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2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza

ISRAEL (Tier 2)*

* This section of the report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement lines as well as the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

The Government of Israel does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore Israel remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting more trafficking crimes and convicting more traffickers despite the diversion of law enforcement resources following Hamas's attack on October 7th and Lebanese Hizballah's attacks starting October 8th, and Israel's ensuing military operations in Gaza and along the Lebanese border. The government also fully approved new victim recognition procedures and introduced a new protection model to individualize provision of shelter and services to victims. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government's efforts to hold labor traffickers criminally accountable remained inadequate, and the government did not consistently investigate labor trafficking cases referred by NGOs. The government's ability to proactively identify labor trafficking victims remained weak due to understaffing, lack of resources, and lack of frontline officials' understanding of labor trafficking. NGOs continued to report that the government's high evidentiary standard to formally recognize victims discouraged victims from seeking government assistance. The government's oversight of foreign labor recruitment outside of bilateral work agreements (BWAs) remained inconsistent.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Significantly increase investigations and prosecutions of labor trafficking crimes, including potential trafficking cases referred by NGOs, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Increase efforts to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care without re-traumatizing victims, including those referred by NGOs, and ensure victim identification procedures take a trauma-informed approach. * Increase enforcement of foreign worker and Palestinian labor rights, including by establishing systems to ensure workers have valid and fair labor contracts, eliminating all worker-paid recruitment fees for all foreign and Palestinian workers, ensuring any recruitment fees are paid by employers, and ensuring any employer-paid recruitment fees are not passed onto workers. * Provide potential trafficking victims efficient access to protection services and ensure all potential victims have full access to services while their case is being reviewed for official victim recognition. * Proactively screen vulnerable populations, including undocumented African migrants, foreign and Palestinian workers, Palestinian children, Ukrainian refugees, and vulnerable LGBTQI+ individuals, to ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as for immigration and "prostitution" associated violations. * Increase training for law enforcement, immigration, border, healthcare, defense, justice, and other front-line officials to proactively identify trafficking victims. * Establish and advertise a policy clarifying that a victim's irregular or temporary immigration status will not factor into victim recognition

decisions, implement a routine process to allow potential foreign trafficking victims to have temporary residency status during the victim recognition process, and allow potential foreign trafficking victims to simultaneously apply for victim recognition and to seek asylum, as applicable. * Ensure all recognized foreign victims receive B1 “rehabilitation” visas. * Increase the number of labor inspectors, social workers, and interpreters in the agricultural, construction, and caregiving sectors, and provide them with training on victim identification procedures. * Expand resources and officials allocated to the National Anti-Trafficking Unit (NATU) to ensure it can adequately perform its duties. * Allocate resources and fully implement the 2019-2024 NAP and 2022-2026 implementation plan to combat trafficking. * Increase efforts to effectively raise public awareness of sex and labor trafficking issues. * Amend the 2006 anti-trafficking law to include a definition of human trafficking consistent with international law.

PROSECUTION

The government increased overall law enforcement efforts but law enforcement actions against labor traffickers remained inadequate. The 2006 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 16 years’ imprisonment for the trafficking of an adult and up to 20 years’ imprisonment for the trafficking of a child. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, the law did not establish the use of force, fraud, or coercion as an essential element of the crime.

Following the October 7th attack and ensuing conflict, the government diverted law enforcement resources, including those for anti-trafficking efforts, to conflict-related efforts including identifying victims of the attack, collecting evidence, and investigating terrorism-related cases. Nonetheless, in 2023 police initiated 54 new investigations, including 10 sex trafficking cases involving 34 suspects, four labor trafficking cases involving seven suspects, and 40 child sex trafficking cases involving 25 suspects. In addition, the government investigated 57 sex trafficking-related crimes involving 83 suspects but determined all were “prostitution” related offenses. The government also investigated an honorary consul of a foreign government in Israel for brokering an illegal labor recruitment scheme. This was a significant increase compared with 25 new investigations involving 24 suspects (21 sex trafficking cases and four labor trafficking investigations), in addition to 112 sex trafficking-related investigations, in 2022. In 2023, the government initiated 16 new prosecutions, 10 for sex trafficking, two for “recruiting minors for prostitution,” and four for “consumption of prostitution from a minor.” This was compared with 14 new prosecutions (six for child sex trafficking, three for adult sex trafficking, and four for attempted solicitation of commercial sex with a child) in 2022. The government continued prosecuting 31 alleged sex traffickers and one alleged labor trafficker in cases initiated in previous reporting periods. For the third consecutive year, the government did not report initiating any new labor trafficking prosecutions, despite NGOs referring cases for investigation and NGOs identifying and referring 54 labor trafficking victims to the government, 29 of whom the government officially recognized as trafficking victims. In 2023, courts convicted 11 traffickers, five for sex trafficking, one for labor trafficking, four for “consumption of prostitution from a minor,” and one for “advertising or informing about prostitution service of a minor;” this was an increase compared with five convictions (two for adult sex trafficking and three for child sex trafficking) in 2022. Of the three sentences issued, including cases convicted in previous reporting periods, courts sentenced two traffickers to sentences greater than one year imprisonment; courts sentenced the third sentenced trafficker to nine months’ imprisonment to be served as community service, probation, and a fine. Courts upheld two convictions on appeal and overturned three convictions on appeal. Hamas may have subjected hostages taken on October 7th, including Israelis and foreign workers, to conditions potentially amounting to sex trafficking and sexual slavery through repeated rape and sexual assault while leveraging their captivity to gain concessions from the Israeli government in the conflict; the government and international observers were investigating these allegations at the end of the reporting period.

