

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Israel

ISRAEL (Tier 2)*

* This section of the report covers Israel within the boundaries recognized by the United States.

The Government of Israel does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Israel remained on Tier 2. These efforts included beginning to implement a new protection model to individualize the provision of shelter and services to victims, incorporating anti-trafficking provisions in new foreign labor recruitment regulations, and allocating more personnel to anti-trafficking law enforcement and prevention agencies. The government investigated and held some complicit officials accountable and enacted legislation to expand legal assistance during criminal proceedings to all trafficking victims. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government's efforts to hold labor traffickers criminally accountable remained inadequate, and it did not consistently investigate labor trafficking cases referred by NGOs; despite regularly recognizing labor trafficking victims and the presence of approximately 137,000 foreign workers in Israel, the government has not initiated a labor trafficking prosecution in four consecutive years. The government relied on victims to self-identify or for civil society to refer them to government services and maintained a high evidentiary standard to formally recognize victims. The government's ability to proactively identify labor trafficking victims remained weak due to understaffing, lack of resources, and lack of front-line officials' understanding of labor trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Significantly increase investigations and prosecutions of labor trafficking crimes, including potential trafficking cases referred by NGOs, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Increase efforts to proactively identify, including by screening vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care without re-traumatizing victims.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Increase enforcement of foreign worker and Palestinian labor rights, including by establishing systems to ensure workers have valid and fair labor contracts, eliminating all worker-paid recruitment fees for all foreign and Palestinian workers, ensuring any recruitment fees are paid by employers, and ensuring any employer-paid recruitment fees are not passed onto workers.
- Increase training for law enforcement, immigration, border, healthcare, defense, justice, and other front-line officials to proactively identify trafficking victims.
- Increase the number of labor inspectors, social workers, and interpreters in the agricultural, construction, and caregiving sectors, and provide them training on victim identification procedures.
- Expand resources and officials allocated to the National Anti-Trafficking Unit (NATU).
- Allocate resources and fully implement the 2022-2026 NAP and implementation plan to combat trafficking.
- Increase efforts to raise public awareness of sex and labor trafficking issues.
- Amend the 2006 anti-trafficking law to include a definition of human trafficking consistent with international law.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The 2006 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 16 years' imprisonment for the trafficking of an adult and up to 20 years' imprisonment for the trafficking of a child. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, the law did not establish the use of force, fraud, or coercion as an essential element of the crime. The government reported also using Section 203(C) of the Criminal Code to prosecute child sex trafficking crimes, which criminalized "accepting sexual services from a minor" and prescribed penalties of up to three years' imprisonment; these penalties were significantly lower than those available under the anti-trafficking law.

Following the October 7, 2023, attack and ensuing conflict, the government diverted law enforcement resources, including those for anti-trafficking efforts, to conflict-related efforts. During the reporting period, police initiated 20 investigations involving at least 32 suspects, including four sex trafficking cases, five labor trafficking cases, and 11 child sex trafficking cases. In addition, the government investigated 81 sex trafficking-related cases involving 128 suspects but determined all were "prostitution" related offenses. This was a significant decrease compared with 54 new investigations involving 66 suspects in the previous reporting period but similar to 25 new investigations involving 24 suspects in 2022. The government initiated 13 sex trafficking prosecutions, compared with 16 sex trafficking prosecutions in the previous reporting period. The government reported 77 prosecutions initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. For the fourth consecutive year, the government again did not report initiating any new labor trafficking prosecutions, despite NGOs referring cases for investigation and the government recognizing labor trafficking victims. Courts convicted 11 traffickers, seven for sex trafficking and four for "consumption of prostitution from a minor," compared with 11 convictions in the previous reporting period. Of the 13 sentences issued in the reporting period, including cases convicted in previous reporting periods, courts sentenced five traffickers (36 percent) to sentences of at least one year imprisonment, which weakened deterrence and did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime. Courts upheld two convictions on appeal and overturned one conviction on appeal.

Hamas and other terrorist organizations may have subjected hostages taken on October 7, 2023, including Israelis and foreign workers, to conditions potentially amounting to sex trafficking and sexual slavery through repeated rape and sexual assault while leveraging their captivity to gain concessions from the Israeli government in the conflict; released hostages also reported experiencing conditions potentially amounting to labor trafficking. The government and international observers continued investigating these allegations at the end of the reporting period. The government coordinated with two foreign governments on multiple transnational trafficking investigations and coordinated with another foreign government to extradite suspected traffickers.

