

2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Italy

ITALY (Tier 2)

The Government of Italy does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore Italy remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, including Italian victims, increasing funding for victim assistance, and increasing funding for prevention activities and implementation of the NAP. The government also adopted a new NRM and separate national identification and referral protocols for undocumented migrants to ensure uniform proactive victim identification and referral to care. Prosecutors established a working group to develop a uniform investigative protocol for trafficking cases involving undocumented migrants. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government prosecuted fewer suspects and convicted fewer traffickers, and for the fourth consecutive year, the government conducted fewer trafficking investigations. Gaps in victim identification systems persisted and the government identified comparatively few Italians or children, despite high estimates by civil society of trafficking among children. The new NRM and identification protocols did not include Italians, which may have left Italian victims without access to trafficking-specific services. The government has never awarded compensation to victims, and restitution remained rare and difficult to obtain. Civil society and experts reported rare cases in which authorities inappropriately penalized victims solely for unlawful acts, including immigration offenses, committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms, and ensure labor trafficking is pursued as such rather than a labor code violation. * Increase proactive victim identification, including for Italians and vulnerable populations such as foreign migrants and children. * Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by enforcing the law prohibiting recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable. * Implement a licensing and accreditation process for massage parlors and increase oversight to identify potential trafficking crimes. * Increase awareness of, and trafficking survivor access to, compensation and increase prosecutors' efforts to systematically request restitution for survivors during criminal trials. * Given significant concerns about forced labor indicators in the Cuban labor export program, screen Cuban government-affiliated overseas workers, including medical professionals, and refer them to appropriate services. * Improve security standards in and around migrant reception centers to limit contact between traffickers and victims or potential victims. * Continue to screen migrants and asylum-seekers, including those aboard rescue vessels docked in Italian ports, for indicators of trafficking, refer identified victims to services, and work with international organizations to protect potential trafficking victims from refoulement. * Continue to strengthen international law enforcement cooperation to prevent and investigate extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse. * Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. * Appoint a national rapporteur to provide an independent review of government efforts. * Publish annual data on prosecutions and convictions of traffickers.

PROSECUTION

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

The government did not disaggregate between sex and labor trafficking for investigations, prosecutions, or convictions pursued under Articles 600, 601, or 602. In 2022 – the most recent year for which the government had comprehensive statistics – the government reported initiating 184 investigations under Articles 600, 601, and 602; this was a decrease compared with 214 in 2021, 254 in 2020, and 323 in 2019, demonstrating a four-year downward trend. The government prosecuted 95 suspects under Articles 600, 601, and 602, a decrease compared with 121 in 2021, 106 in 2020, and 202 in 2019, also indicating an overall downward trend. In 2022, courts convicted 66 traffickers under Articles 600, 601, and 602, a decrease compared with 81 convictions in 2021 and 80 in 2020. Appellate courts upheld the convictions or overturned previous acquittals of 89 traffickers under Articles 600, 601, and 602. While the government did not report comprehensive sentencing data in a format that allowed for an assessment of significant sentencing, it reported the average sentence for traffickers convicted under Article 601 was 9.6 years in 2022, compared with 9.1 years reported in 2021. The government reported 79 final, unappealable sentences issued in 2022 for Articles 600, 601, and 602 (68 in 2021 and 33 in 2020). Of these final sentences, the minimum term of imprisonment issued was 18 months; two sentences were suspended. The government confirmed at least 51 percent of convicted traffickers in 2022 received sentences of one year or longer in prison. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes.

