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RUSSIA (Tier 3)

The Government of Russia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Russia remained on Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government facilitated the return of Russian children from Syria, some of whom may have been trafficking victims. However, during the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of trafficking of Ukrainian citizens and North Korean workers. There were also reports of Russian officials forcing, deceiving, or coercing foreign national adults to fight in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. As part of its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Russian government operated a sprawling filtration operation and detention system that included the use of forced labor. The government continued to perpetuate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) imposition of forced labor conditions on North Korean workers. The government did not screen North Korean workers in Russia for trafficking indicators or identify any North Korean trafficking victims, despite credible reports in previous years that the DPRK operated work camps in Russia and exploited thousands of North Korean workers in forced labor. The government issued or re-issued 4,723 visas to North Koreans in 2022 in an apparent attempt to circumvent UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) prohibiting DPRK overseas labor. The government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in Russia in 2022. Separate from this complicity, the government did not report identifying any trafficking victims, and its efforts to prosecute and convict traffickers decreased. Authorities continued to lack a process for victim identification and referral to care, and the criminal code did not establish a definition for a trafficking victim, hindering identification efforts and limiting access to victim services. The government offered no funding or programs to provide services for trafficking victims, and authorities routinely penalized victims and potential victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a direct result of being trafficked. As in previous years, the government did not draft a national strategy or assign roles and responsibilities to government agencies to combat human trafficking.

Additionally, the government engaged in conduct that created populations that are highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government's forcible transfer of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, including by forcibly separating some children from parental figures, greatly increased the separated children's vulnerability to trafficking. Moreover, the government's war against Ukraine created millions of refugees fleeing Ukraine, as well as those internally displaced by Russia's aggression, all of whom were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The scale and scope of such conduct raise real and serious concerns regarding significant potential risks of trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cease the use of forced labor in filtration detention centers and the use of child labor for military purposes.
- Stop the forcible recruitment and use of Russian citizens and foreign nationals as soldiers by government forces and pro-government militias and enforce limits on the length of compulsory military service.
- Investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and convict traffickers under the trafficking statutes, including complicit officials and suspected trafficking cases related to North Korean workers in Russia, respecting due process.
- Develop and implement formal national procedures to guide law enforcement, labor inspectors, and other government officials in identifying and referring victims to service providers, particularly among labor migrants and individuals in commercial sex, and

screen for trafficking indicators among individuals arrested for commercial sex or immigration violations.

- Allocate funding to state bodies and anti-trafficking NGOs to provide specialized assistance and care to victims.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Given significant concerns that the DPRK subjects its overseas workers to conditions that amount to forced labor, screen North Korean workers, students, and tourists for trafficking indicators and refer them to appropriate services, in a manner consistent with obligations under UNSCR 2397.
- Create a national anti-trafficking action plan and establish a central coordinator for government efforts.
- Ensure victim identification and protection measures are not tied to the prosecution of a trafficker and allow all first responders to officially identify potential trafficking victims and refer them to care.
- Take all necessary steps to allow those forcibly relocated to Russia to travel freely and avoid falling victim to traffickers.
- Increase efforts to raise public awareness of both sex and labor trafficking, including among children.
- Ensure screening of children returned from Iraq and Syria for child soldiering indicators and provide them with rehabilitation and reintegration support.
- Provide victims access to legal alternatives to removal to countries where they face hardship or retribution.
- Amend the criminal code to include a definition of human trafficking that is consistent with the definition under international law.
- Create a central repository for publicly available information on investigation, prosecution, conviction, and sentencing data for trafficking cases.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased already minimal law enforcement efforts. Articles 127.1 (trafficking in persons) and 127.2 (use of slave labor) of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Article 127.1 prescribed penalties of up to five years' prison labor or up to six years' imprisonment for crimes involving an adult victim, and three to 10 years' imprisonment for those involving a child victim. Article 127.2 prescribed penalties of up to five years' prison labor or up to five years' imprisonment for crimes involving an adult victim, and up to five years' prison labor or three to 10 years' imprisonment for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with punishments prescribed for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. However, inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, these articles established the use of force, fraud, or coercion as an aggravating factor, rather than an essential element of the crime. There were reports authorities often prosecuted trafficking crimes under related statutes, including Articles 240 (involvement in prostitution), 240.1 (receiving sexual services from a minor), and 241 (organization of prostitution), the penalties for which were generally lower than the penalties prescribed for trafficking crimes. The government did not report data on trafficking criminal cases, making it difficult to assess the adequacy or effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. Media reports revealed some details on trafficking cases investigated and prosecuted, including some conviction information, although the limited number of cases reported did not constitute an adequate law enforcement response compared with the scale of human trafficking in Russia.

