capacity, as well as lack of Libyan law enforcement, customs, and military personnel, especially along the country's borders, hindered authorities' efforts to combat human trafficking crimes. Libyan law criminalized some forms of sex trafficking but did not criminalize labor trafficking. Articles 418, 419, and 420 of the penal code criminalized some forms of sex trafficking involving women and prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine, which were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. However, inconsistent with international law, the definition of trafficking within these provisions required transnational movement of the victim and did not criminalize sex trafficking acts induced through fraudulent or coercive means. The law did not criminalize sex trafficking involving adult male victims. Article 425 criminalized slavery and prescribed penalties of five to 15 years' imprisonment. Article 426 criminalized the buying and selling of slaves and prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. During the reporting period, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) convened government officials, NGOs, and international organizations to discuss updating Libya's anti-trafficking legal framework; however, the government did not report whether it began drafting new legislation.

Libya's judicial system was not fully functional during the reporting period, nor were there administrative units and courts specifically dedicated to overseeing human trafficking cases. Law enforcement and judicial authorities often lacked understanding of human trafficking crimes. The Ministry of Interior (MOI), nominally responsible for anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, was limited in its ability to carry out anti-trafficking operations. Limited policing capacity hindered the government's ability to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers. Some law enforcement functions fell to disparate armed groups, which received salaries from the government and performed their activities without formal training and with varying degrees of accountability. Perpetrators committing human rights abuses, including human trafficking crimes, generally operated with impunity because of the inadequate legal framework and weak capacity for criminal investigations and prosecutions. The AGO reported arresting 2,068 suspects involved in either ransoming migrants, prostitution, sex trafficking, forced labor, or organ trafficking during the reporting period and a GNU-affiliated armed group claimed to have dismantled a large-scale commercial sex ring; however, the government did not provide additional details, and some of the cases reported by the AGO likely involved non-trafficking crimes. Aside from these cases, the government did not publicly report statistics on investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of

traffickers, including government officials or government-aligned armed groups allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes; the government has never reported prosecuting or convicting anyone for labor or sex trafficking crimes. The government reported coordinating with INTERPOL to issue red notices for suspected traffickers but did not report further details. The government mostly relied on foreign donors and international organizations to provide anti-trafficking training to government officials; however, the government funded four roundtable sessions focused on trafficking during the reporting period.

International observers continued to report systemic official complicity in, and at times perpetration of, human trafficking crimes, including by Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) officials, immigration officers, security officials, Ministry of Defense (MOD) officials, members of armed groups formally integrated into state institutions, and officials from the MOI and its Department to Combat Illegal Migration (DCIM). Various armed groups, militias, and criminal networks infiltrated the administrative ranks of the government and engaged in illicit activities, including human trafficking. Government officials, including LCG and DCIM officials, allegedly colluded with criminal trafficking and smuggling networks and government-affiliated armed groups such as the Stability Support Apparatus (SSA) to systematically subject migrants and refugees to cycles of exploitation and abuse, including sex and labor trafficking, in Libya to obtain financial and other gains. Elements of the LCG, DCIM, SSA, and other government actors at all levels allegedly coordinated with criminal networks to intercept migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, transfer migrants to official and unofficial detention centers, and extort ransoms – including through the use of torture, sex trafficking, sexual slavery, and forced labor – before returning migrants to criminal networks, trapping migrants in cycles of exploitation; government officials were allegedly actively and systematically complicit in a business model subjecting migrants to trafficking and other abuse. Several credible sources continued to report DCIM detention center guards and administrative staff forced detained migrants, including unaccompanied children, to work at detention centers and third locations, such as farms and construction sites. DCIM staff at detention centers contracted armed groups– some of whom had ties to human trafficking networks – to provide security services at individual detention centers. In addition, DCIM guards and staff systematically subjected migrants detained in DCIM detention centers to sex trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation; guards and staff coerced women, girls, men, and boys to perform sex acts in exchange for essentials such as food, clean water, and, at times, their freedom. NGOs and international organizations continued to report DCIM and security officials also “sold” female detainees to outside individuals who then exploited the women in sex and labor trafficking. During the reporting period, Tunisian border officials allegedly “sold” migrants to GNU border officials and GNU-aligned armed groups; these migrants were subsequently held in a DCIM detention center and exploited in forced labor in nearby towns. As in previous reporting periods, the government provided support to and coordinated with factions of the Syrian National Army, a non-state armed group that recruited and used Syrian children as child soldiers in combat and support roles in Syria.

