

2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Jordan

JORDAN (Tier 2)

The Government of Jordan 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 Jordan remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing investigations, identifying and assisting more victims and potential victims, and fully approving amended shelter bylaws to improve access to services for potential trafficking victims identified outside of law enforcement actions. The government also approved bylaws for a donations-based victims' assistance fund and developed a new 2023-2026 national anti-trafficking strategy. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Jordan's employer-based visa system, which placed a significant amount of power in the hands of employers of foreign workers, continued to create vulnerabilities for the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers and remained a significant impediment to authorities identifying and protecting trafficking victims. Authorities continued to inappropriately penalize trafficking victims solely for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS: ✓

Reform the employer-based visa system by enforcing labor law protections for all workers in Jordan, including domestic workers, and establish labor standards to allow workers to freely change employers within their sector. * Enact other measures to prevent trafficking among migrant workers including standardizing electronic tripartite labor contracts in a language the worker understands, establishing arrival orientation trainings for all migrant workers, and ensuring all bilateral labor MOUs comprehensively include internationally recognized labor standards and include pre-departure trainings. * Significantly increase efforts to proactively screen for and identify trafficking victims in immigration detention centers and refugee camps. * Increase efforts to proactively screen for and identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, such as detained foreign migrants, domestic workers, workers in the agricultural sector, refugees, children who experienced homelessness or used the streets as a source of livelihood, and persons in commercial sex. * Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as immigration or prostitution violations, or for leaving an abusive employer. * Continue to allocate adequate funding for operation of the government's central trafficking shelter, train shelter staff to identify and provide specialized care to victims, expand vocational training opportunities for victims and survivors, and provide financial or in-kind support to NGO partners providing shelter and services to victims. * Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict sex and labor trafficking crimes; and take steps to ensure labor trafficking crimes are not charged as lesser offenses such as administrative violations. * Expand specialized shelter and services including long-term shelter and specialized services for child victims. * Continue to train law enforcement officers, judges, prison officials, liaison officers, and labor inspectors throughout the country to screen for, identify, and refer to protection services trafficking victims, including among vulnerable populations such as migrant workers and refugees. * Regulate and investigate fraudulent labor and recruitment practices and permanently blacklist employers and recruitment agencies violating workers' rights. * Investigate and punish individuals for withholding workers' passports under Jordan's passport law. * Increase survivor input, including from individuals with lived experience such as migrant workers, when forming policies, programs, and trainings.

PROSECUTION ✓

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. The 2009 Law on the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. As amended, the law prescribed penalties of imprisonment and a fine between 3,000 (\$4,240) and 10,000 (\$14,120) Jordanian dinars for adult labor trafficking. The amended law did not provide a range for the sentence of imprisonment, but in such cases the penal code provided a default sentence of between three and 15 years' imprisonment. The amended law prescribed penalties of at least seven years' imprisonment and a fine between 5,000 (\$7,060) and 20,000 (\$28,250) Jordanian dinars for adult and child sex trafficking and child labor trafficking. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping.

The Public Security Directorate (PSD) and Ministry of Labor (MOL) joint counter-trafficking unit (CTU) remained the national lead on anti-trafficking investigations and continued to investigate potential trafficking crimes. In 2023, CTU investigated 212 potential trafficking cases, compared with 158 investigations of potential trafficking crimes in 2022. Of the 212 potential cases, CTU determined 14 cases involving at least 34 suspects met the criteria to be classified as trafficking cases for further investigation; 10 additional investigations were ongoing from the previous reporting period. During the previous reporting period, CTU determined 36 cases – involving 71 suspects – of the 158 potential trafficking investigations were trafficking cases. The 14 cases from this reporting period included four sex trafficking cases, 10 forced labor cases (six involving domestic work, three in the bakeries and restaurant sector, and one forced begging case). The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) initiated the prosecution of 23 trafficking cases involving 37 defendants, including 33 labor trafficking defendants and four sex trafficking defendants. This represented a comparable effort to 2022, when prosecutions involved 46 defendants (including 22 labor trafficking defendants). The government convicted 20 traffickers, including 19 labor traffickers who exploited domestic workers, under the trafficking law, compared with 28 convicted traffickers in 2022. Six convictions were upheld upon appeal and one was overturned. Sentences ranged from three years' imprisonment and a fine to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine; all convicted traffickers received prison sentences greater than one year. The government coordinated with a foreign government to extradite a convicted trafficker to Jordan to serve a prison sentence; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in trafficking crimes.