In January 2023, authorities opened an investigation under Article 127.2 into the forced labor of two Uzbek workers on a construction site. In February 2023, media reported authorities arrested five suspected traffickers who allegedly exploited women in commercial sex in foreign countries between 2010 and 2019. In November 2022, media reported the government prosecuted and convicted three traffickers for abducting and selling four men and three women to farmers for the purpose of forced labor; the court issued sentences ranging from eight to 10 years' imprisonment.

In comparison, in 2021, the government and media publicly reported the government conducted four labor trafficking investigations, 13 prosecutions under Articles 127.1 and 127.2, and convicted five traffickers. In previous years, authorities prosecuted suspected traffickers under commercial sex and “pimping” statutes; the government did not report trafficking cases under these statutes in 2022. NGOs noted hundreds of trafficking-related cases were reported to authorities, but the government processed most under other administrative or criminal codes, which suppressed statistics and masked the scale and scope of the problem. Media reported in 2021 that courts convicted 7,081 people under articles related to various forms of exploitation, including the “organization of illegal migration,” “the enslavement of a person,” and kidnapping; however, courts only convicted 16 people under Article 127.1 and no one under Article 127.2. The government did not report whether it trained law enforcement or judicial authorities on trafficking. Russian authorities did not report cooperating in any new or ongoing international investigations in 2022. In July 2022, the government signed a plan with Kyrgyzstan to carry out activities in several areas, including human trafficking. In October 2022, the government signed a three-year plan with Vietnam to cooperate in various fields, including combating human trafficking.

Official complicity in trafficking and other crimes remained a significant concern. NGOs reported government officials and police regularly accepted bribes in exchange for not pursuing trafficking cases, and officials often benefitted financially or materially from trafficking crimes. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. However, in prior years civil society reported the government intentionally investigated official complicity cases under non-trafficking statutes, such as Article 290 (bribery) of the criminal code. In the years following Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Russia-led forces reportedly used children to perform armed duty at checkpoints, and to serve as fighters, guards, mailpersons, and secretaries, as well as informants and human shields. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, media highlighted new reports of Russian forces using children as human shields. Observers reported Russia-associated military associations and clubs, registered as non-profit organizations, continued to routinely prepare youth in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine for conscripted service in Russia’s armed forces; some observers reported Russian-led forces conscripted Ukrainian youth as young as sixteen, some of whom may have participated in fighting. In August 2022, media reported “so-called Russian authorities” in Russia-occupied territory in eastern Ukraine opened a military summer camp for children, where children were taught to use firearms. In November 2022, Russian occupying forces in Crimea reportedly approved a program of “preliminary military training” for schoolchildren of all ages beginning in the current academic year; this program included training on small arms and ammunition and military drills and formations. Experts reported Russian authorities placed thousands of Ukrainian children in “re-education” camps in Russia and Russia-occupied Crimea; in some cases, instruction included military education and training. All children placed in these camps remained vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking. Moreover, multiple reports indicated Russia-led forces forcibly moved thousands of Ukrainians, including children, to Russia through “filtration camps” in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine, where they were deprived of their documents and forced to take Russian passports. Observers noted there were reports of forced labor in filtration detention centers, including prisoners forced to work on town improvement projects, coerced into enlisting in a local police force, and forced to repair, paint, and clean barracks. Widespread reports indicated Russian authorities forcibly transported thousands of Ukrainians into Russia, including to some of its most remote regions, and reportedly forcibly separated some Ukrainian children from their parents and gave the children to Russian families. Widespread and persistent reports also indicate Russian authorities transported, without consent, thousands of Ukrainian children from Ukrainian orphanages and foster families to Russia, where Russian authorities gave them to Russian families. Ukrainians forcibly displaced to Russia were highly vulnerable to trafficking. Observers reported Russian authorities used Ukrainian children as informants to gather information about the location of strategic military objects, such as checkpoints and transportation routes. The government also used Russian children to make tactical stretchers and sew clothes for Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine and announced that high school students in Russia would receive hands-on training with weapons starting in 2023. During the reporting period, there were reports the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers in the Central African Republic. Additionally, during the reporting period, media

