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ETHIOPIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Ethiopia 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, Ethiopia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting more potential trafficking crimes, including those involving allegedly complicit officials, and convicting more traffickers. The government increased efforts to screen for trafficking indicators and identified significantly more potential trafficking victims. The government expanded oversight of private employment agencies to prevent labor abuses and established new labor inspection guidelines to streamline collaboration between labor inspectors and law enforcement personnel on criminal investigations. The government also operationalized its first government-run shelter for trafficking victims in Dire Dawa. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated fewer potential trafficking cases, and did not take sufficient protection and prevention measures regarding migrant workers utilizing the formal recruitment process, hindering its overall ability to protect Ethiopian migrant workers facing trafficking risks abroad. The government did not sufficiently address internal trafficking crimes, including domestic servitude and child sex trafficking, despite the scale of the problem and protection services remained inadequate. Reports of official complicity continued.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cease abducting or detaining children for the unlawful recruitment or use as child soldiers, including in combat or support roles, and demobilize children from non-state armed groups and government security forces while providing adequate protection and reintegration support.
- Vigorously investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers for transnational and internal trafficking crimes, including officials allegedly complicit in the abduction or unlawful detention of children for recruitment or use as child soldiers, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Expand anti-trafficking training to all levels of government and law enforcement, including officials outside Addis Ababa, on implementation of SOPs for victim identification and the NRM to refer all trafficking victims to appropriate care, and on victim-centered investigation techniques and the differences between human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
- Increase availability of protection services for trafficking victims, including partnering with civil society service providers.
- Raise awareness, including at the community level, of formal recruitment processes for migrant work abroad and trafficking risks, including in online scam operations in Southeast Asia.
- Provide pre-departure training to overseas workers and assign trained, dedicated labor attachés to Ethiopian embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad.
- Establish additional bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) with destination countries.
- Enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment agencies, including by establishing the employment oversight board, eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, inspecting private employment agencies, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, and training labor inspectors to report potential violations.
- Ensure police investigate potential cases of domestic servitude, particularly those involving children, and increase training for frontline officials, civil society, and

community members on trafficking indicators and referral procedures to law enforcement.

- Proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including Ethiopian migrant workers returning from overseas, domestic workers, individuals in commercial sex, unaccompanied children, children associated with nonstate armed groups or government security forces, and foreign nationals such as Eritreans, Somalis, South Sudanese, and Cuban regime-affiliated workers, and refer trafficking victims to appropriate services.
- Launch the anti-trafficking fund for victim services.
- Develop a comprehensive and centralized database to accurately report the government's anti-trafficking statistics and disaggregate data on trafficking crimes.

PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Proclamation 1178/2020, Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Persons, as amended by Corrigendum 11/2013, effective as of December 2020, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law prescribed penalties of seven to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 to 100,000 Ethiopian birr (Br) (\$160 to \$800) for labor trafficking and adult sex trafficking and 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 to 100,000 Br (\$240 to \$800) for child sex trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regards to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.

The government did not maintain a centralized law enforcement data collection system on trafficking crimes, hindering its ability to disaggregate human trafficking statistics, particularly those collected at the regional level, and likely resulting in underreported anti-trafficking prosecution statistics. In 2024, the government provided data from the federal level and 10 of 12 regions, with the exception of the Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella regions, the same reporting provided in 2023. The government reported investigating 470 trafficking cases – 27 for sex trafficking, 79 for labor trafficking, and 364 for unspecified forms of trafficking – in 2024, compared with 728 investigations in 2023. The government reported 103 investigations initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. The government reported prosecuting 697 individuals – 23 for sex trafficking, 79 for labor trafficking, and 595 for unspecified forms of trafficking – under the anti-trafficking proclamation; however, some data likely fell outside of the reporting period. This compared with 650 individuals prosecuted in the previous year. The government reported prosecutions of 274 individuals initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. Courts convicted 340 traffickers – 36 for sex trafficking, 55 for labor trafficking, and 249 for unspecified forms of trafficking, compared with 243 convictions in the previous year. Courts did not provide sentencing data for all convictions but reported issuing sentences ranging from one year to life imprisonment in addition to fines. Courts overturned two convictions on appeal and acquitted three defendants.

In response to a case involving 17 Ethiopian trafficking victims repatriated by an international organization from Burma and Laos, the government initiated an investigation into the fraudulent recruitment of Ethiopians for work in these countries, where they were exploited in forced criminality such as computer fraud, scamming, and drug trafficking. The government also established an inter-ministerial committee, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to coordinate the return of additional Ethiopian trafficking victims exploited in these countries.

