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2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia

ETHIOPIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Ethiopia 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 Ethiopia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more potential trafficking crimes, including those involving allegedly complicit officials; identifying more trafficking victims; increasing efforts to monitor private employment agencies to prevent labor abuses; and increasing coordination of anti-trafficking efforts at the city and regional levels. The government established the Labor Market Information System, an online platform to monitor labor recruitment and enhance access to job opportunities abroad. The government regularly sought the input of survivors in its anti-trafficking efforts and encouraged their participation in awareness raising activities. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Despite the government's efforts to protect migrant workers utilizing the formal recruitment process prior to departure and prevent trafficking of this population, the government did not employ dedicated labor attachés at Ethiopian diplomatic missions, hindering its overall ability to protect Ethiopian migrant workers facing trafficking vulnerabilities abroad. The government did not take adequate action to address internal trafficking crimes, including domestic servitude and child sex trafficking, despite the scale of the problem. Officials routinely investigated potential human trafficking cases, particularly domestic servitude, only when there was evidence of physical or sexual abuse, and cases of domestic servitude often moved forward in the criminal justice system as offenses with lesser penalties than human trafficking. Reports of corruption, including the solicitation of bribes and production of fraudulent documentation to facilitate trafficking crimes, remained pervasive.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Expand anti-trafficking training to all levels of government, including regional officials outside of Addis Ababa, on the implementation of the SOPs for victim identification and the NRM to refer all trafficking victims to appropriate care, victim-centered investigation techniques, and the differences between human trafficking and migrant smuggling. * Raise awareness, including at the community level, of formal recruitment processes for migrant work abroad. * Increase protections for Ethiopian trafficking victims exploited abroad, including by providing pre-departure training to all migrant workers, assigning dedicated labor attachés to Ethiopian embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad, training Ethiopian embassy staff to identify and assist victims abroad, and establishing and implementing additional bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) with destination countries that include strong protections for workers. * Ensure police investigate all potential cases of domestic servitude and increase training for frontline officials, civil society, and community members on trafficking indicators and referral procedures to law enforcement. * Systematically and proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including Ethiopian migrant workers returning from overseas, domestic workers, individuals in commercial sex, unaccompanied children, and foreign nationals such as Eritreans, Somalis, South Sudanese, and Cuban medical workers, and refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services. * Collaborate with NGOs and international organizations to increase the availability of short-term shelter, long-term housing, and protective services for all trafficking victims, including adult males, foreign nationals, and victims identified outside of Addis Ababa. * Vigorously investigate and prosecute alleged traffickers, including for both transnational and internal trafficking crimes, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment agencies, including by eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, regularly inspecting private employment agencies, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally

accountable, and training labor inspectors to report potential violations to the appropriate officials.

- * Develop and implement a comprehensive and centralized database to accurately report the government's anti-trafficking statistics and disaggregate data on trafficking crimes and migrant smuggling.

PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. Proclamation 1178/2020, Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Persons, as amended by Corrigendum 11/2013, effective as of December 2020, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law prescribed penalties of seven to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 to 100,000 Ethiopian birr (Br) (\$360 to \$1,785) for labor trafficking and adult sex trafficking and 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 to 100,000 Br (\$535 to \$1,785) for child sex trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regards to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.