The government continued to report law enforcement efforts to address allegations of complicity by government officials in trafficking-related crimes. In 2023, the government investigated one new case and initiated the prosecution of an allegedly complicit official; separately, the State Attorney's Office appealed a verdict in a case in which the defendant was exonerated in November 2023. The government coordinated with INTERPOL and foreign governments on multiple transnational trafficking investigations and prosecutions involving foreign and Israeli suspects and coordinated with other foreign governments to extradite suspected traffickers.

The Police Anti-Trafficking Coordination Unit (PTC) continued to advise Israeli National Police (INP) units throughout Israel on trafficking investigations and government policy. Each district had a senior INP officer designated to lead all trafficking investigations and perform initial identification screening to refer victims to the formal recognition procedure. In January 2024, the government approved the addition of one officer to PTC and five dedicated officers each to establish anti-trafficking divisions in Central and Haifa districts; at the end of the reporting period, budgets for the new positions were approved but they were not yet staffed. The State Attorney's office dedicated anti-trafficking coordinators in each district to advise on and coordinate trafficking prosecutions in their district; the district coordinators met regularly in a forum to share information on ongoing trafficking prosecutions. However, NGOs continued to report the government was at times reluctant to investigate complex cases, especially labor trafficking cases, due to lack of dedicated staff, resources, and understanding. NGOs also alleged that despite sharing evidence of potential labor trafficking cases, the government often did not investigate them, especially those involving foreign workers, in a timely manner. The government reported challenges gathering victim and witness testimony, which was exacerbated by foreign victims' desire to return to their home countries. To address this gap, the government continued implementing guidelines on early testimony in cases involving foreign victims to create a standard approach. INP continued operating an online system to file police complaints for all offenses, including trafficking complaints, for victims hesitant to meet with law enforcement officials, including undocumented migrant workers. As in previous years, the government provided extensive anti-trafficking training, awareness-raising workshops, and seminars, at times in coordination with NGOs, to law enforcement, judicial officials, social workers, medical staff, labor inspectors, and other officials on victim identification and referral, investigating trafficking cases, and providing trauma-informed care to victims.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. In 2023, the government reported receiving 133 victim referrals from civil society and government sources, compared with 128 referrals in 2022; of the 133 referrals, government sources referred 66 potential victims and NGOs and civil society referred 67 potential victims. In 2022, the government reported at least 62 of 128 potential victims were referred from government sources through the government's airport initiative. Of the 133 referrals, the government officially recognized 100 victims, similar to 101 victims recognized in 2022. Of the 100 recognized victims, traffickers exploited 51 in sex trafficking, 35 in labor trafficking, and 14 in unspecified forms of trafficking. Ninety-one of the 100 recognized victims were non-Israelis including Ethiopian, Ukrainian, Russian, Palestinian, Belarusian, Colombian, Moldovan, Spanish, Brazilian, Eritrean, Ghanaian, Indian, Jordanian, South Sudanese, and Sudanese nationals. The government recognized two victims exploited in the Sinai prior to arriving in Israel, compared with seven during the previous year. Separately, the government reported some hostages taken by Hamas on October 7th were potential trafficking victims; Hamas subjected some hostages taken during the attack, including Israelis and foreign workers, to conditions potentially amounting to sex trafficking through repeated rape and sexual assault while leveraging their captivity to gain concessions from the Israeli government in the ensuing conflict. The government continued to circulate trafficking victim identification guidelines widely to relevant ministries. However, NGOs remained critical of the government's ability to proactively identify victims. In addition, NGOs reported multiple cases in which victims had multiple interactions with law enforcement and immigration authorities before eventually being recognized as trafficking victims. NGOs continued to report the government's inaction on labor trafficking cases deterred potential labor trafficking victims from reporting exploitation.

In previous years, PTC was the only government entity with the authority to grant individuals official trafficking victim status, which allowed a victim full access to protection services. Previously, because the government only authorized two PTC officers to review victim applications throughout the country, the victim recognition process took months for a decision and, at times, inhibited victims' access to much-needed protection services during the delay. In January 2024, the government fully transferred official victim recognition authority from PTC to the Ministry of Justice's Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, in consultation with an advisory committee composed of representatives from relevant government agencies, civil society, and trafficking survivors following a 22-month pilot phase. NATU published the updated procedure online in Hebrew, English, and Arabic. In February 2024, NATU launched an online referral form; at the end of the reporting period, the online form was only available in Hebrew. Although NGOs acknowledged the transfer in official victim recognition responsibility was an improvement, they noted concerns regarding the resources of NATU to manage the victim recognition caseload. In addition, NGOs reported the government still required a high burden of proof from trafficking victims, including third party witnesses, which re-traumatized victims and resulted in a number of victims remaining unrecognized by the government. NGOs also asserted the Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) was overrepresented on the advisory committee, leading to extraneous immigration considerations leaving foreign and Palestinian trafficking victims under-recognized. NGOs reported victims, particularly foreign or Palestinian victims, were reluctant to apply for victim recognition due to the high standard of proof, fear of deportation or negative decisions on immigration or residence processes, and distrust of authorities. The government continued a victim identification initiative begun in March 2022 at Ben Gurion International Airport in response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; if a border control official suspected trafficking, the case was immediately flagged for PTC and NATU. However, NGOs reported the program was effectively paused since July 2023. An NGO funded a dedicated social worker to participate in the initiative to educate and counsel potential victims of their rights and available services.