highlighted uncorroborated reports that the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group kidnapped boys in the Central African Republic and exploited them in forced labor in mines.

Persistent and widespread reports indicated the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group recruited convicts, including prisoners from Central Asia, in Russian prisons to fight in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; these convicts were reportedly offered a pardon, freedom, and monthly salary in exchange for fighting, but observers noted there was no legal guarantee the prisoners would be freed upon completion of service, nor that they would receive their salaries. Moreover, reports indicated the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group threatened prisoners who refused to fight with execution. Uncorroborated reports indicated Russian authorities coerced and threatened Russian university students to sign consent forms to early conscription. Observers also reported Russian authorities coerced, used deception, and in some cases force, including torture, to conscript migrants, particularly Central Asian migrants. Furthermore, observers noted the government's mobilization decree issued in 2022 banned volunteer recruits from ending their contracts. Persistent and widespread but unconfirmed reports indicated Russia-led forces attempted to conscript or force many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine to fight against their own country or engage in forced labor, such as to clear rubble and dispose of corpses. In October 2022, the government issued a decree imposing martial law in Russia-occupied territory in eastern Ukraine, giving authorities the power, among other things, to force people to work "for defense needs." In January 2023, media reported the Russian government issued a decree to build a sprawling prison network, including three forced labor camps, in Russia-occupied territory in eastern Ukraine.

Despite credible reports of North Koreans in Russia working under conditions that amount to forced labor, the Russian government did not report any investigations into those conditions. In violation of UNSCRs 2375 and 2397, migrants from the DPRK continued to work in Russia, especially in the Far East, often under conditions of forced labor. The government previously reported approximately 500 DPRK workers remained in the country at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020; the government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in 2022. Despite the government claiming it would cease issuing new work permits to North Korean workers, observers noted many workers continued to enter the country fraudulently to work informally, for example by obtaining tourist or student visas. The government issued or renewed 4,723 visas to North Korean citizens in 2022 (compared with 4,093 in 2021). The government recorded 12,954 migration registrations of North Korean citizens in 2022, including 133 for tourist purposes, 9,571 for student purposes, and 2,314 for other purposes; experts noted many of these visa holders worked illegally in Russia, making them vulnerable to trafficking. In late 2022, media reported Russian authorities openly discussed inviting 20,000 to 50,000 North Korean workers to Russia, mainly to work on infrastructure projects in the Far East. Media reports also indicated Russian and DPRK authorities discussed sending North Korean workers to Russia-occupied territory in eastern Ukraine. Authorities did not report screening North Korean workers for trafficking indicators or offering victims options to legally remain in the country. A February 2016 agreement between Russia and the DPRK enabled Russian authorities to deport North Koreans residing "illegally" in Russia, possibly even those with refugee status. Observers noted this may increase the risk of labor trafficking for North Koreans working in Russia and might subject victims to grave harm as DPRK authorities reportedly arrested, imprisoned, subjected to forced labor, tortured, and sometimes executed repatriated trafficking victims. In January 2023, media reported DPRK authorities requested Russian cooperation in thwarting DPRK workers from fleeing their work and living places in Russia.