As reported in prior years, officials' propensity to conflate human trafficking and migrant smuggling, particularly at the regional and local levels, made it probable some reported cases involved crimes outside the international definition of trafficking. The government took some steps at the *woreda*- (district), city-, and sub-city-levels to address internal trafficking crimes, such as child sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and official complicity; however, overall law enforcement

efforts continued to disproportionately focus on transnational trafficking crimes, and officials did not allocate adequate resources or attention to trafficking crimes within the country, compared with the scale of the problem.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Reports of corruption, including the solicitation of bribes and production of fraudulent documentation to facilitate trafficking crimes, among police, immigration officers, and judicial officials remained pervasive. In March 2025, eight military officials and one police officer were convicted and sentenced to eight years and five months in prison, with a monetary fine of 10,000 birr (\$75.17), for transporting potential trafficking victims along the border using an Ethiopian Defense Force military vehicle. In 2023, the government investigated and charged more than 60 immigration officials, including the former Deputy Director General of Immigration and Citizenship Services, for facilitating potential human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes by providing falsified approval letters for citizens to work abroad; officials initiated prosecutions of some of the officials, however, the legal proceedings remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. During the reporting period, observers reported government and government-affiliated forces forcibly recruited and used child soldiers; the state-mandated Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) conducted some investigations into these cases toward the end of the reporting period, resulting in the release of some child soldiers, but the government did not report initiating any criminal investigations or prosecutions related to these cases. The EHRC, alongside the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), conducted an inquiry into the reported arbitrary detention of children for conscription purposes and administered limited safeguards to prevent the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) coordinated anti-trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and victim-witness protection. Though criminal matters fall under federal jurisdiction, regional states have delegated authority to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. The Federal Police Commission had a specialized investigation unit dedicated to investigating human trafficking crimes, cases of transnational trafficking, and cases involving cross-regional exploitation in Ethiopia; the federal government continued to delegate regional law enforcement units to investigate internal trafficking cases in local jurisdictions. The MOJ maintained its specialized prosecution unit focused on human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes under the Transnational Organized Crime Directorate. The specialized investigators and prosecutors coordinated on trafficking cases and training efforts, including on victim-centered investigations, and evidence gathering. Internal trafficking crimes committed against women and children were investigated by the Prosecution of Crimes Against Women and Children Directorate.

The government, in partnership with civil society organizations, also provided regular trainings to federal and regional government officials, police, prosecutors, judges, and immigration officers, on the distinction between human trafficking and migrant smuggling, anti-trafficking laws, trafficking investigation SOPs, labor laws, financial investigation methods, victim identification, and international cooperation on investigations. Despite specialized trainings and use of the anti-trafficking law, officials reported challenges related to victim identification and the limited availability of protection services for victim-witnesses continued to hinder successful trafficking prosecutions. The government also cooperated with foreign governments, including Madagascar and Djibouti, on potential trafficking investigations. The government had an MOU with the Government of Kenya to cooperate on joint investigations involving cross-border human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

The government reported identifying at least 105 trafficking victims, compared with 541 trafficking victims in the previous reporting period. Additionally, the government increased efforts to screen vulnerable Ethiopians repatriated from the Middle East and other African countries for trafficking

indicators and identified 56,333 potential trafficking victims. Unlike in prior years, the government did not disaggregate victim identification data by type of trafficking and may have included victims of crimes not involving forced labor or sex trafficking. In addition, NGOs and international organizations reported identifying 3,033 potential trafficking victims, providing them with services, including medical care, reintegration assistance, education, and repatriation assistance for Ethiopian citizens in domestic servitude abroad. The government maintained formal SOPs and an NRM to guide officials in the proactive identification of trafficking victims and subsequent referral to services and distributed copies and regularly trained government officials and NGOs on their use. The government, in partnership with an international organization, expanded implementation of the SOPs and NRM through a digital directory of service providers able to assist trafficking victims.