The District Anti-Mafia Directorates handled trafficking prosecutions in coordination with the National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate; the state police, the financial police, and the *Carabinieri* (gendarmerie) conducted investigations under the supervision of the relevant public prosecutor's office; non-specialized investigators referred cases with clear evidence of trafficking to an anti-mafia unit. However, in its 2024 report, GRETA expressed concern authorities often categorized human trafficking as other crimes with a lower burden of proof – such as labor code violations, illicit labor recruitment and brokering, labor exploitation (*caporolato*), commercial sex, and facilitation of irregular migration – which weakened deterrence, as penalties for these crimes were lower than the penalties for trafficking. Prosecutors and judges often applied a narrow definition of human trafficking and frequently believed the involvement of an organized criminal network or an international border crossing were necessary elements of human trafficking and, therefore, did not pursue cases as trafficking without these elements present. Courts often classified trafficking as another crime if the victim initially consented to a situation that resulted in exploitation, and GRETA urged the government to specify in law the irrelevance of initial victim consent. Non-specialized prosecutors sometimes charged suspects with crimes other than trafficking rather than referring the case to an anti-mafia unit to prevent delays in prosecution and victim assistance, as the specialized units would have to relaunch the investigation and consequently extend the timeframe for prosecution and trial. GRETA urged the government to increase specialized anti-trafficking training for investigators, prosecutors, and judges. Insufficient resources resulted in anti-mafia units prioritizing investigations involving criminal networks over cases involving an individual trafficker. Lack of a sufficient number of interpreters, especially for West African dialects, continued to hinder law enforcement investigations, as well as diminish the benefits of investigators' wiretapping capability. Italian prosecutors and police continued to cite insufficient cooperation in investigations from officials in source and transit countries; with many transnational cases, this hindered prosecutions and convictions. Slow criminal justice proceedings continued to hamper prosecutions and convictions.

Law enforcement agencies received training on victim identification and investigation of trafficking crimes from their standard curriculum. In partnership with a government-funded international organization, the government reported training law enforcement officials, immigration and international protection officials, labor inspectors, prosecutors, judges, and anti-trafficking NGOs on a variety of topics including a multidisciplinary approach, immigration protections, and victims' rights. Italian law enforcement cooperated on international trafficking investigations in 2023 that resulted in the identification of at least 302 victims and the arrest of at least 587 suspected traffickers across all countries participating in joint operations. The government continued to provide funding to an international organization for an anti-trafficking project across Africa, part of which focused on improving international judicial cooperation between Italy and Nigeria; Italian law enforcement continued to cooperate and liaise with Nigerian counterparts. In October 2023, anti-mafia and counterterrorism prosecutors established a working group on migrant smuggling and human trafficking, which included magistrates and district prosecutors, to develop a uniform investigative protocol to be used in all cases of migrant arrivals by sea or land; however, no further information on progress was available.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts. The government identified 576 victims in 2022, an increase compared with 493 in 2021 and 536 in 2020. Of the 576 victims identified, traffickers exploited 313 in sex trafficking and 232 in labor trafficking, including 214 in forced labor, seven in forced criminality, two in domestic servitude, and nine in forced begging. Traffickers exploited 31 victims abroad or in transit to Italy. The government also identified 207 potential victims at migration centers whom the government believed were likely to become trafficking victims but had not yet been exploited in Italy. The government focused its victim identification efforts on migrants and asylum-seekers arriving at designated points of entry and reception centers. NGOs and international organizations reported gaps in authorities' victim identification efforts persisted. By focusing efforts on newly arrived people to the country, potential victims who were Italians or did not encounter traffickers until after their arrival may have gone unidentified. Identification of Italian trafficking victims remained extremely rare, and, in 2022, the government identified only two Italian victims of "enslavement." In its 2024 report, GRETA highlighted the near absence of Italian trafficking victims, noting the government identified only three Italian victims in 2021, zero in 2020, and eight in 2019. The government identified very few children (less than 2 percent of victims identified) despite NGOs estimating about 33 percent of trafficking victims were children. GRETA expressed concern the government did not prioritize identifying victims of forced begging and forced criminality. Considering the continued gaps in victim identification, some experts, including those contributing to the 2024 GRETA report, raised concerns the number of victims identified did not represent the true scale of trafficking in Italy.

