

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1227
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Trafficking in Persons Report
Udgivet:	Juni 2019
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	27. juni 2019

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IRAQ: Tier 2 Watch List

The Government of Iraq does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included establishing a cross-ministerial task force to address anti-trafficking deficiencies and establish recommendations for improvements. It also prosecuted and convicted more traffickers and identified some trafficking victims. The government provided shelter to seven victims in the government-run shelter in Baghdad. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. Deficiencies in identification and referral procedures continued to prevent many victims from receiving appropriate protection services. Furthermore, authorities did not proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, which resulted in the punishment of trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as children affiliated to ISIS including child soldiers, prostitution, and immigration violations. The government did not investigate or hold anyone criminally accountable for continued allegations of unlawful recruitment and use of child

soldiers despite a few alleged cases among some non-compliant militia units affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) operating under the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC)—a component of the Iraqi armed forces. The government also did not acknowledge the recruitment and use of children by government-supported armed groups. The government also failed to investigate and hold criminally accountable military and security personnel for credible allegations of the sexual exploitation of women and girls in IDP camps; by failing to do so, it also did not protect and prevent this highly vulnerable population from trafficking. Because the government has devoted sufficient resources to a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute significant efforts to meet the minimum standards, Iraq was granted a waiver per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act from an otherwise required downgrade to Tier 3. Therefore Iraq remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the third consecutive year.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

Investigate and hold criminally accountable government officials for unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers and sex and labor trafficking. • Develop and institute guidelines for proactive victim identification and referral to protection services for all relevant officials, and train officials on these procedures. • Prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers by all armed groups, including units of the PMF and independent militias, and provide appropriate protection services to demobilized child soldiers. • Ensure trafficking victims are not punished for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as prostitution and immigration violations. • Ensure victim identification and protection measures are not tied to the prosecution of a trafficker. • Allow all relevant government authorities to officially identify potential trafficking victims and refer them to care. • Increase unhindered access to adequate protection services for victims of all forms of trafficking and their children, including trauma and psycho-social counseling, medical care, long-term shelter, reintegration services, employment training, and financial assistance. • Make significant efforts to investigate, prosecute, convict, and stringently sentence traffickers, including complicit government officials, even when victims do not participate in legal proceedings against their trafficker. • Amend the anti-trafficking

law to ensure that a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion are not required to constitute a child sex trafficking offense, in accordance with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. • Finalize regulations to enable full implementation of the anti-trafficking law. • Establish a legal framework for NGOs to operate shelters for victims and support such organizations.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts, but did not hold criminally accountable officials complicit in trafficking, including child soldiering and sex trafficking. Iraq's 2012 anti-trafficking law criminalized some forms of labor and sex trafficking. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, the anti-trafficking law required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense and therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. The anti-trafficking law prescribed penalties of up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 10 million Iraqi *dinar* (approximately \$8,790) for trafficking offenses involving adult male victims, and up to life imprisonment and a fine of 15 million to 25 million Iraqi *dinar* (approximately \$13,180-\$21,970) if the offense involved an adult female or child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent, and with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Article 399 of the penal code criminalized "the prostitution of a child" and provided a penalty of up to 10 years' imprisonment, which was sufficiently stringent, although not commensurate with the penalties prescribed for rape. The labor law conflicted with the anti-trafficking law, as its penalties included a fine and imprisonment not exceeding six months, which were not sufficiently stringent. The government reportedly finalized a post-legislative review of its anti-trafficking law, in an effort to improve legal and law enforcement shortcomings. The government continued to lack implementing regulations for the anti-trafficking law, hindering its ability to enforce the law, bring traffickers to justice, and protect victims. In July 2018, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's (IKR) regional parliament approved the 2012 Iraqi anti-trafficking law; however, at the end of the reporting period, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had not developed the regulatory and enforcement framework required to implement the

law. Prior to the adoption of this law, the IKR did not have a comprehensive law that specifically prohibited human trafficking.