The government continued to provide a wide range of protective services for victims. The government, in cooperation with an NGO, operated a 35-bed shelter for female trafficking victims, a 35-bed shelter for male trafficking victims, and transitional apartments with 18 beds for female victims. Shelter residents could leave freely. These shelters offered one year of support services, including job training, psycho-social care, medical treatment, language training, and legal assistance; the shelters could accommodate LGBTQI+ victims, and in 2023, the women's trafficking shelter assisted a transgender woman. In 2023, the women's shelter assisted 56 adult victims and the men's shelter assisted 21 victims; the government did not report if the transitional apartments assisted any victims. Shelter staff could adjust operations to accommodate deaf and deaf-mute victims, including by contracting an interpreter. In response to increased stressors due to the October 7th attack and ensuing conflict, the government increased psycho-social and trauma-informed care in the shelters for residents and staff. NGOs reported the shelters were not suitable for labor trafficking victims who require more flexibility in treatment options. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services (MLSS) continued to operate the National Center for Survivors of Slavery and Trafficking in Persons, also known as the "day center," in Tel Aviv for male and female victims waiting for space at a shelter, who chose not to reside at a shelter, or who had completed one year at a shelter. The center provided psycho-social care and food aid, and employed social workers trained to identify individuals at risk of re-trafficking. In 2023, the center provided services to 93 male and 129 female victims. In September 2023, the government adopted, but had not yet implemented, a new protection model to individualize services for victims. Under the new model, shelter staff developed individualized care plans for each victim. The new model shortened victims' stays in the specialized shelters to approximately six months with the option to extend; after leaving the shelter, victims could continue to receive services through the day center or via 40 specialized social workers throughout Israel. NGOs reported concerns the day center's budget and services had not yet been adequately expanded to facilitate increased services expected under the new model.

The government funded and NGOs operated 17 "HaLev" (Heart) centers for girls and young adults and three additional centers for adult women in commercial sex throughout the country, which provided psycho-social care, medical assistance, vocational training, and other assistance; three

centers were open 24/7 and the Tel Aviv and Haifa HaLev centers catered to all genders, including nonbinary persons. The government continued to provide free medical treatment for one year at various government-funded health facilities for officially recognized trafficking victims living outside of shelters. The Ministry of Health continued operating a dedicated mental health clinic at a hospital in Tel Aviv-Jaffa to treat victims of torture camps in the Sinai, including potential unidentified trafficking victims.

The government continued to encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers but did not require their participation in court cases as a condition for receiving visas and protective assistance; victims could opt to leave the country pending trial proceedings. The government collected early testimony in cases involving foreign victims requesting repatriation before the conclusion of a case. The law allowed victims or witnesses to provide testimony not in the presence of the defendant but, rather, in the presence of the defense attorney in specific offenses, including trafficking. The government implemented existing procedures for managing sex crimes, including sex trafficking, by designating a contact person at every court to coordinate victims' security during proceedings, arranging private waiting rooms, and enabling video testimony. The Legal Aid Administration (LAA) provided free legal aid to trafficking victims to assist in civil procedures, immigration procedures, and – in sex trafficking cases – criminal proceedings; forced labor victims did not have automatic access to LAA assistance in criminal proceedings. In 2021, the government drafted an amendment to the Legal Aid Law to expand legal aid in criminal proceedings to all trafficking victims, including labor trafficking victims; the amendment remained pending for the third consecutive reporting period. In 2023, the LAA received 75 legal aid requests to assist potential trafficking victims. The government allowed recognized foreign trafficking victims to work during the investigation and prosecution of traffickers if issued a B1 “rehabilitation” visa. Following the conclusion of criminal proceedings, trafficking victims could request a B1 “rehabilitation” visa for an additional year; the government extended these visas on an ad hoc basis. If an individual requested recognition as a trafficking victim, thereby entitling them to assistance, they could not simultaneously apply for asylum; an international organization reported this stipulation was problematic in situations where trafficking victims may be reluctant to divulge details about their case for fear of retaliation if they are returned to their home countries. The government drafted procedures to facilitate the safe return of trafficking victims to their home countries and coordinate continued assistance; the procedures were pending approval at the end of the reporting period. Following the October 7th attack, the government coordinated with foreign governments to assist foreign workers in Israel and to coordinate their repatriation; NGOs also reported coordinating repatriation of foreign workers and asylum-seekers attempting to leave Israel after the attack.

The government forfeiture fund, which used property and money confiscated from traffickers to assist victims, allocated 357,013 shekels (\$98,650) to 47 applicants for the provision of various protection services, including housing, counseling, and vocational training for victims, monetary compensation ordered by courts, and funding for NGOs in 2023; the government accelerated several decisions to provide assistance to victims impacted by the October 7th attack. Courts awarded at least 35,000 shekels (\$9,670) to victims through civil proceedings. The anti-trafficking law required courts to explain any decision to abstain from awarding restitution in its verdict, making restitution the default; the government did not report the amount awarded in restitution in 2023.