The government reported providing 56,462 identified and potential victims with referrals to services, compared with 1,022 in 2023. The government reported providing at least 205 victims, including 200 children and five adults, with direct services, including medical care, psycho-social counseling, shelter, family reunification, legal aid, and economic assistance; this compared with at least 96 victims provided services by the government in 2023. Additionally, NGOs and international organizations provided 832 victims with services in 2024. Though most shelter facilities were NGO-run, the government operationalized its first government-run shelter for trafficking victims in Dire Dawa. Despite reliance on civil society organizations to provide most victim services, the government's provision of financial or in-kind support to such organizations remained minimal. An international organization continued to operate five migration response centers (MRCs) that could accommodate more than 500 vulnerable migrants, including potential trafficking victims, per day in Dire Dawa, Metema, Dewelle, Semera, and Togochale and provide basic needs, temporary shelter, and family reunification support. The government continued to support the MRCs by assigning social workers to serve in the MRCs. Unlike the previous year, the international organization did not report how many potential trafficking victims were assisted at the MRCs, compared with 258 in the previous reporting period. The government maintained operation of a child protection unit in Addis Ababa. The unit reportedly provided protection services to child trafficking victims and vulnerable children intercepted or identified en route from rural to urban areas. Protection services for male victims remained scarce, and observers reported the government's overall victim assistance remained limited and inconsistent in quality, particularly outside of Addis Ababa. Authorities did not report meaningful efforts to demobilize or provide reintegration support to children associated with non-state armed groups or government security forces.

The 2020 anti-trafficking proclamation established a fund to support victim protection and care, which could receive funding through a government budget allocation; through fines imposed on, and the sale of, confiscated property from traffickers and from foreign donors. In 2021, the government drafted regulations to initiate creation of the fund; the draft regulations were revised in 2023 and remained pending ministerial-level approval.

To protect Ethiopian citizens exploited abroad, some Ethiopian diplomatic missions in Gulf states continued to provide temporary shelter and facilitate repatriation flights for victims. The government, in collaboration with international organizations, repatriated more than 80,000 Ethiopians. The Victim Migrant Returnees' Reintegration Implementation Directive (No. 696/2023) continued to enhance coordination among and provide guidance to government officials on the identification of potential trafficking victims and subsequent referral to care among Ethiopian returnees. The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MOWSA), in collaboration with international organizations, used the directive to establish a support center at Bole International Airport to facilitate reuniting returnees with their families. The National Partnership Coalition (NPC), in coordination with other government agencies and civil society, maintained an ad hoc committee led by the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) to provide Ethiopian returnees with protection services. While civil society organizations provided most services for returnees, the EDRMC and MOWSA, in collaboration with international organizations maintained temporary government-operated shelters in Addis Ababa, where the government provided basic needs, counseling, medical services, financial assistance, consular services, and family reintegration assistance. Additionally, MOWSA provided seven social workers for a transit center operated by an international organization to assist in the identification of potential trafficking

victims among returnees and the provision of counseling services. Despite these efforts, government officials and civil society reported a lack of personnel and financial resources available to government agencies hindered the government's overall ability to meet the significant need of returnees.

The 2020 anti-trafficking proclamation provided protections to victims participating in investigations and prosecutions, which included protection from prosecution for crimes solely committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government, in partnership with an international organization, drafted an amendment to the proclamation to reportedly increase protections for victims of crime and ensure the protections were in line with international standards; it remained awaiting approval by the MOJ. The government maintained a witness protection directorate to provide assistance to victim-witnesses. Officials maintained an MOU with NGOs to improve coordination between law enforcement agencies and service providers intended to ensure officials referred victims to appropriate care, including shelter, counseling, and legal assistance, throughout the course of legal proceedings. Courts allowed children to testify against traffickers via video or in child-friendly interviewing rooms. Despite these protections, observers reported, in some cases, victims chose not to testify due to fear of reprisal or lack of funding to travel to court. The government did not report how many victims voluntarily participated in criminal proceedings against traffickers. The anti-trafficking proclamation allowed criminal courts to order convicted traffickers to pay restitution, but the government reported that in practice, victims seek compensation for damages in separate civil suits. It did not report if any restitution was ordered during the reporting period or if any civil suits were filed. Proclamation 1178/2020 entitled all victims to the same services and allowed foreign national victims to receive temporary residence permits or repatriation assistance on an as-needed basis.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking.

