

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kyrgyz Republic

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC (Tier 2 Watch List)

The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (or Kyrgyzstan) does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Despite making significant efforts to do so, it did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. Therefore, the Kyrgyz Republic remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year. Significant efforts included investigating more trafficking crimes and identifying and referring more trafficking victims to care. The government eliminated its moratorium on unannounced labor inspections and established a counter-trafficking unit within the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Migration to increase interagency coordination. However, the government prosecuted fewer suspects and did not convict any traffickers for the fourth consecutive year. Resources for victim services and the availability of shelter for victims – especially children and male victims – remained insufficient. There were significant gaps in law enforcement’s understanding of trafficking crimes resulting in the misclassification of human trafficking cases, unidentified victims, and lower penalties for traffickers. Due to inadequate screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS: ✓

- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms, utilizing the articles of the criminal code relating to trafficking in persons.
- Increase the availability of protection services – including short-term shelter, reintegration assistance, and long-term services – for all trafficking victims, especially children and male victims, including by partnering with and allocating resources to civil society service providers.
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive national action plan for 2026-2029.
- Using the NRM and SOPs for victim identification and referral to care, proactively identify trafficking victims and refer them to services, particularly among vulnerable populations including individuals in commercial sex and migrant workers.
- Increase trafficking-specific training for law enforcement, including on the definition of human trafficking and relevant trafficking-related criminal code articles and investigating trafficking cases, and ensure trafficking cases are not misclassified as different crimes.

- Train officials on the use of the NRM and established SOPs for the proactive identification of trafficking victims, granting official victim status without the need to open a criminal case, and for the referral of victims to care services, including foreign victims.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Labor Inspectorate to identify and refer victims of forced labor, including by increased training on human trafficking and allowing unfettered access to factories, construction sites, and farms.
- Eliminate all employee-paid recruitment fees for Kyrgyzstani migrant workers.
- Provide increased resources for law enforcement units designated to investigate online child sex trafficking and other cyber-facilitated trafficking crimes.
- Establish and implement child-friendly procedures for investigations and prosecutions.
- Establish and implement a comprehensive anti-trafficking data collection system for use by law enforcement and inter-ministerial coordinating bodies.

PROSECUTION ✓

The government maintained insufficient law enforcement efforts.

Articles 166, 167, and 170 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of three to six years' imprisonment for crimes involving adult victims, and five to eight years' imprisonment for those involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping. Prosecutors could also charge traffickers using Article 159 for engaging a person in "prostitution" through the use of force or the threat of force or fraud, which was punishable by a fine or imprisonment of up to five years if the victim was an adult, and five to 15 years' imprisonment under aggravating circumstances, including the involvement of children.

In 2024, the government reported investigating 18 trafficking cases, compared with three trafficking cases the previous year. The government continued 20 ongoing investigations from prior years. The government reported prosecuting one defendant for alleged sex trafficking, compared with two prosecutions in the previous year. The government did not convict any traffickers for a fourth consecutive year. Trafficking criminal cases were often not brought to court or charged under a different article of the criminal code. Due to some authorities' conflation of illegal adoption with human trafficking, it was possible some of the reported cases contained elements inconsistent with the definitions of trafficking as established in international law.

The government's NRM allowed civil society and international organizations to file criminal complaints to law enforcement on behalf of victims. As in previous years, victim advocates reported a general lack of proactive investigation and the need for systemic training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges, particularly on victim identification and gathering evidence beyond victim testimony. Observers reported law enforcement and courts were insufficiently resourced to adequately investigate trafficking cases. The government, in collaboration with civil society, trained judges, prosecutors, police, migration officers, and labor inspectors on combating trafficking, victim assistance, and

investigating and prosecuting cases. However, observers reported high turnover within law enforcement and a lack of knowledge of trafficking crimes, capacity, and political will continued to hinder overall law enforcement efforts. Authorities also highlighted challenges with law enforcement data collection. Trafficking cases were often misclassified as different crimes, which were easier to investigate and prosecute and carried lesser penalties; observers reported this was often driven by demands to meet internal case quotas. Additionally, observers noted distrust in law enforcement agencies and a lack of victim-centered approaches by police potentially resulted in underreporting of potential trafficking cases.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking crimes. Experts previously noted cases involving allegedly complicit officials were often classified as abuse of power and not trafficking due to a lack of evidence. International organization experts noted widespread impunity and lack of effective prosecution hindered overall efforts. The government cooperated with the Government of Poland on trafficking-related investigations.

PROTECTION

The government made mixed efforts to protect victims.

