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# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Italy

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### ITALY (Tier 2)

The Government of Italy 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, Italy remained on Tier 2. These efforts included providing assistance to more victims and increasing funding to implement its NAP. The government issued a decree to elevate the Department of Equal Opportunity's (DEO) trafficking unit into a separate department with increased staffing and established and appointed a special envoy for trafficking to improve coordination and monitor government efforts. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government decreased overall law enforcement efforts, including investigating, prosecuting, and convicting fewer traffickers. Gaps in victim identification systems persisted, and the government identified comparatively few Italians or children, despite reports of high estimates of child trafficking in Italy. The government did not award restitution to any trafficking victims and has never awarded compensation.

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## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms, and ensure labor trafficking is pursued as such rather than a labor-code violation.

Increase proactive victim identification, including for Italians and vulnerable populations, such as migrants and children.

Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by enforcing the law prohibiting recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.

Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

Implement a licensing and accreditation process for massage parlors and increase oversight to identify potential trafficking crimes.

Increase awareness of, and trafficking victims' access to, compensation and increase prosecutors' efforts to systematically request restitution for victims during criminal trials.

Screen Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals for trafficking indicators and refer identified victims to appropriate services.

Improve security standards in and around migrant reception centers to limit contact between traffickers and victims or potential victims.

Continue to screen migrants and asylum-seekers, including those aboard rescue vessels docked in Italian ports, for indicators of trafficking, refer identified victims to services, and work with international organizations to protect potential trafficking victims from refoulement.

Continue to strengthen international law enforcement cooperation to prevent and investigate extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Publish annual data on prosecutions and convictions of traffickers.

## PROSECUTION

The government decreased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Article 601 of the penal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of eight to 20 years' imprisonment, which increased by one third to one half if the crime involved a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Authorities utilized additional penal code provisions to prosecute trafficking crimes. Article 600 criminalized placing or holding a person in conditions of slavery or servitude, and Article 602 criminalized the sale and purchase of slaves – both prescribed the same penalties as Article 601. In addition, Article 600-bis criminalized offenses relating to child sex trafficking and prescribed punishments of six to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine.

The government did not disaggregate between sex and labor trafficking for investigations, prosecutions, or convictions pursued under Articles 600, 601, or 602. In 2023 – the most recent year for which the government had comprehensive statistics – the government reported investigating 106 cases under Articles 600, 601, 601 bis, and 602; this was a decrease compared with 125 in 2022. The government prosecuted 175 alleged traffickers under Articles 600, 601, 601 bis, and 602, compared with 178 in 2022. In 2023, courts convicted 150 traffickers under Articles 600, 601, 601 bis, and 602, compared with 159 convictions in 2022. While the government did not report comprehensive sentencing data in a format that allowed for an assessment of significant sentencing, it reported the average sentence for traffickers convicted under Article 601 was 9.6 years in 2023. The government reported 128 final, unappealable sentences issued in 2023 for Articles 600, 601, and 602 (79 in 2022). The government did not report the sentencing data of these final sentences. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes.

The District Anti-Mafia Directorates handled trafficking prosecutions in coordination with the National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate. The state police, the financial police, and the *Carabinieri* (gendarmerie) conducted investigations under the supervision of the relevant public prosecutor's office. Non-specialized investigators referred cases with clear evidence of trafficking to an anti-mafia unit. However, prosecutors and GRETA expressed concern authorities often categorized human trafficking as other crimes with lower penalties than trafficking. Prosecutors and judges often applied a narrow definition of human trafficking and frequently prioritized cases with the involvement of an organized criminal network or an international border crossing and, therefore, did not pursue cases as trafficking without these elements present. Courts often classified trafficking as another crime if the victim initially

consented to a situation that resulted in exploitation. Insufficient resources resulted in anti-mafia units prioritizing investigations involving criminal networks over cases involving an individual trafficker. Lack of a sufficient number of interpreters, especially for West African dialects, continued to hinder law enforcement investigations. Italian prosecutors and police continued to cite insufficient cooperation in investigations from officials in other countries; with many transnational cases, this hindered successful prosecutions. Slow criminal justice proceedings continued to hamper prosecutions and convictions. Law enforcement agencies continued to receive training on victim identification and investigation of trafficking crimes from their standard curriculum. The government, in partnership with a government-funded international organization, provided routine anti-trafficking training to front-line officials. Italian law enforcement cooperated on several international trafficking investigations in 2024 that resulted in the identification of at least 411 victims and the arrest of at least 73 suspected traffickers across all countries participating in joint operations. Italian law enforcement continued to cooperate and liaise with Nigerian counterparts on trafficking investigations.

