

# **2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico**

## **MEXICO (Tier 2)**

The Government of Mexico 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, Mexico remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more trafficking cases and prosecuting more suspects; identifying and assisting more victims; and amending the anti-trafficking law to increase penalties for trafficking cases involving enumerated vulnerabilities, such as age, and strengthening victim protections, such as restitution and shelter. For the first time, courts in the state of Chihuahua convicted a trafficker for forced labor. The state of Tlaxcala convicted a complicit police officer for sex trafficking with adequate penalties. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government convicted fewer traffickers and identified significantly fewer forced labor victims; screening of vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators remained inadequate. Overall services for victims were inadequate. Corruption and complicity in trafficking crimes continued to inhibit law enforcement action and government efforts to address such concerns remained inadequate. The government did not adopt a new NAP for 2025 and beyond.

## **PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations.
- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Increase availability of protection services.
- To prevent forced labor among Cuban workers in Mexico, hire any Cuban workers directly and utilize hiring practices that are in line with domestic and international law, and provide adequate protection to Cuban victims of human trafficking.
- Proactively screen children associated with organized criminal groups or FTOs for trafficking indicators and provide victims with adequate protection and reintegration support.
- Expand efforts to raise awareness of trafficking, systems for victims to report trafficking crimes, and the risks of trafficking during illegal migration.
- Ensure victims are not unlawfully detained, or coerced into testifying or otherwise re-traumatized, particularly for victims who testify against members of organized criminal groups.
- Strengthen efforts to hold labor recruiters, including informal “enganchadores,” accountable for fraudulent recruitment practices that facilitate forced labor in Mexico and abroad.
- Strengthen data collection efforts among federal, state, and local authorities to track progress on policy implementation, assess efforts, and appropriately allocate resources.
- Implement procedures for prohibiting the importation of goods produced by forced labor.

## **PROSECUTION**

The government increased law enforcement efforts; however, the government’s data collection on anti-trafficking efforts was unreliable.

The General Act on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Crime Related to Trafficking in Persons criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, prescribing penalties of five to 30 years' imprisonment and fines for sex trafficking offenses, and five to 20 years' imprisonment and fines for labor trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Amendments to the anti-trafficking law in 2024 enhanced penalties for cases involving trafficking in persons with specific enumerated vulnerabilities, such as pregnancy, disability, and age. The law defined trafficking broadly to include illegal adoption without the purpose of exploitation. Federal officials could exercise jurisdiction over all international trafficking cases, all cases that took place on federally administered territory involving organized crime, and all cases involving allegations against government officials. States investigated other internal trafficking cases. The federal law applied to every state and 30 states had additional state anti-trafficking laws. The 2012 law obligated each state to have a dedicated human trafficking prosecutor; 30 of 32 states had specialized anti-trafficking prosecutors or units as of October 2024. The 2019 Asset Forfeiture Law allowed authorities to seize traffickers' assets, which may be applied toward reparation to the victim.

The government reported initiating 661 new investigations in 2024 (392 for sex trafficking, 48 for forced labor, and 221 for unspecified forms of exploitation), an increase compared with 531 new and ongoing investigations in 2023. The government reported continuing previously initiated investigations of at least 67 individuals in 2024, 28 for sex trafficking and 39 for unspecified forms of exploitation. The State of Mexico did not report any investigations despite reporting the most investigations out of all states in 2023. The government initiated prosecutions of 162 suspects in 2024 – including 49 by federal and 113 by state authorities – an increase compared to prosecutions of 110 suspects initiated in 2023 – 20 by federal and 90 by state authorities. Suspects included 84 alleged sex traffickers, 26 alleged labor traffickers, and 52 suspects for unspecified forms of exploitation. Federal and state authorities also continued previously initiated prosecutions of at least 41 suspects. The government convicted 98 traffickers in 2024 – including nine by federal and 89 by state authorities – a decrease compared to 182 convictions in 2023 – 61 by federal and 121 by state authorities. Authorities convicted 52 sex traffickers, eight labor traffickers, and 38 traffickers for unspecified forms of exploitation. Courts convicted at least 64 of these traffickers under the anti-trafficking law.