The government continued to report law enforcement efforts to address allegations of complicity by government officials in trafficking-related crimes. In 2024, the government investigated one new case, initiated the prosecution of an allegedly complicit official, and convicted one former official pending appeal; separately, the State Attorney's Office appealed a verdict in a case in which the defendant was initially exonerated, and the defendant was convicted.

The Police Anti-Trafficking Coordination Unit (PTC) continued to advise Israeli National Police (INP) units throughout Israel on trafficking investigations. Each district had a senior INP officer designated to lead all trafficking investigations and perform initial identification screening to refer victims to the formal recognition procedure. The government had a dedicated human trafficking and commercial sex police division in the Tel Aviv police district and began hiring officers to staff similar divisions in the Center and Haifa districts. The State Attorney's office dedicated anti-trafficking coordinators in each district to advise on and coordinate trafficking prosecutions in their district; during the reporting period, the government allocated five new dedicated anti-trafficking

positions to coordinate with dedicated police districts, including dedicated positions in the State Attorney's office on labor trafficking and foreign worker protection. However, NGOs continued to report the government was at times reluctant to investigate complex cases, especially labor trafficking cases, due to lack of dedicated staff, resources, and understanding. NGOs also alleged that despite sharing evidence of potential labor trafficking cases, the government often did not investigate them, especially those involving foreign workers, in a timely manner or closed cases without sufficient investigation. The government, at times in coordination with NGOs, provided extensive anti-trafficking training, awareness-raising workshops, and seminars to law enforcement, judicial officials, social workers, medical staff, labor inspectors, and other officials on victim identification and referral, investigating trafficking cases, and providing trauma-informed care to victims.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

During the reporting period, the government reported receiving 135 victim referrals from government sources and civil society, compared with 133 referrals in the previous reporting period; of the 135 referrals, Israeli government sources initially identified and referred 70 potential victims, compared with initially identifying 66 potential victims in the previous reporting period. Of the 135 referrals, the government officially recognized 115 victims, a slight increase from 100 victims recognized in the previous reporting period. Of the 115 recognized victims, traffickers exploited 37 in sex trafficking, 29 in labor trafficking, and 49 in unspecified forms of trafficking; of the 49 unspecified forms of trafficking, 38 victims were exploited in a “harmful cult” abroad, which may have included both sex and labor trafficking. 73 of the 115 recognized victims were non-Israelis, including Brazilian, Colombian, Chinese, Ethiopian, Hungarian, Indian, Palestinian, Russian, South African, Sudanese, Thai, and Ukrainian nationals. The government recognized and provided assistance to 38 Israeli trafficking victims identified in a cult in Guatemala; the government was coordinating with Guatemalan authorities to repatriate them at the end of the reporting period.

The government continued to circulate trafficking victim identification guidelines widely to relevant ministries. However, NGOs remained critical of the government’s ability to proactively identify victims. During the reporting period, the government began integrating social workers into planned police operations on suspected brothels to identify potential victims and explain their rights and available services. NATU maintained an online referral form available in Hebrew. The government continued a victim identification initiative at Ben Gurion International Airport where officials referred suspected trafficking cases to the PTC and NATU; the government funded an NGO social worker in the initiative to educate and counsel potential victims on their rights and available services. In October 2024, Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) amended refugee status determination interview procedures to clarify screening for trafficking indicators and to be trauma-informed.

The Ministry of Justice’s Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, in consultation with an advisory committee composed of representatives from relevant government agencies, civil society, and trafficking survivors, had the authority to officially recognize trafficking victims in Israel. In emergency situations, the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator could refer potential victims to shelter and assistance while their cases were being reviewed by the committee; the government offered temporary services to 43 potential victims during the reporting period. During the reporting period, the government hired two international experts to conduct an assessment and provide recommendations to develop an NRM. NGOs reported concerns regarding the resources of NATU’s capacity to manage the victim recognition caseload. NGOs also reported the government required a high burden of proof from trafficking victims, including third party witnesses, which re-traumatized victims and resulted in a number of victims remaining unrecognized by the government. NGOs asserted concerns the advisory committee underrecognized foreign and Palestinian trafficking victims. NGOs reported victims were reluctant to apply for official recognition due to the high standard of proof, fear of deportation or negative decisions on immigration or residence processes,

and distrust of authorities. NGOs continued to report the government's inaction on labor trafficking deterred potential labor trafficking victims from reporting exploitation.