The government reported identifying 21 trafficking victims, including 19 victims of forced labor (17 men and two girls) and two women victims of sex trafficking, and referred 18 victims to services. This compared with no victims identified or referred to care in the previous reporting period. The government had an NRM on victim identification and referral to care, including provision of social services and specific guidance for assisting child victims. The government also had SOPs for victim identification and referral, to complement the NRM, that law enforcement used; however, experts noted some law enforcement's insufficient knowledge on human trafficking and the poor utilization of SOPs prevented them from proactively identifying victims. The government did not require victims to participate in a criminal case to receive assistance; however, experts previously reported the government did not formally recognize victims unless a criminal case was opened, including victims identified by NGOs, contradicting the NRM. Observers noted the criteria for identifying victims was convoluted and the NRM and SOPs – sporadically used by officials – lacked specific procedures to screen vulnerable populations, such as children, low-income families, and migrants. According to observers, the roles of some of the implementors of the NRM were not clear and there was insufficient capacity and understanding of trafficking and how the NRM worked among stakeholders, including law enforcement.

The government allocated 11,638,400 Soms (\$133,010) to protection efforts in 2024, compared to 6,651,200 million Soms (\$74,682) in 2023. During the reporting period, the government provided financial assistance to four civil society organizations in Bishkek, Osh, and Naryn to deliver social reintegration programs, including crisis support services for trafficking victims. The government continued to rely heavily on in-kind victim support services from a network of 16 civil society organizations based both in Bishkek and throughout the regions; six of these NGOs reported operating shelter services for women and children, including TIP victims. Additionally, one NGO assisted 60 human trafficking victims without government support. Officials often placed child trafficking victims in

state-run orphanages or with their families due to a lack of specialized care available. Adult male victims were often directed to homeless shelters due to the absence of shelters available for male victims. The NRM noted victims could leave shelters at any time but only if accompanied by a social worker. Foreign victims were entitled to the same benefits as Kyrgyzstani citizens. Civil society organizations reported there were no long-term support services available for trafficking victims. In the previous reporting period, the government established regional departmental commissions that were tasked with providing assistance to trafficking victims; however, they did not report providing any assistance. During the reporting period, the government took steps to repatriate 121 vulnerable Kyrgyzstani women and children from Syria with support from a foreign donor and coordinated with Russia to repatriate 21 unaccompanied Kyrgyzstani children to the Kyrgyz Republic.

Investigative judges had the ability to receive victim witness testimony via video. Victims were eligible for free legal assistance when they participated in criminal proceedings; however, the government did not report if this assistance was provided. Trafficking victims were also eligible for pro bono legal services. The NRM had specific instructions on maintaining the confidentiality of a victim's personal information; however, observers reported some law enforcement officials reportedly shared victim contact information with traffickers and the media. The government reported conducting victim interviews without facing external pressure from suspects but did not provide further details on whether child-friendly procedures were followed during the investigation or prosecution of cases. According to the law, victims were eligible for restitution from defendants; however, no cases were reported. Article 166 of the criminal code exempted victims from criminal liability for low-level criminal acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked; however, due to inadequate screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries in which they would face hardship or retribution.

PREVENTION ✓

The government slightly increased efforts to prevent trafficking.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Development and Migration (MLSSM) served as the anti-trafficking national coordinating body and led the anti-trafficking interagency working group, which met twice during the reporting period. The government had a 2022-2025 NAP but did not provide information on the amount of funding allocated from the state budget for implementation of activities. The government continued to conduct awareness campaigns in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs. The government lacked a uniform system of collecting data on its anti-trafficking efforts, which continued to hinder planning and coordination of initiatives. The government did not operate a trafficking-specific hotline. The Ministry of Labor supported a hotline for labor concerns, including potential trafficking cases, but did not report identifying any victims from received calls.

The government, with the support of an international organization, continued to operate the Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad, under the MLSSM. The Center provided pre-departure orientations on personal safety, labor regulations, and workplace safety for

new migrant workers. The government reported more than 20,000 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic found overseas jobs in 2024 with support from the center. The government maintained a publicly available database of private employment agencies with information on agencies licensed by the government. By law, recruitment agencies could charge a maximum pre-departure fee of 1,000 Kyrgyzstani Soms (\$11) to Kyrgyzstani migrant workers seeking employment overseas, but some could charge significantly more. The government previously reported 135 agencies out of the 197 licensed private recruitment agencies charged workers fees. The government initiated steps to ratify ILO Convention 181, which would ban private employment agencies from collecting fees from applicants; the effort remained ongoing by the end of the reporting period. Foreign workers were required to receive a reissued work visa and work permit if they changed employers. In February 2025, the government lifted its moratorium on unannounced labor inspections, which had been in place since October 2022, though officials had continued to conduct limited inspections (both scheduled and unannounced) of public and private sector operations during this time, including in response to legal complaints. Additionally, the MLSSM established a new counter-trafficking unit to improve interagency coordination. The government reported the labor inspectorate conducted 519 scheduled and 551 unannounced inspections in 2024, compared with 1,155 inspections (none unannounced) the previous reporting period. Observers reported the labor inspectorate was underfunded and understaffed and inspectors often did not assess penalties or refer cases to law enforcement, instead providing employers time to make corrections. Observers reported inspectors rarely travelled to regions outside of Bishkek for inspections. The government provided limited training for labor inspectors; observers reported the training was insufficient. The government continued to adhere to labor recruitment agreements with the Governments of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom. The government trained its diplomatic personnel on human trafficking. The government reported making some efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE: ✓