Preliminary identification of trafficking victims could be completed by a wide variety of front-line officials, including civil society organizations (CSOs), but formal victim identification could only be completed by law enforcement or any of the government authorities or CSOs implementing one of the projects under the "Single Program of emergence, assistance, and social integration" (Single Program). The government provided assistance to trafficking victims through its national anti-trafficking network or the Single Program implemented by regional and local authorities and CSOs through 21 projects, covering the entire country. The government did not require victims to interact with law enforcement to gain access to the Single Program, but victims were required to participate in the program in order to obtain benefits such as shelter, legal assistance, medical care, cultural mediation, psychological care, employment training, work permits, language training, and a residence permits. The government funded a new round of assistance projects for the Single Program, from March 2024 through August 2025, and allocated €28.8 million (\$31.82 million) for their implementation by regional and local authorities and selected CSOs across Italy. Previously, the government allocated €27.2 million (\$30.06 million) to these projects from October 2022 until March 2024 and €24 million (\$26.52 million) from July 2021 to October 2022. NGOs reported high standards of assistance projects across regions but noted the quality of assistance sometimes varied. NGOs reported quality standards for victim assistance was lower in the south. NGOs reported the Department of Equal Opportunity (DEO), which coordinated protection efforts, was not sufficiently

funded or staffed to consistently monitor assistance projects; to assist the DEO, the government maintained a technical committee to help monitor the projects. In 2022, through the Single Program, the government and government-funded CSOs assisted 808 new trafficking victims and 517 victims from prior years, totaling 1,325 trafficking victims assisted. Of the 1,325 trafficking victims, traffickers exploited 815 in sex trafficking and 472 in labor trafficking (including 427 forced labor, 19 forced criminality, 17 forced begging, and nine domestic servitude); traffickers exploited 38 victims abroad or in transit to Italy. This was similar to 1,369 trafficking victims assisted in 2021 and 1,456 in 2020. The number of labor trafficking victims identified and assisted increased in recent years. The government also assisted 10 witnesses and 433 potential victims at migration centers whom the government believed were likely to become trafficking victims but had not yet been exploited in Italy.

Using a multidisciplinary approach in partnership with civil society, the Anti-Trafficking Technical Committee drafted and adopted a new NRM in December 2023, which addressed all forms of trafficking and included specific protocols for children. However, NGOs and GRETA continued to note it was implemented unevenly throughout Italy, and experts expressed concern the NRM only focused on foreign nationals without recognizing Italian victims. In partnership with civil society in June 2023, the government also adopted a detailed national operational protocol (the *Vademecum*) for the identification and referral to assistance of vulnerable migrants and implemented it at ports of entry and migrant reception centers. The government also had an NRM specifically for labor trafficking and exploitation in agriculture, which included minimum standards, standard procedures, and available assistance for victims. In addition, the government had a victim identification and referral mechanism for some forms of child trafficking and children in the asylum system and children were also included in the new NRM.

The government reported observing standard UNHCR procedures to screen for trafficking victims among the approximately 157,651 asylum-seekers, unaccompanied children, and undocumented migrants that arrived by sea in 2023. In coordination with the government in December 2023, UNHCR released updated guidelines for the identification of trafficking victims among asylum-seekers. Civil society coordinated with law enforcement and immigration officials at arrival points and long-term reception centers, and an international organization reported providing information on potential trafficking victims to local officials responsible for assigning migrants to migration centers and trafficking victims to shelters. However, NGOs, citing unstructured identification mechanisms in migrant centers, continued to claim authorities were unable to properly screen and identify many trafficking victims upon arrival, potentially leaving some victims unidentified in migration centers and classifying them instead as asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants and therefore subject to detention and then deportation. Anti-trafficking CSOs did not have access to most migration centers, and GRETA urged the government to allow this access to ensure the proactive identification of trafficking victims. Local committees continued to utilize national guidelines for asylum-seekers to adjudicate asylum applications to identify trafficking victims among applicants; however, inconsistencies in implementation persisted.