The government did not maintain a centralized law enforcement data collection system on trafficking crimes, hindering its ability to disaggregate human trafficking statistics, particularly those collected at the regional level, and likely resulting in underreported anti-trafficking prosecution statistics. In 2023, the government provided data from the federal level and 10 regions, the same reporting provided in 2022. The government reported investigating 728 trafficking cases – 21 for labor trafficking and 707 for unspecified forms of trafficking – in 2023, compared with 498 investigations in 2022. The government reported 69 investigations initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. The government reported prosecuting at least 650 individuals in 531 cases – two for sex trafficking, 15 for labor trafficking, and 633 for unspecified forms of trafficking – under the anti-trafficking proclamation; however, some data likely fell outside of the reporting period. This compared with at least 608 individuals prosecuted in 497 cases reported in the previous year. The government reported prosecutions of at least 48 individuals initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. Courts convicted 243 traffickers – 41 for labor trafficking and 202 for unspecified forms of trafficking – under the anti-trafficking proclamation in 2023, compared with at least 225 convictions in 2022. Courts did not provide sentencing data for all convictions but reported issuing sentences ranging from one to 16 years' imprisonment in addition to fines. Courts upheld at least 33 convictions, overturned at least one conviction on appeal, and acquitted 32 defendants. As reported in prior years, officials' propensity to conflate human trafficking and migrant smuggling, particularly at the regional and local levels, made it probable some reported cases involved individuals seeking to cross international borders via irregular migration and other crimes not involving exploitation through labor trafficking or sex trafficking. The government took some steps at the *woreda*- (district), city-, and sub-city-levels to address internal trafficking crimes, such as child sex trafficking and domestic servitude; however, overall law enforcement efforts continued to disproportionately focus on transnational trafficking crimes, and officials did not allocate adequate resources or attention to trafficking crimes within the country's borders, compared with the scale of the problem. Observers reported law enforcement routinely only investigated potential human trafficking cases, particularly domestic servitude, when there was evidence of physical or sexual abuse; while some of these cases resulted in convictions and imprisonment of perpetrators, courts typically convicted perpetrators using the criminal code for sexual assault or child abuse, rather than for human trafficking, resulting in lesser penalties. Additionally, observers also reported officials frequently relied on Labor Proclamation 1156/2019 to investigate/address labor trafficking cases; however, Proc. 1156/2019 did not include domestic work or the informal sector, and cases of domestic servitude often moved forward in the criminal justice system as labor violations or assault instead of as human trafficking cases.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Reports of corruption, including the solicitation of bribes and production of fraudulent documentation to facilitate trafficking crimes, among police, immigration officers, and judicial officials remained pervasive. In 2023, the government investigated and charged more than 60 immigration officials, including the former Deputy Director General of Immigration and

Citizenship Services, for facilitating potential human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes by providing falsified approval letters for citizens to work abroad; the investigation remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In 2022, the government investigated two officials – one police officer in the former Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region and one immigration official employed at Bole International Airport – for potential human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes; these cases remained ongoing.

The Federal Police Commission (FPC) maintained responsibility to investigate and prosecute human trafficking crimes. In practice, FPC investigated cases in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, cases of transnational trafficking, and cases involving cross-regional exploitation in Ethiopia; the federal government continued to delegate regional law enforcement units to investigate internal trafficking cases in local jurisdictions. The FPC, in partnership with an international organization and foreign donors, established a specialized investigation unit dedicated to investigating human trafficking crimes. The Ministry of Justice maintained a specialized prosecution unit focused on human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes, which included eight prosecutors, up from six in 2022. The specialized investigators and prosecutors regularly coordinated on trafficking cases and training efforts, including on victim-centered investigations, child-friendly interviewing techniques, and evidence gathering. The government, in partnership with civil society organizations, also provided regular trainings to federal and regional government officials, police, prosecutors, judges, and immigration officers, on the distinction between human trafficking and migrant smuggling, anti-trafficking laws, trafficking investigation SOPs, digital investigation techniques, victim identification, and international cooperation on investigations. The government, in partnership with an international organization, finalized new prosecution guidelines, which outlined best practices for prosecutors handling human trafficking cases, and trained prosecutors on their use. Despite an increase in overall specialized trainings and use of the anti-trafficking law, officials reported challenges related to victim identification, availability of protection services, and processing of digital evidence continued to hinder successful trafficking prosecutions. The government cooperated with foreign governments, including Malawi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United Kingdom on potential trafficking investigations and signed a cooperation agreement on extradition with South Africa. In November 2023, the government signed an MOU with the Government of Djibouti to establish a joint investigation team to coordinate on cases of cross-border human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. The government reported identifying 541 trafficking victims, compared with 264 in the previous reporting period. Of the 541 victims identified, traffickers exploited 278 in sex trafficking and 263 in labor trafficking; 439 were adults (11 men and 428 women), and 102 were children (42 boys and 60 girls); all 541 were Ethiopian nationals. In addition to victims identified by the government, NGOs and international organizations reported identifying and assisting more than 4,200 potential trafficking victims, providing them with services, including medical care, reintegration assistance, education, and repatriation assistance for Ethiopian nationals in domestic servitude abroad. The government maintained formal SOPs and an NRM to guide officials in the proactive identification of trafficking victims and subsequent referral to services and increased their implementation by distributing copies and regularly training government and NGO stakeholders on their use. The government, in partnership with an international organization, expanded implementation of the SOPs and NRM to Dire Dawa and the regional states, particularly in Amhara and Oromia, and created a website to make the SOPs and NRM publicly available; however, their use outside of Addis Ababa remained limited. The government increased proactive screening of vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, particularly among individuals in commercial sex and Ethiopian migrant workers returning from employment in Gulf states. The government screened more than 35,000 Ethiopians repatriated from the Middle East and other African countries for indicators of trafficking or other crimes; it did not report the number of trafficking victims identified among this population.

