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2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Armenia

ARMENIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Armenia 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, Armenia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating and prosecuting more trafficking cases and convicting more traffickers. The government partnered with civil society to administer victim services, and it allocated more funding for victim protection. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. First responders did not consistently screen vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, and long-term victim services and reintegration support were inadequate. Law enforcement officials and judges lacked trauma-informed approaches, and the government did not implement victim-witness assistance measures, impeding successful law enforcement actions and undermining broader anti-trafficking efforts. The government did not regulate or monitor labor recruitment agencies or prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees, increasing foreign workers' vulnerability to trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase proactive victim identification efforts, including by implementing and training officials on SOPs to screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including foreign workers, individuals in commercial sex, migrants, refugees, and children in state institutions.
- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Implement a systemic victim-witness assistance program to increase protective services for victims participating in criminal justice proceedings and strengthen measures to protect victim confidentiality; train law enforcement and judicial officials to use victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches during investigations and court proceedings.
- Provide advanced training for police and Investigative Committee (IC) investigators on conducting victim-centered, trauma-informed anti-trafficking investigations, including evidence collection.
- Seek and implement recommendations from civil society, NGOs, and members of the Victim Identification Commission (VIC) on decrees standardizing victim protection.
- Increase resources for long-term victim services, including reintegration services, longer-term housing support, and economic assistance.
- Implement legal authorities for labor inspectors to conduct regular inspections, including non-legal employers, and identify victims through unannounced visits.
- Train judges on issuing restitution in criminal cases, establish procedures to seize assets from traffickers, and create effective methods to allocate restitution in a timely manner.
- Develop and consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by eliminating worker-paid recruitment fees and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Establish and implement preventative measures for child labor trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Articles 188 and 189 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to eight years' imprisonment for crimes involving adult victims and seven to 10 years' imprisonment for crimes involving child victims. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

In 2024, law enforcement investigated 38 cases (20 sex trafficking and 18 labor trafficking), compared with 27 investigations in 2023. Authorities continued 10 investigations initiated in previous years. The government initiated prosecutions of 10 alleged traffickers (seven for sex trafficking and three for labor trafficking), compared with eight prosecutions in 2023. The government reported two prosecutions initiated in previous years remained ongoing. Courts convicted six traffickers (four sex traffickers and two labor traffickers), compared with two convictions in 2023. Courts sentenced one trafficker to eight years' imprisonment and sentenced the other five traffickers to probation (including three traffickers who received time served following three years in detention), which weakened deterrence and did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime. Prosecutors appealed the probationary sentences in three cases. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. Law enforcement coordinated with INTERPOL on 11 trafficking investigations.

The Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) maintained a specialized anti-trafficking unit. However, the criminal procedural code required police to transfer preliminary findings and reports to the IC General Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases, which was responsible for starting an official investigation. The criminal code required the IC review the police's submission within 24 hours to determine whether to launch a criminal case; observers reported this did not give investigators time to sufficiently review the cases and led to suspects' releases. Further, officials reported this process allowed suspects to conceal evidence and intimidate victims and witnesses before a criminal case was officially opened. The IC lacked sufficient resources and training to effectively investigate trafficking cases, especially online cases. The Office of the Prosecutor General's (OPG) Department of Combating Crimes Against the Person had two specialized prosecutors responsible for trafficking cases, but central and regional office prosecutors could also prosecute cases. Regional police units designated an officer as the main point of contact for trafficking within their jurisdiction. The IC and the OPG continued to dismiss or reclassify trafficking cases referred by local police because of a lack of evidence or a high reliance on victim testimony without corroborating evidence. Additionally, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) reported high turnover across law enforcement agencies created obstacles in maintaining specialized knowledge. The MOIA and justice academies maintained classes on trafficking for new police, investigators, and prosecutors; the MOIA Academy also convened a roundtable with police, OPG, IC, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), and an NGO. The government did not report providing specialized anti-trafficking training to prosecutors during the reporting period. However, in partnership with civil society and a foreign donor, the Judicial Academy developed an anti-trafficking module required for all new judges.

