

of movement have significantly compounded these vulnerabilities, particularly in remote agricultural areas. A study conducted by an international organization in 2019 reported the presence of women in commercial sex and children in sex trafficking near PRC-financed railway construction sites affiliated with the BRI. Lao communities displaced by frequent natural disasters; foreign-invested mining and construction operations, including those affiliated with the BRI; and foreign agricultural land concessions may be vulnerable to trafficking amid ensuing economic hardships.

Since March 2020, hundreds of thousands of Lao migrants formally and informally working in Thailand and other countries, including Malaysia and the PRC, have returned to Laos, culminating in widespread unemployment within the country and increased economic hardship for families dependent on foreign remittances. These conditions have placed many Lao workers in potentially exploitative situations as they travel domestically within Laos in search of low-salary jobs—including at PRC-managed land concessions and SEZs—or illegally migrate for work abroad, particularly back to Thailand. Police observed that the closure of the Laos-Thailand border created a local demand for commercial sex, which, following the closure of bars and nightclubs as a pandemic mitigation measure, in turn may have led to a spike in sex trafficking in hotels and private residences.

The pandemic-related closure of garment factories in 2021 and a significant downturn in the tourism industry led to widespread disproportionate unemployment among Lao women, who are increasingly vulnerable to predatory recruitment practices as a result. Against this backdrop, SEZ casinos have used social media to lure hundreds of Lao women to work as “chat girls”—online representatives selling casino stock to male customers—with false promises of high salaries, free meals, and free accommodations. Many of these women do not meet the unattainably high sales quotas set by the casino managers and are forced to incur debt to pay the difference, as well as to pay for meals and accommodations; casino managers then leverage this debt to confine them and subject them to forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers operating in Laos and Dubai lure young Lao men and women into fraudulent online cryptocurrency sales operations and “resell” those who cannot meet their quotas to other criminal networks—for forced labor in similar fraud schemes, domestic servitude, or sex trafficking. Reports indicate child sex tourists from the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States have traveled to Laos for the purpose of exploiting child sex trafficking victims.

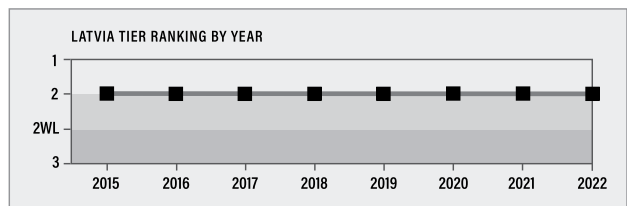
Some Burmese, PRC, Russian, Thai, and Vietnamese nationals are reportedly subjected to sex trafficking in the Golden Triangle SEZ located at the intersection of the Lao, Burmese, and Thai borders, where thousands of undocumented migrant workers are also vulnerable to forced labor in debt-based coercion. Other reports indicate Burmese nationals working as manual laborers or involved in commercial sex near the Lao portion of the Golden Triangle may be victims of trafficking. Lao and foreign nationals, including migrant workers from the PRC, experience conditions indicative of forced labor at PRC-owned mining companies. Traffickers also exploit Vietnamese, PRC national, and Lao women and children in sex trafficking in larger Lao cities and in close proximity to national borders, casinos, and other SEZs, reportedly to meet the demand of international tourists and migrant workers.

Observers report new costs related to COVID-19 testing required by formal labor agreements with key destination countries have catalyzed an increase in the irregular migration of Lao nationals through informal channels known for trafficking vulnerabilities. During pandemic-related border closures, traffickers have deceived some local communities into believing that Laos’ international borders had reopened in order to lure them into sex trafficking and forced labor abroad. Traffickers have targeted Lao labor migrants from the southern part of the country in particular. Some victims migrate with the assistance of legal or illegal brokers charging fees; this is increasingly occurring under the direction of Lao intermediaries working with foreign traffickers. Others move independently through Laos’ 27 official border crossings using valid travel documents. Many of these border crossings are managed by provincial- or district-level immigration authorities with less formal training and limited hours of operation, making them easier transit points for traffickers to facilitate the movement of Lao victims into neighboring