The government maintained guidelines discouraging the prosecution of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked; the government intervened in at least two cases to withdraw cases against potential victims. However, the government did not systematically screen for trafficking among the undocumented African migrant population, foreign workers employed by foreign construction companies, Palestinian children in forced begging or forced criminality, or individuals in commercial sex and, as a result, authorities may have inappropriately penalized unidentified and some identified victims for immigration violations or “prostitution”-associated offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. In January 2024, the government announced it would require all Ethiopian nationals, a population vulnerable to trafficking, without open asylum claims to return to Ethiopia by February 2024; the action was paused following a court order but government did not report if it would actively screen for

trafficking indicators during these procedures or if it would coordinate with the Ethiopian government to ensure vulnerable individuals received assistance upon their return. The government continued a program to expunge the records of individuals convicted of “prostitution”-associated offenses but not sentenced to prison terms, including potential sex trafficking victims; the government did not report the number of records fully or partially expunged in 2023.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. NATU continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts among relevant ministries and NGOs. NGOs reported that while NATU demonstrated political will and was knowledgeable about trafficking, it was not always effective influencing other parts of the government and lacked resources to fully implement its mandate. The government maintained its 2019-2024 NAP to combat human trafficking and continued using the 2022-2026 implementation plan to guide its implementation. In December 2023, NATU published its second report on the government’s anti-trafficking efforts with data covering 2022. NATU also continued reviews on implementation of some bilateral work agreements (BWAs), Palestinian workers, and implementation of the government’s law prohibiting consumption of commercial sex. NATU prioritized research into new arrangements for bringing foreign workers to Israel. PIBA conducted research on foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”); the report was pending publication at the end of the reporting period. The government conducted various national awareness-raising campaigns; however, NGOs reported public awareness of trafficking issues in Israel remained low and the government’s awareness-raising efforts were ineffective. Following the October 7th attack, the government funded an NGO to distribute food vouchers to persons in commercial sex vulnerable to trafficking and expanded public awareness efforts targeted towards foreign workers on their labor rights in Israel.

Article 376A of the Penal Law 5737-1977 prohibited holding a person’s passport against their will and carried a penalty of three to five years’ imprisonment; the government investigated an unspecified number of these cases in 2023. In 2023, the Ministry of Economy and Industry (MOEI), which employed 210 labor inspectors, issued 167 administrative warnings, imposed 26 fines totaling 2.255 million shekels (\$623,100), and filed five indictments for labor violations that remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Labor courts delivered sentences in three cases involving employers of foreign workers of fines payments totaling 504,066 shekels (\$139,280). Through MOEI inspections, employers returned 701,958 shekels (\$193,960) of withheld wages to 156 foreign workers in 2023. PIBA’s enforcement unit opened 180 criminal investigations but did not report filing any indictments against employers of foreign workers for suspected violations of labor laws or the anti-trafficking law. PIBA sent 28 warning letters (21 to caregiving agencies and seven to construction companies), held 32 hearings (28 on caregiving agencies and four for construction companies), and revoked one permit to employ foreign workers. NGOs continued to report there were not enough labor inspectors, especially in the construction and agricultural sectors; interpreters; social workers; or staff in the Office of the Commissioner of Foreign Workers’ Labor Rights to sufficiently monitor and enforce labor laws.

NGOs continued to report the government did not effectively regulate foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), nor did it effectively prevent the exploitation of foreign workers in the construction and agriculture sectors recruited outside of established BWAs. Israel experienced acute labor shortages following the October 7th attack, particularly in the construction and agriculture sectors, due to the immediate cancellation of all entry permits for Palestinian workers, and due to Thai agricultural workers leaving Israel. The government passed several short-term labor recruitment measures to increase labor recruitment outside of the framework of BWAs, including increasing foreign worker quotas in construction and agriculture sectors, allowing the return of foreign workers who completed their work in Israel, and increasing the quotas for workers recruited by foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”). In 2023, the government signed new BWAs with Sri Lanka in the agriculture and construction sectors and India in the construction sector; however, NGOs reported the government did not share the content of the India BWA or the BWA signed with Uzbekistan in the previous reporting period. The government maintained sector-specific BWAs with 11 countries for agriculture, construction, caregiving, and domestic work

sectors; in 2023, 16,532 foreign workers arrived in Israel through these agreements. Foreign workers recruited under BWAs had triplicate standardized labor contracts held by the worker, employer, and the government. The government did not fully prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. Previously, private Israeli recruitment agencies could not charge worker-paid recruitment fees in the domestic caregiving sector and worker-paid recruitment fees were capped at 2,814 shekels (\$780) in the agricultural sector. However, June 2022 regulations allowed companies recruiting in the domestic caregiving sector to require workers to pay three recruitment fee payments totaling 6,107 shekels (\$1,690). The Government of the Philippines suspended its BWA alleging this policy change contravened the agreement. NGOs noted foreign workers in the caregiving sector working outside of BWAs had to pay the new fees on top of already high recruitment fees.