The government continued to provide a wide range of protection services for victims. The government, in cooperation with an NGO, operated a 35-bed shelter for female trafficking victims, a 35-bed shelter for male trafficking victims, and transitional apartments with 18 beds for female victims. Shelter residents could leave freely. These shelters offered one year of support services, including job training, psycho-social care, medical treatment, language training, and legal assistance; the government was renovating shelters during the reporting period and completed upgrades to the specialized shelter for male victims. During the reporting period, government shelters assisted 70 victims, similar to 77 victims in the previous reporting period. Shelter staff could adjust operations to accommodate deaf and non-verbal victims, including by contracting an interpreter. In response to increased stressors due to the October 7, 2023, attack and ensuing conflict, the government increased psycho-social and trauma-informed care in the shelters for residents and staff. The government, in cooperation with an NGO, continued to operate the National Center for Survivors of Slavery and Trafficking in Persons, also known as the "day center," in Tel Aviv for male and female victims waiting for space at a shelter, who chose not to reside at a shelter, or who had completed one year at a shelter. The center provided psycho-social care and food aid, and employed social workers trained to identify individuals at risk of re-trafficking.

During the reporting period, the government began implementing a new protection model to individualize services for victims. Under the new model, shelter staff developed individualized care plans for each victim. The new model shortened victims' stays in the specialized shelters to approximately six months with the option to extend; after leaving the shelter, victims could continue to receive services through the day center or via 40 specialized social workers throughout Israel. As part of the new model's implementation, the government began expanding the day center's operations, including plans to move the location to a larger facility in Tel Aviv and doubling staff. During the reporting period, the government transferred psychological services for trafficking victims to a dedicated clinic in Tel Aviv that operated extended hours allowing victims to access services after regular working hours. The government funded 17 NGO-operated "HaLev" (Heart) centers for girls and young adults and three additional centers for adult women in commercial sex throughout the country, which provided psycho-social care, medical assistance, vocational training, and other services. The government continued to provide free medical treatment for one year at various government-funded health facilities for officially recognized trafficking victims living outside of shelters. The Ministry of Health continued operating a dedicated mental health clinic at a hospital in Tel Aviv-Jaffa to treat sub-Saharan victims of torture camps in the Sinai, including potential trafficking victims. The new protection model also expanded access to the day center for victims of Sinai torture camps not officially recognized as trafficking victims. NGOs reported government services were difficult to access for victims living outside of Tel Aviv.

The government continued to encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers but did not require their participation in court cases as a condition for receiving visas and protection services; foreign victims could opt to be repatriated pending trial proceedings, and the government collected early testimony in those cases. The law allowed victims or witnesses to provide testimony not in the presence of the defendant but, rather, in the presence of the defense attorney in specific offenses, including trafficking. The government implemented existing procedures for managing sex crimes, including sex trafficking, by designating a contact person at every court to coordinate victims' security during proceedings, arranging private waiting rooms, and enabling video testimony. In July 2024, the government enacted legislation expanding free legal aid to all trafficking victims through the Legal Aid Administration (LAA) to assist in civil procedures, immigration procedures, and criminal proceedings; prior to the legislation forced labor victims did not have automatic access to LAA assistance in criminal proceedings. In 2024, the LAA received 75 legal aid requests to assist potential trafficking victims. The government allowed recognized foreign trafficking victims to work during the investigation and prosecution of traffickers if issued a B1 "rehabilitation" visa. Following the conclusion of criminal proceedings, trafficking victims could request a B1 "rehabilitation" visa for an additional year; the government

extended these visas on an ad hoc basis. The government issued 34 B1 visas and 73 residency permits to trafficking victims during the reporting period.

The government forfeiture fund, which used property and money confiscated from traffickers to assist victims, did not allocate any funds in 2024 due to a shortage of resources; the government continued to distribute funds to victims allocated in previous years. Courts awarded at least 204,971 shekels (\$56,200) to victims through civil proceedings. The anti-trafficking law required courts to explain any decision to abstain from awarding restitution in its verdict, making restitution the default; courts ordered at least 426,000 shekels (\$116,810) in restitution in 2024.