Federal and state courts upheld three convictions on appeal and acquitted one individual. The government did not report complete sentencing information. The state of Chihuahua achieved its first forced labor conviction, sentenced the trafficker to 10 years in prison, and ordered payment of over 59,400 pesos (\$2,931) in restitution to the victims. The government reported cooperating in 19 investigations with foreign counterparts.

Two specialized units, the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes of Violence against Women and Trafficking in Persons (FEVIMTRA) and the Specialized Prosecutor's Office on Organized Crime (FEMDO), prosecuted cases under Mexico's federal anti-trafficking law. Since 2023, the National Anti-Kidnapping Coordination's (CONASE) mandate was expanded to also be the lead agency for coordinating human trafficking investigations among federal and state law enforcement agencies. However, the government did not allocate additional funding to CONASE, limiting its capacity to effectively implement its anti-trafficking responsibilities. Coordination across state and federal levels continued to be slow.

The government previously identified trafficking as highly prevalent in the states of Guerrero, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz. Tlaxcala convicted 13 traffickers and Veracruz convicted nine traffickers. Authorities in Guerrero again did not convict any traffickers. The government, including several states, reported providing anti-trafficking training, including on victim identification, to law enforcement, the National Guard, hotline operators, and judicial officials, sometimes in collaboration with international organizations. Officials also participated in trainings conducted by international organizations.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns. The government took action to hold complicit officials accountable in some cases. The state government of Tlaxcala convicted and sentenced a former police officer to 33 years in prison for sex trafficking.

A judge filed complaints in local and federal courts against a former Sinaloa Supreme Court Justice for alleged human trafficking and other crimes, and noted the investigation had been obstructed due to impunity and conflicts of interest. Authorities initiated an investigation of officials from the state of Quintana Roo for their alleged involvement in a trafficking network. The Chiapas Attorney General's Office initiated an investigation of senior government officials for their alleged involvement in human trafficking.

## PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts.

The government reported identifying 860 victims in 2024 (795 by federal and 65 by state officials), including 343 sex trafficking victims, 75 forced labor victims, and 442 victims of unspecified forms of exploitation; however, some states did not provide full year data and others provided none. This was an increase from 467 victims identified in 2023, including 213 sex trafficking victims, 154 labor trafficking victims, and 100 victims of unspecified forms of exploitation. The government did not report complete disaggregated data on identified victims; sex trafficking victims included at least six men, 162 women, nine boys, and 112 girls; forced labor victims included at least 15 men, three women, 30 boys, and 25 girls; and victims of unspecified forms of trafficking included 117 men, 224 women, 26 boys, and 72 girls. The government identified 49 foreign victims – 32 in sex trafficking (three from the United States, seven Argentines, one Chilean, 11 Colombians, one Guatemalan, four Venezuelan, and five of unknown nationality), two Guatemalan victims of forced labor, and 15 in unspecified forms of trafficking (one Colombian, 13 Cubans, and one Guatemalan).

Some agencies had SOPs for victim identification and assistance; however, gaps in victim identification remained. Victim referrals to service providers were largely ad hoc and procedures varied from state to state, with most shelters relying on prosecutors to make decisions on the provision of victim assistance on a case-by-case basis for adult victims and Department of Family Development officers to refer child victims. SOPs lacked formal procedures to screen for victims among some vulnerable groups, including children apprehended for alleged gang-related criminal activity and migrants in detention facilities. NGOs reported authorities did not effectively identify and refer potential victims. Authorities did not consistently screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable groups including migrants and asylum-seekers, including those seeking to enter the United States illegally, or when apprehending individuals in commercial sex and forced criminality; this limited opportunities to identify trafficking victims being inappropriately penalized, detained, or subjected to immigration enforcement, solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Lack of screening also precluded victim identification among groups of migrants apprehended during law enforcement operations, including some sent to southern states.

Labor inspectors had a protocol for identifying suspected forced labor victims during routine inspections of formally registered businesses and farms and could respond to complaints alleging forced labor. Authorities did not screen Cuban regime-affiliated workers in Mexico, including medical professionals, for indicators of forced labor, despite evidence the Cuban regime continues to profit from the forced labor of workers. Consular officials followed a protocol for identifying and providing assistance to Mexican victims abroad, but the government did not report victims identified or assisted in other countries.

