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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; 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. Moreover, the government repatriated North Korean workers who had attempted to escape, without screening them for trafficking indicators; these individuals were highly vulnerable to forced labor and other grave harms, such as arrest, imprisonment, torture, or execution, upon return to the DPRK. The government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in Russia in 2023. Separate from this complicity, the government did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting any traffickers and did not report identifying any trafficking victims. 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 were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government's forcible transfer of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, including by forcibly separating some children from their parents or guardians, greatly increased the separated children's vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, the government created significant vulnerabilities to trafficking for Ukrainian citizens in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine by restricting access to a wide range of services and employment for those who did not acquire Russian citizenship. Moreover, the government's war against Ukraine forced millions of refugees to flee 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 raised real and serious concerns regarding significant potential risks of trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cease the use of forced labor in filtration and other 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. * Cease support to nonstate armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers. * 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 UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2397. * Cease the forcible relocation of Ukrainian adults and children and take all necessary steps to prevent trafficking among this population, including by allowing those forcibly relocated to Belarus and Russia and within Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine freedom of movement. * 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. * 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 protection services and reintegration support. * Provide victims access to legal alternatives to removal to countries where they may 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 grave 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.

The government did not report data on trafficking criminal cases, and no single agency was responsible for collecting and maintaining data. In previous years, authorities prosecuted suspected traffickers under commercial sex and "pimping" statutes; the government did not report trafficking cases under these statutes in 2023. 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. 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 those prescribed for trafficking crimes. The government did not report training law enforcement or judicial authorities on trafficking. Russian authorities did not report cooperating in any international investigations.

Official complicity and corruption in trafficking and other crimes remained a significant concern, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. 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. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian-occupation

authorities forcibly transferred hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, within Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine and into Belarus and Russia, including to some of Russia's most remote regions, and often through filtration detention centers in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine, where authorities deprived Ukrainian citizens of their documents and forced them to take Russian passports. Russian authorities reportedly forcibly separated some Ukrainian children from their parents or guardians and placed them for adoption with Russian families or gave them to Russian foster families. Observers noted there were reports of forced labor in filtration detention centers, including detainees forced to work on town improvement projects, coerced into enlisting in a local police force, and forced to repair, paint, and clean barracks. Moreover, observers reported the Russian government detained thousands of Ukrainian civilians in other prisons and detention centers throughout Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine; authorities forced many of these detainees to perform labor, including to dig trenches and mass graves. Russian-occupation authorities also transported, without consent, thousands of Ukrainian children from Ukrainian institutions and foster families to Russia, where Russian authorities gave them to Russian families. Russian-occupation authorities in eastern Ukraine increasingly separated children from their families under the pretext parents or guardians were unable to financially support their children or due to purported poor or dangerous living conditions. Additionally, observers reported the government used medical infrastructure in Belarus and Russia as a false pretext to transfer Ukrainian children to these countries for purported medical care; in December 2023, the Russian government issued a decree requiring Russia-led forces in eastern Ukraine to send children with certain medical conditions to Russian sanatoriums or other locations for treatment. Authorities announced they provided services to 150 Ukrainian children at Russian sanatoriums in 2023. Authorities also deported Ukrainian children to Belarus and Russia under the guise of sending them to recreational camps and on educational and vacation trips. In January 2024, the Russian government issued a decree expediting Russian citizenship for children separated from their families and from orphanages, complicating efforts to return these children to Ukraine. As of January 2024, authorities reportedly returned approximately 500 children to Ukraine; however, this number was miniscule compared to the tens of thousands of children separated from their families or guardians and forcibly relocated to Belarus, Russia, or within Russia-occupied territory in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainians forcibly relocated within Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine and to Belarus and Russia were highly vulnerable to trafficking.

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 Ukrainian children as human shields. Observers also reported Russian authorities used Ukrainian children as informants to gather information about the location of strategic military objects, such as checkpoints and transportation routes, and used Russian children, including orphans and children with disabilities, to sew clothes and bandages for Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine and to make tactical stretchers, mobile stoves, and trench candles. Russian authorities expanded efforts to militarize Russian children and Ukrainian children in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine. The government publicly announced there were approximately 10,000 "military-patriotic" clubs in Russian schools, and the Ministry of Education reportedly announced it piloted a mandatory course in schools that included classes on drones, practice using live ammunition, and excursions to military units. Observers reported Russia-associated military associations and clubs, registered as non-profit organizations, continued to routinely prepare Ukrainian youth in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine for conscripted service in Russia's armed forces; some observers reported Russia-led forces conscripted Ukrainian youth as young as 16 years old, some of whom may have participated in fighting. In February 2024, observers reported Russia-led forces created new camps for Ukrainian children in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Ukraine, where Russian-occupation authorities taught children to use firearms. In November 2023, Russia-led forces announced a new "professional military orientation" for students in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine. Experts reported Russian authorities placed thousands of Ukrainian children in "re-education" camps in Belarus, Russia, and Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine; in some cases, instruction included military education and training. All children placed in these camps remained vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking. As in previous reporting periods, the government provided support to the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, an armed group that unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers in the Central African Republic

(CAR). Media previously reported the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group kidnapped boys in CAR and exploited them in forced labor in mines.