The law allowed for an initial three to six months of government assistance to all trafficking victims. After initial assistance, foreign victims were eligible to obtain temporary residency and work permits and had a path to permanent residency; in addition, foreign victims were eligible for six months of shelter benefits, renewable for an additional six months only if the victim obtained a job or enrolled in a training program. The government reported implementing a de facto 30-day recovery and reflection period available to victims through the Single Program. GRETA urged the government to codify the 30-day recovery and reflection period into law and ensure all trafficking victims systematically received this entitlement regardless of their participation in criminal proceedings. In its 2024 report, GRETA expressed concern residence permits sometimes took more than a year to obtain, occasionally required participation with law enforcement, and the number of residence permits issued for trafficking was low compared with the number of victims assisted. Residence permits were required to access many services, including work permit, and GRETA urged the government to extend the right to work prior to receiving residence permits. Through the projects implemented under the Single Program, the government provided several forms of shelter, including emergency reception, first reception, and second reception; most, but not all, shelter options were gender-specific. The emergency and first reception included emergency shelters and

protected apartments, while second reception included semi-autonomous living arrangements. However, in some cases, often due to insufficient space, the government housed victims and potential victims with undocumented migrants in reception centers in the Reception and Integration network; such housing lacked adequate security, and traffickers may have sought to recruit or remove victims from these centers. Foreign unaccompanied child victims automatically received a residence permit until age 18 and accommodations in a general children's center or a designated center for trafficking victims who were also asylum-seekers. Children could receive counseling and were enrolled in public schools with the support of voluntary guardians. Assistance for trafficking victims with special needs and unaccompanied children was sometimes insufficient. The law entitled children to be interviewed in appropriate venues by specialized experts. Article 143-bis entitled victims to interpreters, which most victims reported receiving, in all interviews and criminal proceedings. However, insufficient availability of interpretation services for lesser known African dialects, with victims coming from as many as 15 different language groups, remained a significant challenge. Trustworthy interpreters were also difficult to secure because reportedly many interpreters came from the same communities as accused traffickers.

The law entitled victims to free legal assistance, contingent on a lack of sufficient financial resources, and guaranteed legal assistance for child victims. However, in its 2024 report, GRETA reported it was difficult for victims to prove insufficient financial resources and noted many lawyers were not sensitized to trafficking; GRETA urged the government to ensure all trafficking victims received free legal assistance as early as possible by specialized lawyers. Victims could receive assistance from and be accompanied by cultural mediators for all interviews and criminal proceedings. Organizations implementing the Single Program provided psychological assistance to trafficking victims, but GRETA noted victims accommodated in facilities for asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection did not have sufficient access to psychologists. The law entitled all victims to be informed of their rights, and courts could allow victims to remain anonymous during trial. In its 2024 report, GRETA noted most victims received information on their rights from CSOs implementing the Single Program rather than from law enforcement. Victim testimony could be recorded in a pre-trial setting in front of the defendant's lawyer so victims were not required to appear in court, which was a requirement for children; GRETA reported if specialized prosecutors were involved, this protection happened more frequently for adult victims.

Italian criminal law lacked a provision specifically prohibiting inappropriate penalization of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked; while Articles 45 and 56 gave prosecutors and judges discretion on prosecution based on the principle of the "state of necessity", these articles did not apply to immigration-related offenses. Current law required proof that the unlawful act was committed solely as a result of being trafficked, usually via the conviction of the trafficker, which left victims and potential victims at risk of prosecution and conviction when a court did not first convict the perpetrators. Although Italy's highest penal court upheld the principle of non-punishment of trafficking victims in a 2023 ruling and two separate rulings in prior reporting periods, in some cases, courts convicted trafficking victims of crimes before they could be identified. The 2023 NRM urged officials not to penalize victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. However, civil society and experts continued to report trafficking victims – either because they were not officially recognized as such or because they could not prove their exploitation in criminal proceedings – were prosecuted for and convicted of drug trafficking, possession of a false identity document, or immigration-related offences. Civil society and experts claimed the government denied international protection status and potentially deported trafficking victims who were convicted of crimes they were forced to commit solely as a direct result of being trafficked. In its 2019 and 2024 reports, GRETA and other experts urged the government to adopt a legal provision explicitly preventing inappropriate penalization of victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a result of being trafficked; however, the Ministry of Justice stated it did not have plans to do so.

