

# 2024 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 prosecuting more suspects and convicting more traffickers; identifying and assisting more victims; and amending its labor law with more robust obligations for agricultural employers to protect employees. The government's regulation prohibiting the importation of goods produced with forced labor officially took effect, and officials produced a guide for its implementation. To improve coordination among federal and state law enforcement agencies, the government designated the National Anti-Kidnapping Coordination (CONASE) as the new lead agency for human trafficking investigations. For the first time in four years, courts convicted traffickers in the State of Veracruz, which was reported as having a high trafficking prevalence. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not allocate additional funding to CONASE to fulfill its expanded role. Authorities reported initiating significantly fewer investigations. The government offered few services to victims not participating in criminal justice proceedings, and the high security measures and restriction on movement imposed on residents in government shelters may have re-traumatized some victims. Overall services for victims were inadequate compared to the scale of the problem and services were acutely lacking for male victims, forced labor victims, and victims in rural areas. Corruption and complicity in trafficking crimes continued to inhibit law enforcement efforts and undermine the public's trust in reporting suspected cases, but the government did not prosecute or convict any officials for complicity in trafficking crimes. Fraudulent recruitment practices for work in Mexico and abroad continued to be widespread, but the government did not take steps to hold recruiters or labor agents accountable.

### PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase resources for victim services, in consultation with international organizations and NGOs, including comprehensive, trauma-informed services to victims not participating in criminal justice proceedings, reintegration support for all victims, and improved access to services for men and boys, LGBTQI+ individuals, and labor trafficking victims. \* Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including labor trafficking and those involving complicit officials, at the federal and state levels, and allocate sufficient resources to CONASE to hire and train staff necessary to effectively fulfill its expanded mandate to lead trafficking investigations. \* Allow adult victims greater independence to make informed choices about their own security needs and do not impose restriction of movement on adult victims while in the government's care. \* Increase efforts among front-line officials to proactively identify victims among vulnerable groups in Mexico and overseas – including individuals in commercial sex, children apprehended for illicit gang-related activities, Cuban government-affiliated workers, and migrants and asylum-seekers, including migrant workers – and refer them to service providers for assistance. \* Strengthen efforts to hold labor recruiters, including informal “enganchadores,” accountable for fraudulent recruitment practices that facilitate forced labor in Mexico and abroad. \* Ensure victims are not unlawfully detained, coerced into testifying, or otherwise re-traumatized and increase funding for victim-witness protection services beyond the duration of a trial, particularly for victims who testify against members of organized criminal groups. \* Develop a new multiyear NAP to take effect after the current plan's expiration at the end of 2024 and allocate resources toward its implementation. \* Allocate funds and implement transparent oversight to a legally required victim assistance fund to

cover restitution payments convicted traffickers are unable to pay and develop a mechanism to ensure victims receive court-ordered payments. \* Increase funding to and collaboration with NGOs that serve at-risk populations and provide services to victims. \* Conduct culturally relevant awareness campaigns and outreach efforts in local languages targeted to rural, migrant, and Indigenous communities that provide information and foster trust for at-risk individuals to seek assistance. \* Strengthen data collection efforts among federal, state, and local authorities to track progress on policy implementation, assess efforts, and appropriately allocate resources. \* Vigorously implement new procedures for prohibiting the importation of goods produced by forced labor.

## PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts, but authorities reported initiating significantly fewer investigations and data collection on anti-trafficking efforts was unreliable. The 2012 anti-trafficking law 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. 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 thirty states had additional state anti-trafficking laws. The 2012 law obligated each state to have a dedicated human trafficking prosecutor; 31 of 32 states had established specialized anti-trafficking prosecutors or units. The 2019 Asset Forfeiture Law allowed authorities to seize traffickers' assets.