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## PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

The government identified 540 new trafficking victims in 2023, compared with 576 in 2022. The government reported, of the 540 victims identified, traffickers exploited 255 in sex trafficking and 257 in labor trafficking, including 19 in forced criminality, two in forced begging, and 12 in domestic servitude. Traffickers exploited 28 victims abroad or in transit to Italy. The government also identified 192 potential victims at migration centers whom the government believed were at risk to become trafficking victims but had not yet been exploited in Italy. The government focused its victim identification efforts on migrants and asylum-seekers arriving at designated points of entry and reception centers. Identification of Italian trafficking victims remained extremely rare, and, in 2023, the government identified only four Italian victims of “enslavement” (two in 2022). The government identified very few children (less than 2 percent of victims identified), despite a previous NGO estimate that about 33 percent of trafficking victims were children. Considering the continued gaps in victim identification, some experts raised concerns the number of victims identified did not represent the true scale of trafficking in Italy. The government reported observing standard UNHCR procedures to screen for trafficking victims among asylum-seekers, unaccompanied children, and undocumented migrants arriving by sea. Civil society coordinated with law enforcement and immigration officials at arrival points and long-term reception centers to screen for trafficking indicators;

officials had access to updated guidelines for victim identification. Anti-trafficking civil society organizations (CSOs) did not have access to most migration centers; civil society recommended MOUs with the government to ensure consistent access to the centers and improve proactive identification of trafficking victims. Local committees continued to utilize national guidelines for asylum-seekers to adjudicate asylum applications to identify trafficking victims among applicants; however, implementation of the guidelines remained inconsistent.

Preliminary identification of trafficking victims could be completed by a wide variety of front-line officials, including CSOs, but only law enforcement or a government authority or CSO implementing a project under the "Single Program of emergence, assistance, and social integration" (Single Program) could formally identify trafficking victims. The government adopted a new NRM in 2023, which included specific protocols for children; however, NGOs and GRETA continued to note it was not fully implemented throughout Italy, and experts expressed concern the NRM only focused on foreign nationals without recognizing Italian victims. In 2024, in compliance with the NAP and NRM, four newly established working groups facilitated the adoption of victim referral SOPs to multiple agencies. The government also maintained a detailed national operational protocol (the *Vademecum*) for the identification and referral to assistance of migrants, as well as a separate identification protocol specifically for labor trafficking and exploitation in agriculture. In addition, the government had a victim identification and referral mechanism for some forms of child trafficking and children in the asylum system. Local authorities and private stakeholders had 34 trafficking victim referral procedure MOUs throughout Italy, including three new agreements signed in 2024.

The government provided victim assistance through its national anti-trafficking network, or the Single Program, implemented by regional and local authorities and CSOs through 21 projects, covering the entire country. The government did not require victims to interact with law enforcement to receive services through the Single Program, but victims were required to participate in the program in order to obtain benefits, such as shelter, legal assistance, medical care, cultural mediation, psychological care, employment training, work permits, language training, and residence permits. The government allocated €28.8 million (\$30 million) to projects under the Single Program throughout Italy from March 2024 through August 2025, an increase of €1.6 million (\$1.66 million) for the previous 17-month period. In March 2025, the government issued a decree that elevated the DEO's trafficking unit into a separate Department with provisions for increased staffing. In 2023, through the Single Program, the government and government-funded CSOs assisted 1,368 trafficking victims. Of the 1,368 trafficking victims, traffickers exploited 750 in sex trafficking and 568 in labor trafficking (including 499 forced labor, 31 forced criminality, 15 forced begging, and 23 domestic

servitude); traffickers exploited 50 victims abroad or in transit to Italy. This was an increase compared with 1,325 trafficking victims assisted in 2022. The government also assisted seven witnesses and 457 potential victims at migration centers whom the government believed were at risk to become trafficking victims but had not yet been exploited in Italy.

The law allowed for an initial three to six months of government assistance to all trafficking victims. After initial assistance, foreign victims were eligible to obtain temporary residency and work permits and had a path to permanent residency. In addition, foreign victims were eligible for six months of shelter benefits, renewable for an additional six months only if the victim obtained a job or enrolled in a training program. February 2025 updates to legislative decree 286/98 provided issuance of six-month residence permits, with extensions to one year or longer, for victims of exploitation, including trafficking, and had a path to permanent residency. In 2024, the government passed Legislative Decree 145/2024, which the government reported provided a training pathway for exploited foreign workers who chose to cooperate with law enforcement. The government reported implementing a de facto 30-day recovery and reflection period available to victims through the Single Program but the reflection period was not codified in law. In its 2024 report, GRETA expressed concern residence permits, which were required to access many services, sometimes took more than a year to obtain and occasionally required cooperation or interaction with law enforcement. Through the projects implemented under the Single Program, the government provided several forms of shelter, including emergency reception, and first and second reception. Most, but not all, shelter options provided specific accommodation for either men or women. The emergency and first reception included emergency shelters and protected apartments, while second reception included semi-independent living arrangements. However, the government at times placed trafficking victims in reception centers in the Reception and Integration network, which lacked adequate security; and reports indicate some traffickers sought to recruit or remove victims from these centers. Foreign unaccompanied child victims automatically received a residence permit until age 18 and accommodations in a general children's center or a designated center for trafficking victims who were also asylum-seekers. Children could receive counseling and were enrolled in public schools. Assistance for trafficking victims with special needs, men, and unaccompanied children was sometimes insufficient. The law entitled children to be interviewed in appropriate venues by specialized experts and entitled victims to interpreters, which most victims reported receiving, in all interviews and criminal proceedings.