The government recruited convicts in Russian prisons, including prisoners from Central Asia, to fight in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; authorities reportedly offered these convicts a pardon, freedom, and monthly salary in exchange for fighting, but observers reported some convicts were not pardoned, nor did they or their families receive full compensation. Observers reported Russian authorities coerced, used deception, and in some cases used force, including torture, to recruit foreign nationals particularly Central and South Asian migrants, as well as citizens from Cuba and Syria; reports indicated the government often did not pay them in full. Furthermore, observers noted the government's 2022 mobilization decree banned volunteer recruits from ending their contracts, and reports indicated authorities executed soldiers who refused to fight. The government reportedly ordered regional authorities target marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, individuals who experienced homelessness or indebtedness, and migrants, for military recruitment; observers noted these populations were particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Observers reported Russia-led forces unlawfully conscripted or forced many Ukrainians in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine, including those in detention, to fight against their own country or engage in forced labor, such as to clear rubble and dispose of corpses. In December 2023, observers reported Russian authorities forced a battalion composed of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) to fight Ukrainian forces. Moreover, observers reported Russian authorities forced Ukrainian POWs to perform dangerous labor near the frontlines, including forcing them to carry heavy loads of ammunition and supplies to frontline positions and to retrieve wounded Russian soldiers. In October 2022, the government issued a decree imposing martial law in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine, giving authorities the power, among other things, to force people to work "for defense needs." Russia-led forces in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine forced prisoners from Ukrainian prisons to renovate the premises and build defensive fortifications, often under the threat of violence. 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 Ukraine. In May 2023, an international organization reported Russian authorities used force, including torture, threats of violence, and coercion, to force Ukrainian employees to perform labor at a nuclear power plant.

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, Russia continued to host North Korean workers dispatched by DPRK authorities, especially in the Far East, often under conditions of forced labor. The government previously reported approximately 500 North Korean workers remained in the country at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020; the government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in 2023. Though the government claimed it would cease issuing new work permits to North Korean workers, observers reported it attempted to conceal the flow of North Korean workers to Russia by issuing tourist and student visas to them instead. The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not report how many visas the government issued to North Korean citizens in 2023 (4,723 in 2022); however, the Border Service reported 1,117 North Korean citizens entered Russia in 2023 (223 in 2022); experts noted many of these citizens worked without documentation in Russia, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. In December 2023, media reported Russian authorities discussed providing agricultural land for North Korean workers to farm, and authorities in Russia's Far East publicly requested approximately 2,000 North Korean workers for multiple construction projects. Media previously 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 sent approximately 150 North Korean workers in January 2024 to Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine to work in construction.

PROTECTION

The government maintained 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 criminal code recognized an individual as a victim only if authorities

initiated an investigation, and 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 for the third consecutive year, 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 during the pandemic and that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine further 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 victim-witness assistance program to provide protection services to victims participating in criminal justice proceedings. In recent years, authorities reportedly pressured some victims to cooperate in investigations without any offer of protection. Observers previously 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, 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 psycho-social care, interpretation, facilitating the return of documents or wages, and assisting in the resettlement or repatriation of victims, although there was only one NGO specialized in providing assistance to trafficking victims; an NGO and international organization also ran a 24/7 hotline. Observers reported government shelters and crisis centers lacked the capacity to assist trafficking victims and excluded victims who did not meet strict requirements, including possessing valid identification documents and regular migration status. NGOs reported they no longer referred victims to these shelters because of their poor conditions, the lack of screening for trafficking indicators, and the risk victims may be vulnerable to further trafficking; as in previous years, there were no reports of victims assisted in these shelters in 2023. The government did not report if courts ordered compensation to victims. 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 2023, the government reported it repatriated 90 children from Syria and provided these children with psycho-social care and family reintegration support. In March 2024, the government reported it repatriated an additional 32 children from Syria; the government reported it had repatriated 546 children from the Middle East since the start of its repatriation program in 2018.

