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2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uzbekistan

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UZBEKISTAN (Tier 2)

The Government of Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying and referring more trafficking victims to care and slightly increasing funding for victim protection services. The government also collaborated with multiple governments in law enforcement investigations, which resulted in the extradition of traffickers to Uzbekistan. The National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Decent Work designed an action plan to combat online trafficking to be used by different ministries. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. While the national government continued to enforce a ban on forced labor in the cotton harvest, some local officials allegedly continued to create pressures to meet production targets, which could perpetuate incentives for coercion in the cotton harvest. In addition, there was limited government oversight to ensure compliance with Uzbekistan's law, exacerbated by the Labor Inspectorate's inability to conduct unannounced inspections. Existing laws establishing forced labor as an administrative violation at the first offense continued to hinder overall efforts. Official complicity at local levels remained a significant concern, and penalties for complicit officials were lower than those prescribed by the law. Efforts to identify victims of forced labor remained inadequate.

Article 135 of the criminal code continued to allow house arrest in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking, unlike other grave crimes.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Amend the provision, under Article 148 (2) of the Criminal Code, to remove the option for administrative violations for first time offenders of adult forced labor and ensure criminalization. * Proactively identify trafficking victims, including by screening those in forced labor, and refer all victims to appropriate services, including by allowing authorized ministries and local officials to grant official victim status, ensuring the NRM establishes clear roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, training all first responders in identification and referrals, and collaborating with civil society in the process. * Vigorously enforce the national ban on forced labor in cotton production and exercise greater oversight over local authorities to prohibit their utilization of mobilization practices, including by increasing monitoring of the harvest and removing the obligation of local officials to ensure the fulfillment of production targets, and strengthen efforts to ensure all citizens are aware of their “right to refuse” participation in other work outside their professional duties. * Respecting due process, vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms, and strengthen training for law enforcement on anti-trafficking legislation and understanding human trafficking, including forced labor. * Sufficiently increase the number of labor inspectors and provide them with systemic, specialized training to identify forced labor victims. * Strengthen the labor inspectorate by instructing it to report potential trafficking cases to law enforcement and by allowing unfettered access to private enterprises, including farms, cotton and silk clusters, factories, and construction sites for unannounced inspections. * Continue to grant and expand the access of independent observers to monitor cotton cultivation and ensure full access and protection. * Increase oversight of worker contracts in the cotton and silk sectors, and ensure workers have bargaining power, the choice of cluster affiliation, access to copies of contracts, and ensure workers are aware of mechanisms to report complaints and forced labor cases and are free to form labor associations in accordance with existing laws. * Amend Article 135 of the Criminal Code to prevent allowing house arrest in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking crimes and ensure penalties are commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. * Enable civil society and labor activists to operate freely, including by ensuring local governments do not interfere with the formation of labor unions and by removing obstacles to streamline and

increase the registration of anti-trafficking NGOs and facilitate their work. * Implement a systematic victim-witness assistance program to increase protective services for victims participating in the criminal justice process and train law enforcement and judicial officials to use victim-centered approaches during investigations and court proceedings and to proactively seek victim restitution in criminal cases. * Amend legislation to ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, particularly for illegal border crossings or loss of personal identification documents. * Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2397.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. Article 135 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of three to five years' imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim and eight to 12 years' imprisonment for those involving a child victim, which were sufficiently stringent. However, with respect to sex trafficking, by allowing for house arrest in lieu of imprisonment, these penalties were not commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, Article 135 established the use of force, fraud, or coercion as aggravating factors rather than essential elements of the crime. Article 148 (2) of the criminal code addressed "administrative forced labor." Such offenses involving adult victims were only considered administrative violations for first time offenses; repeated offenses were penalized with a fine or imprisonment of up to two years. Article 148 (2) criminalized all "administrative forced labor" offenses involving children with a fine or up to three years' imprisonment. Civil society and government contacts alike have noted these provisions, coupled with limited capacity to identify the crime among judicial officials and front-line officers, significantly constrained Uzbekistan's ability to prosecute and convict labor traffickers.