The law entitled victims to free legal assistance, contingent on a lack of sufficient financial resources, and guaranteed legal assistance for child victims. However, in its 2024 report,

GRETA reported it was difficult for victims to prove insufficient financial resources and noted many lawyers were not sensitized to trafficking. Victims could receive assistance from and be accompanied by cultural mediators for all interviews and criminal proceedings. Organizations implementing the Single Program provided psychological assistance to trafficking victims. The law entitled all victims to be informed of their rights, and courts could allow victims to remain anonymous during trial. In its 2024 report, GRETA noted most victims received information on their rights from CSOs implementing the Single Program rather than from law enforcement. Victim testimony could be recorded in a pre-trial setting in front of the defendant's lawyer so victims were not required to appear in court, and pre-recording was a requirement for child victims.

Italian criminal law provided judges and courts with discretion to not file non-immigration criminal charges, which protected trafficking victims from inappropriate penalization for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. However, the law's requirement of proof that the unlawful act was committed solely as a result of being trafficked, predominantly via the conviction of the trafficker, left victims and potential victims at risk of prosecution and conviction when a court did not first convict the perpetrators. Civil society and experts continued to report trafficking victims that officials did not formally recognize as trafficking victims were sometimes prosecuted for and convicted of drug trafficking, possession of a false identity document, or immigration-related offenses. In its 2024 report, GRETA and other experts urged the government to adopt a legal provision explicitly preventing inappropriate penalization of victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a result of being trafficked.

The government continued to lack comprehensive statistics on restitution and compensation awarded to victims and did not allow prosecutors to request restitution during criminal trials. The government could offer a single payment of €1,500 (\$1,560) to victims for compensation, although GRETA and NGOs noted the process to claim compensation was overly complex and no victims had ever received it. Restitution could not be decided in criminal court, but rather through a separate civil suit; it remained rare and difficult to obtain and often took several years for courts to make a final decision. If prosecutors did not request a "precautionary seizure" during the criminal trial, then all assets seized from the convicted trafficker were awarded to the government rather than the victim through the separate civil suit.

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## PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts.

The DEO, as coordinator of the interagency steering committee on trafficking, which met once in 2024, was responsible for coordinating the projects for prevention and victim assistance under the Single Program, submitting a biannual anti-trafficking report, and various policy initiatives. A technical committee, comprising representatives at the expert level, assisted and advised the steering committee and met on an ad hoc basis throughout the year. Civil society could attend meetings for the steering and technical committees to provide consultations. In June 2024, DEO established a special envoy for human trafficking to oversee the steering committee, improve coordination, and function as the national rapporteur. Experts recommended ensuring the special envoy had sufficient independence in fulfilling the role of national rapporteur. The government continued to implement its 2022-2025 NAP, and GRETA reported the government allocated €7 million (\$7.28 million) for implementation in 2024, compared with €2 million (\$2.08 million) in 2023. However, the NAP did not include a timeline for completion of action items, an independent monitoring and evaluation body, or a ministry designated with the authority to enforce its implementation – all of which hindered the NAP's effectiveness. Four working groups, which included government officials and CSOs, were responsible for implementation of the NAP's action items. The government also continued to implement its 2023-2025 plan to combat labor exploitation, including labor trafficking, in agriculture. The government focused awareness-raising efforts on sectors where trafficking was common, including agriculture, and implemented a multidisciplinary approach by funding an international organization through 2024 to provide cultural mediators and work with labor inspectors to raise awareness of labor trafficking among migrant workers. Civil society, regional and local authorities, and the national anti-trafficking hotline conducted several awareness campaigns, including through billboards displaying services available from the national hotline, and published most awareness-raising material online for public access. The DEO continued to operate its 24-hour national hotline for victims of human trafficking, available in 12 languages, through a contract with the Veneto regional government. The government increased the hotline's funding, allocating €1.4 million (\$1.46 million) until June 2026. In 2024, 976 calls to the hotline led to the identification of 107 potential victims. The Ministry of Labor maintained a digital platform to provide legal counseling and access to local services to victims of labor exploitation. The government had a help desk dedicated to victims of labor exploitation, including trafficking, which included a hotline, social media accounts, a website, and a chat function.