The government continued to lack comprehensive statistics on restitution and compensation awarded to victims and did not allow prosecutors to request restitution during criminal trials. The government could offer a single payment of €1,500 (\$1,650) to victims for compensation, although GRETA and NGOs noted the process to claim it is overly complex, the amount is insufficient, and no victims had ever received it. In its 2024 report, GRETA urged the government to uniformly

inform victims of their right to compensation, expand victims' effective access to compensation, and consider increasing the maximum amount granted to victims. Restitution could not be decided in criminal court, but rather through a separate civil suit; it remained rare and difficult to obtain; and often took several years for courts to make a final decision. If prosecutors did not request a "precautionary seizure" during the criminal trial, then all assets seized from the convicted trafficker were awarded to the government rather than the victim through the separate civil suit. GRETA urged the government to allow courts to award restitution from convicted traffickers during the criminal trial rather than through a separate civil suit. In its 2019 and 2024 reports, GRETA continued recommending the government increase the use of existing legal remedies to provide restitution to victims and more proactively seize assets and pursue forfeiture against perpetrators. The government did not award restitution from criminal cases to any trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The government minimally increased prevention efforts. The DEO, as coordinator of the interagency steering committee on trafficking, which met twice in 2023, was responsible for coordinating the projects for prevention and victim assistance under the Single Program, submitting a biannual anti-trafficking report, and various policy initiatives. A technical committee, comprising representatives at the expert level, assisted and advised the steering committee. Civil society could attend meetings for the steering and technical committees to provide consultations. The government remained without a national rapporteur to provide independent analysis of government efforts to combat human trafficking; NGOs and GRETA continued to urge the government to establish such a body. Civil society continued to report the DEO was not effective at steering and coordinating national anti-trafficking efforts. While the government adopted an anti-trafficking NAP for 2022-2025 and GRETA reported the government allocated €2 million (\$2.21 million) for implementation in 2023, the NAP did not include: a timeline for completion of action items, an independent monitoring and evaluation body, or a ministry designated with the authority to enforce its implementation. Roundtables, which included government officials and CSOs, were responsible for implementation of the NAP's action items; however, by the end of 2023, the roundtables were not operational, and GRETA urged the government to introduce an independent evaluation body. The inter-ministerial working group on labor exploitation, which focused on the agricultural sector and illicit labor brokers, continued to implement its previous three-year plan (2023-2025) to combat labor exploitation in agriculture. The government reported allocating €1 million (\$1.105 million) to the implementation of prevention activities in 2023, an increase compared with no funding reported for implementation in 2022. The government focused awareness-raising efforts on sectors where exploitation was common, including agriculture, and implemented a multidisciplinary approach by funding an international organization through 2024 to provide cultural mediators and work with labor inspectors to raise awareness of labor trafficking and exploitation among migrant workers. CSOs, regional and local authorities, and the national anti-trafficking hotline conducted several awareness campaigns, including through billboards displaying services available from the national hotline.

Experts and NGOs expressed concern that a March 2023 decree narrowed the range of individuals who qualify for special protection and exempted migrants recovered in certain conditions from some international protections, which could increase their vulnerability to trafficking and re-trafficking. The government continued to cooperate, via an MOU valid through 2026, with the Government of Libya as well as Frontex and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to manage irregular migration from Libya. However, many NGOs and international experts criticized this coordinated effort because it often resulted in the occupants of vessels identified in the Libyan search-and-rescue area being returned to Libyan shores. Civil society reported state and non-state actors in Libya committed severe human rights abuses, including sex and labor trafficking, against many of the more than 20,078 migrants and refugees returned to Libya between August 2022 and August 2023, including inside detention centers. A 2023 UN fact-finding mission to Libya documented numerous crimes against humanity, including trafficking, committed by Libyan government or state-affiliated actors. The report criticized the EU's ongoing support to these actors, including the Libyan Coast Guard, and urged member states, including Italy, to ensure funds supporting the EU mission did not contribute to these crimes. In February 2024, Italy's high court