The government reported authorities investigated 531 cases in 2023, a significant decline from 831 investigations reported in 2022. Federal authorities reported prosecuting 20 individuals in 2023, but this figure may have included duplicated case data. In comparison, federal authorities prosecuted 11 suspected traffickers in 2022. The government reported state officials prosecuted at least 143 suspects (in at least 90 new prosecutions and at least 49 ongoing prosecutions) in 19 states, but this data was not complete. Suspects included 104 suspected sex traffickers, 14 suspected labor traffickers, and 25 suspects for unspecified forms of exploitation. This was an increase from 2022, when officials reported prosecuting at least 63 suspects at the state level but provided data from only 10 states and did not clarify whether this figure included prosecutions ongoing from previous years. In 2023, federal authorities reported convicting 61 traffickers and state authorities reported convicting 121 traffickers – 64 for sex trafficking, eight for labor trafficking, and 49 for unspecified forms of trafficking. However, federal data likely included duplicated case data and some convictions counted in these statistics may have been for child sexual abuse material crimes that did not constitute trafficking under the international law definition. Federal and state courts also upheld 20 convictions on appeal, overturned 28 convictions on appeal, and acquitted 23 individuals. In comparison, federal officials in 2022 convicted five sex traffickers and state authorities convicted 111 traffickers – 81 for sex trafficking, 20 for labor trafficking, and 10 for unspecified forms of trafficking. Total reported convictions increased from 116 in 2022 to 182 in 2023, but the government's inconsistent data reporting methods limited the scope of meaningful comparison. A lack of coordination among labor inspectors, criminal justice authorities, and service providers hampered efforts to hold labor traffickers criminally accountable and provide comprehensive assistance for labor trafficking victims. The government did not provide sentencing details for convicted traffickers. In the previous year, the government reported courts issued sentences to convicted traffickers ranging from 10 to 196 years and six months' imprisonment and ordered many traffickers to pay fines and restitution. An NGO that operated the national human trafficking hotline referred 108 calls to specialized prosecutors for investigation, an increase from 43 calls referred in 2022. Mexican prosecutors collaborated with foreign counterparts on 13 investigations and two prosecutions. The government lacked a coordinated system to track data on its anti-trafficking law enforcement and victim protection efforts, making it difficult for authorities to verify statistics, assess efforts, and appropriately allocate resources.

Two specialized prosecution units, the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes of Violence against Women and Trafficking in Persons (FEVIMTRA) and the Specialized Unit in Investigation of Trafficking in Minors, Persons, and Organs, prosecuted cases under Mexico's federal anti-trafficking law. State-level specialized prosecution units, whose capacity levels, staffing, and funding varied widely, had the primary responsibility for enforcing anti-trafficking laws throughout the country. In June 2023, the government expanded the mission of the CONASE to include jurisdiction for human trafficking and extortion cases. CONASE became the lead agency for human trafficking investigations, with the responsibility for coordinating among federal and state law enforcement agencies. However, the government did not allocate additional funding to CONASE, limiting its capacity to effectively expand its responsibilities. Although those living in rural areas, particularly Indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities, faced severe trafficking risks, prosecutor offices in these areas were particularly understaffed and lacked sufficient resources to effectively prosecute trafficking crimes. Coordination across state and federal levels continued to be slow. The government identified the states of Guerrero, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz as having a high trafficking prevalence; for the first time in at least four years, authorities in Veracruz convicted seven traffickers, but authorities in Guerrero did not convict any traffickers for at least a fourth consecutive year. Authorities in Tlaxcala convicted two sex traffickers. Local experts reported insufficient funding for prosecutors in these states led them to charge suspects with crimes they believed easier to prove. Federal law enforcement officials trained police and prosecutors on enforcing trafficking laws, and federal and state officials provided trafficking training to judicial officials. The Secretariat of Finance's Financial Intelligence Unit continued to conduct workshops for public officials from relevant sectors on financial flows and human trafficking.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. Some government officials facilitated or participated in trafficking crimes. Media and NGO reports based on interviews with migrants and asylum-seekers alleged incidents of Mexican extorting migrants for money and at times colluding with organized criminal groups to facilitate kidnapping and ransom schemes. These abuses exacerbated migrants' and asylum-seekers' existing vulnerabilities to trafficking and further deterred vulnerable individuals from reporting crimes. The government's anti-trafficking NAP identified corruption and collusion with criminal groups as challenges that contribute to high levels of impunity for trafficking crimes. The government operated a hotline and website open to the public for the anonymous reporting of suspected corruption involving public officials, but it did not report receiving any trafficking-related tips. In January 2024, authorities announced an investigation into a political party leader for alleged involvement in trafficking crimes that remained open at the close of the reporting period. However, the government did not report any prosecutions or convictions of officials for complicity in trafficking crimes. The government also did not provide updates on cases opened in previous years, including: the former governor of Puebla, arrested in February 2021 for ordering the 2005 torture and illegal arrest of a journalist who exposed the official's alleged involvement in a child sex trafficking ring; a 2021 investigation of a public servant detained for alleged involvement in child sex trafficking crimes; or the arrests in 2021 and 2022 of a former leader and two former employees of a national political party, charged with running a sex trafficking operation with party resources.