The government did not have any policy structures, institutional capacity, political will, or resources to proactively identify and protect trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers; women in commercial sex; and children associated with armed groups. The government coordinated with an international organization to develop a handover protocol for children associated with armed groups; the handover protocol was pending approval at the end of the reporting period. The government did not report identifying any victims nor providing foreign trafficking victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they could face hardship or retribution. An international organization reported identifying at least 1,450 trafficking victims in 2024, including 1,000 women, 413 men, 29 girls, and eight boys; the international organization reported that traffickers exploited approximately 55 percent of the identified victims in forced labor, 30 percent in sex trafficking, and 15 percent in unspecified forms of exploitation. Libyan authorities cooperated on a limited basis, including to cancel visa exit fees, with international organizations to repatriate, resettle, or evacuate some migrants, which included unidentified trafficking victims. The government allowed international organizations to be present at most of the official disembarkation points along the western coastline where migrants arrived after the LCG intercepted or rescued them at sea; however, the government’s procedures for disembarked migrants remained unclear and put migrants further at risk of exploitation. In addition,

an NGO reported the quick and chaotic nature of disembarkation hampered the ability of international organizations to assess specific needs and vulnerabilities, monitor violations, or record claims for protection before authorities funneled refugees and migrants into detention; the NGO also reported refugees and migrants were unable to confidentially raise concerns, report abuse, or seek protection. The government continued to operate a limited number of centers for victims of sex trafficking and other forms of sexual abuse to receive limited services; however, the government did not report what services were available at these centers and past reporting indicated incidents of abuse.

Due to inadequate screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government's criminalization of all forms of illegal entry, stay in, and exit from Libya did not distinguish between migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, trafficking victims, and other groups in need of human rights protections, thereby further penalizing potential trafficking victims. The government, at times working with local armed groups, forcibly expelled and deported sub-Saharan African migrants – a population highly vulnerable to trafficking – without screening for trafficking indicators; international organizations confirmed the estimated 5,980 migrants expelled between September 2023 and August 2024 included trafficking victims. Reports continued to indicate that authorities and armed groups possibly affiliated with the Libyan National Army (LNA) sometimes expelled and deported migrants outside official deportation procedures, including at times leaving migrants in the desert at the Niger border without alerting humanitarian actors.

In March 2025, an international organization estimated 5,043 migrants and refugees –including trafficking victims – were held in 13 DCIM detention centers and an unknown number of unofficial detention centers under the control of GNU-aligned armed groups where armed groups and government officials subjected them to a wide range of abuses, including sex and labor trafficking; the international organization estimated thousands more were held illegally in facilities controlled by armed groups or in secret facilities. Throughout the reporting period, security forces and affiliated armed groups conducted mass raids to round up undocumented and documented migrants and asylum-seekers – including trafficking victims – using excessive and lethal force and resulting in penalization, including arrest and detention, of unidentified trafficking victims.

Libya is a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol, but the government lacked the institutional capacity and resources to prevent human trafficking. The GNU did not have a national coordinating body responsible for combating human trafficking. The government did not conduct any public anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, nor did it take actions to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government coordinated with an international organization to train security forces on preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, and a draft law to raise the age of recruitment to 18 years old was pending in the House of Representatives. However, the government did not report further steps to prevent the recruitment or use of children by militia groups, armed groups affiliated or aligned with the government, or other armed groups operating throughout the country. As in previous reporting periods, the GNU continued to partner with some European countries to disrupt human trafficking and migrant smuggling operations to reduce illegal migration flows across the Mediterranean Sea. However, European and international NGOs and international organizations criticized this cooperation, citing severe security and human rights conditions and an increased risk of trafficking for migrants forced to return to or remain in Libya. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Libya. Instability and lack of government oversight and capacity in Libya continue to allow for human trafficking crimes to persist and be highly profitable for traffickers. Trafficking victims – adults and children – are highly vulnerable to extreme violence

and human rights abuses in Libya by governmental and non-state armed groups, including physical, sexual, and verbal assault; abduction for ransom; extortion; arbitrary killings; inhumane detention; and child soldier recruitment or use. IDPs are vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking.

As in previous reporting periods, the government provided support to and coordinated with factions of the Syrian National Army, a non-state armed group that recruited and used Syrian children as child soldiers in combat and support roles in Syria. According to reports between 2013 and 2022, observers reported the LNA, LNA-affiliated armed groups, and other nonstate armed groups recruited or used child soldiers in Libya; reporting was not available to confirm if these practices were ongoing.