PROTECTION

The government decreased already negligible efforts to protect victims. The government did not develop or employ a formal system to guide officials in proactive identification of victims or their referral to available services. The law did not specifically define who was a trafficking victim or differentiate trafficking victims from victims of other crimes; experts noted this hindered identification measures and limited access to services. The government did not report identifying any trafficking victims in 2022, compared with 52 in 2020, the most recent year for which

authorities reported statistics. NGO estimates of the actual number of victims ranged from thousands to more than a million; one NGO noted human trafficking cases increased starting in 2020 due to the pandemic and that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine increased trafficking risks. Civil society reported a significant number of cases went unreported due to the lack of a formal referral mechanism, victims' credible fears of authorities, and the lack of government assistance to victims. Observers noted police regularly avoided registering victims in criminal cases that were unlikely to be solved to avoid a lower conviction rate. The government also did not have a program to protect or support victims who participated in the investigation or prosecution of their alleged traffickers. In recent years, authorities reportedly pressured some victims to cooperate in investigations without any offer of protection. Observers noted Russia's removal from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in September 2022, following its exclusion from the Council of Europe in March, left trafficking victims with fewer remedies and noted that in several past cases only appeals to the ECtHR had led to government action. The government did not report if it repatriated trafficking victims to Russia under a previously established readmission agreement with the EU intended to assist in the repatriation of Russian citizens.

As in previous years, the government did not provide funding or programs for protective services dedicated to trafficking victims. NGOs provided all protection services, including shelter, food, legal services, basic medical and psychological support, interpretation, facilitating the return of documents or wages, and assisting in the resettlement or repatriation of victims, although few were able to provide specialized assistance for trafficking victims; an NGO and international organization also ran a 24/7 hotline. While in prior years government-funded homeless shelters provided medical and psychiatric aid and referred trafficking victims to international NGOs and homeless shelters located in many of Russia's regions, NGOs reported they no longer sent victims to these shelters because of their poor conditions, the lack of screening for trafficking indicators, and the risk that victims may be vulnerable to further trafficking; as in previous years, there were no reports of victims assisted in these shelters in 2022. The government did not report if courts ordered compensation to victims; publicly available data showed trafficking victims did not receive compensation in civil suits in 2022. The government continued the repatriation of Russian children, including potential trafficking victims, whose parents were alleged fighters with ISIS. ISIS was known to use child soldiers and perpetrate other forms of trafficking. The government did not report screening for trafficking indicators, but past media reports indicated the children received counseling. In 2022, the government reported it had repatriated 423 children from the Middle East since the start of its repatriation program in 2017, including 292 children from Syria and 122 children from Iraq; the government repatriated an additional 56 children from Syria in March 2023 and reported it provided these children with psychosocial support and rehabilitation services.

The government did not actively cooperate with civil society. As in previous reporting periods, the government took steps to limit or ban civil society groups' activities, including some dedicated to anti-trafficking activities, through measures such as "foreign agent" laws. In June 2022, Russian authorities arrested a former colleague of a prominent migrant rights activist who ran a non-profit organization that assisted Tajik labor migrants and deported him to Tajikistan, where observers feared he could be tortured and imprisoned; Russian authorities closed the organization and harassed multiple former employees and volunteers. In December 2022, government revisions to the foreign agent laws went into effect, further shrinking the operating space for civil society organizations. Additionally, authorities could prosecute NGOs that assisted undocumented trafficking victims because anti-terror laws made it a crime for individuals or organizations to provide material assistance to people considered to be in Russia illegally. Authorities also penalized victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Authorities treated foreign victims as illegal migrants and criminally charged them with "prostitution" or "unlawful presence in country;" authorities detained or deported many victims without screening for trafficking indicators. Authorities frequently prosecuted Russian and foreign victims of sex trafficking for engaging in commercial sex and did not take proactive measures to identify victims during brothel raids. Authorities punished child victims of forced criminality, often together with the traffickers who forced them to commit these crimes. Authorities did not screen other vulnerable populations, such as foreign women entering Russia on student visas despite evidence of their intention to work, migrant workers, or other individuals who exhibited trafficking risks. In prior

years, authorities reportedly prosecuted under anti-terror laws Russian citizens returning from Syria and Iraq, where some were subjected to trafficking, without screening them for indicators of trafficking. The ILO Committee of Experts again noted its deep concern in 2020 that some provisions of the Russian criminal code, which include compulsory labor as possible punishment, are worded broadly enough to lend themselves to application as a means of punishment for the expression of views opposed to the government.