The government reported initiating 135 investigations, including 117 for sex trafficking and 18 for labor trafficking. This compared with 134 investigations initiated in 2022. The government reported prosecuting 91 defendants, including 83 for sex trafficking and eight for forced labor. This compared with prosecuting 103 defendants in 2022. The government reported convicting 72 traffickers (66 for sex trafficking and six for labor trafficking), compared with 115 in 2022. While the government provided some information on sentencing, it was unclear which penalties traffickers specifically received. Authorities reported challenges in investigating

transnational trafficking cases because of limited information shared by foreign authorities. Observers noted courts and law enforcement agencies lacked sufficient resources and a backlog of cases, including on trafficking.

The Ministry of Interior (MVD) had a division exclusively dedicated to anti-trafficking efforts and the Labor Inspectorate was responsible for conducting inspections, including checks for forced labor indicators. Law enforcement efforts to address labor trafficking were constrained by lack of understanding of trafficking crimes, poor interagency coordination and information sharing, frequent staff turnover, and corruption. Government officials viewed forced labor as a separate crime from human trafficking, which may have decreased identification of cases, prevented some victims from accessing services they were entitled to, and caused underreporting of trafficking. The government's requirement for law enforcement to obtain hard evidence to open a trafficking case, noting victim testimony alone was not sufficient, inhibited law enforcement's ability to fully investigate trafficking crimes. The government continued to provide trafficking-specific training, seminars, and conferences to police, judges, immigration officers, and other government officials, including the labor inspectorate, and conducted some activities in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign donors.

The government administratively penalized 31 officials for complicity in forced labor; however, the government did not provide information on fines or penalties. This compared with 35 officials administratively penalized in 2022. In 2022, a court sentenced the director of a state-run orphanage in Khorezm region to five and a half years' imprisonment for sex trafficking of girls living in the orphanage to two high-ranking regional officials – the penalty received was lower than what the criminal code prescribes. In November 2023, the two high-ranking regional officials involved in the case received sentences ranging from two to three years' imprisonment for rape. The government did not report criminally prosecuting any officials for their alleged complicity in forced labor crimes. Observers reported trafficking cases involving allegedly complicit officials were investigated only when there was public attention and individuals with political connections were more likely to go unpunished for crimes they committed, including trafficking.

Six Uzbekistani traffickers were extradited back to Uzbekistan after extradition requests from the government and joint law enforcement operations, including from Türkiye, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Malaysia. In 2023, a school principal from Yashnabad district received an administrative fine for mobilizing teachers for landscaping and beautification works.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts. Authorities identified and referred 193 trafficking victims in 2023, compared with 93 identified and referred in 2022. Of the 193 victims, 111 were sex trafficking victims and 82 were forced labor victims, compared with 81 sex trafficking victims and 12 forced labor victims in 2022. All sex trafficking victims were Uzbekistani citizens exploited in the country and all forced labor victims were Uzbekistani citizens identified abroad. The government did not identify any foreign national victims but reported foreign victims were entitled to the same benefits as citizens of Uzbekistan. The government reported that 72 victims (22 women sex trafficking victims and 50 women forced labor victims) received government-supported services, compared with 102 victims (61 women sex trafficking victims and 41 men forced labor victims) in the previous reporting period. NGOs identified 103 victims – 23 victims of sex trafficking (one male and 22 females) and 80 victims of forced labor (60 males and 20 females).

The government had formal procedures for victim identification and referral to care, which outlined ministries authorized to make initial victim identification designations and approve victims for receipt of government assistance, after which cases would be referred to local trafficking commissions for final verification of official victim status. However, the government's referral procedures did not clearly outline the roles and responsibilities among key stakeholders, and a lack of training on the procedures impeded implementation. Officials authorized to identify trafficking victims could refer victims to either a state-run shelter or NGOs for services. Some officials were not aware of the existing procedures for victim identification and referral. Civil society observers previously expressed concern the two-step victim verification process in the formal victim identification and referral procedures was not sufficiently detailed or inclusive of NGO roles and overly bureaucratic in nature. Experts previously noted that regional branches of the Subcommittee on Combating Trafficking in Persons had minimal knowledge on the law and crime, in some cases did not want to take responsibility for victim identification, and had an unclear division of labor. Regional governors who chaired trafficking commissions and made the final decision on verification of official victim status did not have dedicated funds to assist victims and therefore were not incentivized to grant such status. The government reported victims could receive government-funded services before obtaining verification of official victim status, but only after preliminary identification from the government's regional commissions or other agencies responsible for implementing the formal procedures, and victims could continue to receive more assistance after the regional commissions granted verification of official victim status, which could delay