countries. Traffickers in rural communities often lure Lao women and girls with false promises of legitimate work opportunities or promises of marriage—typically through the use of marriage brokers—to nationals in neighboring countries, primarily the PRC, and then subject them to sex trafficking, forced labor, and forced concubinage leading to forced childbearing. This trend reportedly increased following completion of the Lao-China Railway but fluctuated during pandemic-related travel restrictions and border closures; traffickers also use other methods to transport Lao victims overland through Thailand en route to the PRC for these purposes. Brokered marriages between rural Lao women and PRC men employed at SEZs known for trafficking vulnerabilities also increased during the pandemic. Children from economically disadvantaged rural areas are especially vulnerable to trafficking, given the legal work age of 14, the widespread closure of schools during the pandemic, and the lure of higher wages abroad. Traffickers exploit a large number of Lao women and girls in Thailand in commercial sex and forced labor in domestic service, factories, or agriculture. According to Thailand-based public health organizations, traffickers take advantage of the undocumented immigration status of some Lao men and boys to subject them to sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Lao men and boys in forced labor in Thailand’s fishing, construction, and agricultural industries. Lao men are also subjected to forced labor on fishing vessels operating in Indonesian territorial waters. Companies operating under the auspices of the Japanese government’s “Technical Intern Training Program” have exploited Lao nationals in forced labor in agriculture and several other sectors. Lao women and girls are reportedly vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking at “girl bars”—entertainment sites advertising paid “accompaniment” services often involving sex acts with young women and girls—in urban areas in Japan.

LATVIA: TIER 2

The Government of Latvia 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, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Latvia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting more suspected traffickers, identifying and referring more trafficking victims, and approving a new two-year national action plan (NAP). Furthermore, the government introduced a new interviewing methodology to offer a coordinated and effective child protection and criminal justice response and prevent further traumatization during investigations and court proceedings. In addition, the government conducted an examination into the limited number of criminal investigations initiated despite the growing number of labor trafficking cases reported every year. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities investigated fewer trafficking cases. Officials continued to identify few child trafficking victims even though children in state social care centers, such as orphanages, remained vulnerable to sex trafficking. Moreover, many judges and prosecutors lacked a sufficient understanding of all forms of trafficking and how to apply anti-trafficking laws. The development and implementation of the national referral mechanism (NRM) remained at a standstill.



PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers under the trafficking statute (Section 154-1 of the criminal law) rather than for lesser crimes and issue significant sentences. • Proactively identify trafficking victims,

particularly children in social care centers induced into commercial sex and victims of sex trafficking in Latvia's legal commercial sex industry.

- Train relevant authorities, such as staff at state social care centers, on understanding trafficking risks and identifying trafficking victims.
- Develop and implement an NRM to include guidance on identification, referral, and information exchange among stakeholders.
- Expand efforts to educate officials involved in judicial proceedings, particularly prosecutors and judges, to understand all forms of trafficking and apply anti-trafficking laws.
- Increase anti-trafficking training for law enforcement, particularly regional police officers, on working with victims, collecting evidence, and understanding all forms of trafficking and psychological coercion.
- Increase access to shelters and specialized services for male trafficking victims.
- Provide long-term assistance, such as housing, to victims after completion of the state-funded assistance program.
- Issue a new mandate for the anti-trafficking working group to continue its work.
- Conduct national awareness campaigns on trafficking targeting vulnerable populations.

PROSECUTION

The government marginally increased law enforcement efforts. Sections 154-1 and 154-2 of Latvia's criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to eight years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult victims and between three and 12 years' imprisonment for offenses involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Judges and prosecutors had the power to reclassify cases from Section 154-1 to other crimes. Prosecutors could charge trafficking crimes under Section 164, which criminalized exploiting vulnerability or using deceit to involve individuals in commercial sex, some provisions of which prescribed penalties as lenient as community service or a fine. Additionally, law enforcement officials reportedly were more likely to investigate and charge suspected traffickers for crimes other than trafficking, such as "pimping" and "transfer for sexual exploitation." Authorities used Section 165-1, which prohibited the transfer of individuals for the purpose of sexual exploitation, to prevent potential cases of trafficking by charging perpetrators who attempted to recruit individuals for sexual exploitation schemes abroad.