The government reported providing at least 96 victims, including 15 persons with disabilities, with direct services, including medical care, psycho-social counseling, shelter, family reunification, legal

aid, and economic assistance; this compared with at least 113 victims provided services in 2022. The government reported providing 1,022 potential victims with referrals to services provided by civil society organizations. The government did not operate any shelters for trafficking victims and continued to rely on NGOs to provide shelter services. Despite reliance on civil society organizations to provide most victim services, the government's provision of financial or in-kind support to such organizations remained minimal. An international organization continued to operate five migration response centers (MRCs) in Dire Dawa, Metema, Moyale, Semera, and Togochale to provide vulnerable migrants, including potential trafficking victims, with basic needs, temporary shelter, and family reunification support. The government supported the MRCs in various ways, including by donating land for infrastructure, providing rent-free usage of government facilities, participating in MRC management committees, and facilitating referrals to services. The international organization did not screen for trafficking among all migrants but reported providing services to at least 258 potential trafficking victims among nearly 30,000 vulnerable migrants at the MRCs, compared with 608 potential victims in the previous reporting period. The government maintained operation of a child protection unit in Addis Ababa. The unit reportedly provided protection services to child trafficking victims and vulnerable children intercepted or identified en route from rural to urban areas. Protection services for male victims remained scarce, and observers reported the government's overall victim assistance remained limited and inconsistent in quality, particularly outside of Addis Ababa. The 2020 anti-trafficking proclamation established a fund to support victim protection and care, which could receive funding through a government budget allocation; through fines imposed on, and the sale of, confiscated property from traffickers; and from foreign donors. In 2021, the government drafted regulations to initiate creation of the fund; the draft regulations were revised in May 2023 and pending ministerial-level approval for the third consecutive reporting period.

To protect Ethiopian nationals exploited abroad, some Ethiopian diplomatic missions in Gulf states continued to provide temporary shelter and facilitate repatriation flights for victims. The government increasingly advocated with Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, to conduct coordinated repatriations of Ethiopians abroad, rather than mass deportations. In May 2023, the government ratified the Victim Migrant Returnees' Reintegration Implementation Directive (No. 696/2023) to enhance coordination among and provide guidance to government stakeholders on the identification of potential victims and subsequent referral to care among Ethiopian returnees. The National Partnership Coalition (NPC), in coordination with other government agencies and civil society, maintained an ad hoc committee led by the Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) to provide Ethiopian returnees with protection services and undertook efforts to prevent trafficking among this population, which likely included potential trafficking victims. Officials at Bole International Airport and at land border crossings coordinated with an international organization to screen Ethiopians returning from abroad for trafficking indicators. Observers noted the time allotted for screening interviews – approximately five minutes – was insufficient to adequately identify potential trafficking victims, especially amidst the high number of returnees, which an international organization reported was more than 100,000 individuals in 2023. While civil society organizations provided most services for returnees, the EDRMC and the Ministry of Women Social Affairs (MOWSA) set up temporary government-operated shelters to assist large numbers of returnees in Addis Ababa, where the government provided returnees, which likely included potential trafficking victims, with shelter, basic needs, counseling, medical services, cash assistance, consular services, and family reintegration assistance. The MOWSA provided six social workers for a transit center operated by an international organization to assist in the identification of potential trafficking victims and the provision of counseling services. Despite these increased efforts, government officials and civil society reported a lack of personnel and financial resources available to government agencies to provide protection services hindered the government's overall ability to meet the significant need of returnees. Observers reported that while protection services for returnees continued to improve in Addis Ababa, protection services for Ethiopians returning directly to other parts of the country, particularly Bahir Dar and Mekelle, remained limited.