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 February 2024, the government included on the "foreign agents" register a leading civil society organization dedicated to monitoring and documenting human rights violations and providing legal assistance to vulnerable individuals, including migrants, refugees, and human trafficking victims. Additionally, authorities prosecuted NGOs that assisted undocumented trafficking victims under anti-terror laws making it a crime for individuals or organizations to provide material assistance to people considered to be in Russia "illegally." Authorities penalized trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Authorities treated foreign victims as undocumented 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 law enforcement actions in commercial sex establishments. Authorities punished child victims of forced criminality, often together with the traffickers who forced them to commit unlawful acts. 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. An international organization expressed deep concern some provisions of the Russian criminal code, which include compulsory labor as possible punishment, were worded broadly enough to lend themselves to application as a means of punishment for the expression of views opposed to the government.

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. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, media reports indicated Russian authorities increased efforts to arrest and repatriate North Korean escapees. In August 2023, media reported authorities repatriated at least 200 North Korean workers, including workers who had attempted to escape and workers who were ill, from eastern Russia; the government did not report screening these workers for trafficking indicators. These individuals were highly vulnerable to being subjected to forced labor and other grave harm upon return to the DPRK.

PREVENTION

The government decreased already 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 March 2024, the Ministry of Labor proposed legislation requiring labor migrants obtain a temporary work permit linked to a particular employer, restricting labor migrants’ ability to change employers; the law remained in draft stage at the end of the reporting period. The Ministry of Internal Affairs previously required recruitment agencies seeking 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. The government did not report inspecting businesses for labor violations, including indicators of human trafficking. 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; despite these inspections, the use of undocumented or forced labor remained widespread due to complacency and corruption. The government provided no funds for awareness campaigns or other prevention activities. A law that made it a crime to talk to children younger than 16 about sexual issues and exploitation hindered effective prevention campaigns. Observers reported Russian-occupation authorities increasingly forced Ukrainian citizens in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine to accept Russian citizenship; the government restricted access to a wide range of services, including humanitarian assistance, medical care, and social services, and employment, to residents without Russian citizenship. Residents who acquired Russian citizenship remained vulnerable to denaturalization at any time due to changes the government implemented under the country’s law on citizenship. These measures created significant trafficking vulnerabilities for residents in eastern Ukraine. 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 extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse by its citizens, despite such allegations.

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 irregular migration, and the production of counterfeit goods. According to an NGO, foreign nationals increasingly enter the country outside regular migration channels 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. Undocumented migrants, ethnic minorities, and refugees are at particularly high risk of human trafficking in Russia. 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. After a sharp decrease at the onset of the pandemic, labor migration to Russia increased in 2021 and 2022; however, the number of migrant workers in Russia has not reached pre-pandemic levels. 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. Children of migrant workers are vulnerable to forced labor in informal sectors. Moreover, observers report Russia's mobilization campaigns for its full-scale invasion of Ukraine have led to a shortage of approximately one million workers; many young men who have not yet been mobilized reportedly prefer to work in the informal economy out of fear that an employer will report them to authorities, leaving these men highly vulnerable to trafficking. 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 and refugees 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 often 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, sex trafficking, use by armed groups in the Middle East, and other forms of abuse. 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 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 online scam operations.

Traffickers exploit women and children from Europe (predominantly Ukraine and Moldova), Southeast Asia (primarily the PRC and the Philippines), Africa (particularly Nigeria), and Central Asia in 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 as undocumented migrants or as students. Sex trafficking occurs in brothels, hotels, and saunas, among other locations. Traffickers also exploit children experiencing homelessness in sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Russian women and children in sex trafficking in Russia and abroad, including in Northeast Asia, Europe, Central Asia, Africa, the United States, and the Middle East. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Russia's North Caucasus region in 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, subsequently subjecting them to exploitation. ISIS members often sell the wives and children of male foreign fighters 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 trafficking situations; in some instances, officials have engaged directly in trafficking crimes. 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. Russian forces reportedly force many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine, including at filtration detention centers, to engage in forced labor. Ukrainian citizens, including children, forcibly displaced within Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine and to Belarus and Russia are highly vulnerable to trafficking. Moreover, the government's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine creates significant trafficking vulnerabilities for the millions of refugees who have fled Ukraine and for the IDPs and others in need of humanitarian aid and protection assistance within Ukraine. Since 2014, Russia-led forces have reportedly used children for military purposes and force many Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine to fight against their own country. As in previous reporting periods, the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers in CAR. Russia-led forces reportedly recruited Syrian child soldiers to guard installations and fight in Libya in previous reporting periods.