The State Police's anti-trafficking unit in Riga, comprising 18 officers and specializing in investigating trafficking, brokered marriages, and related crimes, investigated most trafficking cases in the country. Additionally, each of the five regional police boards employed anti-trafficking specialists. In 2021, the unit investigated three new cases (all labor trafficking), compared with seven cases (one sex trafficking and six labor trafficking) under Section 154-1 in 2020. In one investigation, police arrested five suspects for labor trafficking at three NGO-run addiction prevention centers. The NGO forced residents with addiction and mental health conditions into heavy labor in the agricultural and forestry industries without pay and under the guise of "work therapy." The investigation found inadequate living conditions and medical care; as a result, the state closed two of the three centers, with the third still under investigation. Observers noted unlike past trafficking cases, in which law enforcement charged suspects with lesser crimes, authorities opened criminal proceedings related to organized trafficking and money laundering. Due to the rise in labor trafficking cases, the government provided guidelines for authorities to use in identifying such cases, particularly cases combining economic crime and illicit financial flows. In addition, based on a regional project to support stakeholders in combating and disrupting labor trafficking, the government conducted an examination into why authorities initiated a limited number of criminal investigations despite the growing number of labor trafficking cases every year. A specialized prosecution office reviewed, monitored, and managed all Riga District Court trafficking-related cases pertaining to Section 154-1. In the rest of the country, regional prosecution offices investigated and prosecuted trafficking cases. Authorities prosecuted four suspects (all labor trafficking) under Section 154-1, compared with two in 2020, and courts convicted one trafficker for sex trafficking, the same as in 2020. The convicted trafficker received a three-year prison sentence, whereas in 2020 the convicted trafficker received a suspended sentence with no jail time. Under Section 165-1, authorities investigated two new cases, prosecuted one suspect, and convicted four traffickers

(sentences included imprisonment, suspension, reversal, and cancellation due to death). By comparison, in 2020, authorities investigated one new case, prosecuted one suspect, and convicted zero traffickers. In 2021, the anti-trafficking police unit seized approximately €329,749 (\$373,870) in assets from suspected traffickers. Latvian authorities cooperated with their European counterparts on several trafficking-related investigations, judicial assistance requests, and one extradition. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes.

Perennial issues within the judicial system, such as lengthy trials and lenient sentences, which often resulted in no jail time for convicted traffickers, remained the government's greatest deficiency—providing limited deterrence, contributing to the underreporting of trafficking crimes, and undermining defendants' rights to a fair trial within a reasonable time. For instance, the trial for a 2014 case involving two Riga police officers charged with "facilitating pimping" remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Similarly, the trial for a 2017 labor trafficking case against seven individuals remained ongoing. Adequate evidence collection remained a problem in investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases; in 2021, authorities terminated five investigations due to a lack of evidence or statute of limitations. Additionally, NGOs reported police outside of Riga had limited motivation to pursue trafficking cases and difficulty identifying victims. NGOs also reported regional police began investigating trafficking-related crimes only after involving Riga's anti-trafficking unit. Observers warned such a passive approach could lead to the re-victimization of victims. Furthermore, reports persisted that police, prosecutors, and judges retained a limited understanding of trafficking. Experts noted the need for more training for authorities, particularly on applying anti-trafficking laws, working with victims, and understanding psychological coercion. The government addressed knowledge gaps by requiring trafficking-specific training for judges and court administration officials and allocating €6,020 (\$6,830) from the state budget toward it. The government supported additional educational efforts by providing training for police on the different types of trafficking and recruitment methods and front-line workers on victim identification. Experts noted, though, that a lack of interest in training among law enforcement officials often led to poor attendance at international and local seminars. To enhance law enforcement's response to trafficking and authorities' collaboration with other stakeholders, the government participated in a project with the Governments of Estonia and Finland to strengthen law enforcement's knowledge of and approach to trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to protect victims. In 2021, the government identified 60 trafficking victims (seven sex trafficking, 53 labor trafficking), an increase from 47 in 2020. Police, immigration, and social services utilized written procedures for identifying victims. Authorities referred victims to the state-funded assistance program based on decisions by either law enforcement or an NGO-led panel of experts. Experts raised concerns that the lack of a centralized referral mechanism hindered coordination among stakeholders and the facilitation of care for all potential victims. Subsequently, in 2020, the prime minister directed the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to develop an NRM to include guidance on identification, referral, and information exchange. As of the end of the reporting period, however, the MOI had not completed drafting the NRM. Identifying child trafficking victims internally remained a challenge; authorities identified zero child victims in 2021 (two in 2020) even though government officials cited children housed in state social care centers, such as orphanages, as vulnerable and reported an increase in recent years in potential sex trafficking cases involving such children. Observers maintained the crime remained underreported and stated further education of staff at state social care centers could lead to increased understanding of trafficking risks and identification of child trafficking victims. In addition, experts reported the need for an improved child protection system to increase the identification of and assistance for child trafficking victims, particularly children with behavioral conditions and children in state social care centers. In 2021, the Ministry of Welfare (MOW) introduced a new interviewing methodology—the "Barnahus" multidisciplinary and interagency model—to respond to witnesses of violence, particularly children, with the goal to offer a coordinated and

effective child protection and criminal justice response and prevent further traumatization during investigations and court proceedings. The MOW planned to introduce the model in all state institutions by 2023. Furthermore, child protection maintained a helpline and website with information about safety measures for child victims of abuse, including trafficking.