## PROTECTION

The government increased overall protection efforts; it identified and assisted more victims, but its victim identification, referral, and protection efforts remained inadequate. The government reported identifying 467 victims in 2023 (213 sex trafficking victims, 154 labor trafficking victims, and 100 victims of unspecified forms of exploitation), although some states did not provide a full year of data while others provided none. This was a modest increase from 2022, when the government reported identifying 440 victims, but not all states provided data. At the federal level, the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection and the National Institute of Migration (INM) identified 31 victims (24 in sex trafficking and seven in unspecified forms of exploitation). In comparison, federal officials identified 40 victims (31 in sex trafficking and nine in forced labor) in 2022. State officials reported identifying 436 victims, including 189 sex trafficking victims in 15 states, 154 labor trafficking victims in seven states, and 93 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking in six



states. In comparison, state officials in 2022 reported identifying 400 victims (231 sex trafficking victims in 17 states, 112 forced labor victims in nine states, and 57 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking in four states). The government did not report complete disaggregated data on the identified victims: sex trafficking victims included 64 girls, 105 women, nine boys, and eight men; labor trafficking victims included 17 girls, 25 women, 13 boys and 94 men; and victims of unspecified exploitation included three girls, eight women, three boys and one man. The government reported at least five identified victims were persons with disabilities and at least one identified as LGBTQI+. Identified victims included an unspecified number of Indigenous individuals. The government identified 61 foreign victims (22 in sex trafficking, 35 in forced labor, and four in unspecified forms of exploitation). Twenty of these sex trafficking victims were from Colombia, and the government did not report the nationalities of the other foreign victims.

Some agencies had SOPs for victim identification and assistance, but across the government victims were largely identified in response to complaints rather than through proactive screening methods. Authorities did not screen Cuban government-affiliated workers in Mexico, including medical professionals, for indicators of forced labor, despite evidence the Cuban government may have forced some of them to work. Immigration officials had formal SOPs to screen for, identify, and assist potential trafficking victims during initial immigration verification. Consular officials followed a protocol for identifying and providing assistance to Mexican victims abroad, but the government did not report the number of Mexican trafficking victims authorities identified or assisted in other countries. 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, but local observers reported a lack of coordination with other secretariats to facilitate criminal investigations and victim assistance. An international organization supported state governments in Mexico City and Tabasco to develop and disseminate guides providing resources for public officials on victim identification, referral, and available services in their respective states. The government trained more than 1,500 911 first responders and more than 1,000 child protection officials on human trafficking. Nonetheless, NGOs reported authorities at all levels of government lacked sufficient understanding of trafficking laws and failed to effectively identify and refer potential victims.

The government had neither nationwide guidelines to consistently refer victims to service providers nor a designated agency to manage victims' care outside the criminal justice system; prosecutors made most victim assistance decisions on a case-by-case basis. Most states had some internal protocols for victim referrals to other agencies for assistance. However, victim referrals from first responders to law enforcement and service providers were largely ad hoc and procedures varied from state to state, with most shelters relying on prosecutors to identify and refer adult victims and Department of Family Development officers to refer child victims.

The government did not provide complete data on victim services. 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 or government-supported services. This was an increase from 2022 when federal and state officials reported 79 victims, including 60 exploited in sex trafficking and 19 in labor trafficking, received government or government-supported services. Federal and state authorities reported referring at least 199 victims, including 65 exploited in sex trafficking, 61 exploited in labor trafficking, and 73 exploited in unspecified forms of trafficking, to service providers. This was an increase from 2022, when authorities reported referring at least 50 victims, including 34 exploited in sex trafficking and 16 in labor trafficking, to service providers. The government did not clarify the extent to which these figures overlapped or provide detail on the type and duration of services provided. Not all states reported data.

Federal and state agencies generally offered victims short-term emergency assistance such as medical care, food, and housing in temporary or transitional spaces. The government provided some victims additional services such as psychological care, legal assistance, and access to education or employment opportunities, 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. NGOs provided most long-term

support for victims, many of which were not specialized for trafficking victims. NGOs reported the government provided insufficient funding for critical victim services and victims in most states did not receive sufficient government assistance. 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, leaving victims highly vulnerable to re-exploitation. The government provided few services to Indigenous victims and others in rural locations where government presence and multilingual capacity were limited.