The 2020 anti-trafficking proclamation provided protections to victims participating in investigations and prosecutions as outlined under the Witness and Whistleblowers Protection Proclamation (No. 699/2010), which included protection from prosecution for crimes solely committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government, in partnership with an

international organization, drafted an amendment to Proclamation 699/2010 to reportedly increase protections for victims of crime, including trafficking, and ensure the protections were in line with international standards; the draft amendments were awaiting approval by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) for the second consecutive reporting period. The government maintained a witness protection directorate to provide assistance to victim-witnesses and, in partnership with an international organization, provided anti-trafficking training to the unit. Officials maintained an MOU with NGOs to improve coordination between law enforcement agencies and service providers intended to ensure officials referred victims to appropriate care, including shelter, counseling, and legal assistance, throughout the course of legal proceedings. Courts allowed children to testify against traffickers via video or in child-friendly interviewing rooms. Despite these protections, observers reported, in some cases, victims chose not to testify due to fear of reprisal or lack of funding to travel to court. The government reported supporting 64 victims voluntarily participating in criminal proceedings against traffickers, compared with supporting eight victims in 2022. The anti-trafficking proclamation allowed courts to order convicted traffickers to pay restitution; the government reported courts awarded restitution but did not report the amount of restitution ordered. The law also allowed victims to file civil suits against traffickers for compensation for damages; however, the government did not report the number of civil suits filed. Some officials reported courts preferred victims pursue civil suits instead of ordering restitution during a criminal trial. The government did not report the number of civil suits seeking compensation filed. Proclamation 1178/2020 entitled all victims to the same services and allowed foreign national victims to receive temporary residence permits or repatriation assistance on an as-needed basis. Due to disparate implementation of identification procedures and regular detention of unhoused populations, authorities may have detained or deported some unidentified trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking. The senior-level National Council (NC), chaired by the deputy prime minister, maintained responsibility for the creation of policies and strategies for the prevention of human trafficking and migrant smuggling; however, the NC did not meet in 2023. The working-level NPC, housed in the MOJ and composed of members from relevant government ministries, religious institutions, civil society organizations, and media, continued to serve as the government's primary coordinating body for issues related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The NPC maintained six working groups, which met occasionally throughout the year, related to the following topics: awareness raising, crime prevention and law enforcement, victim protection and overseas employment promotion, data collection, diaspora engagement, and research. The city administrations of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and all regions, except Tigray, South Ethiopia, Central Ethiopia, and South West Ethiopia regional states, maintained regional partnership councils to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. The NPC, in partnership with an international organization, supported the drafting of regulations for these councils to formalize efforts at the regional level; the regulations were finalized in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city administrations and Sidama regional administration, but were awaiting final approval in Amhara and Oromia. The NPC implemented a 2021-2025 NAP, which included activities related to the prevention of human trafficking; while the NAP addressed all forms of trafficking, the focus of activities was primarily on Ethiopian overseas workers. The federal government allocated 1.58 billion Br (\$28.3 million) to efforts to combat trafficking and transnational organized crime, compared with 1.36 billion Br (\$24.4 million) allocated for anti-trafficking and migrant smuggling efforts in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. Regional governments also allocated funds for anti-trafficking efforts but did not report specific funding amounts. The government sought input from survivors in developing new anti-trafficking policies and programs and encouraged survivors' participation in awareness raising activities. The government continued a research study to analyze trafficking trends and risks within Ethiopia, particularly focused on IDPs and internal migration. The government, both independently and in partnership with international organizations and foreign donors, conducted various awareness campaigns at the federal and regional levels on trafficking indicators and reporting mechanisms, primarily targeted toward schools, rural communities, religious institutions, private recruitment agencies, and media. The Addis Ababa City Administration, in partnership with an international organization, operationalized

a toll-free, 24/7 trafficking-specific hotline, established during the previous reporting period, to report trafficking crimes and refer victims to services. The hotline reported referring 16 potential trafficking cases to police for investigation and 42 callers to legal services. Federal and regional police maintained additional hotlines to report crimes, including human trafficking.

The Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS) continued to regulate labor migration and other labor-related matters, including labor trafficking. Proclamation 1246/2021 Ethiopian's Overseas Employment (Amendment) continued to require recruitment agencies to be registered and licensed, and the government required recruitment agencies to ensure migrant workers received training on worker rights and destination countries' laws prior to departure. The government routinely monitored recruitment agencies through both desk reviews and in-person inspections, which resulted in an unreported number of administrative actions, including fines, warnings, and license removal. The MOLS did not establish an employment board to oversee implementation of the employment proclamation, as mandated by Proclamation 1246/2021. The overseas employment proclamation continued to require employment agencies to deposit a \$100,000, or the equivalent in Ethiopian Birr, security bond in a bank as insurance, which officials would use to assist and repatriate trafficking victims; however, the government did not consistently enforce this requirement. Proclamation 1246/2021 allowed employment agencies to charge migrant workers, not including those employed in domestic work, to pay recruitment fees the amount of one month's salary over four payment periods.

In 2023, the MOLS established and dedicated staff and resources to maintain the Labor Migration Information System (LMIS), which included a website and mobile application, to digitize all employment services. The LMIS allowed Ethiopians seeking work abroad to register by creating an online profile that included demographic information, education, work experience, skills, and employment preferences. The LMIS also maintained a database of migration data, job opportunities posted by recruitment agencies, pre-departure information, and resources for migrants upon their return to Ethiopia. The MOLS and the NPC trained recruitment agencies and Ethiopian embassies abroad on LMIS. The MOLS continued to provide pre-departure training for Ethiopians seeking work abroad, typically between 50-80 participants per day, including on employment contracts, worker rights, and resources for assistance. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training Agency implemented government-funded vocational training programs, ranging from 20 days to six months, which included training on job skills, basic foreign languages, and cultural considerations of destination countries. The government maintained BLAs with Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to commit to ethical recruitment, legal remedies against those who violated the law, and equal protection of Ethiopian workers, to include equal wages for equal work and reasonable working hours. The government finalized BLAs with the Governments of Germany and Lebanon, as well as a Sweden-based construction company, and revised the BLA with Jordan to increase protections for migrant workers. Experts reported the new BLA with Lebanon, which did not include a minimum wage and offered minimal legal protections, failed to adequately protect domestic workers, a group particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to Lebanon's employer-based visa system. The government continued to draft and negotiate BLAs with the Governments of Bahrain, Canada, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Oman, and South Sudan. Despite the protection and prevention efforts provided within the formal recruitment process prior to departure, the government did not employ dedicated labor attachés at Ethiopian diplomatic missions, hindering the government's overall ability to monitor migrant worker conditions abroad.

Labor inspectors overseeing working conditions in the country received anti-trafficking training and reported potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement following routine inspections of worksites; however, labor inspectors continued to focus on child labor violations. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, investigation and accountability actions remained pending for one allegation of sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators against one Ethiopian peacekeeper serving in the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2018. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Ethiopia, and traffickers exploit victims from Ethiopia abroad. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Ethiopia in domestic servitude and sex trafficking throughout the country and boys and men in labor trafficking in traditional weaving, construction, agriculture, forced begging, and street vending. Brothel owners exploit girls in sex trafficking in Addis Ababa's central market and near the city's main bus stop. Traffickers increasingly use social media to recruit child victims for sexual exploitation and trafficking. Labor recruiters frequently target young people from Ethiopia's vast rural areas with false promises of a better life in urban areas; in some cases, traffickers replicate legitimate app-based recruitment tools to fraudulently recruit vulnerable populations and exploit them in forced labor. In some cases, traffickers exploit children from rural areas encouraged to work by their parents as a result of extreme economic pressures in sex trafficking or forced labor. International organizations estimate there are between 3.5 and 4.4 million IDPs in Ethiopia as a result of internal conflict and climate change, including drought and flooding. IDPs, particularly those who migrate from rural areas to urban cities, and individuals in resettlement camps are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking due to a lack of access to justice, education, economic opportunity, and basic needs, such as food, water, and health services.