The government maintained guidelines discouraging the prosecution of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked; the government intervened in at least seven cases to withdraw cases against potential victims. However, the government did not systematically screen for trafficking indicators among the undocumented African migrant population, foreign workers employed by foreign construction companies, Palestinian children in forced begging or forced criminality, or individuals in commercial sex and, as a result, 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 such as immigration violations or “prostitution”-associated offenses. The government continued a program to expunge the records of individuals convicted of “prostitution”-associated offenses but not sentenced to prison terms, including potential sex trafficking victims. The government expunged the records of three sex trafficking victims in 2024.

PREVENTION

The government modestly increased prevention efforts.

NATU continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts among relevant ministries and NGOs, and in November 2024, the government added a new position in NATU focused on preventing labor trafficking. The government continued implementing the 2022-2026 anti-trafficking NAP and implementation plan. In December 2024, NATU published its third report on the government’s anti-trafficking efforts with data covering 2023. NATU also continued reviews on implementation of some bilateral work agreements (BWAs) and implementation of the government’s law prohibiting the purchase of commercial sex. NATU prioritized research into new arrangements for bringing foreign workers to Israel. NGOs reported that while NATU demonstrated political will and was knowledgeable about trafficking, it was not always effective influencing other parts of the government and lacked resources to fully implement its mandate.

The government conducted various national awareness-raising campaigns, including on the rights of foreign workers in Israel and the new law on the purchase of commercial sex. The government did not have a trafficking-specific hotline, but PIBA, in collaboration with an NGO, continued to operate a 24-hour hotline to assist foreign workers in Israel under bilateral agreements; workers entering Israel through private recruitment schemes following the October 7, 2023, attack could also access the hotline. PIBA’s call center received five calls in 2024 resulting in identifying a victim, three criminal investigations, and two investigations by PIBA’s enforcement unit. In November 2024, PIBA launched a new digital platform in Hebrew for foreign workers to access information about their employer, recruitment agency, work permit, and other important information; workers could report complaints through the platform.

Article 376A of the Penal Law 5737-1977 prohibited holding a person’s passport against their will – a key trafficking indicator – and carried a penalty of three to five years’ imprisonment; the government did not report if any such cases were investigated or prosecuted during the reporting period. In 2024, the Ministry of Economy and Industry (MOEI), which employed 210 labor inspectors, issued 92 administrative warnings, imposed 22 fines totaling 1.46 million shekels (\$400,330), and filed five indictments for labor violations that remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Labor courts delivered sentences in five cases involving employers of foreign

workers of fines payments totaling 165,000 shekels (\$45,240). Through MOEI inspections, employers returned 285,000 shekels (\$78,150) of withheld wages to 65 foreign workers in 2024. PIBA's enforcement unit opened 372 criminal investigations in 2024 but did not report filing any indictments against employers of foreign workers for suspected violations of labor laws or the anti-trafficking law.

NGOs continued to report the government did not effectively regulate foreign contracting companies ("Hevrot Bitzua"), nor did it effectively prevent the exploitation of foreign workers in the construction and agriculture sectors recruited outside of established BWAs. In July 2024, the government published a new call for bids on projects from foreign contracting companies ("Hevrot Bitzua") requiring bidding companies not be based in countries deemed not making significant efforts to combat human trafficking; several Chinese companies filed court petitions protesting this requirement and decisions were pending in those cases. The government maintained sector-specific BWAs with 15 countries for the agriculture, construction, caregiving, domestic work, and hospitality sectors; in 2024, the government signed five new BWAs with Malawi in agriculture, Ecuador in agriculture, and agreements for the manufacturing, hotel, and restaurant sectors with Sri Lanka. Foreign workers recruited under BWAs had triplicate standardized labor contracts held by the worker, employer, and the government. The government did not fully prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. Previously, private Israeli recruitment agencies could not charge worker-paid recruitment fees in the domestic caregiving sector and worker-paid recruitment fees were capped at 2,814 shekels (\$770) in the agricultural sector. However, June 2022 regulations allowed companies recruiting in the domestic caregiving sector to require workers pay three recruitment fee payments totaling 6,107 shekels (\$1,670). The Government of the Philippines suspended its BWA in 2023 alleging this policy change contravened the agreement.