Following the October 7th attack and increased reliance on labor recruitment outside of BWAs, the government approved resolutions to temporarily amended legislation on private labor recruitment agencies to regulate and limit the collection of worker-paid recruitment fees by imposing caps on fees, ensuring record of payments, and requiring private recruitment agencies to provide foreign workers information about their rights in a language they understand. The resolutions opened private recruitment for key sectors to allow the recruitment of workers outside of bilateral agreements; recruitment for the agricultural and construction sectors was opened for 90 days for 10,000 workers per sector. The resolutions gave precedence to workers recruited under the BWAs, if available. PIBA published regulations in November 2023 for hiring foreign workers in the construction sector through private recruitment, which required companies hiring workers be in good standing with PIBA, prohibiting recruitment from “high-risk” countries, and other provisions. Throughout the process, NATU raised awareness among government officials on the importance of ensuring new recruitment processes prevent trafficking. In February 2024, a government resolution extended private recruitment for an additional 90 days; NGOs challenged the resolutions in court alleging inadequate labor protections. NGOs reported significant concerns regarding the new private recruitment processes, including concerns about private recruitment agencies charging workers illegal recruitment fees and the government’s limited ability to adequately oversee recruitment to prevent trafficking. NGOs reported workers recruited from Malawi had to have salaries paid directly to bank accounts in Malawi, which workers did not have access to, leaving workers unable to access funds and at risk of trafficking while in Israel.

While Israeli law required employers of foreign workers to provide detailed labor contracts in a language the worker understood, there was not adequate government oversight to ensure contracts for workers not covered by BWAs met labor standards; this left workers vulnerable to exploitative employment practices, including long work hours, violations of work and living conditions, and exploitative promissory notes. NGOs reported foreign workers often paid exorbitant fees to recruitment agencies in their country of origin or the Israeli manpower agency; NGOs reported many foreign workers financed the fees through high interest rate loans from informal or illicit lenders in Israel further, increasing workers’ vulnerability to trafficking.

While most foreign workers could change employers without their previous employer’s permission, foreign construction workers were limited to changing employers on a specified date each quarter and otherwise required employers’ permission to change employers. Foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”) did not authorize workers, primarily in the construction sector, to change employers unless it was to another foreign contracting company. NGOs reported PIBA procedures for recruitment agencies in the caregiving sector continued to require every agency to hire a licensed social worker responsible for supervising the conditions of foreign caregivers, including home visits, and for informing relevant authorities about labor violations. While the government contended workers’ visas were not tied to a specific employer, government policies restricted foreign caregivers’ ability to change employers by allowing them to work only in a specific geographical area, preventing them from changing employers more than three times, and preventing them from changing employers after being in Israel for 63 months. However, NGOs reported “futility” in submitting transfer requests resulted in a chilling effect, particularly for workers employed by foreign contracting companies or foreign construction companies, making workers unwilling to submit transfer requests in part for fear of retribution from their company or home government. The law excluded workers in the caregiving sector from labor protections related to rest days and limited work hours, increasing caregivers’ vulnerability to trafficking. NGOs reported

if a foreign caregiver abruptly left their employer, including due to physical or sexual violence, government policy allowed employers to unilaterally revoke their visa; the policy did not entitle foreign caregivers to an immigration hearing in such cases.

PIBA continued implementing a policy regarding Palestinian work permits in the construction, manufacturing, and service sectors to allow Palestinian workers to change employers more easily; NGOs reported enforcement of trading permits for Palestinian workers increased but noted reform efforts remained insufficient, and employers and middlemen continued to solicit illicit fees from Palestinian workers, which left Palestinian workers vulnerable to labor violations and trafficking. In January 2023, the government required employers of Palestinian workers to transfer wages directly to the worker's bank account to prevent wage theft. The government continued implementing 2022 changes to its agriculture student internship to provide greater oversight over training centers to prevent misconduct and labor exploitation; however, NGOs reported the changes were insufficient, and they continued to identify students in the program who experienced labor exploitation. In 2022, the government published a proposed regulation restricting and narrowing the types of work for asylum-seekers and Ukrainian refugees, prohibiting work in 17 localities across Israel other than certain sectors such as construction, agriculture, or hospitality; the regulation had not yet been implemented but NGOs reported concerns it would increase the vulnerability of refugees and asylum-seekers to trafficking. As of December 2023, approximately 10,883 Ukrainian refugees ineligible for immigration based on the law of return who had entered Israel since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 remained in the country; most of this population arrived on tourist visas, which have been regularly renewed, and are working under a "non-enforcement" government policy. In January 2024, the government extended tourist visas given to Ukrainian citizens until December 2024; however, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa District Court required PIBA to provide Ukrainian asylum-seekers 2A5 conditional visas, similar to those of asylum-seekers, in February 2024. PIBA appealed the decision on April 7. NGOs reported this unstable situation and unclear work permit policy increased the vulnerability of this population to trafficking.