The government reported allocating 1.46 million Mexican pesos (\$71.6 million) for victim care. The government did not provide complete data on victim services and not all states reported data. Federal and state authorities reported referring at least 80 victims (199 in 2023), including 38 sex trafficking victims, 25 forced labor victims, and 17 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, to service providers. Federal and state authorities reported 381 victims, including 51 exploited in sex trafficking, 20 exploited in labor trafficking, and 310 in unspecified forms of trafficking, received government or government-supported services. This was an increase from 2023 when federal and state officials reported 118 victims, including 50 exploited in sex trafficking, 18 exploited in labor trafficking, and 50 exploited in unspecified forms of trafficking, received government of

government-supported services. The state of Tamaulipas reported assisting in the repatriation of one foreign labor trafficking victim. Civil society reported providing services without government support to 282 victims (126 exploited in sex trafficking, 79 in forced labor, and 77 in unspecified forms trafficking). Amendments to the anti-trafficking law in 2024 included requirements for authorities to help victims attain comprehensive reparations and empowered states to establish shelters and transitional housing for victims.

The government reported providing medical and psychological care, protection during judicial processes, shelter, legal assistance, and reintegration support to victims, often in partnership with NGOs. However, victim services varied throughout the country; were unavailable in many regions; and were particularly inadequate for male victims, forced labor victims, and victims in rural areas. There were no government or NGO trafficking shelters that accepted men and few that accepted boys older than 13, limiting access to specialized services for male victims and victims with teenage sons in their care. Medical and psychological support often did not extend beyond cursory evaluations. Shelters at the state and local levels typically housed victims only for the duration of a criminal trial and long-term reintegration services were very limited.

An international organization reported there were 15 specialized shelters for trafficking victims, including two that provided specialized services for foreign trafficking victims – all funded directly by the federal government and eight managed by NGOs. Other shelters for victims of crime could assist trafficking victims throughout the country and an expert reported that 39 NGOs in Chiapas operated shelters for migrants that could also assist trafficking victims. Government shelters restricted residents' freedom of movement and limited their participation in outside activities, due to legitimate safety concerns.

By law, foreign victims were eligible to receive the same services as Mexican victims, regardless of immigration status. Some state governments required victims to file complaints with the Public Prosecutor's Office to receive protection services; however, specialized prosecutors' offices were primarily located in major cities which limited the ability of victims in rural areas to file complaints. Some states also required victims to obtain official victim status prior to being referred to a shelter operated by the federal government. Courts could permit victims to provide testimony via video or pre-recorded or written statements. However, experts reported officials did not use victim-centered, trauma-informed interview techniques. State governments reported victims periodically cooperated in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. The government reported providing victim-witnesses with psychological and legal assistance, physical protection, and specialized assistance for victims with disabilities during court proceedings. The government did not report allocating resources to diplomatic missions to provide assistance to Mexican trafficking victims abroad, compared with 2 million pesos (\$118,000) allocated in 2023.

Media reporting indicated officials in Quintana Roo screened for trafficking indicators during at least one law enforcement operation where potential trafficking victims were identified. Trafficking victims were often fearful of reporting abuses due to a mistrust of authorities and fear of punishment, deportation, or other repercussions. The government did not report providing humanitarian visas to trafficking victims in 2024, compared to nine in 2023. Humanitarian visas enabled foreign trafficking victims to legally remain and work in the country for up to one year, which could be extended; this benefit was not dependent on a victim's willingness to participate in a criminal trial. The law provides a reflection period of 30 days for foreign trafficking victims.

The anti-trafficking law required judges in criminal cases at the state and federal levels to order traffickers to pay restitution to victims and victims could file civil suits against traffickers for damages. The government reported at least 16 cases in which courts ordered traffickers to pay restitution to victims; however, it did not report if the victims collected the damages awarded in trial. The anti-trafficking law mandated the establishment of a fund to cover restitution payments traffickers were unable to pay; however, the government has not created this fund. The government provided compensation for 49 victims totaling \$2,433,411 through a separate fund in 2024.

## **PREVENTION**

The government maintained prevention efforts.