In May 2024, the government approved Government Resolution 1752, a new framework for the recruitment of foreign workers. Resolution 1752 prioritized labor recruitment through BWAs, allowed private recruitment only from countries the government deemed to be making significant efforts to combat human trafficking, and increased resources allocated to enforcing labor standards and preventing exploitation. The resolution also created an interagency committee, including NATU, to act as a task force to monitor implementation and establish work plans to provide oversight of foreign labor recruitment. Before Resolution 1752, the government implemented resolutions approved in March 2024 that temporarily amended legislation on private labor recruitment agencies to regulate and limit the collection of worker-paid recruitment fees by imposing caps on fees, ensuring record of payments, and requiring private recruitment agencies to provide foreign workers information about their rights in a language they understand. NGOs reported significant concerns regarding the new private recruitment processes, including concerns about private recruitment agencies charging workers illegal recruitment fees and the government's limited ability to adequately oversee recruitment to prevent trafficking. While Israeli law required employers of foreign workers to provide detailed labor contracts in a language the worker understood, there was not adequate government oversight to ensure contracts for workers not covered by BWAs met labor standards; this left workers vulnerable to labor trafficking. NGOs reported foreign workers often paid exorbitant fees, including through high interest rate loans from illicit lenders in Israel, to recruitment agencies in their home country or the Israeli manpower agency, which increased worker's vulnerability to trafficking. While most foreign workers could change employers without their previous employer's permission, foreign construction workers were limited to changing employers on a specified date each quarter and otherwise required employers' permission to change employers. Foreign contracting companies ("Hevrot Bitzua") did not authorize workers, primarily in the construction sector, to change employers unless it was to another foreign contracting company. NGOs reported PIBA procedures for recruitment agencies in the caregiving sector continued to require every agency to hire a licensed social worker responsible for supervising the conditions of foreign caregivers, including home visits, and for informing relevant authorities about labor violations.

The government made efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex acts by enacting legislation in February 2025 to prohibit consumption of commercial sex and fining purchasers of commercial sex. Courts could require individuals found guilty of purchasing commercial sex to participate in

educational workshops instead of paying a fine. NGOs reported the new legislation empowered individuals in commercial sex to seek assistance.

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 Israel. Israeli children, Israeli Bedouin, Palestinian women and girls, and foreign women are vulnerable to sex trafficking in Israel. Traffickers use social media, dating apps, online forums, and chat rooms to exploit girls in sex trafficking. Family members force Israeli Bedouin and Palestinian women and girls from the West Bank into marriages with older men; these women and girls experience physical and sexual abuse, threats of violence, and restricted movement and may be subjected to sex and labor trafficking. Traffickers sometimes use drug addiction to control sex trafficking victims. Some Bedouin Israeli children are reportedly vulnerable to forced labor, experiencing long working hours and physical violence.

Following the October 7, 2023, attack and resulting displacement of residents in areas around Gaza, NGOs reported the increased vulnerability of children to exploitation, including sex trafficking. Hamas may have subjected hostages taken on October 7, 2023, including Israelis and foreign workers, to conditions amounting to sex trafficking and sexual slavery through repeated rape and sexual assault while leveraging their captivity to gain concessions from the Israeli government in the conflict. Released hostages also reported experiencing conditions potentially amounting to labor trafficking. Armed wings of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas recruited and used child soldiers in combat and support roles; observers reported armed wings of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas forcibly used Israeli children in unknown roles in 2023. During the reporting period, credible reporting alleged Israeli forces forcibly used Palestinian detainees as scouts in military operations in Gaza to clear booby-trapped buildings and tunnels and gather information. NGOs report the heightened regulations on and social antagonism against Palestinians in Israel increases their vulnerability to trafficking and note an increase in traffickers exploiting Palestinian adults and children in sex trafficking.

After Israel revoked Palestinian work permits in October 2023, observers reported an increase in West Bank Palestinians (approximately 40,000 as of February 2025) working illegally in Israel, which increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Prior to October 2023, some employers or intermediaries illegally charged Palestinian workers monthly commissions and fees, and in many cases, employers illegally hired Palestinian workers to other workplaces; these workers are vulnerable to forced labor. The employer-based work permit system for Palestinians – except those working in the construction and manufacturing sector – bound Palestinian workers to specific employers, which enabled some employers to exploit workers in forced labor. Furthermore, as a condition of their overnight permits, some employers retained identity documents of Palestinian workers, effectively restricting their movement in Israel and increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. NGOs report the majority of Palestinian women and men in commercial sex in Israel exhibit indicators of trafficking, but most did not apply for trafficking victim recognition due to fear of retaliation and distrust of authorities; NGOs report an increase in Palestinian women in Israel relying on “survival sex,” which further increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Palestinian children in forced begging and other forms of labor trafficking, such as washing windshields and vending. NGOs also report traffickers increasingly coerce Palestinian children to engage in criminal acts, such as auto theft, in Israel.