victim access to care. Due to an insufficient use of formal identification procedures and a lack of screening of vulnerable populations, authorities may have detained some unidentified trafficking victims, including individuals in commercial sex and migrant workers. Some victims were reluctant to contact or cooperate with law enforcement because of a distrust of authorities, a fear for their personal and familial safety, and social stigmatization. Civil society previously noted a lack of female representation in the regional commissions during the victim identification process, which may have made female victims uncomfortable given social norms. Local officials regularly referred victims who did not wish to pursue a criminal case to NGO offices for assistance. According to media reporting, Uzbekistan's Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, in coordination with Malaysian authorities, facilitated the repatriation of an Uzbekistani that was exploited in forced labor in Malaysia.

The government allocated 1.961 billion Uzbekistani som (\$158,994) for victim protection and assistance, compared with a total of 1.830 billion som (\$148,373) during the previous reporting period. The government maintained a fund to assist Uzbekistani migrants in destination countries; however, observers noted significant delays in accessing funds and victims were often unable to receive services, including shelter, abroad. The government continued to provide in-kind support to local NGOs for the provision of victim assistance, such as food and clothing. The government-run shelter in Tashkent provided victims with medical, psychological, social, and legal assistance. The Republican Rehabilitation Center assisted 98 victims, including 50 men, 22 women, 13 boys, and 13 girls, compared with 122 victims in 2022. Child victims were placed in specialized centers, separate from adults. The government also operated centers to assist victims of violence throughout the country, which could include trafficking victims. Observers previously noted victim services and reintegration efforts were underfunded and stressed a need for more trafficking victim shelters, including outside Tashkent. Civil society observers previously noted the cumbersome process and ongoing delays in NGO registration, as well as additional requirements that created obstacles to their work and constrained civil society efforts to assist victims and monitor trafficking, including in the cotton harvest. Current law did not explicitly exempt transnational trafficking victims from facing a criminal penalty for illegally crossing international borders, which may have deterred some victims from reporting their traffickers.

Although victims could bring civil suits against traffickers, such instances were rare due to the high cost of legal representation, which was neither provided by the government nor affordable. The law mandated security measures to protect victims and witnesses during investigations but did not require other types of support. Experts previously reported the government did not adequately ensure victims' protection in court trials, acknowledging

victims were verbally attacked and threatened; authorities allowed perpetrators and victims to enter the courtrooms at the same time. The government noted victims were not obligated to appear in person for preliminary proceedings and could provide testimony via audio or video; however, it did not report making use of such approaches. Experts previously reported some victims felt pressured and ashamed as court trials were open to the public and held in victims' communities; due to the lack of safety, victims sometimes declined to testify against traffickers. The government reported 159 victims participated in investigations in 2023, although they were not required to participate to gain access to protection services and none of the victim witnesses applied for witness protections. In 2023, courts ordered 10 trafficking victims to receive restitution; however, the government did not report the amount, compared with court orders for 70 victims to receive a total of 539,528,000 som (\$43,744) in 2022.