Victims had uneven access to shelters across the country. An international organization reported there were 29 shelters in Mexico that could assist trafficking victims, including 13 specialized shelters for trafficking victims, 11 for survivors of GBV, and five that each served a specialized population such as Indigenous women, children and adolescents, or migrants. NGOs operated most shelters that served trafficking victims. The government provided services such as security, transportation, and medical assistance to victims in some NGO shelters. The government, through its specialized prosecutor offices, operated five shelters for trafficking victims participating in legal processes. FEVIMTRA continued to operate a high-security shelter in Mexico City that could accommodate 44 female victims and their children for up to three months while victims participated in legal processes. The states of Mexico and Mexico City continued operating four government-funded shelters for trafficking victims. In government shelters, authorities restricted residents' freedom of movement and limited their participation in outside activities, including work. Local experts reported an NGO shelter in Chiapas also restricted residents' ability to leave freely. NGOs expressed concerns the high security measures, including victims' inability to leave the shelter unaccompanied, may have re-traumatized some victims. Several states had agreements in place allowing officials to refer victims to out-of-state shelters, but state governments did not always provide funding or other support as part of these arrangements. 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. There were reports a victim with disabilities was denied access to a trafficking shelter. In November 2023, the government published in its official gazette an operational manual, developed with support from an international organization in the previous reporting period, for standards of care in government and NGO shelters that serve trafficking victims.

By law, foreign victims were eligible to receive the same services as Mexican victims, regardless of immigration status, but local experts reported it was difficult in practice for foreign victims to access some services without documentation. Government healthcare professionals reportedly denied medical services to foreign victims in irregular status. The government reported repatriating four foreign sex trafficking victims to their home countries. The government allocated 2 million pesos (\$118,000) for its overseas diplomatic missions to provide assistance to Mexican trafficking victims exploited abroad and trained officials in providing consular assistance to Mexican trafficking victims.

The law provided victims with protection from punishment for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. However, the government lacked formal procedures to identify victims among vulnerable groups, including children apprehended for alleged gang-related criminal activity and migrants in detention facilities. Authorities also did not consistently conduct screening for indicators of trafficking among vulnerable groups including migrants and asylum-seekers, or when apprehending individuals in commercial sex. NGOs reported authorities sometimes wrongfully detained victims on trafficking charges and some officials utilized shelters as detention facilities for victims until their cases were completed. Trafficking victims among migrants and asylum-seekers were often fearful of reporting abuses due to a mistrust of authorities and fears of punishment, deportation, or other repercussions. The government provided humanitarian visas to nine trafficking victims in 2023. In comparison, it provided humanitarian visas to five trafficking victims in 2022. Humanitarian visas enabled foreign trafficking victims to legally remain and work in the country up to one year, which could be extended; this benefit was not dependent on a victim's willingness to participate in a criminal trial. Nonetheless, government officials and NGOs acknowledged barriers to victims receiving humanitarian visas, including authorities' failure to identify eligible foreign

trafficking victims, insufficient efforts to make victims aware of the process for obtaining such relief, and the lengthy wait times for processing requests.

The anti-trafficking law stipulated authorities must apply the principle of “maximum protection” to guarantee the safety, wellbeing, and privacy of victims and witnesses, including protecting individuals’ identities and providing name and residence changes to victims affected by organized crime. Courts routinely permitted victims to provide testimony from a different room via closed circuit television. Nonetheless, identifying information sometimes became publicly available in high-profile cases, and NGOs reported officials often re-traumatized victims through a lack of sensitivity, victim shaming, and inadequate protections for victims during criminal proceedings. The government did not adequately fund witness protection programs, leaving eligible victims without access to these services. Experts expressed concern prosecutors coerced some victims to testify during judicial proceedings. Authorities’ failure to employ victim-centered procedures, combined with an overall lack of specialized services and security, disincentivized victims from filing complaints or participating in investigations and prosecutions. Women, Indigenous persons, LGBTQI+ individuals, and migrants experienced structural discrimination that led to inequality in assistance and limited their access to justice.

The Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB) had a unit responsible for supporting access to justice and compensation for victims of federal crimes, but the government did not provide it with sufficient funding and trained personnel, limiting its ability to provide this support to trafficking victims. The national anti-trafficking law required judges in criminal cases at the state and federal levels to order traffickers to pay restitution to victims. Local experts reported prosecutors consistently requested restitution and judges consistently ordered restitution payments when sentencing convicted traffickers. However, the government did not provide information on the amounts judges ordered convicted traffickers to pay or the number of victims who received restitution payments. The law also held the government responsible to maintain a fund to cover payments traffickers were unable to pay; however, the government did not cover any restitution payments traffickers could not pay, and it did not report how funds budgeted for this purpose were used.

## PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. The anti-trafficking commission, led by SEGOB, coordinated efforts among government agencies and civil society organizations. The government continued implementation of its NAP, the National Program to Prevent, Punish, and Eradicate Human Trafficking Crimes and for the Protection and Assistance to Victims of these Crimes (2022-2024). Baja California and Hidalgo coordinated anti-trafficking efforts through interagency committees at the state level. However, coordination challenges among federal, state, and local authorities and the absence of data collection and monitoring tools to track progress on policy implementation limited the government’s progress.

The government provided funding to an NGO to manage and operate the national human trafficking hotline, which offered 24-hour assistance to callers in Spanish, English, and Indigenous languages. In November 2023, the Nuevo Leon state government launched a program to prevent, address, combat, and eradicate human trafficking 2022-2027, and the states of Baja California, Morelos, Puebla, Quintana Roo, and Tlaxcala continued implementing multiyear plans to combat human trafficking. The government conducted a variety of anti-trafficking training and awareness programs for government officials and members of the public. State governments, including in Coahuila, Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, and Veracruz trained officials on trafficking prevention. State-level criminal justice officials disseminated anti-trafficking awareness campaigns through social media, INM created infographics to help vulnerable migrants recognize indicators of trafficking and encourage possible victims to contact authorities, and the Foreign Secretariat disseminated online informational materials to raise awareness of trafficking risks and reporting methods to Mexican nationals in the United States. Officials in Chihuahua translated trafficking awareness materials into Raramuri and conducted outreach designed to prevent forced begging of children and Indigenous individuals. Nonetheless, awareness and understanding of trafficking, particularly forced labor, remained low among the public. Experts noted prevention campaigns insufficiently reached high-

risk groups such as children, rural and Indigenous communities, and non-Spanish speakers. Mexican authorities continued to employ Cuban government-affiliated medical professionals but did not report efforts to prevent forced labor among these workers, despite ongoing concerns by international experts that the Government of Cuba may have compelled some of them to work. Media reports indicated Mexican authorities paid Cuban medical professionals' salaries to the Cuban government, rather than the workers, which increased risks of forced labor. An NGO reported the Government of Mexico paid the Cuban government approximately \$3,500 a month per worker, and in turn, the Cuban government paid each worker \$200 a month, leaving workers with only 6 percent of their salaries.

The Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) did not have enough labor inspectors, hampering robust and consistent enforcement of labor laws. Furthermore, 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. Authorities conducted very few inspections in major farming states where abuses allegedly were rife, investigated few complaints, and lacked effective coordination mechanisms to provide identified victims with appropriate services and access to criminal justice. Federal labor law required employment agencies and labor recruiters to seek authorization from and register with STPS to operate legally, and the law prescribed fines for noncompliance. 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 recruiter – known as “enganchadores” – evaded government oversight and committed exploitative practices with impunity. The labor law required employers to pay wages weekly; employers who withheld wages to keep an employee in compelled servitude could also be charged under the anti-trafficking law. However, the government did not effectively enforce its laws against employers who withheld wages to compel workers to meet certain quotas or continue working for a certain length of time. In January 2024, the government enacted amendments to the labor law mandating agricultural employers provide workers with written contracts, decent housing, access to healthcare, and education for their children. The law also mandates the government to establish a minimum wage for agricultural workers and conduct labor inspections at least once a year to verify compliance with the law's provisions. In May 2023, the STPS published guidelines that made effective a regulation prohibiting the importation of goods produced with forced labor and produced a guide for its implementation. In June 2023, Mexico ratified the ILO P029—Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930.

A 2021 reform to the Migration and Refugee 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. Local observers expressed concerns the law did not protect unaccompanied children from exploitation, as it did not require adults to prove their relationship to the child. The Secretariat of Tourism continued collaborating with an NGO on awareness raising activities on the protection of children in the tourism sector, and SEGOB launched a national initiative for identifying and reporting trafficking cases in the hotel sector. 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 438 registered sex offenders in 2023. The government did not report investigating or prosecuting any suspects for extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation crimes or other 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 Mexico, and traffickers exploit victims from Mexico abroad. Groups considered most at risk for trafficking in Mexico include unaccompanied children, Indigenous persons, Afro-Mexicans, persons with mental and physical disabilities, asylum-seekers and migrants, IDPs, LGBTIQ+ individuals, informal sector workers, and children in gang-controlled territories. These groups commonly experienced risk factors including marginalization, intrafamilial and social violence,