The anti-trafficking commission (the Commission), led by the Secretariat of the Interior of the Federal Government (SEGOB), coordinated efforts among government agencies and civil society organizations, and met three times during the reporting period. The government continued implementation of its 2022-2024 NAP; however, it did not report drafting and adopting a NAP for 2025 and beyond. The Commission reported funding research on populations vulnerable to trafficking, regional coordination in combating trafficking, and the identification of migrant trafficking victims. Coordination challenges among federal, state, and local authorities and the absence of a coordinated system to track progress and data on anti-trafficking law enforcement and victim protection efforts made it difficult for authorities to verify statistics, assess efforts, and appropriately allocate resources.

The government operated a national human trafficking hotline and online chat, which offered 24-hour assistance in Spanish and English. The national hotline reported receiving 1,251 calls during the first six months of 2024 and referring 305 to law enforcement for investigation, compared with referring 108 calls in 2023. Hotline staff could provide potential victims with legal and psychological assistance. Federal and state authorities conducted anti-trafficking training and awareness programs for government officials and citizens, in public and digital spaces, including on trafficking indicators and reporting potential trafficking cases. Experts previously noted prevention campaigns insufficiently reached high-risk groups such as children, rural and Indigenous communities, and non-Spanish speakers.

The government had a contractual agreement with the Cuban regime to hire Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals. Authorities did not report efforts to prevent forced labor among these workers. In 2024, the government drastically increased the number of Cuban regime-affiliated workers to 3,650 from 800 in 2023. Government officials confirmed paying the Cuban regime directly for workers' services without oversight to ensure workers received adequate compensation. The government continued to pay the regime directly, facilitating the confiscation of workers' wages. According to a report, the government paid the Cuban regime 45,000 to 60,000 pesos (\$2,174 – \$2,898) a month per worker, while Cuba paid \$130.40- \$173.90 monthly to each worker; an amount significantly below the basic minimum wage.

The Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) did not employ a sufficient number of labor inspectors, hampering robust and consistent enforcement of labor laws. Furthermore, the 510 labor inspectors had a limited mandate for conducting oversight of working conditions in informal businesses and farms – which employed more than half of Mexican workers. A 24-hour advance notice requirement for routine inspections hampered their effectiveness when they did occur. Labor inspectors identified four victims in 2024 and referred them to protection services. Federal labor law required employment agencies and labor recruiters to seek authorization from and register with STPS to operate and prescribed fines for non-compliance. The law also prohibited recruiters and labor agents from charging fees to workers and employers from passing agency fees to workers in the form of wage deductions. However, the government did not report fining any employment agencies for violations, and many informal labor recruiters – known as “enganchadores” – evaded government oversight and committed exploitative practices with impunity. The labor law required employers pay wages weekly; employers who withheld wages to keep an employee in compelled servitude could also be charged under the anti-trafficking law, though in practice the government did not effectively enforce this element of the law.

The STPS had guidelines for implementing regulations prohibiting the importation of goods produced with forced labor; however, the government did not report investigations or restrictions of such imports during the reporting period.

The law required authorities to issue temporary documents to undocumented migrant children and their adult caregivers, granting legal presence in Mexico while the government conducted a best