The MOJ continued assigning specialized prosecutors and judges to criminal cases, including trafficking; in accordance with the amendments to the anti-trafficking law, the Judicial Council continued to appoint specialized public prosecutors and judges to ensure each governorate had at least one specialized judge and prosecutor, resulting in 13 specialized prosecutors and 62 specialized judges in the country at the end of 2023. The Judicial Council established a special Supreme Judicial Committee to monitor and improve the judiciary's handling of trafficking cases. Although CTU was headquartered in Amman, it used specialized liaison officers in police stations across the country to identify victims outside of the capital and relied on additional liaison officers in Syrian refugee camps; however, international organizations reported some liaison officers did not either proactively investigate trafficking cases or screen for trafficking indicators. CTU also assigned liaison officers with the Civil Aviation Regulatory Commission. Legal experts continued to report some judges remained hesitant to convict perpetrators for human trafficking, preferring to pursue other charges such as labor violations that carried lesser penalties due to the complexity of cases, lack of judicial experience and expertise, and the cultural acceptance of some forms of the crime such as forced labor in domestic work. In addition, civil society organizations reported domestic servitude victims were pressured or encouraged to drop complaints against their employers. The government – at times in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs – trained law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, labor inspectors, social workers, healthcare providers, provincial and district governors, and other frontline officials on trafficking indicators, victim identification, investigation procedures, and related topics.

The government modestly increased victim protection efforts. In 2023, CTU identified and officially recognized as victims 36 individuals, compared with 37 identified victims in 2022. Of the 36 victims, four were victims of sex trafficking, 22 of labor trafficking, and 10 of an unspecified form of trafficking; 26 were adults, and 10 were children. Of the adults, eight were male and 18 female; and 19 were foreign citizens and 17 Jordanian. In addition, the government identified 157 potential trafficking victims, an increase compared to identifying 86 potential trafficking victims in 2022. NGOs and foreign embassies identified an additional 39 potential trafficking victims. Of the 193 government-identified victims and potential victims, officials referred 133 victims and potential victims to either a government specialized shelter or a shelter managed by a partner NGO; the government did not report what services the other 60 victims and potential victims received. The government continued implementing an NRM and accompanying victim identification SOPs for victim identification and referral to services.