Migrants in Libya are extremely vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking, including those seeking employment in Libya or transiting Libya en route to Europe. An international organization reported indicators of exploitation and abuse amounting to trafficking are experienced by 76 percent of men, 67 percent of women, and 77 percent of children and youth transiting Libya. Migrants living in Libya are vulnerable to exploitation by state and non-state actors, including employers who refuse to pay laborers' wages. As of October 2024, international organizations estimate there were at least 787,326 migrants and refugees from more than 44 nationalities in Libya. Migrant workers in Libya predominantly come from sub-Saharan and Sahel countries for seasonal agricultural or construction work; the lack of government oversight of informal recruitment agencies and workers' undocumented status increases migrants' vulnerability to trafficking. Libya continues to serve as a departure point for migrants, including unaccompanied children, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe from North Africa. Elements of the LCG work with armed groups and other criminals, including traffickers, to exploit migrants for profit. There are financial incentives for migrant smugglers and human traffickers to prevent disembarkation of migrants transiting the Mediterranean Sea and to return migrants to Libya for detention and further exploitation. An international organization reported cases of traffickers compelling migrant boys to drive boats to Europe where they were then detained on the grounds of facilitating migrant smuggling. Due to violence and localized conflict, as well as border closures and movement restrictions, traditional smuggling and trafficking routes have become more clandestine, creating greater risks and dangers for migrants; an international organization reports increased incidences of forced labor in smuggling hubs of Sabha, Brak al-Shati, Shwayrif, and Bani Walid since 2017.

Various armed groups, criminal gangs and networks, tribal groups, smugglers, and traffickers cooperate and compete in the smuggling and trafficking of migrants to and through Libya, while carrying out serious human rights abuses and violations against migrants, including torture, sexual abuse and exploitation, rape, extortion, ransom, theft, and forced labor. International organizations report smugglers and traffickers trade migrants and refugees within illicit networks, while holding them in inhumane conditions. Highly organized trafficking networks subject migrants to forced labor and sex trafficking through fraudulent recruitment, confiscation of identity and travel documents, withholding or non-payment of wages, debt-based coercion, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. An international panel of experts identified Libyan networks of smugglers and traffickers had elements in at least 17 countries – including Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) – that fraudulently recruited migrants and systematically exploited migrants in sex and labor trafficking during their journey and in Libya. In some cases, migrants reportedly pay smuggling fees to reach Tripoli, but once they cross the Libyan border they are sometimes abandoned in southern cities or the desert where they are vulnerable to severe forms of abuse, including human trafficking. Since the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, international organizations estimate approximately 256,000 Sudanese refugees have entered Libya; international organizations identify this population at high risk of sex and labor trafficking and other mistreatment.

Several credible sources continue to report migrants held in detention centers controlled by the DCIM and non-state armed groups and militias are subject to severe abuse, rampant sexual violence, and forced labor. An unknown number of migrants are also held in criminal prisons affiliated with the Ministry of Justice, MOI, and MOD. Private employers and DCIM officials use detained migrants for forced labor in domestic work, garbage collection, construction, road paving,

and agriculture. According to international observers, detention center operators also force migrants to provide ancillary services to armed groups, such as offloading and transporting weapons, cooking food, cleaning, and clearing unexploded ordnance; armed groups also forcibly recruit detained migrants. Once the work is completed, employers and detention center officials return the migrants to detention. In some cases, detention center officials force detained migrants to work or exploit them in sex trafficking in exchange for basic necessities or their release from prison. An international organization reported that detained sub-Saharan African migrants are treated in a harsher manner than other nationalities, suggesting discriminatory treatment. In addition, there were isolated reports that security forces singled out Christian migrants, including potential trafficking victims, due to their religious affiliation. During the reporting period, Tunisian border officials allegedly “sold” migrants to GNU border officials and GNU-aligned armed groups at the Tunisia and Libya border; these migrants were subsequently held in a DCIM detention center and exploited in forced labor in nearby towns. In 2021, there were reports Chadian mercenary groups in Libya fraudulently recruited and “sold” newly recruited fighters between Chadian and Libyan armed groups, mostly affiliated with the LNA; some recruits reported being forced to engage in criminal activities. North Korean nationals working in Libya may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.

There is reportedly a high prevalence of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence and exploitation of female migrants along the migration routes to Libya and in DCIM-run and armed group-run detention facilities in Libya; perpetrators of sexual violence, including sex trafficking, against female migrants include various armed groups, smugglers, traffickers, and MOI officials. International NGOs also report migrant men and boys are vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuse, including sex trafficking. Commercial sex rings reportedly subject sub-Saharan women and girls to sex trafficking in brothels, particularly in the towns of Ubari, Sabha, and Murzuq in southern Libya; Nigerian women and girls are at increased risk of sex trafficking in Libya.