interest determination for the child. The government participated in a program with authorities in the United States to limit the entry into Mexico of sex offenders convicted in the United States. The Government of Mexico reported it denied entry to at least 122 registered sex offenders in 2024. The government reported conducting awareness campaigns to discourage the demand for commercial sex acts. Amendments to the law in 2024 required the Ministry of Tourism design programs and public policies to discourage the demand for extraterritorial commercial sexual exploitation and abuse. However, the government did not report investigating or prosecuting any suspects for extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation crimes. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Mexico, and traffickers exploit victims from Mexico abroad. Traffickers recruit and exploit Mexican women and children and to a lesser extent, men, in sex trafficking in Mexico and the United States through false promises of employment, deceptive romantic relationships, or extortion. Most trafficking cases occur among family, intimate partners, acquaintances on social media, or through fraudulent employment-related schemes. Local experts report a high prevalence of child sex trafficking in Tlaxcala, where parents or other family members are often complicit in facilitating these crimes. Powerful family-run networks target and seduce girls in the community or other states, then exploit them in sex trafficking in Mexico or the United States. Traffickers increasingly recruit potential victims online, including via video games, social media, websites, and dating applications, and advertise images of sex trafficking victims via social media; an NGO reported from 2022 to 2024 over 45 percent of victims who called the anti-trafficking hotline were initially recruited through websites or social media. Traffickers use explicit deepfake images of children generated by artificial intelligence to coerce child victims. The government reported extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse was prevalent, especially in tourist areas and in northern border cities. Authorities reported trafficking networks increasingly used cryptocurrencies to launder proceeds from their crimes. Traffickers exploit Mexican adults and children in forced labor in Mexico and the United States in sectors including agriculture, domestic service, childcare, fishing, herding livestock, manufacturing, mining, food processing, construction, tourism, begging, and street vending. Traffickers commonly exploit day laborers and their children in forced labor in Mexico's agricultural sector, with most victims coming from economically vulnerable populations. Individuals are at risk to trafficking in agricultural regions in harvesting vegetables, coffee, sugar, and tobacco. "Enganchadores" frequently employ deceptive recruitment practices and charge unlawful fees to place agricultural workers in Mexico and the United States; many workers are promised decent wages and a good standard of living, then subsequently compelled into forced labor through debt bondage, threats of violence, and non-payment of wages. Most foreign victims of trafficking in Mexico are from Central and South America, particularly El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Venezuela, with Venezuelan victims increasing in recent years; traffickers exploited some of these victims along Mexico's southern border. The Cuban regime subjected workers in Mexico to wage confiscation and placed unreasonable restrictions on their movements that did not align with international standards on the health and safety of workers. According to an NGO, between 2022 and 2023, at least 48 Cuban workers had escaped. The Cuban regime likely forced regime-affiliated professionals in Mexico to work.

Organized criminal groups and FTOs exploit children and adults in sex trafficking and forced criminality, including in the production, cultivation, transportation, and sale of drugs; extortion; arms trafficking; alien smuggling; robbery; and kidnapping. Organized criminal groups and FTOs utilize fraudulent job advertisements, economic or social manipulation, torture, threats of murder, blackmail, intimidation, or kidnapping to forced or coerce adults and children into sex trafficking and forced labor, including forced criminality. These organizations also exploit individuals' drug dependencies to coerce them to engage in criminal activities. Children living in territory controlled by criminal organizations are at higher risk of trafficking as criminal groups increase child

recruitment for illicit activity. Organized criminal groups, including the FTO Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), operate online scam operations from informal call centers in Jalisco state targeting timeshare owners in the United States and Canada; media reports have documented indicators that local workers are recruited under false pretenses of legitimate call center work and subsequently forced into criminal scamming activity through threats and violence, including disappearances and murder.

Aliens – including unaccompanied children, asylum-seekers, or those seeking to illegally immigrate to the United States – are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor, including by organized criminal groups, and are often fearful to report abuses due to retaliation. Such aliens, who often rely on smugglers, are at particularly high risk of exploitation as many assume debts to pay smugglers and are exploited to “pay off” unmet ransom demands. Migrants and illegal aliens are often kidnapped by organized criminal groups, increasingly in southern states, who demand ransom for their release or force them to contact their families for money transfers, which exposes them to repeated kidnappings and increases their vulnerabilities to debt bondage, thereby driving further profits for criminal organizations. These crimes are often perpetuated by organized criminal groups and FTOs such as the Sinaloa Cartel, CJNG, and Tren de Aragua, since they control most alien smuggling routes. Ongoing armed conflict between organized criminal groups, including between the Sinaloa cartel and CJNG in Chiapas, has displaced communities, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities to trafficking, including forced criminality, as individuals face the risk of forced recruitment by cartels seeking to expand territorial control. Observers, including Mexican legislators, noted links between violence against women and girls and disappearances, murders, and trafficking by organized criminal groups. A community-based self-defense armed group in Guerrero, established to protect local populations from organized crimes, recruited children for their armed faction.

Trafficking-related corruption remains a concern. Some current and former government officials facilitated or participated in trafficking crimes. Media and NGO reports alleged incidents of Mexican authorities extorting migrants for money, at times taking away identification documents, and sometimes colluding with organized criminal groups to facilitate kidnapping and ransom schemes, increasing their vulnerabilities to trafficking.