Law enforcement officials often blamed victims for their situations and overlooked or ignored vulnerabilities, impeding successful law enforcement actions and undermining broader anti-trafficking efforts. Judges lacked an understanding of trafficking crimes, leading to discriminatory rulings. Courts often admitted evidence of victims' circumstances, such as prior acquaintance with the trafficker, prior consensual sexual activity, or whether victims had the ability to physically escape, erroneously accepting this evidence as establishing consent even in cases where force, fraud, or coercion was established. Observers reported the lack of specialized training for judges and frequent rotations further impeded efforts.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts.

The government identified and referred to care 25 victims in 2024, the same number as in 2023. Of the 25 victims identified, traffickers exploited 11 in sex trafficking and 14 in labor trafficking. This included 10 women, six men, and nine children; all victims were Armenian. The government did not identify any foreign victims for the fourth consecutive year. The VIC, which comprised representatives from MOLSA, OPG, police, and NGOs, maintained sole authority to officially recognize victims; all governmental organizations and NGOs could refer potential victims to the VIC. The VIC used standardized indicators to screen and formally identify victims and met 10 times (eight in 2023) to discuss cases and make victim status determinations.

The 2014 Law on Identification and Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking and Exploitation prescribed identification, referral, and assistance procedures for relevant actors. Front-line officials, including police, service providers, and labor inspectors, screened potential victims for trafficking indicators using standardized checklists. The MOLSA maintained a guide for social workers to screen and identify victims when working with vulnerable populations, and it had leaflets in three languages to help inform victims on available state resources. The Migration and Citizenship Service of MOIA continued implementing screening procedures to identify victims in migration flows. Despite these various procedures, experts continued to report officials did not proactively identify victims and instead relied on victims to self-identify. First responders did not adequately screen vulnerable populations, particularly individuals in commercial sex, for trafficking indicators, and efforts to proactively identify foreign national victims remained limited. Police officers, social workers, and other front-line officials in remote areas lacked adequate training to identify and refer potential victims. The government trained victim service providers on victim identification and referral and government services available to victims.

The government provided emergency shelter, medical services, and psychological support to potential trafficking victims during the “pre-identification stage,” a stage where the government collected information on a potential victim within 10 days. The government, in collaboration with NGOs, provided victims an assistance package, which included legal, medical, and psycho-social support; housing; a one-time monetary compensation of 250,000 drams (\$640); and access to social, educational, and vocational programs. The government and partner NGOs provided financial and medical support to 22 victims. The government maintained a cooperation agreement and fully funded one specialized NGO-run shelter to provide services to trafficking victims; the government did not report how many victims the shelter supported during the reporting period. However, the cooperation agreement only lasted one year at a time, restricting the NGO’s ability to make long-term protection plans; this sometimes resulted in gaps in services and victims transferring shelters, which re-traumatized some victims – especially those with disabilities. The government placed child victims in the NGO-run shelter or childcare institutions. The shelter could also accommodate male victims with separate rooms or rented apartments. Unlike previous years, adult victims could not leave the NGO-run shelter without staff supervision and could not work while staying in the shelter; limiting victims’ freedom of movement potentially re-traumatized and disempowered victims to direct their own recovery. Experts reported reintegration services, especially long-term housing, were inadequate and increased vulnerability to revictimization; the government did not include trafficking victims in the list of vulnerable people eligible for state housing.

The government allocated approximately 45.6 million drams (\$116,925) for victim protection efforts, including operation costs for the NGO-run shelter, compared with 34.7 million drams (\$88,975) in 2023. The government maintained minimum standards for victim assistance; however, experts reported the standards did not include input from civil society and were not always applicable to trafficking victims. For example, minimum standards required a mandatory medical evaluation for victims upon arrival at the shelter, but this would be traumatizing for some victims. The government provided foreign victims the same services as Armenian victims, and the law entitled foreign victims to a 30-day reflection period in which victims could recover before deciding whether to participate in criminal justice proceedings. The law also entitled foreign victims to receive a permanent residence permit.