The government continued to cooperate, via an MOU valid through 2026, with the Government of Libya, as well as Frontex and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, to



manage illegal migration from Libya. Civil society reported state and non-state actors in Libya committed severe human rights abuses, including sex and labor trafficking, against many of the migrants and refugees returned to Libya, including inside detention centers.

Labor inspectors did not have the authority to formally identify trafficking victims but could refer them to police and NGOs. In its 2024 report, GRETA encouraged the government to strengthen the oversight of domestic work and highly vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture, enforce relevant laws, and ensure labor inspectors had sufficient resources. The law prohibited recruitment fees charged to foreign workers, and the government licensed and accredited labor brokers and labor recruitment agencies; however, fraudulent labor recruitment and passport retention – key indicators of trafficking – remained concerns. EU workers not considered “highly qualified,” non-EU workers, and asylum-seekers were able to change employers without prior government permission, which helped decrease their vulnerability to trafficking. The government lacked regulations – including a licensing or accreditation system – and oversight on massage parlors, which remained probable locations for sex trafficking. GRETA noted there were no reported cases of the government holding an agency or company accountable for trafficking. In 2023, the government continued efforts to hold individual labor recruiters accountable for illicit labor brokering by arresting 60 suspects (74 in 2022), prosecuting 506 suspects (591 in 2022), and convicting 153 criminals (171 in 2022). Illicit labor brokering did not typically meet the threshold for labor trafficking; however, law enforcement efforts in this sector helped prevent and reduce the demand for forced labor. The law required businesses to submit reports on their actions to minimize the risk of forced labor and prohibited the purchase of products made with forced labor. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex, nor did it report efforts to reduce the demand for participation in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse by its citizens, despite previous allegations of such crimes.

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## 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 foreign and domestic victims in Italy. Sex traffickers increasingly use online platforms, such as social networks, mobile applications, and the dark web, to recruit and exploit victims and book apartment rentals to make their illicit operations difficult to track. Refugees, predominantly women and children, fleeing the Russia-Ukraine war are vulnerable to trafficking, including labor trafficking in illegal cigarette production. Individuals who identified

as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, many from Brazil and other Latin American countries, are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced criminality in Italy. Traffickers, often part of criminal networks run by Chinese nationals, systematically exploit women from China in sex trafficking in apartments, beauty centers, clubs, and massage parlors and in labor trafficking in a variety of Chinese national-owned businesses, sometimes forcing drug addiction on victims as a means of coercion. Massage parlors are frequently used as fronts for the purchase of commercial sex, increasing vulnerabilities to sex trafficking. Trafficking networks and gangs continue to grow more sophisticated, organized, and violent, particularly Nigerian gangs linked to the Black Axe, Supreme Viking Confraternity, and the Eiye syndicate. Traffickers continue to subject Nigerian women and girls to sex trafficking through debt-based coercion and voodoo rituals. Authorities report traffickers encourage Nigerian victims to claim asylum to obtain legal residency and facilitate further exploitation. NGOs report most Ivorian women who migrate to Italy do so with the help of organized criminal gangs, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking; some are subjected to domestic servitude and sex trafficking en route to Italy. Traffickers exploit migrant women in sex trafficking in and around migration centers.

Some Italian citizens engage in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse abroad. Traffickers exploit children in Italy through sex trafficking, forced criminality, forced begging, and forced labor in the agricultural sector, shops, bars, restaurants, and bakeries. Romani children are vulnerable to trafficking, including forced begging and child sex trafficking. Traffickers recruit girls in Eastern Europe, using romance scams or false promises of relationships via social media and exploit them in child sex trafficking in Italy. Traffickers frequently target unaccompanied children, who are especially vulnerable to trafficking.

Labor traffickers operate in agriculture – predominantly in southern Italy – construction, household labor, hospitality, and restaurants. Undocumented migrants, asylum-seekers, and unregistered workers in informal markets are vulnerable to trafficking in Italy. Traffickers use debt bondage to exploit victims, predominantly men from Bangladesh, and force them to sell roses throughout the country. There are strong indicators of forced labor in Cuba's global labor export program, including the medical missions. In 2024, there were approximately 353 Cuban regime-affiliated medical workers in Calabria whom the Cuban regime may have forced to work. In response to concerns with the program, Calabrian officials revised their contract with the Cuban regime to prevent direct payment to regime authorities and issue individual contracts to each worker, offering them protections under Italian law. Traffickers target migrant centers to recruit and exploit asylum-seekers, sometimes claiming to be family members to gain access to the centers. Asylum-seekers may legally work beginning two

months after filing their applications, although many seek illegal employment immediately in informal sectors, increasing their risk for trafficking.

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