Reports indicate armed actors, including Eritrean forces, regional Ethiopian forces, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), committed human rights abuses and GBV, including potential trafficking crimes, against women and girls in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar between the beginning of the conflict in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 and the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the government and the TPLF in November 2022. Prior to the COHA, observers reported unspecified military personnel and other officials forced women to have sex in exchange for basic commodities and humanitarian assistance. Some international reports allege Eritrean forces continued to commit human rights abuses, including potential human trafficking crimes, in Tigray after the signing of the COHA. International organizations report Eritrean forces forcibly recruited and used children in combat in Ethiopia in previous reporting periods. Children in conflict areas throughout the country are vulnerable to unlawful recruitment or use by armed groups. Reports allege non-state armed groups may have recruited or used children in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia.

Trusted community members, known as *manamasas*, recruit and groom vulnerable youth on behalf of local and international human trafficking syndicates by exaggerating the advantages of working abroad. Traffickers use technology to recruit and exploit trafficking victims abroad, including using fake social media accounts to depict "successful" migration. Scarce economic opportunities and poverty, coupled with familial encouragement, compel tens of thousands of Ethiopians to transit out of Ethiopia via three main routes, where they are vulnerable to trafficking. Undocumented economic migrants take the eastern route, via Djibouti or Somalia, to Yemen and onward to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Due to increased reporting of human rights abuses and killings at the Yemen-Saudi border, an increasing number of Ethiopian migrants take the eastern route intending to reach Oman via Yemen. The southern route often involves individuals transiting through Kenya and onward to South Africa in hopes of finding enhanced economic opportunities. The northwestern route, the least common, has traditionally been taken by men through Sudan to Libya or Egypt and onward to Europe; however, observers report women using this route to reach Khartoum, where they apply for and receive visas to Lebanon. Observers have reported the process to acquire visas is often illegitimate and part of trafficking schemes. Across all three of these major migration routes, traffickers exploit Ethiopian migrants in sex and labor trafficking in transit countries and in their intended destinations. Families often finance irregular migration, and parents may force or coerce their children to travel abroad for work. Most traffickers are small local operators, often from the victims' home communities, but highly organized trafficking networks also facilitate irregular migration flows and exploit individuals in sex or labor trafficking. More than 100,000 Ethiopians returned from abroad in 2023, many of whom likely faced increased trafficking vulnerabilities in their destination country, along their route, and once back in Ethiopia.

Traffickers exploit Ethiopians in sex and labor trafficking in other African countries, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Saudi Arabia remains the primary destination for economic migrants, representing 80-90 percent of Ethiopian labor migration; observers report approximately 750,000 Ethiopians reside there, the majority without valid travel documentation. Traffickers frequently

exploit this vulnerable population in sex or labor trafficking. Ethiopians traveling to the Middle East through licensed Ethiopian employment agencies are also susceptible to trafficking by employers or illegal employment agencies in the destination country. The employer-based visa system – common in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – binds domestic workers to one employer and prevents their freedom of movement. Throughout the Middle East, traffickers exploit Ethiopian women in domestic servitude, subjecting them to severe physical and emotional abuse. Ethiopians abroad – especially in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia – often face stigmatization and abuse, leading to loss of employment and potential deportation; this population remains vulnerable to trafficking. In Lebanon, employers forcibly removed Ethiopian domestic workers from their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving them trapped in the country; unable to find new work or a safe way home; these individuals are vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian women and children in forced begging, sometimes via organized begging rings, in Saudi Arabia. Thousands of Ethiopians – including domestic workers and migrant laborers who lost their employment due to the pandemic and migrants pushed out by violence in Yemen – face increasing vulnerabilities to trafficking after being placed in abusive detention centers in southern Saudi Arabia. Media reports allege the Houthis in Yemen forcibly recruited African migrants, including Ethiopians, to join their ranks after kidnapping hundreds who entered Houthi-controlled territory during their migration journey and transferring them to military training facilities. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian girls in domestic servitude and sex trafficking, sometimes using substances as a means of control, in neighboring African countries, particularly Djibouti and Sudan. Traffickers exploit Ethiopian boys in labor trafficking in forced begging, domestic servitude, and shopkeeping in Djibouti. Ethiopians fleeing internal conflict and seeking refugee status or asylum in neighboring countries, where protection services are limited, are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking as displacement, food insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity persists.

As of February 2024, Ethiopia hosts nearly one million refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. Refugees without access to education, economic opportunity, or basic needs, such as food, water, and health services, and those further displaced by conflict are vulnerable to trafficking. Cuban medical professionals working in Ethiopia may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.