ruled it was not legal to return migrants at sea to Libya and sentenced the captain of a ship who accompanied 101 migrants to Libya in 2018. In its 2024 report, GRETA recommended improved screening of all migrants and urged the government to suspend its MOU with Libya. GRETA also noted recent policies the government implemented to address irregular migration and fear of deportation may have deterred undocumented migrants from choosing to interact with law enforcement and increased vulnerability to trafficking. The government reported signing several trafficking-specific MOUs in 2023, including one with India and another with the International Criminal Court, Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom, to jointly investigate human traffickers and migrant smugglers operating in Libya and other African countries; however, resulting trafficking-specific actions were not reported. The government continued to provide funding to international organizations for anti-trafficking projects, primarily in Africa.

Labor inspectors did not have the authority to formally identify trafficking victims but could refer them to police and NGOs; in 2022, cooperating labor inspectors and police reported identifying 24 potential trafficking victims. With few exceptions, labor inspectors were not authorized to inspect private households without the homeowner's consent, thereby limiting their detection of domestic servitude. Labor inspectors collaborated with international organizations to strengthen inspection and outreach efforts through the use of cultural mediators and local multidisciplinary task forces. The government maintained a labor exploitation working group at the national level and local task forces in various regions to address labor exploitation, including labor trafficking. Experts estimated that as many as 200,000 agricultural workers, especially seasonal workers, and 500,000 undocumented migrants were at risk of labor trafficking and exploitation in Italy. There were several documented cases of exploitation among the more than 170,000 Ukrainian refugees in Italy; in April 2022, police arrested a suspect for illegal cigarette production, involving the labor exploitation of several Ukrainian refugees. In its 2024 report, GRETA encouraged the government to strengthen the oversight of domestic work and highly vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture, enforce relevant laws, and ensure labor inspectors had sufficient resources.

Fraudulent labor recruitment and passport retention remained concerns. Although illegal, employers or labor recruiters sometimes charged a placement fee to employees, which increased their risk of trafficking. EU workers not considered "highly qualified," non-EU workers, and asylum-seekers were able to change employers without prior government permission, which may have decreased their vulnerability to trafficking. The government had a licensing and accreditation system for labor brokers and labor recruitment agencies. However, there was a lack of regulation – including a licensing or accreditation system – and oversight on massage parlors, which remained likely locations for sex trafficking. In its 2024 report, GRETA noted there were no reported cases of the government holding an agency or company accountable for trafficking or exploitation. In 2022, the government continued efforts to hold individual labor recruiters accountable for illicit labor brokering by arresting 74 suspects (48 in 2021 and 67 in 2020), prosecuting 591 suspects (523 in 2021 and 271 in 2020), and convicting 171 criminals (163 in 2021 and 109 in 2020). Illicit labor brokering did not meet the threshold for labor trafficking; however, law enforcement efforts in this sector helped prevent and reduce the demand for forced labor. In its 2019 and 2024 reports, GRETA recommended the government intensify efforts to screen for trafficking victims more effectively through increased labor inspections, expanded training of inspectors, and in strengthening the monitoring of recruitment and temporary agencies including in agriculture, domestic labor, hospitality, and food service. The law required businesses to submit reports on their actions to minimize the risk of forced labor and prohibited the purchase of products made with forced labor. The DEO continued to operate its 24-hour national hotline for victims of human trafficking, available in 12 languages, through a contract with the Veneto regional government; the government provided €500,000 (\$552,486) in funding for the hotline until June 2024. In 2023, 140 calls to the hotline led to the identification of a trafficking victim (6 percent of total victims identified) and 67 victims identified through the hotline subsequently received assistance through the Single Program. The Ministry of Labor maintained a digital platform to provide legal counseling and access to local services to victims of labor exploitation. The government had a help desk dedicated to victims of labor exploitation, including trafficking; the help desk included a hotline, social media accounts, a website, and a chat function. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. The government did not report making efforts to reduce the demand for