The government did not have a trafficking-specific hotline, but PIBA, in collaboration with an NGO, continued to operate a 24-hour hotline to assist foreign workers in Israel under bilateral agreements; workers entering Israel through private recruitment schemes following the October 7th attack could also access the hotline. Although there was no comparable hotline for documented migrant workers who worked in Israel through private recruitment, nor for Palestinian workers in Israel and Israeli settlements in Area C of the West Bank, which was under Israeli military control, the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Labor Rights managed inquiries from foreign workers via email, phone, and social media sites. The government made efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex acts by fining purchasers of commercial sex; courts could require individuals found guilty of purchasing commercial sex to participate in educational workshops instead of paying a fine.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Israel. Israeli children, Israeli Bedouin, and Palestinian women and girls, foreign women, and transgender adults and children are vulnerable to sex trafficking in Israel. Traffickers use social media websites, including dating apps, online forums, social media sites, and chat rooms, to exploit girls in sex trafficking. Israeli Bedouin and Palestinian women and girls from the West Bank are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking after family members force them into marriages with older men; these women and girls experience physical and sexual abuse, threats of violence, and restricted movement. Traffickers sometimes use drug addiction to control sex trafficking victims. Some Bedouin Israeli children are reportedly vulnerable to forced labor, experiencing long working hours and physical violence. Hamas subjected some hostages taken during the October 7th attack, including Israelis and foreign workers, to conditions potentially amounting to sex trafficking through repeated rape and sexual assault while leveraging their captivity to gain concessions from the Israeli government in the ensuing conflict. Observers reported armed wings of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas forcibly used Israeli children in unknown roles. Following the October

7th attack and resulting displacement of residents in areas around Gaza, NGOs reported the increased vulnerability of children to exploitation, including sex trafficking.

Some employers or intermediaries illegally charge Palestinian workers monthly commissions and fees, and in many cases, employers illegally hire Palestinian workers to other workplaces; these workers are vulnerable to forced labor. The employer-based work permit system for Palestinians – except those working in the construction and manufacturing sector – binds Palestinian workers to specific employers, which enables some employers to exploit workers in forced labor. Furthermore, as a condition of their overnight permits, some employers retained identity documents of Palestinian workers, effectively restricting their movement in Israel. NGOs report the majority of Palestinian women and men in commercial sex in Israel exhibit indicators of trafficking, but most did not apply for trafficking victim recognition due to fear of retaliation and distrust of authorities; following the October 7th attack and increased restrictions on renewals of residence and work permits for Palestinians, NGOs report an increase in Palestinian women in Israel relying on “survival sex,” which further increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Palestinian children, some as young as 5 years old, in forced begging and other forms of labor trafficking, such as washing windshields and vending, in the Northern District of Israel, Jerusalem, and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. NGOs also report an increase in traffickers coercing Palestinian children to engage in criminal acts, such as auto theft, in Israel. Previous reports indicate traffickers fraudulently recruited Palestinian children for agricultural work on Israeli settlements in Area C of the West Bank, which is under Israeli military control, and experienced conditions amounting to labor trafficking including coercion, dangerous work without adequate safety equipment, and less pay than advertised.

Foreign workers, primarily from South and Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Palestinians working in Israel for temporary work in construction, agriculture, and caregiving; traffickers exploit some of these workers in forced labor. Israeli and foreign employers exploit foreign workers, including in labor trafficking, particularly Turkish, People’s Republic of China (PRC) nationals, Palestinian, Russian, and Ukrainian men, in the construction sector. In 2023, 16,532 foreign workers entered Israel through BWAs and 15,532 foreign workers entered Israel through other labor recruitment frameworks, including private recruitment, foreign construction companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), and “expert” visas. Traffickers subject some Thai men and women to forced labor in Israel’s agricultural sector by imposing conditions of long working hours, no breaks or rest days, withheld passports, poor living conditions, and difficulty changing employers due to limitations on work permits. Jordanian day workers are vulnerable to forced labor in construction, agriculture, and other sectors, primarily in the southern coastal resort city Eilat, due to limits on entry permits and the geographic isolation of Eilat. Some traffickers in the agricultural sector recruit agricultural students to take part in an agricultural study program on student visas and force them to work in the industry upon arrival, effectively circumventing the BWA process; observers reported the programs contain no academic content and students are bound by tuition fees – which NGOs reported were de facto recruitment fees – of up to 11,000 shekels (\$3,040) effectively creating situations of debt bondage. In 2021, the government recognized 10 Vietnamese agricultural students as trafficking victims after they were forced to endure 14-16 hour workdays, were confined to company-controlled housing, and had their passports confiscated; participants were also under a threat of a \$30,000 promissory note for breaching their contract. NGOs report students in these programs who experienced exploitation and abuse were reluctant to report details due to threats of retaliation and deportation or fear they and their family will face harassment by their home governments. Caregivers are at high risk for forced labor due to their isolation inside private residences and their lack of protection under the labor law; local NGOs report traffickers subject caregivers to excessive recruitment fees, fraudulent work contracts, long work hours, confiscation of passports, underpayment of wages, physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse, denial of severance pay, and poor housing including – in some cases – living in the same room as their employer. Foreign caregivers constitute the second largest share of all documented foreign workers in the country; the vast majority of these workers are women. NGOs report foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), primarily PRC- and Turkish-owned construction companies, in Israel compelled PRC and Turkish nationals to work under the threat of debt bondage or coercive promissory notes.