The Ministry of Interior's (MOI) anti-trafficking unit, within the anti-crime directorate, reported that its many responsibilities limited its ability to conduct trafficking investigations. Moreover, Iraqi and KRG officials continued to lack a general understanding of trafficking and ability to recognize trafficking indicators. Nevertheless, the MOI reportedly initiated the investigation of 356 trafficking cases, of which 110 were ongoing as of January 2019. There were reportedly 148 trafficking victims involved in these cases, including sex trafficking, forced labor, child trafficking, and forced begging. The MOI detained 426 people for alleged involvement in trafficking crimes, but it did not specify whether these were for sex or labor trafficking. Of these individuals, the government referred 105 for prosecution, while it acquitted 117 and released 43 on bail. The government convicted and sentenced 53 perpetrators, but it did not report under which laws the perpetrators were convicted nor did it report the details of the sentences prescribed. These statistics demonstrated an increase from the previous reporting period when the government initiated 266 investigations, 78 prosecutions, and 32 convictions. During the reporting period, the KRG reported it prosecuted 89 persons for trafficking offenses and convicted seven trafficking offenders, but authorities did not share additional information of these cases; in the previous year, the KRG reported 58 investigations, but it did not report any prosecutions or convictions. The Kurdistan Ministry of Interior (KMOI) also reported it opened an investigation into a forced labor case involving 22 Philippine migrant workers, who were ultimately forced to work in Baghdad; however, the case was hindered by KMOI's difficulty in gaining access to the victims.

Significant concerns of alleged official complicity in trafficking crimes remained. In 2018, there were reports that government officials in key security positions protected traffickers from investigation and prosecution. The government did not report efforts to investigate allegations that some non-compliant PMF-affiliated militias, including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN), and—as reported in 2017—Kata'ib Hizbullah (KH), recruited and used children. Furthermore, some foreign governments with large numbers of migrant workers in Iraq paid immigration fines for their citizens, including trafficking victims; embassies

indicated Iraqi officials sometimes forced them to pay bribes, along with immigration fees, to release their citizens from detention and to repatriate them. The government did not report efforts to investigate or prosecute continued allegations that security and military personnel in IDP camps were complicit in the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls, particularly those with ties to alleged ISIS members. While law enforcement at times investigated prostitution violations, officials failed to identify trafficking indicators among persons in prostitution.

During the reporting period, the MOI provided several trainings for MOI, MOJ, and MOLSA personnel on victim identification and protection. The KMOI did not report providing anti-trafficking training for its personnel.

PROTECTION

The government maintained efforts to identify trafficking victims, but major deficiencies in the government's identification and referral procedures prevented many victims from receiving care and led to the penalization of victims. The MOI reportedly identified 148 trafficking victims during investigations, which included 74 female victims of sexual exploitation, 64 male and female victims of forced labor, one child trafficking victim, and nine male and female victims of forced begging. This represented an increase from the 41 victims the government identified in the previous reporting period. However, unlike in the previous reporting period, the government did not report how many victims the MOI referred to protection services. The government did not have a national victim referral mechanism and the government's ad hoc referral process remained deficient. Coordination on case referral across the country was limited, and coordination between ministries in both Iraq and the IKR was poor.

The government remained without government-wide victim identification guidelines for all relevant officials or first responders who came in contact with potential trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, including undocumented foreign migrants and persons in prostitution. Civil society organizations reported Iraqi officials, including district-level police officers, did not proactively identify victims of

trafficking, as officials lacked a general understanding of human trafficking. Government officials reported the MOI failed to properly identify victims, including during investigations of prostitution crimes that involved potential trafficking indicators. Government officials also reported victim identification efforts remained low because investigative judges were the only officials who could officially identify and refer a trafficking victim to protection services; because judges required victims to testify in front of the perpetrators in court, many victims did not come forward due to their fear of retaliation. Because of this requirement and the resulting absence of victim witnesses, judges determined—in many cases—there was insufficient evidence to officially classify a person as a trafficking victim, thereby denying victims access to protection services. Furthermore, the government did not have specialized judges or courts that were trained or dedicated to handling trafficking cases. Victims who filed police reports against their traffickers faced retaliation from their traffickers, which ultimately resulted in the arrest and detention of the victim.