The government continued to refer identified victims to multiple shelters, including shelters run by an NGO and the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), and referred cases to CTU for investigation. MOSD continued to operate and fund the Dar Karama shelter, which provided psycho-social care, medical treatment, legal assistance, and vocational training; however, vocational training options were limited. It also continued to offer computer classes, a book club, and religious services for both Muslim and Christian shelter residents. The shelter's staff included lawyers and specialists in psychology, social work, nursing, and education. The gendarmerie provided shelter security outside of the shelter and plainclothes police officers escorted residents needing to leave the shelter. Provision of shelter services was not conditional upon a victim's cooperation with law enforcement or judicial authorities and victims could freely and willingly leave the shelter. Victims were allowed to stay at the shelter for as long as two months, but victims' stay in the shelter could be extended with MOSD approval. During the reporting period, the government fully approved a shelter bylaw to allow victims to stay the length of an investigation and prosecution without additional approvals. The new bylaws also codified the shelter's acceptance of potential victims not officially recognized by CTU and self-referral cases. The shelter had the capacity to serve a total of 35 victims, both Jordanian citizens and foreign nationals, with space for 20 women, five children, and 10 men. Dar Karama was the only shelter in the country available to men and had a separate wing and entrance for male victims; the shelter assisted 17 male victims and potential victims. In 2023, the shelter served a total of 117 victims and potential victims, which represented an increase compared with 97 victims served in 2022. An NGO assessed victims who were migrant workers often preferred shelters provided by the embassies of their countries of origin, if such services were available, due to mistrust of authorities. The government referred 12 identified victims to an NGO shelter; the government did not report providing financial or in-kind support to the NGO shelter. An NGO reported a lack of specialized shelter and services for child victims. For victims identified outside of Amman, the government reported it had two shelters in Irbid and Aqaba for GBV victims that could provide temporary assistance to female trafficking victims before transferring them to the Dar Karama shelter. Shelter staff frequently cooperated with foreign victims' home embassies to assist their nationals. The government frequently lacked funds to purchase return flights for foreign trafficking victims who wished to voluntarily return to their home country and did not have regular access to interpretation services for languages other than English, relying at times on embassies, NGOs, and international organizations to provide repatriation and interpretation assistance. However, the government assisted in the voluntary repatriation of 16 victims, compared with assistance in 46 voluntary repatriations in the previous reporting period. The amended anti-trafficking law required creating a donations-based victims' fund, which the government intended to use to finance protection services, plane tickets for voluntary repatriation, and other underfunded needs; the government fully approved the fund bylaws but did not provide details about its use of these during the reporting period. Because the government shelter was located in Amman, victim services were difficult to access for victims outside of the capital.

The government encouraged victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers; PSD accompanied victims to court and officials assigned all victims a lawyer throughout judicial proceedings to ensure protection of their rights. The 2009 anti-trafficking law, as amended, extended witness protections to trafficking victims and trafficking victims were able to provide court statements electronically to prevent re-traumatization. Foreign victims also had the

option to provide a deposition prior to being repatriated. The amended anti-trafficking law required authorities to provide victims legitimate means to obtain compensation for damages through restitution or civil suits; the MOJ maintained an MOU with the Jordanian Bar Association to provide free legal aid to victims seeking compensation from traffickers, but the government did not report if any victims received restitution or compensation. The government did not report if it provided foreign victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they faced retaliation or hardship. The NRM required the government to waive fees and assist foreign victims – who wished to remain in Jordan – with obtaining residency and finding employment. The government did not report granting any residency or work permits to foreign trafficking victims. Authorities may have penalized some foreign trafficking victims for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including fines, arrests, detentions, and deportations. NGOs continued to report migrant workers, likely including unidentified trafficking victims, were regularly administratively detained for immigration violations including for overstaying visas and fleeing abusive employers; CTU did not have regular access to immigration detention centers to screen for trafficking indicators. NGOs reported foreign labor trafficking victims were less likely to report abuses to authorities because of fear of deportation or detention. During the reporting period, there were allegations CTU officials arrested and detained a domestic worker on trafficking charges in retaliation for attempting to assist other domestic workers seeking relief from abusive employers.

PREVENTION ✓

The government maintained inadequate prevention efforts. The National Committee for Countering Human Trafficking (NCCT), chaired by the Minister of Justice and comprising relevant ministries, met regularly. The government developed a 2023-2026 National Anti-Trafficking Strategy in partnership with NGOs, although it had not been launched by the end of this reporting period; the government partnered with international organizations and foreign donors to fund a portion of the strategy's activities in addition to individual ministries' budgets. The government continued to raise awareness about trafficking crimes throughout the country through workshops, the distribution of informational materials, and other means. The government continued distributing anti-trafficking information to all foreign migrant workers entering Jordan and at inspected worksites. The government included trafficking indicators within both its computerized labor inspection system and labor inspectors' checklists. The MOL and CTU continued to operate a hotline to receive complaints of labor violations and potential trafficking crimes; the hotline offered interpretation services in some source-country languages. However, due to overall budget shortfalls, the government did not consistently maintain interpreters of some Asian languages at the hotline, which led to challenges in identifying potential trafficking victims and referring them to protection services. The MOL also operated an online complaint mechanism for reporting labor complaints and potential trafficking cases; in January 2023, MOL added accessibility in Bengali and Amharic to the platform, which was previously available only in Arabic and English.