Networks of workforce agencies recruit workers to Israel through a fraudulent asylum-claim process, charge workers high facilitation fees, and sell them fake documents; these workers are vulnerable to trafficking. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, government and NGO sources report increased vulnerability of Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly women and girls, to sex trafficking in Israel. Eritrean and Sudanese men and women asylum-seekers and temporary residents are highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking in Israel. As of December 2023, there were approximately 23,081 African asylum-seekers in Israel, most of whom were from Eritrea or Sudan. Asylum-seekers received temporary stay permits but did not have the explicit right to work in Israel and routinely worked low-wage jobs in unsafe environments. Economic distress among women in this population, especially Eritrean women, greatly increases their vulnerability to sex trafficking. Approximately 400 female asylum-seekers engaged in "survival sex" prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; the government estimates that figure tripled during the pandemic. NGOs report the October 7th attack and ensuing conflict further increased asylum-seekers reliance on "survival sex" and vulnerability to trafficking due to the economic impact of the conflict. In 2020, an NGO reported that of approximately 4,000 to 5,000 African migrants still present in Israel after having experienced torture and exploitation in the Sinai Peninsula from 2011-2017, the government had only recognized approximately 400 to 500 as trafficking victims but that the actual number was much higher. In 2022 and 2023, NGOs and the government identified domestic servitude victims from Ethiopia's Tigray region in Israel. Ethiopian recruitment agencies fraudulently recruited the women for domestic work in Jordan where they experienced conditions amounting to forced labor before being "sold" to other employers in the West Bank and eventually seeking assistance in Israel.

Russian, Ukrainian, Eritrean, and Ethiopian women are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking through online-facilitated forced marriages. NGOs report some Palestinian LGBTQI+ men and boys and Palestinian transgender women in Israel are vulnerable to sex trafficking due to their lack of legal status and restrictions on work eligibility for Palestinians in Israel. Traffickers subject women from Central and Eastern Europe, PRC, Ghana, and Eritrea to sex trafficking in Israel; some women arrive on tourist visas to willingly engage in commercial sex – particularly in Eilat – but sex traffickers subsequently exploit them. Some traffickers reportedly recruit sex trafficking victims with false, fraudulent, or misleading job offers on the internet, sometimes through legitimate employment websites, or through false romantic relationships. Eastern European and South American sex trafficking victims report being recruited through social media and messaging platforms.

WEST BANK AND GAZA**

** This section of the report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement lines as well as the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories were subject to the exercise of authority or control by separate entities. The Palestinian Authority exercised varying degrees of authority in restricted areas of the West Bank due to the Israeli Defense Force's continuing presence, none over Palestinian residents in Gaza due to Hamas exercising de facto control, and none over East Jerusalem due to Israel's extension of Israeli law and authority to East Jerusalem in 1967 and an Israeli prohibition on any Palestinian Authority activity anywhere in Jerusalem. Oslo Accords-era agreements divided the West Bank into three territorial areas: Areas A, B, and C. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fell into Areas A and B, with Palestinian agricultural lands and rural communities in Area C. Area C comprised more than 60 percent of the West Bank and Israel retained both administrative and security control of Area C and designated most Area C land as either closed military zones or settlement zoning areas. Palestinians in the West Bank were subject to Jordanian, British Mandatory, and Ottoman statutes in effect before 1967, military

ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, Palestinian Authority (PA) law, as well as Sharia law. Israeli citizens who committed crimes within the West Bank were only subject to Israeli law and could only be tried in civilian courts within Israel, while Israel prosecuted Palestinians from the West Bank in military courts. The PA exercised varying degrees of authority in the areas of the West Bank where it exercises control. Although PA laws apply in Gaza, along with Egyptian, British Mandate, and Ottoman statutes, and Sharia law, Hamas, and the Israeli Defense Forces exercised general de facto control over the area.

Civil affairs in Areas A and B of the West Bank and Gaza are governed by a complicated network of Palestinian Basic Law and decrees as well as Jordanian and Egyptian laws and laws from the British Mandate and Ottoman eras. Area C of the West Bank is administered solely by Israeli military law. This network of laws does not fully criminalize sex and labor trafficking in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Article 310 of the Jordanian Penal Code of 1960 criminalized some forms of child sex trafficking in the West Bank and prescribed penalties of three months to three years' imprisonment and a fine of five to 50 Jordanian dinars (\$7-\$70). Article 311 of the same law criminalized some forms of adult sex trafficking in the West Bank and prescribed penalties of one to three years' imprisonment. However, both provisions only applied to offenses involving female victims and did not apply to offenses where the victim was considered a "common prostitute or of known immoral character," thereby wrongfully excluding individuals from protection. Article 317 of the same law separately criminalized detaining a woman for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and prescribed penalties of two months to two years' imprisonment. None of the penalties prescribed under these provisions were sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. The 2004 PA Minister of Labor Decree No. 1 on Hazardous Work prohibited the "sale and trafficking of children" and forced or compulsory labor of children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories but did not specify penalties. The Children's Law, as amended, criminalized child sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Article 261 of the 1936 Penal Code 74 for the British Mandate High Commissioner for Palestine criminalized some forms of labor trafficking in Gaza and prescribed penalties up to one year imprisonment. These penalties were not sufficiently stringent. An international organization reported supporting the PA to draft a comprehensive anti-trafficking law; at the end of the reporting period, the draft law had undergone two of the three Cabinet of Ministers reviews and was awaiting the President's signature.