Because of the government's victim identification and referral deficiencies, including authorities' lack of knowledge and understanding of trafficking, victims remained at high risk of criminalization and punishment. Trafficking victims in Iraq, including in the IKR, continued to be vulnerable to arrest, imprisonment, deportation, and financial penalties for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as prostitution, immigration violations, and child soldiering. Authorities often detained sex trafficking and foreign forced labor victims until authorities determined their status as a victim. Foreign migrant workers, including foreign labor trafficking victims, faced regular discrimination in the criminal justice process, re-victimization, and retaliation from traffickers. Foreign labor trafficking victims—both identified and unidentified—were often required to pay overstay fines to obtain an exit visa to legally exit the country and return to their home country. Although employers were legally responsible to pay any immigration fees or liabilities related to foreign workers under Iraq's sponsorship system—in practice—workers, including trafficking victims, often paid the fines. An NGO reported in 2018 that police occasionally detained children engaged in street begging and kept them in custody before releasing them; police did not screen these children for trafficking nor refer them to appropriate protection services. An international organization reported the government increasingly recognized that people arrested for prostitution could be

victims of trafficking and should be treated as such; however, it was unclear how often this occurred in practice due to authorities' lack of knowledge on trafficking and ad hoc approaches to proactive identification.

The Iraqi government and the KRG provided limited protection services to victims of trafficking. Neither the Iraqi government nor the KRG operated shelters for male trafficking victims. The Iraqi government did not allocate funding in its budget specifically for victim protection services. Likewise, the MOLSA-run trafficking shelter in Baghdad did not have dedicated funding for its operation and therefore relied on donations from civil society organizations. During the reporting period, seven trafficking victims utilized the shelter, which was an increase from the previous reporting period during which the shelter was empty. Civil society organizations reported, however, that overall services provided in government-operated shelters remained poor and provided inadequate psycho-social and medical care and vocational training. Additionally, female victims were not allowed to freely enter and exit shelters and officials limited victims' ability to communicate with anyone outside of the shelter. The government also did not provide care for rape victims, including trafficking victims who were also victims of rape; due to social norms, rape victims were often encouraged by government authorities or sometimes forced by their families to marry their rapists. The Iraqi government did not provide funding or in-kind assistance to NGOs that provided victim care. NGOs reported a shortage of specialized shelters for trafficking victims, in part because NGOs were not allowed to legally operate shelters. The KRG continued to operate four shelters in the IKR for women, which could provide services to female victims of trafficking, but they rarely did so in practice. Victims required a court order to leave the shelters, thus significantly restricting their movement. The KRG did not report how many, if any, trafficking victims received services at these shelters during the reporting period. Recognizing the deficiencies in protection services in the IKR, the KMOI and an NGO continued their plans to jointly establish a shelter for female victims of trafficking and gender-based violence in Erbil; the shelter was not open at the end of the reporting period. In 2018, the KRG facilitated the release of several hundred Yezidis held captive by ISIS, most of whom were likely trafficking victims; however, the KRG did not report whether it provided essential psycho-social or other protective services to these victims. Neither the Iraqi government nor the KRG reported efforts to provide protection services to demobilized child soldiers of ISIS or the PMF, thus

failing to prevent re-victimization or re-recruitment of these children into armed groups. Furthermore, Iraqi and KRG authorities continued to inappropriately detain and prosecute without legal representation children allegedly affiliated to ISIS—some of whom were victims of forcible recruitment and use—and used abusive interrogation techniques and torture to gain children’s confessions; the government did not screen these children as potential trafficking victims. In addition, the government failed to protect and prevent the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls in IDP camps, as security and military personnel and camp personnel allegedly committed acts of sexual violence and exploitation, abusing their position of power.