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit both domestic and foreign victims in the Kyrgyz Republic, and they exploit victims from the Kyrgyz Republic abroad. Adult male labor migrants working abroad are reportedly at the highest risk of trafficking. Kyrgyzstani men, women, and children are exploited in forced labor in Russia and to a lesser extent in eastern European countries, as well as within the Kyrgyz Republic – specifically in agriculture, construction, trucking, service sectors, textiles, domestic service, and childcare. Young men and women from rural areas and low-income families, children in the child welfare system, and orphans are vulnerable to trafficking. Experts assess that traffickers leveraged threats of deportation as a coercive tool to exploit migrants in forced labor or sex trafficking. Kyrgyzstani families on the “Russian blacklist” often send their children to work in Russia, where they are vulnerable to trafficking. Russia continues to be a major destination for Kyrgyzstani labor migrants; however, many are vulnerable to trafficking as they return to the Kyrgyz Republic or seek new job opportunities in Kazakhstan, Turkey, or the European Union. Observers have reported some children, mostly teenage girls, have been forced to repay family debts by working in Russia and Kazakhstan as nannies and domestic workers – these children are also vulnerable to sex trafficking. Some Kyrgyzstani migrants in Russia, including those

detained in Russian prisons, are vulnerable to recruitment schemes to fight in the Russia-Ukraine war, some under the promises of Russian citizenship. Kyrgyzstani nationals employed by Russian companies operating in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine are vulnerable to trafficking and conscription into the Russian military. Kyrgyzstani citizens traveling to the United States illegally through multiple countries, including in Latin America and Europe, are vulnerable to trafficking.

Within the Kyrgyz Republic, the practice of “bride kidnapping” by Kyrgyzstani men continues to place women and girls at risk of forced marriage that may subsequently lead to sex trafficking and forced labor. Reported cases of violence against women and girls, including those with disabilities, have significantly increased in the Kyrgyz Republic; obstacles to accessing justice and services drive some victims to seek and accept unsafe employment opportunities and migrate illegally, which can then be exploited by traffickers. Some traffickers exploit girls in sex trafficking in nightclubs and massage parlors, often under the influence of drugs; traffickers then exploit victims’ substance use to maintain control and as a means of coercion. Previous reports indicated women survivors of violence, which including potential trafficking victims, faced multiple barriers to accessing services and justice due to a lack of response from authorities, which was compounded by a lack of shelters and other services. Observers noted a pronounced increase in the use of fraudulent online recruitment channels by trafficking syndicates, including through social media platforms and online marketplaces. International organizations reported victims of sex trafficking are forced to perform live streaming sex acts. Observers reported some trafficking victims are forced to recruit other victims for sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Kyrgyzstani women and girls in sex trafficking abroad in India, Kazakhstan, Russia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and within the Kyrgyz Republic. Women and teenage girls from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are vulnerable to sex trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic; the southern region is a destination for traffickers to exploit Uzbekistani and Tajikistani citizens in sex and labor trafficking, including in the agriculture, construction, and service sectors. Some Uzbekistani migrants face extortion by Kyrgyzstani border guards, which increases their risk to trafficking. Some Uzbekistani migrants are exploited in forced labor in the construction sector in the Kyrgyz Republic. Some men and women from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan transit the country as they migrate to Russia, Kazakhstan, the UAE, and Türkiye, where they are vulnerable to exploitation in sex and labor trafficking. Chinese nationals employed at mining and construction projects under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative within the Kyrgyz Republic experience conditions indicative of forced labor.

Unaccompanied children who engage in begging and children engaged in domestic work – often in the homes of extended family members – are vulnerable to traffickers. Some Kyrgyzstani children are vulnerable to forced labor in agriculture, construction, dried fruit production, walnut harvesting, animal husbandry, restaurants, markets, construction, and trash collection. People with disabilities and children of migrant workers abroad are vulnerable to trafficking, including in forced criminality and sex trafficking. Observers reported some Kyrgyzstanis are forced to smuggle drugs domestically and abroad, including in Russia. Some individuals are vulnerable to trafficking on the basis of their sexual orientation or identity. Some Kyrgyzstani men who traveled to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to fight alongside or seek employment within armed groups brought their families with them, at times under deception. Kyrgyzstani citizens who have not been repatriated and remain in these conflict zones, including children in camps in Syria, are at risk of trafficking, including forcible recruitment or use by armed groups.