PREVENTION

The government decreased prevention efforts. The government created a new agency responsible for coordinating the government's anti-trafficking response, the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Decent Work (the Commission), consisting of two sub-commissions: the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons, headed by the MVD, and the Sub-Commission on Decent Work, headed by the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR). The Sub-Commission on Decent Work led efforts to address internal forced labor, and the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons led efforts to address other types of trafficking, including cases of forced labor involving Uzbekistani citizens abroad. This replaced the long-standing Commission on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. The Commission coordinated anti-trafficking efforts with the Chair of the Senate, who served as the National Rapporteur on trafficking, and met four times. The Commission directed the activities of regional commissions in 12 regions, one semi-autonomous republic, and one independent city (Tashkent). The Commission designed an action plan to combat online trafficking, which was adopted and distributed to different ministries. The government reported allocation of a total 133 billion som (\$10.78 million) for anti-trafficking efforts, including prevention and protection. However, the government did not centrally allocate funding for the Commission, which instead required funding contributions from individual member ministries' budgets; this arrangement reportedly led to overreliance on NGO and international assistance. Authorities continued to conduct public awareness campaigns, some in collaboration with civil society. The central government continued to conduct awareness campaigns regarding the prohibition on forced labor. Media reported the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped repatriate 523 Uzbekistani citizens that were in vulnerable situations in other countries, including in cases featuring corollary forced labor indicators.

Representatives from civil society reported no systemic forced labor for the third consecutive year but noted a small number of scattered instances of forced labor persisted in the annual cotton harvest. Observers reported mixed findings on instances of forced labor during the 2023 cotton harvest; all reported isolated instances of likely forced labor, while some reported an increase in what appeared to be government-sponsored forced labor of state civil servants and bank employees. Reduced central government oversight of labor conditions, a reliance on complaints to identify cases, and limited civil society monitoring created vulnerabilities for trafficking in the cotton harvest. Observers reported isolated cases of children working in the fields, usually with their parents, to pick cotton. Local authorities and farmers faced difficulties in attracting cotton pickers during the 2023 harvest – the shortage of pickers prompted *mahalla* committees (neighborhood-level governments), often operating under pressure from *hokimiyats* (local authorities) to meet production targets, including allegedly with threats, to mobilize some individuals to the fields. One NGO reported instances of harassment by clusters during monitoring missions of some cotton clusters. Some civil society members noted the existence of district-level “production targets” which could be construed as de facto quotas and create opportunities for coercion, increasing the vulnerability to forced labor. One observer reported while *mahalla* employees attempted to follow the law, they could be punished for not mobilizing sufficient cotton pickers. Experts reported that out of the instances of forced labor found during the cotton harvest, some involved perceived threats rather than explicit coercion; there was an expectation and belief that refusal resulted in negative consequences from the *mahalla* or employers. Observers previously reported clusters did not typically face any penalties from local officials when they violated contract obligations with farmers, such as significant delays of payments for cotton delivered, and some officials may perceive an obligation to protect the interests of certain clusters or reportedly own a cluster. Cotton pickers often did not have contracts or were unaware of their existence, which civil society and international observers agreed was a key vulnerability for pickers. Brigade leaders, often from the *mahalla* where most of the pickers lived, acted as middlepersons and signed contracts with clusters or farmers on behalf of a group of pickers, which could create opportunities for embezzlement according to observers. A civil society report indicated ongoing development of the privatized cluster system inadvertently generated other vulnerabilities, including avenues for private businesses to subject harvest workers to contract violations, loss of bargaining power or choice of cluster affiliation, and coerced cultivation of cotton. Some farmers signed contracts with clusters without knowing how much they would be paid for cotton, and many did not have copies of their contracts.

During the 2023 harvest – the first in which cotton prices paid by the clusters were based on international market prices – some farmers spent more on production than clusters paid them, increasing vulnerabilities of farmers and their workers. In addition, some farmers were obligated to buy inputs from clusters that charged more than market prices. Observers previously noted the absence of a legal framework to ensure oversight of worker contracts, including in farming, and, during the 2023 cotton harvest, most seasonal pickers did not appear to have contracts. A civil society organization reported, in some instances, individuals felt threatened by the loss of social benefits, the termination of employment, or other reprisals if they refused to participate in the harvest as cotton pickers and some were asked to pay for replacement pickers.