Neither the Iraqi government nor the KRG provided adequate protections or witness support to victims to encourage their assistance in investigations and prosecutions of trafficking offenders. The MOI reported that any foreign or Iraqi trafficking victim could file a civil lawsuit against a trafficker, but no victims filed such lawsuits in 2018, likely due—in part—to the lack of protections or necessary services provided to victims during trial. Courts did not protect the privacy or identity of victims when testifying against their trafficker. The Iraqi government did not allow trafficking victims to work, move freely, or leave the country during trials. Labor courts in the IKR did not provide translation and interpretation services for foreign workers, including foreign labor trafficking victims, creating difficulties for victims to sue abusive employers. Although the Iraqi anti-trafficking law allowed for the government to provide special residency status benefits to foreign trafficking victims, it did not report offering this assistance to any victims during the reporting period. The KRG did not offer special residency status to victims during the reporting period either, but it reportedly refrained from deporting victims. The Iraqi government and the KRG reportedly provided foreign victims relief from deportation or offer legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution. The Iraqi government and KRG reportedly both cooperated with an international organization to repatriate an unknown number of foreign trafficking victims during the reporting period.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking. Iraqi law prohibited voluntary recruitment of any person younger than age 18 into the governmental armed forces, including governmental paramilitary forces, militia groups, or other armed groups. There were no reports of child soldiers used within the Iraqi military, and the government reportedly provided training to military officers on child soldier issues. However, the Iraqi government faced challenges in exercising complete control over certain units of the PMF, which sometimes undertook operations independent of political leaders or military commanders. The Iraqi government's inter-ministerial senior committee to monitor, evaluate, and report on children's rights violations in conflict zones in Iraq continued to coordinate with an international organization. The government also continued to discuss the development of an action plan—in cooperation with an international organization—for the government and the PMC to address the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; however, as of March 2019, it was not completed.

Budget shortfalls, understaffing, a stagnant economy, internal conflict, and vast reconstruction needs limited the Iraqi government and KRG's ability to dedicate resources to combat trafficking. The Iraqi government's inter-ministerial counter-trafficking committee (CCCT), which was led by the MOI, showed increasing willingness to report on its achievements. The KRG expanded an anti-trafficking committee—established in 2016—to include 19 ministries and government agencies; the KRG's adoption of Iraq's anti-trafficking law also allowed it to become an active member of the CCCT. The Iraqi government drafted and implemented a national anti-trafficking action plan in March 2019. NGOs and journalists reported they were unaware of major government-funded anti-trafficking information or education campaigns. However, the Iraqi government reported it actively advertised its anti-trafficking hotline and posted anti-trafficking information at border crossings, airports, and transportation hubs. The Iraqi government continued to operate a 24-hour anti-trafficking hotline but did not report how many calls it received; NGOs reported the government initiated an unspecified number of trafficking investigations after receiving a call to the hotline. The KRG also operated a hotline where trafficking victims could seek assistance and report labor abuses. The Iraqi government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, but it did not make efforts to reduce the demand for child sex tourism. The Iraqi government and the KRG took some efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor. Both

governments cooperated with each other to maintain an online visa system to track migrant workers and their sponsoring companies to prevent employers from committing labor abuses. The KMOI reported the system automatically blocked a company from sponsoring more than 50 foreign workers during the reporting period. The KMOI reported it blacklisted 29 companies, thus preventing them from sponsoring foreign workers; it was unclear, however, if the KRG prosecuted any of these companies for potential labor trafficking crimes. The Iraqi government did not report if it punished abusive recruitment agencies or employers of foreign workers. The Iraqi government reported it provided all government employees anti-trafficking training, including diplomatic personnel, but it did not adopt specific measures to prevent its diplomats from facilitating human trafficking.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Iraq, and traffickers exploit victims from Iraq abroad. The violent conflict with ISIS exacerbated the population's vulnerability to trafficking, in particular women and children, although the government's territorial defeat of the terrorist group, announced December 9, 2017, has improved conditions for Iraqi civilians. However, insecurity still remained in areas liberated from ISIS rule. Since January 2014, more than five million Iraqis have been displaced, with approximately 1.8 million still displaced as of the end of 2018, many of whom are female heads of household vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse due to their perceived affiliation with ISIS. In addition, more than 250,000 Syrian refugees remained displaced in Iraq, the vast majority in the IKR. With the defeat of the ISIS physical caliphate, the reported incidence of these violations has diminished. Between 2014 and 2018, ISIS militants kidnapped and held captive thousands of women and children from a wide range of ethnic and religious groups, especially Yezidis, and sold them to ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria, where ISIS fighters subjected them to forced marriage, sexual slavery, rape, and domestic servitude. ISIS maintained an organized system to buy and sell women and girls for sexual slavery, including sales contracts notarized by ISIS-run courts. The media has reported that ISIS sold some captives to wealthy individuals in Gulf countries, and reports suggested that some