The government continued to lack a formal victim-witness assistance program. The Criminal Procedure Code and a 2016 decree mandated some victim-witness assistance measures, but the government did not implement them. Observers continued to report investigations did not

incorporate victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches, such as the use of female medical professionals for forensics examinations with female victims. Guidelines restricted interviews to four hours for adults and restricted interviews for children to 90 minutes in the presence of a psychologist. Observers reported victims hesitated to participate in criminal justice proceedings due to an absence of confidentiality in public testimonies, creating a fear of retaliation from traffickers and stigmatization from their families and communities. Authorities lacked victim-centered approaches during court proceedings, and victims, including children, appeared in front of the traffickers in court. The law only permitted a victim's attorney to request restitution in criminal cases rather than prosecutors; however, judges often directed victims to file civil suits for compensation instead, and this occurred in at least one case during the reporting period. The law allowed investigators to place defendants' property in custody to fund potential civil claims, but this rarely occurred in practice.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts.

The Anti-Trafficking Ministerial Council and the Inter-Agency Working Group against Trafficking in Persons (IWGTP) monitored and carried out anti-trafficking efforts; the Ministerial Council did not meet for the second consecutive year, and IWGTP met two times. The government continued implementing its 2023-2025 NAP and allocated 45.6 million drams (\$117,276) for its implementation in 2024, compared with 37 million drams (\$94,870) the previous year. However, observers reported many of the goals and projects in the NAP depended on funding from donors and international organizations, which the government did not secure. The government allocated 9.6 million drams (\$24,615) for prevention efforts, an increase compared with 600,000 drams (\$1,540) in 2023. The government organized awareness campaigns, including television programs, trainings, and distribution of print materials. It also funded a website to make information on trafficking trends available to the public and hosted an annual awards ceremony for journalists publishing trafficking stories. MOLSA maintained a 24-hour hotline for social services, including trafficking victim services, and the government funded an NGO-run hotline for trafficking and sexual abuse; neither hotline reported receiving any trafficking-related calls. MOLSA sought input from survivors on the gaps of victim services to strengthen victim protection efforts.

The government did not regulate or monitor labor recruitment agencies or prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. Foreign workers could change employers without obtaining special permission. The government maintained bilateral labor agreements with Bulgaria, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. The government did not effectively enforce labor laws in either the formal or informal sectors. The Health and Labor Inspection Body conducted labor inspections, and inspectors received training on identifying trafficking cases; however, it did not have jurisdiction to conduct inspections of "non-legal" employers, such as small farms or illegal businesses. Police reported inspecting businesses involved in commercial sex and using checklists to screen individuals in commercial sex for trafficking indicators; however, the government did not report identifying any victims during these inspections. The government lacked a comprehensive system to respond to allegations of violations of children's rights, including child labor trafficking. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Armenia, and traffickers exploit victims from Armenia abroad. Traffickers, commonly family members, exploit Armenian women and children in sex trafficking; socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and women in commercial sex are particularly vulnerable. Traffickers exploit Armenian children and adults in labor trafficking, especially in farming. Socio-economically disadvantaged individuals, individuals with disabilities, migrant

workers, and displaced persons and refugees are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Traffickers exploit some Armenian migrants who seek employment in Russia often through recruitment fraud and recruitment fee-related debt bondage by labor brokers. There are reports that fraudulent labor recruiters recruit Indian migrants for employment in Armenia and exploit them in forced labor. Traffickers force children to beg or sell items on the street, such as tissues, and exploit children in agricultural work. Children working in construction, agriculture, and service provision within the country are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Persons with disabilities, men in rural areas with little education, and children in state childcare institutions remain highly vulnerable to labor trafficking. Traffickers increasingly used social media to recruit victims. The more than 100,000 displaced persons and refugees from Nagorno Karabakh are vulnerable to trafficking.