Neither the PA nor Hamas, which exercised de facto control in Gaza for part of the reporting period before the Israeli ground operation, comprehensively collected data on trafficking cases. According to an international organization, the PA preliminarily identified cases involving human trafficking such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, and forced begging arising from cases related to GBV or labor violations. The PA reported investigating six potential labor trafficking cases; otherwise, the PA did not report any specific statistics nor did Hamas in Gaza. Unlike previous years, the PA did not organize any anti-trafficking trainings or coordinate with an international organization to train officials. PA officials generally had minimal understanding and awareness of trafficking issues but also noted when they did suspect potential trafficking cases, they were frequently unable to fully investigate due to lack of access and authority in Israeli settlements and Area C, which is under Israeli military jurisdiction.

Neither the PA nor Hamas, which exercised de facto control in Gaza for part of the reporting period before the Israeli ground operation, had standard procedures to identify victims nor mechanisms to refer trafficking victims to care. The PA and Hamas did not report identifying any trafficking victims or referring any potential victims to assistance. An NGO reported identifying and providing services to 38 forced labor victims in 2022 but did not report the number of victims it assisted in 2023. The PA Ministry of Social Development operated three centers (two for boys in Ramallah and one for girls in Bethlehem) for vulnerable children, including child trafficking victims, which provided shelter, psycho-social care, and reintegration assistance. However, one of the centers may also operate as a detention center for juvenile offenders. Prior to the October 7th attack and ensuing conflict, there were two shelters for female victims of violence in Gaza that could assist female trafficking victims – one operated by an NGO and one operated by de facto authorities; however,

neither reported assisting trafficking victims. Aside from these centers, there were no appropriate services available for trafficking victims in the West Bank and Gaza beyond limited services from NGOs and international organizations.

Neither the PA nor de facto authorities in Gaza had a designated lead official, agency, or coordinating body to address trafficking nor efforts to prevent trafficking. The PA and de facto authorities in Gaza did not report any policies to prevent the exploitation of Palestinian workers in Israel or Palestinian migrant workers abroad. Security measures in the West Bank resulting from the October 7th attack and ensuing conflict, including movement restrictions, severely impeded the PA's ability to perform labor inspections, including identifying potential child forced labor cases.

Human traffickers exploit Palestinian victims in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and traffickers exploit Palestinian victims abroad. Palestinian women and children working as domestic workers are vulnerable to forced labor in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Traffickers allegedly exploit Palestinian women and girls in sex trafficking in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, but stigmas and cultural taboos likely result in severe under-reporting of these cases; Palestinian LGBTQI+ individuals are also vulnerable to sex trafficking. In some cases, husbands coerced their wives into commercial sex in Gaza, at times amounting to sex trafficking.

Palestinian workers in Israel are vulnerable to forced labor due to third-party brokers charging exorbitant worker-paid recruitment fees for Israeli work permits. Following restrictions on the approximately 100,000 Palestinians working in Israel after the October 7th attack, NGOs report concerns the resulting economic impact on Palestinians in the West Bank could increase exploitation, including trafficking. Traffickers fraudulently recruit Palestinian children for work in agriculture in Israeli settlements in the West Bank; children initially work voluntarily but receive lesser pay, perform more strenuous work than advertised, and work in coercive environments – all indicators of forced labor. Traffickers also exploit children, including children under 10 years old, in forced labor as street vendors. Children in Gaza work in exploitative conditions that may amount to labor trafficking collecting scrap metal, street vending, or with other hazardous conditions. In 2022 and 2023, Ethiopian recruitment agencies fraudulently recruited women for domestic work in Jordan where they experienced conditions amounting to forced labor before being “sold” to other employers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories where they experienced further exploitation before seeking assistance in Israel.

Traffickers, sometimes through organized networks, exploit Palestinian children in forced begging in Israel. In some cases, family members arrange for Palestinian children to go to Israel where they stay by themselves or with older children to beg; these children stay for weeks before “rotating” out or Israeli authorities arrest them and return them to the PA. Traffickers exploit Palestinian children, some as young as 5 years old, in forced begging and other forms of labor trafficking, such as washing windshields and vending, in the Northern District of Israel, Jerusalem, and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. NGOs also reported an increase in traffickers coercing Palestinian children to engage in criminal acts in Israel such as auto theft.

Palestinian children are vulnerable to recruitment or use as child soldiers. Some Palestinian armed groups organized prior to October 2023 regular camps for children that involve firearm instruction and military training that serve as recruitment events; armed wings of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas allegedly recruited and used children in 2023, and the Nassar Salah al-Din Brigades in Gaza recruited or used a child in 2022. As of March 2024, more than 1.7 million people were displaced in Gaza and Gazans have extremely limited access to water, food, hygiene and sanitation facilities, medical care, etc.; this population remains extremely vulnerable to exploitation, including trafficking. Palestinians and foreign nationals attempting to flee the conflict in Gaza are vulnerable to trafficking; Egyptian authorities, independent brokers and fixers, and Hamas charged exorbitant fees for exit permits to leave through Rafah crossing, leaving these populations vulnerable to trafficking through debt bondage and other exploitative practices.