Jordan's employer-based visa system continued to prevent foreign workers from leaving or changing their employers prior to the end of the term stipulated in their contract without a letter of release from their visa sponsor or employer or receiving adequate access to legal recourse in response to abuse; the government reported granting ad hoc permission to allow domestic workers to change employers and approved the transfer of one Ethiopian domestic worker. Authorities considered migrant workers, likely including unidentified trafficking victims, who left their place of employment prior to fulfilling their work contract to be illegal residents and subjected them to fines, detention, or deportation for their irregular presence in the country; loss of legal status created greater vulnerabilities to trafficking. Additionally, migrant workers could not withdraw their social security contributions without written consent of their employer. Jordan maintained several bilateral labor MOUs with other countries detailing recruitment procedures, working conditions, and wages; however, these MOUs were inconsistent and, at times, exacerbated vulnerabilities to trafficking. While the MOU with the Philippines ensured a base wage, tripartite labor contracts, and fully prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees, MOUs with most other countries did not. The government reported it was reviewing MOUs with countries to determine whether certain MOUs needed to be amended; the government renewed and signed an MOU with Ethiopia but did not

report specific provisions in the renewed agreement aside from general provisions “aimed at combating trafficking.” NGOs reported government statements claiming migrant workers posed “health risks,” and immigration actions by security services targeting sub-Saharan African and South Asian migrants in Jordan further marginalized these vulnerable communities. The government worked with countries with diplomatic representation in Jordan to verify migrant workers’ ages, approve work permits, and translate work contracts into workers’ native languages.

The government continued implementing 2021 regulations requiring recruitment agencies to provide migrant domestic workers with insurance covering medical care and workplace accidents. The regulations also authorized the MOL to publicly rate recruitment agencies based on compliance with the labor law – including provisions prohibiting fraudulent recruitment practices, worker-paid recruitment fees, and contract switching – and to close and withdraw licenses from poorly ranked agencies; the MOL issued warnings to 15 agencies, suspended five, closed none, and did not revoke the license of any. Jordanian law prohibited recruitment agencies and employers of foreign workers from charging workers recruitment fees or deducting recruitment costs from wages; however, some foreign workers, particularly Egyptian workers, reported being pressured to pay their own recruitment fees or employers charging them for paid recruitment fees. MOL’s digital reporting platform received 8,573 labor complaints in 2023, of which 54 related to confiscation of travel documents, 569 to overtime, 3,353 to non-payment of wages, and 75 to forced labor; MOL resolved 8,463 of the complaints as labor law violations and referred the remaining 110 for investigation. Through regular labor inspections, the MOL referred two domestic worker complaints to CTU for further investigation; however, CTU determined these cases were administrative labor violations, not trafficking, and MOL resolved them. The MOL continued applying the criteria for businesses joining the “golden list” of garment sector companies to include forced labor indicators to incentivize compliance with international and Jordanian labor standards. Companies on the “golden list” qualify for financial incentives and lower recruiting costs but face financial penalties if found violating the criteria; five companies obtained “golden list” status in 2023. Jordan’s passport law criminalized the withholding of passports by an employer, carrying penalties of six months to three years’ imprisonment and fines; the government did not report if CTU referred any cases to the MOJ or prosecutions for passport withholding. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE: ✓