The senior-level National Council, chaired by the deputy prime minister, maintained responsibility for the creation of policies and strategies for the prevention of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and met once. The working-level NPC, housed in the MOJ and composed of members from relevant government ministries, religious institutions, civil society organizations, and media, continued to serve as the government's primary coordinating body for issues related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling and maintained six working groups. The NPC met quarterly to implement and evaluate performance of the 2021-2025 NAP and validate their annual plan for anti-trafficking, smuggling, and migration management. The city administrations of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and all regions, except three, maintained regional partnership councils to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts; Tigray initiated efforts to establish a council during the reporting period. Unlike in previous years, the federal government did not report how much funding it allocated to efforts to combat trafficking and transnational organized crime, compared with 1.58 billion Br (\$28.3 million) allocated for anti-trafficking and migrant smuggling efforts in the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Regional governments and city administrations also allocated funds for anti-trafficking efforts but did not report specific funding amounts. The government sought input from survivors in developing new anti-trafficking policies and programs and encouraged survivors' participation in awareness raising activities. The government held a national conference on migration research to analyze trafficking trends and risks within Ethiopia, particularly focused on IDPs and labor migration. The government, both independently and in partnership with foreign governments, international organizations and foreign donors, conducted various awareness campaigns at the federal and regional levels on trafficking indicators and reporting mechanisms, with a focus on illegal migration, primarily targeted toward schools, rural communities, religious institutions, and media. The Addis Ababa City Administration, in partnership with an international organization, maintained a toll-free, 24/7 trafficking-specific hotline to report trafficking crimes and refer victims to services. The hotline reported receiving 941 calls this year and referred 56 potential trafficking cases to police for investigation. Federal and regional police reportedly had additional hotlines to report crimes, including human trafficking.

The Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS) continued to regulate labor migration. Proclamation 1246/2021 Ethiopian's Overseas Employment (Amendment) required recruitment agencies to be registered and licensed, and the government required recruitment agencies to ensure migrant workers received training on worker rights and destination countries' laws prior to departure. The government routinely monitored more than 809 recruitment agencies through both desk reviews and in-person inspections, which resulted in administrative actions taken against 121 agencies, including fines, warnings, and license removal, compared to an unreported number of administrative actions in the previous reporting period in 2024, compared with monitoring 40 agencies and taking administrative action against 77 agencies in 2023. The MOLS also provided anti-trafficking training to 162 participants from private recruitment agencies and delivered training of trainers to regional states. The MOLS remained without its mandated employment board to oversee implementation of the employment proclamation. The overseas employment proclamation continued to require employment agencies to deposit a \$100,000, or the equivalent in Ethiopian Birr, security bond in a bank as insurance, which officials would use to assist and repatriate trafficking victims; however, the government did not consistently enforce this requirement. Employment agencies were allowed to charge migrant workers, not including those employed in domestic work, to pay recruitment fees the amount of one month's salary over four payment periods. During the reporting period, the government began drafting a new overseas employment proclamation to better regulate labor migration.

The MOLS continued to implement its Labor Migration Information System (LMIS), which included a website and mobile application, to digitize all employment services. The LMIS allowed Ethiopians seeking work abroad to register by creating an online profile that included demographic information, education, work experience, skills, and employment preferences. The LMIS maintained a database of migration data, job opportunities posted by recruitment agencies, pre-departure information, and resources for migrants upon their return to Ethiopia. The MOLS also deployed their Expat Work Permit System within the ILMS to enhance protections for migrant workers in Ethiopia. The government trained 189 government officials on LMIS this reporting period. The MOLS continued to provide pre-departure training for Ethiopians seeking work abroad, including on employment contracts, worker rights, and resources for assistance. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training Agency implemented government-funded vocational training programs, ranging from 20 days to six months, which included training on job skills, basic foreign languages, and cultural considerations of destination countries. The government maintained BLAs with Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to enhance protections of migrant workers. Experts previously reported the BLA with Lebanon, which did not include a minimum wage and offered minimal legal protections, failed to adequately protect domestic workers, a group particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to Lebanon's employer-based visa system. The government finalized new BLAs with the Government of Kuwait and with a Sweden-based company. It also continued to draft and negotiate BLAs with several other governments. Despite the protection and prevention efforts provided within the formal recruitment process prior to departure, the government did not employ dedicated labor attachés at Ethiopian diplomatic missions, hindering the government's overall ability to monitor migrant worker conditions abroad. Labor inspectors overseeing working conditions in the country received anti-trafficking training and reported potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement following routine inspections of worksites. In partnership with an NGO, the government finalized and implemented trafficking in persons guidelines for labor inspectors to identify potential trafficking victims, utilize the NRM to refer victims to services, and coordinate with police and prosecutors on criminal investigations. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, investigation and accountability actions remained pending for one allegation of sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators against one Ethiopian peacekeeper serving in the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2018.