The government continued to allow independent monitoring of the cotton harvest for child and forced labor, with unimpeded access to the cotton fields for observations and to interview laborers. The government continued to issue official monitoring access permits to civil society groups. The MEPR, the Federation of Trade Unions, and the Confederation of Employers had a Commission to conduct child and forced labor monitoring and independent monitors for the annual cotton harvest. The State Labor Inspectorate employed 344 inspectors that could impose administrative penalties and the government also hired independent monitors for the annual cotton harvest. However, the government did not report conducting any monitoring activities or report data on investigations of forced labor allegations for a second consecutive year. The government did not provide updates on user assessments of the Cotton Harvest Feedback Mechanism for the last three harvests. A civil society organization noted restrictions in freedom of association by the government including obstructing and shutting down a small number of cotton cooperatives comprised of farmers, potentially to increase their bargaining power. In 2023, the President signed a decree that would allow farmers to freely sell their surplus raw materials and cotton on the market starting during the 2024 cotton harvest.

Some civil society members reported the central government continued to set silk cocoon production quotas and claimed forced and coercive labor practices exist in the sector. Previously reported NGO accounts of forced labor in the silk cocoon harvest alleged direct local government involvement and that some silk cocoon clusters forced farmers to sign compulsory contracts, requiring them to provide a specific amount of silk cocoons for every hectare of land – farmers who failed to produce the required quota risked land expropriation; however, no reports of land expropriation have been reported. The government did not report efforts to monitor the silk sector; however, production is usually home-based and done by families, reportedly including children, which continued to make this industry difficult to monitor. Half of the population of Uzbekistan worked in the informal sector; civil society has

noted this includes the cotton and silk sectors, which makes it difficult for independent observers to monitor social protections and the application of labor regulations.

Uzbekistan's Agency for External Labor Migration (AELM) provided financial, social, and legal assistance to vulnerable migrants in destination countries and assistance in finding employment for returning migrants. In addition, the government, in cooperation with an NGO, provided information and support for labor migrants on safe work abroad and their rights. AELM worked with private recruitment agencies to secure work contracts for migrants in Russia, South Korea, Türkiye, Japan, Kazakhstan, the UK, and some countries in Eastern Europe; however, observers reported limited employment opportunities were available through the AELM. AELM runs representative offices in Russia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, the UAE, the Republic of Korea, and Japan. The government maintained agreements to enhance coordination on labor migration with Russia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Qatar. Labor recruitment laws in Uzbekistan prohibited charging workers recruitment fees; however, the government did not report enforcement efforts.

Labor inspectors were not empowered to bring criminal charges for first time violations of the law against forced labor and did not have the authority to refer victims to services without first referring them to law enforcement. International observers noted some inspectors also demonstrated limited comfort with their administrative enforcement mandate and that inspections often only occurred at the request of law enforcement or after receiving complaints. The Labor Inspectorate received 19,876 labor complaints, which it reported investigating; however, no forced labor cases were identified in those investigations. Observers noted the Labor Inspectorate was underfunded, understaffed, and had high turnover. The Labor Inspectorate's inability to conduct unannounced inspections under a continuing moratorium hampered its ability to identify and assist potential victims, and hindered effective implementation of labor laws.

The MVD operated a hotline and the Commission maintained a website to identify human trafficking victims and refer them to services. The hotline received 111 calls in 2023 (compared with 160 in 2022). The government did not provide information about the number of victims assisted as a result of hotline calls. Observers noted most pickers in the cotton harvest were not aware of any government hotline to report forced labor. The government operated a 24-hour hotline that provided Uzbekistani labor migrants with legal advice and directed them to the nearest consulate for assistance. An NGO operated a widely publicized 24/7 anti-trafficking hotline in 13 regional centers. The government funded a public research firm to assess the awareness of human trafficking among the population and the causes of the crime.

The government did not conduct efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit Uzbekistani victims domestically and abroad, and some foreign nationals may be vulnerable to trafficking in Uzbekistan. While international observers agree the government has successfully abolished systemic forced labor in the annual cotton harvest, some civil society observers have reported isolated instances of forced labor from local officials. A civil society organization reported that, due to pressure from local authorities to meet cotton production targets, some employees from state institutions and banks and individuals that receive social benefits were mobilized to pick cotton by local officials. The majority of pickers that participated in the most recent cotton harvest were unemployed women from rural areas, often without contracts, and are vulnerable to coercion that increases forced labor risks. Private companies in some regions mobilize employees for the harvest. Some civil society activists allege that farmers are forced to vacate and remit their land to private cotton operators, including in the cluster sites established on their former land. This could make them vulnerable to forced labor because of a disruption of livelihoods and the ensuing economic hardships. Observers reported climate change, including sudden-onset disasters such as drought, could increase the movement of people that depend on farming from rural areas, increasing their vulnerabilities to exploitation. Illegal mining operations of gold and other precious metals, in some cases involving children, exist in some regions of the country where individuals are vulnerable to forced labor.