Yezidi captives were moved to Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. IKR-based civil society organizations also reported in 2018 that ISIS members and supporters kidnapped Yezidi children for exploitation in Turkey. ISIS reportedly kidnapped 120 Turkmen children in 2014. They have reportedly been sold multiple times for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and only 20 of the kidnapped children were rescued by the end of 2018. Throughout 2015-2018, thousands of women and children escaped ISIS captivity—many of whom were pregnant as a result of rape and sex trafficking; these women and girls, including IDPs among this population, remain highly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including re-trafficking. Some Yezidis reportedly reside in Iraqi IDP camps where they continue to live with Sunni families that formerly exploited them under ISIS rule. As of the end of 2018, 2,500 Yezidi women and girls remain missing; some reports indicate these women and girls remain with ISIS in eastern Syria and Turkey or have been exploited in other parts of the region, Europe, or Asia.

Children remain highly vulnerable to forcible recruitment and use by multiple armed groups operating in Iraq, including—but not limited to—ISIS, the PMF, tribal forces, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), and Iran-backed militias. Despite the defeat of the physical caliphate, ISIS continues to abduct and forcibly recruit and use children in combat and support roles, including as human shields, informants, bomb makers, executioners, and suicide bombers; some of these children were as young as 8 years old and some were mentally disabled. In 2018, multiple sources reported the PKK and YPG operating in the IKR and Sinjar continued to recruit and use children. Local NGOs reported in 2018 that Yezidi militias in Sinjar, including the pro-KRG Ezidixan Protection Force and Sinjar Command Force, recruited approximately 10 to 20 Yezidi boys. Some sources alleged that the KRG-aligned Yezidikhan Protection Force and ethnic Yezidi units of the KRG security forces operating in Sinjar may have had child recruits in their ranks. NGO and local government contacts confirmed that hundreds of Yezidi children have been recruited by the PKK-aligned Yezidi Civil Protection Units (YPS) and other PKK-affiliated militias. In 2018, civil society organizations reported the PKK recruited and trained children from Sinjar, Makhmour, and other locations, and sent them to bases in Sinjar, Turkey, and the Qandil Mountains between Iraq and Iran.

Since 2015, NGOs continue to report that some non-compliant, Iran-aligned PMF units recruit, use, and provide military training to children, though the incidence of these reports has declined with the defeat of ISIS' territorial presence in Iraq. In 2018, NGOs reported that some PMF-affiliated militias, including Iranian-backed Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN) and AAH, recruited boys younger than the age of 18 to fight in Syria and Yemen. In 2017, reports also indicated both the AAH and Kata'ib Hizbullah (KH) militias recruited and used child soldiers. Some of the forces in the HHN, AAH, and KH militias operate under the umbrella of the PMF, but they generally operate outside of the command and control of the Iraqi government. Civil society organizations and local contacts reported in 2017 that posters commemorating children who died while fighting for Shia militias were commonplace in Shia-majority areas of Baghdad and throughout southern Iraq. Most of the children who were celebrated for fighting allegedly fought for brigades of the AAH and KH militias. As reported in 2017, some AAH and KH members or brigades recruit children, most commonly out of schools. According to the PMF official social media site and posters in the street in mid-2017, the PMF offered military training courses to children and youth ages 15-25. In 2015 and 2016, multiple sources reported factions of the PMF recruited and used children in operations in Fallujah and other areas of the country, while PMF-affiliated media celebrated the service and sacrifice of child soldiers. Credible reporting in 2017 indicated Sunni tribal militias recruited boys out of IDP camps, some of which received military training. In August 2016, an international NGO reported that Sunni tribal militias affiliated with the PMF recruited at least seven children from the Debaga IDP camp in northern Iraq; witness accounts reported that members of the Iraqi Security Forces facilitated the recruitment of children from the camp.