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 Ethiopia, and traffickers exploit victims from Ethiopia abroad. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Ethiopia in domestic servitude and sex trafficking throughout the country and boys and men in labor trafficking in traditional weaving, construction, agriculture, forced begging, and street vending. Traffickers increasingly use social media to recruit child victims for sexual exploitation and trafficking. Traffickers also utilize social media to target university graduates, promising false job opportunities in Southeast Asian countries, particularly Thailand, Burma, and Laos, where they are exploited in forced criminality. Labor recruiters frequently target young people from Ethiopia's vast rural areas with false promises of a better life in urban areas; in some cases, traffickers replicate legitimate app-based recruitment tools to fraudulently recruit vulnerable populations and exploit them in forced labor. In some cases, traffickers exploit children from rural areas encouraged to work by their parents as a result of extreme economic pressures in sex trafficking or forced labor. The International Organization for Migration estimates there were 3.4 million IDPs in Ethiopia in 2024 as a result of internal conflict, drought, and flooding. IDPs, particularly those who migrate from rural areas to urban cities, and individuals in resettlement camps are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking due to a lack of access to justice, education, economic opportunity, and basic needs, such as food, water, and health services. Previous reports indicated armed actors, including Eritrean forces, regional Ethiopian forces, the ENDF, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), committed human rights abuses and violence against women and girls, including potential trafficking crimes, in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar between the beginning of the conflict in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 and the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the government and the TPLF in November 2022. Prior to the COHA, observers reported unspecified military personnel and other officials forced women to have sex in exchange for basic commodities and humanitarian assistance. Observers have described human rights abuses and violence against women and girls in the ongoing conflicts in Amhara and parts of Oromia between the ENDF and armed groups. Due to these conflicts, reports of outward migration and trafficking have increased. Children in conflict areas throughout the country are vulnerable to unlawful recruitment or use by armed groups. Reports allege non-state armed groups may have recruited or used children in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia. During the reporting period, observers reported government and government-affiliated forces forcibly recruited and used child soldiers. International organizations report Eritrean forces also forcibly recruited and used children in combat in Ethiopia in previous reporting periods.

Trusted community members, known as *manamasas*, recruit and groom vulnerable youth on behalf of local and international human trafficking syndicates by exaggerating the advantages of working abroad. Scarce economic opportunities and poverty, coupled with familial encouragement, compel tens of thousands of Ethiopians to transit out of Ethiopia via three main routes, where they are vulnerable to trafficking. Undocumented economic migrants take the eastern route, via Djibouti or Somalia, to Yemen and onward to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Due to human rights abuses and killings of Ethiopians at the Yemeni-Saudi border, an increasing number of Ethiopian migrants take the eastern route intending to reach Oman via Yemen. The southern route often involves individuals transiting through Kenya and onward to South Africa. The northwestern route, the least common, has traditionally been taken by men through Sudan to Libya or Egypt and onward to Europe; however, observers report women using this route to reach Khartoum, where they apply for and receive visas to Lebanon. Observers have reported the process to acquire visas is often illegitimate and part of trafficking schemes. Across all three of these major migration routes, traffickers exploit Ethiopian migrants in sex and labor trafficking in transit countries and in their intended destinations. Most traffickers are small local operators, often from the victims' home communities, but highly organized trafficking networks also facilitate illegal migration flows and exploit individuals in sex or labor trafficking. More than 80,000 Ethiopians returned from abroad in 2024, many of whom were vulnerable to trafficking in their destination country, along their route, and once back in Ethiopia.

Traffickers exploit Ethiopians in sex and labor trafficking in other African countries, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Ethiopians traveling to the Middle East through licensed Ethiopian employment agencies are susceptible to trafficking by employers or illegal employment agencies in the destination country. The employer-based visa system – common in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait,

Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – binds domestic workers to one employer and prevents their freedom of movement. Throughout the Middle East, traffickers exploit Ethiopian women in domestic servitude, subjecting them to severe physical and emotional abuse. Ethiopians abroad – especially in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia – often face stigmatization and abuse, leading to loss of employment and potential deportation; this population remains vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian women and children in forced begging, sometimes via organized begging rings, in Saudi Arabia. Media reports allege the Houthis in Yemen forcibly recruited African migrants, including Ethiopians, to join their ranks after kidnapping hundreds who entered Houthi-controlled territory during their migration journey and transferring them to military training facilities. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian girls in domestic servitude and sex trafficking, sometimes using substances as a means of control, in neighboring African countries, particularly Djibouti and Sudan. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian boys in labor trafficking in forced begging, domestic servitude, and shopkeeping, especially prevalent in Djibouti. Ethiopians fleeing internal conflict and seeking refugee status or asylum in neighboring countries, where protection services are limited, are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking as displacement, food insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity persists. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Ethiopia – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.

As of March 2025, Ethiopia hosts more than one million refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. Refugees without access to education, economic opportunity, or basic needs, such as food, water, and health services, and those further displaced by conflict are vulnerable to trafficking. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated medical workers in Ethiopia to work.