participation in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse by its citizens despite previous allegations of such actions.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit foreign and domestic victims in Italy. Sex traffickers increasingly use online platforms, such as social networks, mobile applications, and the dark web, to recruit and exploit victims and book apartment rentals to make their illicit operations difficult to track. Refugees, predominantly women and children, fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are vulnerable to trafficking. LGBTQI+ individuals, many from Brazil and other Latin American countries, are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced criminality in Italy. Traffickers, often part of criminal networks run by People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals, systematically exploit women from the PRC in sex trafficking in apartments, beauty centers, clubs, and massage parlors as well as labor trafficking in a variety of PRC national-owned businesses, sometimes forcing drug addiction on victims as a means of coercion. Massage parlors are frequently used as fronts for the purchase of commercial sex, raising concerns about sex trafficking. Of an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 individuals involved in commercial sex on the streets, NGOs reported approximately 60 percent (or 24,000 to 27,000) are trafficking victims or at risk of trafficking and between 5 and 8 percent are children (or approximately 2,000 to 3,600). Trafficking networks and gangs continue to grow more sophisticated, organized, and violent, particularly Nigerian gangs linked to the Black Axe, Supreme Viking Confraternity, and the Eiye syndicate. Traffickers continue to subject Nigerian women and girls to sex trafficking through debt-based coercion and voodoo rituals. Authorities report traffickers encourage Nigerian victims to claim asylum to obtain legal residency and facilitate further exploitation. NGOs report most Ivorian women who migrate to Italy do so with the help of organized criminal gangs, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking; some are subjected to domestic servitude and sex trafficking en route to Italy. Traffickers sometimes exploit migrant women in sex trafficking in and around migration centers.

Some Italian citizens engage in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse abroad. Traffickers exploit children in Italy through sex trafficking, forced criminality, forced begging, and forced labor in the agricultural sector, shops, bars, restaurants, and bakeries. Romani children are vulnerable to trafficking, including forced begging and child sex trafficking. "Lover boy" gangs recruit girls in Eastern Europe, especially Romania, via social media and exploit them in child sex trafficking in Italy. Traffickers frequently target unaccompanied children, who are especially vulnerable to trafficking. The government reported the number of unaccompanied seaborne children increased to 17,319 in 2023; a significant increase compared with 13,386 in 2022, 10,053 in 2021, and 4,631 in 2020. The government reported there were 20,926 unaccompanied children in Italy in 2022.

Labor traffickers operate in agriculture, predominantly in southern Italy, construction, household labor, hospitality, and restaurants. Undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers living in the approximately 30 informal settlements across Italy are vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers use debt bondage to exploit victims, predominantly men from Bangladesh, and force them to sell roses throughout the country. There are strong indicators of forced labor in Cuba's labor export program, including the medical missions. In 2023, there were approximately 172 Cuban government-affiliated medical workers in Calabria who may have been forced to work by the Cuban government. Italy has an estimated 1.5 million unregistered workers and 3.7 million undocumented workers in the informal market who are at risk for labor trafficking. Specifically for the agricultural sector, experts estimated that as many as 200,000 workers in 2021, particularly seasonal workers, are at risk for forced labor and exploitation in Italy. Employers in the agricultural sector sometimes submit falsified forms pertaining to their workers, which impedes labor inspections and the potential identification of trafficking victims. Italy had approximately 500,000 undocumented migrants in 2022, many of whom are at risk for trafficking. Italy received approximately 157,651 undocumented migrant arrivals by sea in 2023 – a significant increase compared with previous years; many set sail from Libya, where some migrants are subjected to extortion, torture, human trafficking, and rape by militias or traffickers while awaiting passage to Italy. Traffickers target

migrant centers to recruit and later exploit asylum-seekers, sometimes claiming to be family members to gain access to the centers. Asylum-seekers may legally work beginning two months after filing their applications, although many seek illegal employment immediately in informal sectors, increasing their risk for trafficking.