Some civil society observers have reported that some local officials provide silkworms to farmers and force them to sign contracts stating they will agree to cultivate silk cocoons in furtherance of production quotas. International observers noted the majority of farmers do not have written contracts with silk clusters, which makes them vulnerable to forced labor. Despite a 2018 government prohibition on the practice and new protections for teachers written into the revised 2023 constitution, some local officials continue to force teachers to perform voluntary work inconsistent with their contractual duties, such as supporting community events. In previous years, some local officials forced students (including children), private businesses employees, and others to work in other forms of non-cotton agriculture and to clean parks, streets, and buildings. Officials have previously casted these compulsory tasks as part of Uzbekistan's traditional *Hashar* system, under which community members are

expected to perform voluntary work for communal benefit. Due to high levels of informal employment, which include lack of contracts, individuals in the construction sector are vulnerable to trafficking. Criminalization of same-sex relationships between men makes some members of Uzbekistan's LGBTQI+ communities vulnerable to police abuse, extortion, and coercion into pornography and informant roles; widespread social stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals also compound their vulnerability to family-brokered forced marriages that may feature corollary sex trafficking or forced labor indicators. Children in institutions are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Some children are vulnerable to forced criminality in drug trafficking. According to 2021 data from international experts, 24 percent of children in Uzbekistan live in poverty and many work to help their families, facing high risk for trafficking. An estimated 3,000 Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan on short-term visas are vulnerable to trafficking because of inadequate access to public services and employment opportunities, compounded by instances of harassment from authorities. Traffickers exploit Uzbekistani nationals domestically in brothels, clubs, and private residences. North Korean nationals working in Uzbekistan may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.

Traffickers exploit Uzbekistani nationals in sex trafficking and forced labor in the Middle East, including in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE; in Europe, including Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, and Türkiye; and in Central, South, and East Asia, including in Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and Thailand, respectively. Uzbekistani nationals are subjected to forced labor in these regions in the construction, transportation, oil and gas, agricultural, retail, and food sectors. Observers noted an increased use of online recruitment by traffickers, primarily for forced labor. Uzbekistani nationals are subjected to forced criminality in cyber scam operations and forced labor in cryptocurrency mining in Burma and Laos. Hundreds of thousands of Uzbekistani migrant workers are at elevated risk of trafficking in Russia, where employers and authorities charge high work permit fees that catalyze debt-based coercion, subject them to poor living and working conditions, and garnish or withhold their wages; these vulnerabilities are often compounded by Russian employers' failure to register Uzbekistani migrant workers with the relevant authorities. More than half of Uzbekistani migrant workers reportedly forego the complex bureaucratic processes required to obtain proper documentation, exacerbating their vulnerability in the system. Russia continues to attract the vast majority of Uzbekistani labor migrants. Uzbekistani citizens traveling to the United States irregularly through multiple countries, including Latin America and Europe, may become vulnerable to trafficking. Uzbekistani labor migrants, particularly inmates in Russian prisons, are vulnerable to forced recruitment or under the promise of fast-tracked citizenship to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine. Some Uzbekistani migrants are

recruited to work in construction in Ukrainian territory occupied by Russia, where their passports are confiscated and they are mobilized to fight in Russia’s war against Ukraine. Some Uzbekistani men working in Türkiye are recruited by terrorist organizations to fight in Syria. Uzbekistani men who traveled to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to fight alongside or seek employment in armed groups brought their families with them, at times under deception. The Uzbekistani citizens left in these conflict zones, including children, may be at risk of trafficking, including in camps in Syria. Uzbekistani children in these camps are at risk of recruitment by armed groups.

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