Foreign workers in Israel are primarily from South and Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Palestinians working in Israel for temporary work in construction, agriculture, and caregiving. Traffickers exploit some of these workers in forced labor. Israeli and foreign employers exploit foreign workers, particularly Turkish, Chinese, Palestinian, Russian, and Ukrainian men, in forced labor in the construction sector. Traffickers subject some Thai men and women to forced labor in Israel’s agricultural sector by imposing conditions of long working hours, no breaks or rest days, withheld passports, poor living conditions, and difficulty changing employers due to limitations on

work permits. Jordanian day workers are vulnerable to forced labor in construction, agriculture, and other sectors, primarily in the southern coastal resort city Eilat, due to limits on entry permits and the geographic isolation of Eilat. Some traffickers recruit agricultural students to take part in an agricultural study program on student visas and force them to work in the industry upon arrival, effectively circumventing the BWA process; observers reported the programs contain no academic content and students are bound by tuition fees – which NGOs reported were de facto recruitment fees – of up to 11,000 shekels (\$3,040), creating situations of debt bondage. NGOs report students in these programs who experienced exploitation and abuse were reluctant to report details due to threats of retaliation and deportation or fear they and their family will face harassment by their home governments. Caregivers are at high risk for forced labor due to their isolation inside private residences and their lack of protection under the labor law; local NGOs report traffickers subject caregivers to excessive recruitment fees, fraudulent work contracts, long work hours, confiscation of passports, underpayment of wages, physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse, denial of severance pay, and poor housing including living in the same room as their employer – all key indicators of trafficking. Foreign caregivers constitute the second largest share of all documented foreign workers in the country; the vast majority of these workers are women. NGOs report foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), primarily Chinese- and Turkish-owned construction companies, in Israel compelled Chinese and Turkish nationals to work under the threat of debt bondage or coercive promissory notes.

Government and NGO sources report increased vulnerability of Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing the Russia-Ukraine war, particularly women and girls, to sex trafficking in Israel. As of December 2024, an NGO estimated there were approximately 39,400 African asylum-seekers in Israel, most of whom were from Eritrea, Ethiopia, or Sudan. Asylum-seekers received temporary stay permits but did not have the explicit right to work in Israel and routinely worked low-wage jobs in unsafe environments, increasing vulnerabilities to trafficking. An NGO reported managers of *hamaras* – coffee shops or pubs that served as meeting places – coerced some African asylum-seeker women who worked as hostesses or waitresses to have sex with customers in nearby apartments. Approximately 400 female asylum-seekers engaged in “survival sex” prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; the government estimates that figure has tripled in recent years. NGOs report the October 7, 2023 attack and ensuing conflict further increased asylum-seekers reliance on “survival sex” and vulnerability to trafficking due to the economic impact of the conflict. An NGO reported economically vulnerable women, including among asylum-seekers, are coerced by landlords or male roommates to have sex in exchange for rent. In 2020, an NGO reported that of approximately 4,000 to 5,000 African migrants still present in Israel after having experienced torture and exploitation in the Sinai Peninsula from 2011-2017, the government had only recognized approximately 400 to 500 as trafficking victims but that the actual number was much higher. NGOs and the government previously identified domestic servitude victims from Ethiopia’s Tigray region in Israel. Ethiopian recruitment agencies fraudulently recruited the women for domestic work in Jordan where they experienced conditions amounting to forced labor before being “sold” to other employers in the West Bank and eventually seeking assistance in Israel.

Russian, Ukrainian, Eritrean, and Ethiopian women are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking through online-facilitated forced marriages. Traffickers subject women from Central and Eastern Europe, China, Ghana, Eritrea, and South Africa to sex trafficking in Israel. Some women arrive on tourist visas to willingly engage in commercial sex – particularly in Eilat – but sex traffickers subsequently exploit them. During the reporting period, NGOs reported an increase of criminal networks smuggling Chinese women in debt into Israel and subsequently forcibly holding them in Tel Aviv apartments and exploiting them in sex trafficking. Some traffickers reportedly recruit sex trafficking victims with false, fraudulent, or misleading job offers on the internet, sometimes through legitimate employment websites, or through false romantic relationships. Eastern European and South American sex trafficking victims report being recruited through social media and messaging platforms.