The government continued to contract two NGOs to assist victims in the state-funded, NGO-run assistance program, allocating €224,560 (\$254,600), compared with €201,000 (\$227,890) in 2020. The government allocated additional assistance to the NGOs due to the increased number of identified victims. Starting in 2021, NGOs could spend 20 percent of the allocated funds for administrative expenditures, an increase from 10 percent in previous years. Local governments did not have separate budgetary funds to assist trafficking victims but could provide help to victims within their jurisdictions. The NGO-run assistance program offered victims medical and psychological assistance, legal representation, housing, psychotherapy, and reintegration services. Shelters were available to trafficking victims throughout the country. Following the increased number of male labor trafficking victims who were living with mental health conditions or addictions, NGOs reported the need for a specialized shelter for men. In 2021, the program assisted 55 victims, of which the vast majority were labor trafficking victims, an increase from 44 in 2020. Two of the 55 victims were foreign nationals, a significant change from 31 in 2020; all other victims in the program were Latvian nationals. Experts attributed the significant decrease in the number of foreign national victims identified to an increase in domestic labor trafficking of Latvian citizens. Experts expressed concern about human trafficking in Latvia's legal commercial sex industry and the potential penalization of victims, noting law enforcement's focus on fining potential victims who were not in compliance with regulations or statutes, rather than on identifying victims. NGOs emphasized the need for long-term assistance, such as housing, to vulnerable victims after completion of the program. Government regulations on assistance to trafficking victims limited state-funded services to six months, although victims whose cases went to trial received assistance, mostly legal counseling, for the duration of the legal proceedings. Latvian law allowed foreign victims to receive residence permits and a 30-day reflection period to consider claiming formal status as a trafficking victim. Most victims were open to cooperation with law enforcement. In 2021, 26 victims cooperated with law enforcement. Latvian courts could apply legal provisions, such as closed court hearings, to protect victims and witnesses who agreed to provide testimony. Additionally, courts had digital video capabilities and audio recording equipment to protect victims and witnesses from trafficker-victim confrontation. However, experts reported traffickers continued to intimidate victims, and authorities provided uneven levels of protection during court proceedings. Trafficking victims were eligible to receive restitution from the trafficker in a criminal case, file a civil suit against the trafficker, or receive compensation from the government, but the government deducted any debts owed to the state from compensation amounts. In 2021, 14 victims received compensation (two in 2020) from the State Agency for Judicial Assistance, which administered the victims' compensation program, totaling €29,295 (\$33,210). Despite the increased number of victims who received compensation, some experts expressed concerns that access to compensation remained sporadic with a complex application process that often required legal assistance.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. In 2021, the government approved a new two-year NAP, which included more training for investigators, prosecutors, and labor inspectors. Several ministries published quarterly and annual reports on trafficking, including a study on strengthening the capacity of social workers and the role they play in preventing trafficking. Although the mandate for Latvia's anti-trafficking working group expired in December 2020 and the Cabinet of Ministers did not issue a new mandate, the group, which comprised representatives from the government and civil society, continued to monitor domestic and international developments, facilitate information exchange, and coordinate the government's response. While anti-trafficking activities did not have a single national funding source, each state institution's structure and budget included funding for such activities. In 2021, the MOI secured funding for various international

anti-trafficking projects. In collaboration with other Baltic Sea Region countries, the government participated in a project establishing long-term cooperation between stakeholders and academia to educate future journalists on trafficking issues through workshops, panel discussions, and competitions. Domestically, the government conducted several trainings and informative events to raise public awareness on trafficking issues and maintained public facing websites with trafficking information. However, the government did not conduct any national public awareness campaigns. The government maintained emergency helplines, and in 2021, three calls resulted in investigations of potential trafficking crimes. The State Police participated in an international project aiming to combat sexual exploitation among children by addressing trafficking risks and victim vulnerability. A special police unit focused on preventing child sex tourism and the sexual abuse of children. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. However, government representatives, legislators, and NGOs examined the issue of liability for consumers of commercial sex, including through legislative changes holding consumers criminally accountable.