Refugees and IDPs face heightened risk of forced labor and sex trafficking due to their economic and social vulnerability and lack of security and protections. NGOs report trafficking networks in the IKR target refugees and IDPs, operating with assistance from local officials, including judges, officials from the Asayish forces, and border agents. Credible NGOs in 2017 and 2018 report that women and girls in IDP camps, whose family members have alleged ties to ISIS, continue to endure a complex system of sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and abuse by armed actors residing in the camps, security and military officials, and camp personnel controlling access to humanitarian assistance and services. In 2015 and 2016, NGOs reported

some personnel from the Asayish forces facilitated the sex trafficking of women and girls in Syrian refugee camps in the IKR. Reports from 2015 indicated a trafficking network exploited IDPs and some Syrian refugee women in sex trafficking in hotels and brothels in Baghdad, Basrah, and other cities in southern Iraq after agents of the network promised to resettle them from the IKR; the women's children were also forced to beg on the street. Criminal gangs reportedly force boys and girls to beg, especially IDP and refugee children and children with disabilities, primarily in urban areas; criminal gangs also force children to sell and transport drugs and weapons, particularly in southern Iraq.

Iraqi, Iranian, and Syrian women and girls, as well as LGBTI persons in the IKR, are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. According to IKR press reports, the collapse of Iran's currency and economic slowdown spurred an influx of more than 2,000 young Iranian women and girls into the IKR in 2018, many of whom were victims of sex trafficking in cafes, hotels, and massage centers. According to KRG law enforcement in 2018, IKR-based taxi drivers allegedly facilitate the transportation of these women and girls from Iran to the IKR under the cover of tourism. Numerous media reports in 2018 claim that girls as young as 11 years old are observed in night clubs and casinos in Baghdad as waitresses, dancers, and in prostitution; some militia groups, including AAH, reportedly provided security at these establishments and relied on them for income. In 2018, an NGO reported a new trend in the IKR in which male sex traffickers use the threat of publicizing compromising photos of women to sexually exploit or force them into prostitution. NGOs in 2016 reported cases in which criminal networks exploited girls who have run away from their families out of fear of honor killings in child sex trafficking. The media reported in 2018 that trafficking gangs increasingly used social media sites, particularly Facebook, to buy and sell women and girls for sex and labor exploitation. Reports from 2014-2017 suggested some Iraqi law enforcement officials have allegedly frequented brothels known for sex trafficking or accepted bribes to allow sex trafficking. Foreign media reports from 2018 suggest a growing trend of the child sex trafficking of Iraqi girls, aged 11-16, in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and the UAE. Trafficking networks also reportedly sell Iraqi children in neighboring countries and Europe for commercial sexual exploitation.

Traditional practices, including child forced and “temporary” marriages and fasliya—the exchange of family members to settle tribal disputes—also place women and girls at increased risk of trafficking within the country. For example, in October 2016, the media reported a girl from the Nada tribe in Maysan Province was forced to marry a man of another tribe as a resolution for the killing of a man by someone in the Nada tribe. Child protection organizations reported in 2016 incidents of child marriage—which could increase a child’s vulnerability to exploitation—increased among IDPs and Syrian refugees in the IKR, as heads of households sought ways to generate income and reduce the family’s economic burden. As reported in previous years, traffickers forced Syrian girls from refugee camps in the IKR into early or “temporary marriages” with Iraqi or other refugee men; some KRG authorities allegedly ignored, or may have accepted bribes to ignore, such cases, including those in which girls are sold multiple times.

Some men and women from throughout Asia and Africa who migrate—both legally and illegally—to Iraq are subjected to forced labor as construction workers, security guards, cleaners, handymen, and domestic workers. In January 2016, the MOLSA reported approximately 140,000 foreign workers lacked formal work permits; NGOs reported some employers and recruitment agents exploit workers’ illegal status by withholding salaries and subjecting workers to substandard living conditions. Some foreign migrants are recruited for work in other countries in the region but are forced, coerced, or deceived into working in Iraq and the IKR. In 2018, the KMOI reported 22 workers from the Philippines legally entered the IKR under the sponsorship of a labor contracting company, but were subsequently forced to work in Baghdad. An international organization reported in 2018 that if a foreign worker had a complaint of abuse about an employer, recruitment agents move the worker to a different employer and do not report the employer to the police. Recruitment agencies reportedly operate clandestinely without permits and beyond the control of the government.

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