crime victimization, and a need to migrate within the country or abroad to find employment. 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 an especially 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, then exploit them in sex trafficking in Mexico or the United States. The online sexual exploitation of children continued to increase. Transgender persons are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. Traffickers increasingly use the Internet, particularly social media, to target and recruit potential victims; an NGO reported in 2022 that more than 60 percent of victims who called the anti-trafficking hotline were initially recruited through websites or social media. The same NGO reported an increase in reports of traffickers recruiting children through video games. Traffickers exploit Mexican adults and children in forced labor in the formal and informal economies in Mexico and the United States; they subject victims to forced labor in sectors including agriculture, domestic service, childcare, 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 and Indigenous populations. Individuals and families migrate from the poorest states to the agricultural regions to harvest vegetables, coffee, sugar, and tobacco; many receive little or no pay or time off; endure inhumane housing conditions without access to adequate food, clean water, or medical care; and are denied education for children. Some employers illegally withhold weekly wages to compel agricultural workers to meet certain harvest quotas or continue working until the end of the harvest and some induce workers into debt by charging inflated prices for food and necessities. "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. NGOs estimated traffickers increasingly exploited individuals in forced labor in Mexico. Most foreign victims of forced labor and sex 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. NGOs and the media report victims from the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa have also been identified in Mexico, some en route to the United States. Government-affiliated Cuban workers in Mexico, including 800 medical professionals contracted by the Mexican government, may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.

Organized criminal groups profit from sex trafficking and force Mexican and foreign adults and children into exploitation in illicit activities, including as assassins and lookouts, and in the production, transportation, and sale of drugs. Local observers reported an increase in organized criminal groups exploiting children in trafficking. Experts expressed particular concern over the forced recruitment of Indigenous children by organized criminal groups, who use torture and credible threats of murder to exploit these children in forced criminality. Criminal groups exploit thousands of children in Mexico to serve as lookouts, carry out attacks on authorities and rival groups, perform fuel theft, or work in poppy fields. Observers also expressed concern over recruitment of recently deported Mexican nationals and foreign migrants by organized criminal groups for the purpose of forced criminality. Organized criminal groups, including the Jalisco New Generation cartel, 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. Migrants and asylum-seekers in or transiting Mexico are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor, including by large and small organized criminal groups. Traffickers frequently target the most vulnerable migrants and asylum-seekers who are often fearful to report abuses, including members of marginalized populations that frequently experience discrimination from authorities. Migrants who rely on smugglers are at particularly high risk of exploitation as many of them assume debts to pay smugglers. NGOs and the media reported an increase in violence targeting asylum-seekers, many of whom must remain for long periods of time in Mexico



while waiting for an appointment with United States immigration authorities; reports documented widespread sexual violence, kidnapping, extortion, and other crimes targeting these individuals, many of whom live in makeshift encampments, with unmet basic needs, exposed to dangerous conditions, and at risk of human trafficking. Criminal groups subject some migrants and asylum-seekers to forced labor to “pay off” unmet ransom demands. Media and NGO reports alleged incidents of Mexican officials extorting migrants and asylum-seekers for money and at times colluding with organized criminal groups to facilitate kidnapping and ransom schemes, exacerbating migrants’ and asylum-seekers’ existing vulnerabilities to trafficking and further deterring vulnerable individuals from reporting crime. Observers, including Mexican legislators, noted links between violence against women and girls and women’s disappearances, murders, and trafficking by organized criminal groups.

Observers reported potential trafficking cases in substance abuse rehabilitation centers, women’s shelters, and government institutions for people with disabilities, including by organized criminal groups and facility employees. Trafficking-related corruption remains a concern. Some government officials collude with traffickers or participate in trafficking crimes. Corrupt officials reportedly participate in sex trafficking, including running sex trafficking operations. Some immigration officials allegedly accept payment from traffickers to facilitate the irregular entry of foreign trafficking victims into Mexico. The government reported extraterritorial commercial child sex exploitation and abuse is increasing, especially in tourist areas and in northern border cities. Parents are sometimes complicit in facilitating this exploitation of their children, and children experiencing homelessness are also believed to be at high risk. Many perpetrators are from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe; Mexican men also purchase sex from child trafficking victims. Authorities reported trafficking networks increasingly used cryptocurrencies to launder proceeds from their crimes.