In accordance with European Parliament directives, Latvian labor law required employers to regulate working conditions for employees posted abroad. The law also required employers to provide a written contract and minimum wage to employees or face penalties. The State Police monitored job advertisements and responded when employment offers suggested potential trafficking. Legislation prohibited recruitment fees; however, recruitment agencies often imposed legally permissible fees for document preparation. In 2021, the government monitored the activities of licensed employment agencies and canceled 46 licenses for agencies in violation (zero in 2020). With the rise of third country nationals arriving in Latvia for employment in recent years, labor regulations required agencies to provide job-related information to employees in a language they understood. Latvian embassies abroad distributed informative brochures on labor exploitation risks in seven languages.

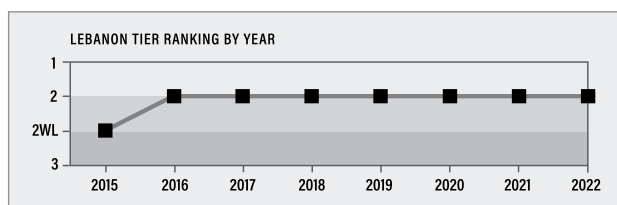
TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Latvia, and traffickers exploit victims from Latvia abroad. Traffickers exploit Latvian women and girls in sex trafficking in Latvia and other European countries. However, the government reports a decrease in international trafficking cases involving Latvians in 2021 with only one sex trafficking victim identified in The Netherlands. In contrast, government officials note an increase in domestic labor trafficking of Latvian citizens. Traffickers target marginalized communities, single women with limited education, children from disadvantaged families, students, and unemployed adults by word-of-mouth and through social media. Children in state social care centers, including orphanages, are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. Police report a growing number of children recruited for commercial sex from state social care centers and disadvantaged families. However, there have been no documented sex trafficking cases involving children living in state social care centers. Latvian women coerced into brokered marriages in Western Europe are vulnerable to sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced labor; the husbands in these brokered marriages are third country nationals from India, Pakistan, and Nepal who use these marriages to obtain EU residency benefits. Government reports indicate a rise in traffickers, especially from Russia, exploiting individuals experiencing mental health conditions, addiction, and homelessness. Guest workers, particularly men, from India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine, most of whom arrive in Latvia legally with Schengen or student visas, and mainly work in the agriculture, construction, food, and forestry industries, are also vulnerable to labor trafficking. The State Labor Inspectorate reports that increasing numbers of illegal workers in the construction and transportation industries, including taxi drivers from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan who receive work contracts from Polish recruitment agencies, are at risk to trafficking. As a result of the Lukashenka regime facilitating illegal migrant flows across the Latvia-Belarus border, hundreds of migrants from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia remain detained near the border and vulnerable to trafficking. Separately, undocumented migrants from Algeria, Pakistan, Russia, and Vietnam, some of whom may be or may become trafficking victims, transit Latvia en route to Western Europe. Foreign nationals and Ukrainian refugees, predominantly women and children, who are

fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and seeking sanctuary, are highly vulnerable to trafficking.

LEBANON: TIER 2

The Government of Lebanon 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, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Lebanon remained on Tier 2. These efforts included implementing changes to reporting processes to prevent automatic penalization of migrant workers leaving abusive employers and adopting a screening tool (developed with an international organization) to better identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including migrant workers. The government also continued to temporarily waive requirements for employer approval to allow migrant workers to change employers and waived most overstay fines incurred by migrant workers during the pandemic. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Lebanon had a caretaker government for 13 months, including five months of the reporting period until September 2021, which limited the government's ability to establish effective anti-trafficking policies for part of the reporting period. For the second consecutive year, the government did not report initiating any new prosecutions and did not convict any traffickers. The government did not approve the labor law amendment extending legal protections to all foreign workers that has been pending since 2009 or approve the draft standardized contract for migrant workers for the second consecutive year. Despite adopting a new screening tool, the government did not implement formal victim identification and referral procedures, which resulted in the potential for unidentified victims to face arrest, detention, or deportation for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. Lebanon's visa sponsorship system continued to create vulnerabilities for the exploitation of migrant workers and remained a significant impediment to authorities identifying and protecting trafficking victims.



PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Finalize and implement government-approved procedures for officials to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, such as undocumented or detained migrants, women holding *Artiste* visas, domestic workers, and Syrian refugees, for referral to protection services.

- Increase efforts to ensure trafficking victims are not arrested, detained, or deported for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration or "prostitution" violations.
- Enact the labor law amendment extending legal protections to all foreign workers, including domestic workers and *Artiste* visa holders, and approve the draft standardized contract for migrant workers as initially submitted to the State Shura Council in 2020.
- Strengthen and expand efforts to reform the visa sponsorship system to ensure all foreign workers, including domestic workers and *Artiste* visa holders, are not bound to abusive employers, and allow workers full freedom of movement, including by permanently waiving previous employer approval requirements for workers to change employers.
- Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of perpetrators of all forms of trafficking under the anti-trafficking law and investigate for potential trafficking crimes employers and recruitment agents who withhold workers' passports, travel documents, or wages.
- Ensure provisions are available to victims for legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they would face retribution and hardship.
- Increase efforts to train judges, prosecutors,

law enforcement officials, and diplomatic personnel on trafficking and application of the anti-trafficking law.

- Screen all domestic workers in detention centers for trafficking indicators and refer victims to care.
- Take concrete steps to improve oversight of *Artiste* visas, a program that contributes to the vulnerability of women to sex trafficking.
- Ensure the judiciary coordinates with the Directorate of General Security (DGS) to consistently apply the anti-trafficking law by granting temporary residency permits for trafficking victims and allowing victims to work.
- Continue to work in partnership with NGOs to screen for, identify, and provide protection services, including witness support during criminal proceedings, for all victims.
- Increase efforts to raise public awareness of trafficking, including exploitation of migrant domestic workers.
- Formally establish the victim assistance fund.
- Adopt and implement the national anti-trafficking action plan (NAP).
- Improve the judiciary's capacity to collect, compile, and track data and outcomes of trafficking cases from all courts.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased overall law enforcement efforts. The 2011 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to seven years' imprisonment and fines if the offense involved an adult victim and 10 to 12 years' imprisonment and fines for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The pandemic, compounded by ongoing financial, economic, and political crises, continued to affect law enforcement's ability to investigate trafficking cases and compile data. Due to the ongoing economic and financial crisis, the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and other law enforcement agencies reduced their workforce to only come to work one or two days per week, limiting the government's ability to respond to information requests. In addition, the MOJ did not have a centralized data collection system, impeding the government's ability to report data on prosecutions and convictions. As a pandemic mitigation measure, law enforcement worked on a rotational basis, reducing the normal number of officers on duty, and most offices did not have basic supplies including electricity or fuel for vehicles or generators. Despite the relaxation of some pandemic mitigation measures, courts only partially re-opened with reduced hours of operation. In addition, strikes closed the courts from May to September 2021, and an ongoing public sector labor curtailment resulted in most government offices only being open once a week. In 2021, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) investigated 21 potential sex trafficking cases. Additionally, DGS investigated 102 cases of suspected trafficking involving migrant domestic workers and adult nightclub workers holding *Artiste* visas. DGS reported it determined 35 of the 102 cases met the criteria for trafficking cases; 32 cases involved labor exploitation, and three cases involved sexual exploitation. The 123 total investigations in 2021 represented a significant decrease from 218 initiated in 2020. For the second consecutive year, the government did not report any new prosecutions or convictions. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. In a notable February 2022 case, prosecutors, for the first time, brought criminal charges of slavery and forced labor against the former employer and recruitment agency of a migrant domestic worker; the case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Separately, the MOI investigated a Lebanese national employed by the Kenyan consulate for allegedly further exploiting potential trafficking victims in forced labor who had come to the consulate for assistance; the government did not report the status of the case at the end of the reporting period.

Due to courts' reduced capacity, all but emergency trials were suspended, and the government prioritized completing investigations that would allow the release of pre-trial detainees to reduce overcrowding in prisons. The ISF anti-trafficking unit remained understaffed and underfunded, with only 22 officers covering all of Lebanon, and no field offices outside of Beirut; this continued to limit the ISF's work. Additionally, government officials and NGOs continued to report some judges lacked understanding of the anti-trafficking law and knowledge of best practices for handling trafficking cases. Officials generally sought to resolve trafficking cases involving foreign workers through mediation between the employer and worker, rather than referring them for criminal prosecution. Government