PREVENTION

The government maintained negligible efforts to prevent trafficking. The government had neither a designated lead agency to coordinate its anti-trafficking efforts nor a body to monitor its anti-trafficking activities or make periodic assessments measuring its performance. Russia did not have a NAP. The government continued to operate regional migration centers where foreign migrants who did not need visas to enter the country could obtain work permits directly from the government; however, an international organization estimated only half of eligible migrants obtained these permits, as they entailed large upfront and monthly fees and sometimes required multiple time-consuming trips to the center. The international organization noted migrants not able to complete the permit process were increasingly vulnerable to labor exploitation and trafficking due to their lack of proper documentation. In October 2022, the government signed an MOU with Tajikistan to open a Russian pre-migration center in Dushanbe to allow Tajik migrant workers to obtain fingerprint registration, employment certificates, and other services prior to traveling to Russia. The Ministry of Internal Affairs required recruitment agencies that sought to employ Russians overseas to obtain a license, but it did not report if it continued to regulate and issue such licenses, and no such requirement existed for agencies recruiting foreign workers. In previous years, authorities conducted scheduled and unannounced inspections of businesses employing foreign workers to check for violations of immigration and labor laws – with penalties in the form of fines and/or revocation of foreign worker permits; the government did not report conducting inspections in 2021 or 2022. In spite of frequent inspections in past years, the use of undocumented or forced labor remained widespread due to complacency and corruption. The government provided no funds to NGOs to carry out prevention and awareness campaigns. Prevention campaigns were hampered by a law that made it a crime to talk to children younger than 16 about sexual issues and exploitation. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, nor did it make efforts to reduce the demand for participation in international sex tourism by its citizens, despite such allegations. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Russia, and victims from Russia are exploited abroad. Although labor trafficking remains the predominant form of human trafficking in Russia, sex trafficking also occurs. Traffickers exploit workers from Russia and other countries in Europe, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the DPRK in forced labor in Russia. Instances of labor trafficking have been reported in the construction, manufacturing, logging, textile, transport, and maritime industries, as well as in sawmills, agriculture, sheep farms, grocery and retail stores, restaurants, waste sorting, street sweeping, domestic service, call centers, and begging. Labor traffickers also exploit victims in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, facilitation of illegal migration, and the production of counterfeit goods. According to an NGO, foreign nationals increasingly enter the country illegally with the help of criminal groups, which subsequently increases the migrants' vulnerability to trafficking. In previous years, there were reports of widespread forced labor in brick factories in the Dagestan region. Observers noted undocumented migrants and refugees were at particularly high risk of human trafficking in Russia. After a sharp decrease at the onset of the pandemic, labor migration to Russia began to increase in 2021; media reported more than 7.8 million migrants from the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan entered Russia in 2021.

Although labor migration increased again in 2022, the number of migrant workers in Russia has not reached pre-pandemic levels. Many migrant workers experience exploitative labor conditions characteristic of trafficking cases, such as withholding of identity documents, non-payment for services rendered, physical abuse, lack of safety measures, or extremely poor living conditions. To offset the shortage of migrant workers, the government increased the use of convict labor, particularly for large construction projects; observers expressed concern that prisoners working for private businesses may not be doing so voluntarily in spite of government claims that its correctional labor programs comply fully with its international obligations. According to an international organization, children of migrant workers are vulnerable to forced labor in informal sectors. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, media reported more than two million Ukrainians resided in Russia, including more than one million who escaped Russian aggression in Ukraine. Many of these migrants work unofficially and are vulnerable to both forced labor and sex trafficking; most identified victims of forced begging in recent years are Ukrainian. Subcontracting practices in Russia's construction industry result in cases of non-payment or slow payment of wages, which leave workers at risk of labor trafficking. Organized criminal groups often recruit victims from within their own ethnic communities. Traffickers have been known to pose as landlords renting rooms to migrant workers to recruit victims and coerce them into forced labor. Traffickers lure children from state and municipal orphanages into forced begging, forced criminality, child pornography, sex trafficking, and use by armed groups in the Middle East. Organized criminal groups recruit victims for forced begging from state institutions for the elderly and people with disabilities; these institutions are not trained on how to identify trafficking and sometimes facilitate the exploitation. Traffickers target former Russian prisoners for forced labor in so-called "work houses" or labor camps, where they are forced to work for accommodation and food and often subjected to physical violence and coerced to stay. Illicit companies in Southeast Asia recruit and exploit Russian citizens for forced labor in cyber scam operations.