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Jordan, and traffickers exploit victims from Jordan abroad. Trafficking victims in Jordan are primarily from South and Southeast Asia, East Africa, Egypt, and Syria. Jordan relies on foreign migrant workers – many of whom are undocumented – in several sectors, including construction, agriculture, textiles, domestic work, and food service; according to an NGO, workers in these sectors are the most vulnerable to trafficking because of informal work agreements. According to a 2020 study, officials estimate the total number of foreign workers in Jordan could be as high as 1.5 million, while the MOL estimates the number of undocumented foreign workers in Jordan to be as high as 500,000. Jordan’s employer-based visa system increases foreign workers’ vulnerability to trafficking by preventing them from changing employers without the initial employer’s consent. Because work permits are linked to a specific employer, when a worker quits one job before securing another, the worker loses legal status thereby increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Unscrupulous employers exploit the non-transferability of work visas to control or manipulate workers. Some recruitment agencies fraudulently recruit victims from labor-source countries to Jordan, using false promises of salary or other benefits. Forced labor victims in Jordan experience withheld or non-payment of wages, confiscation of identity documents, restricted freedom of movement, unsafe living conditions, long hours without rest, isolation, and verbal and physical abuse. For example, adults from South and Southeast Asia migrate to work in factories in Jordan’s garment industry, some of whom experience withholding of passports, restricted movement, and unsafe living conditions. Workers recruited from countries without diplomatic representation in Jordan, such as Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, and Uganda, were further vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers exploit some migrant workers from Egypt – the largest source of foreign labor in Jordan – in forced labor in the construction, service, and agricultural sectors. In 2021, civil society reported

an increase in Ethiopian domestic workers exploited in forced labor in Jordan. In 2023, an NGO reported an increase in Ethiopian women from Tigray seeking employment as domestic workers in Jordan. Upon arrival in Jordan, they were exploited in forced labor and unable to leave the homes of their employers; they later reported being transported to the West Bank and Gaza where they experienced further exploitation before seeking assistance in Israel. In 2022, an NGO estimated there were 500,000 domestic workers in Jordan, primarily women from South and Southeast Asia and East and West Africa, who are highly vulnerable to forced labor.

Refugees from Iraq, the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, and other locations are highly vulnerable to trafficking in Jordan, especially women and children working illegally or informally. As of January 2024, Jordan is host to approximately 717,430 UNHCR-registered refugees from more than 55 countries, including 643,199 Syrians. Non-Syrian refugees, including refugees from Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, do not have access to the formal labor market without renouncing their UNHCR registration, making them vulnerable to labor exploitation. Iraqi refugees reported vulnerability to exploitation in the informal sector because employers pay them below-market wages and expect work for excessively long hours. NGOs continue to observe an increase in child labor and potential forced child labor among Syrian refugee children working alongside their families in the agricultural and service industries, as well as peddling goods and begging. NGOs reported slow-onset climate change events such as drought and worsening water scarcity exacerbated Jordan's refugee population's vulnerability to trafficking. There have been reported cases of Syrian refugee women and girls sold into forced marriages in Jordan. Refugee boys and young men, in particular, often work illegally and informally in the Jordanian economy, which puts them at risk of trafficking.

Some Jordanian and Syrian girls are forced to drop out of compulsory school to perform domestic service in their families' homes; some of these girls are vulnerable to trafficking. During the previous reporting period, the government investigated a case in which a mother allegedly exploited her two Jordanian daughters in sex trafficking to foreign tourists. Jordanian boys employed within the country in the service industry, agricultural sector, and as mechanics, street vendors, and beggars may be forced labor victims. NGOs report children begging in the streets in Jordan, some of whom are highly vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Lebanese, North African, and Eastern European women in sex trafficking who have migrated to Jordan to work in restaurants and nightclubs; some Jordanian women working in nightclubs may also be exploited in sex trafficking. Individuals from the Dom community, an Indo-Aryan people also known as the Bani Murra, are also vulnerable to forced labor and forced begging in Jordan due to a lack of access to social and education services and employment opportunities in Jordan.