Women and children from Europe (predominantly Ukraine and Moldova), Southeast Asia (primarily PRC and the Philippines), Africa (particularly Nigeria), and Central Asia are victims of sex trafficking in Russia. Observers note migrant workers are also vulnerable to sex trafficking and an increasing number of sex trafficking victims are from Africa, arriving either illegally or legally as students. Sex trafficking occurs in brothels, hotels, and saunas, among other locations. Children experiencing homelessness are exploited in sex trafficking. Russian women and children are reportedly victims of sex trafficking in Russia and abroad, including in Northeast Asia, Europe, Central Asia, Africa, the United States, and the Middle East. An NGO reported women and girls from Russia's North Caucasus region are primarily exploited for sex trafficking in Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Traffickers use social media to recruit, monitor, and control victims. Russian criminal groups threaten family members to coerce women into commercial sex in Russia and abroad. ISIS has recruited women from Russia's North Caucasus region and women from Central Asia residing in Russia to join it through online romantic relationships and then subject them to exploitation. Wives and children of foreign fighters are sold after their spouse or father is killed in action.

Corruption among some government officials and within some state agencies creates an environment enabling trafficking crimes. In recent years, criminal cases have involved Russian officials suspected of allegedly facilitating trafficking by enabling victims' entry into Russia, providing protection to traffickers, and returning victims to their exploiters; in some instances, officials have engaged directly in trafficking crimes. Employers sometimes bribe Russian officials to avoid enforcement of penalties for engaging illegal workers. Prior to 2018, the DPRK sent approximately 20,000 North Korean citizens to Russia annually for work in a variety of sectors, including logging in Russia's Far East. Observers note a growing trend in the use of non-labor visas to bring DPRK workers to Russia. The North Korean government subjects many of these North Korean citizens to conditions of forced labor. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, multiple reports indicate Russia-led forces have forcibly moved thousands of Ukrainians, including children, to Russia through "filtration camps" in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine, where Russian so-called "authorities" deprive them of their documents and force them to take Russian passports. Observers noted there were reports of forced labor in filtration detention centers, including prisoners being forced to work on town improvement projects, coerced into enlisting in a local police force, and forced to repair, paint, and clean barracks. Once in Russia, widespread

reports indicate Russian authorities have forcibly transported thousands of Ukrainians to some of Russia's most remote regions and have reportedly forcibly separated some Ukrainian children from their parents and given the children to Russian families. Experts reported Russian authorities placed thousands of Ukrainian children in "re-education" camps in Russia and Russia-occupied Crimea. Widespread and persistent reports also indicate that Russian authorities transported without consent thousands of Ukrainian children from Ukrainian orphanages and foster families to Russia, where they gave them to Russian families. Ukrainians forcibly displaced to Russia are highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine creates significant trafficking vulnerabilities for the millions of refugees who have fled Ukraine and for the internally displaced persons and others in need of humanitarian aid and protection assistance within Ukraine.

In the years following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, persistent and widespread but unconfirmed reports indicate Russia-led forces have attempted to conscript or force many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine to fight against their own country, and following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Russian forces have reportedly forced many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine to engage in forced labor, such as to clear rubble and dispose of corpses. Since 2014, Russia-led forces have reportedly used children to perform armed duty at checkpoints, and to serve as fighters, guards, mailpersons, and secretaries; and reports indicate Russia-led forces have used children as informants and as human shields. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, media highlighted new reports of Russian forces using children as human shields. Observers report Russia-associated military associations and clubs, registered as non-profit organizations, continue to routinely prepare youth in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine for conscripted service in Russia's armed forces. During the reporting period, there were reports the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group unlawfully recruited and used children in the Central African Republic. Russia-led forces reportedly recruit Syrian child soldiers to guard installations and fight in Libya.