

USDOS – US Department of State

2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uzbekistan

UZBEKISTAN: Tier 2

The Government of Uzbekistan 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 to the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Uzbekistan was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included passing a new anti-trafficking law outlining improved victim protection protocols; amending the criminal code to explicitly criminalize child forced labor in the first offense; identifying more victims than in prior years; investigating, prosecuting, convicting, and sentencing significantly more traffickers than the previous reporting period, constituting the first quantitative enforcement increase in six years; and, for the first time, referring potential cases of official complicity in cotton harvest forced labor for criminal investigation. Authorities also undertook new efforts to repatriate and provide robust protection and reintegration services for hundreds of Uzbekistani women and children previously stranded in exploitative conditions that often amounted to trafficking in armed conflict zones in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; mitigated elevated risk among vulnerable populations during the pandemic by connecting nearly half a million unemployed migrant workers with job opportunities; and significantly reduced the incidence of forced labor in the annual cotton harvest—despite an increase in the size of the work force—through continued mechanization and privatization measures, increased oversight into labor practices, expanded provision of monitoring access to civil society and international organizations, and other factors. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Local officials in some districts continued to impose cotton production quotas in contravention of the national ban on the practice, perpetuating incentives for the mobilization of civil servants into cotton harvest forced labor in some areas of the country. Although the government continued to fine officials for labor violations, for the ninth consecutive year it did not criminally prosecute any officials for their alleged complicity in forced labor crimes. Existing laws establishing forced labor as an administrative violation at first offense continued to constrain effective enforcement.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue substantive action to end all government-compelled forced labor and hold complicit officials criminally accountable, including by increasing enforcement of the national ban on cotton production quotas at local levels. • Continue efforts to ensure all citizens are aware of their “right to refuse” participation in the cotton harvest or other work outside their professional duties, and of the requirement to pay for replacement workers, without suffering consequences. • Amend legislation to fully criminalize forced labor in the first offense. • Respecting due process, increase investigations and, when sufficient evidence exists, criminally prosecute, convict, sentence, and incarcerate persons complicit in human trafficking, including officials involved in mobilizing forced labor. • Establish and implement a legal framework to regulate labor brokers involved in the recruitment of seasonal agricultural workers. • Continue to grant and expand the access of independent observers to monitor cotton cultivation and fully cease the harassment, detention, and abuse of activists and journalists for documenting labor conditions. • Expand space for civil society and freedom of association for labor activists, including by streamlining and increasing registration of anti-trafficking NGOs, and by ensuring that local governments do not interfere with the formation of labor unions. • Continue training law enforcement officials and labor inspectors on proper identification and handling of trafficking cases, with an emphasis on anti-trafficking legislation and evidence gathering procedures. • Improve victim identification among, and provision of psychosocial care to, Uzbekistani families repatriated from armed conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. • Train all first responders to officially identify potential trafficking victims and refer them to care. • Improve anti-trafficking coordination and communication between government agencies, NGOs, and the international donor community by establishing a secretariat within the national trafficking in persons commission. • Amend legislation to ensure victims are not penalized for any unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, particularly for illegal border crossings or loss of personal identification documents.

- Encourage prosecutors to proactively seek victim restitution in criminal cases.
- Monitor private employment agencies for recruitment fees and ensure they are paid by employers rather than prospective job applicants.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. Article 135 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of three to five years' imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim and eight to 12 years' imprisonment for those involving a child victim, which were sufficiently stringent. However, with respect to sex trafficking, by allowing for house arrest in lieu of imprisonment, these penalties were not commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, Article 135 established the use of force, fraud, or coercion as aggravating factors rather than essential elements of the crime. Article 148 (2) of the criminal code addressed "administrative forced labor." Such offenses involving adult victims were only considered administrative violations for first time offenses; repeated offenses were penalized with a fine or imprisonment of up to two years. In February 2021, Article 148 (2) was amended to criminalize all "administrative forced labor" offenses involving children with a fine or up to three years' imprisonment. Civil society and government contacts alike noted these provisions, coupled with limited capacity to identify the crime among judicial officials and frontline officers, significantly constrained Uzbekistan's ability to prosecute and convict labor traffickers.

The government continued to provide increasingly detailed law enforcement data compared to previous reporting periods. Progress was, at times, constrained by gaps in technical capacity, lack of familiarity with existing laws, insufficient evidence gathering procedures, and poor coordination between the labor inspectorate and judicial officials. Some enforcement efforts suffered as a result of the pandemic, during which observers reported an increase in the prioritization of cases involving the sale of children, at the expense of anti-trafficking work. Some law enforcement officers were hesitant to investigate trafficking crimes due to a perception that cases would be too difficult to prosecute. Despite this, for the first time in six years, investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and incarcerations increased. The government reported conducting 566 investigations and prosecuting 93 cases – 51 cases of sexual exploitation, 39 of cases involving unspecified exploitation of children, and three of forced labor – involving 129 suspects, compared with 66 investigations and 53 prosecutions involving an unspecified number of defendants in 2019. Because of a tendency to conflate cases involving "sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16" with sex trafficking, it is possible some of the 566 reported investigations contained elements inconsistent with international law. For the second consecutive year, these figures included an increase in international investigations under the auspices of a tripartite anti-trafficking enforcement initiative between the governments of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan; 28 of the 93 prosecutions featured trafficking crimes committed abroad. Authorities also cooperated with Kazakhstani counterparts to extradite an Uzbekistani national following reports from labor migrants that the individual had recruited them and subsequently withheld their wages; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period. The government reported convicting 100 defendants for crimes involving trafficking in 2020, including 50 for sexual exploitation, six for forced labor, and 44 for "trafficking in minors," compared to 64 total in 2019. Of the 100 convicted traffickers, courts sentenced 33 to imprisonment, 35 to house arrest, one to correctional labor, and 20 to probation, compared with 18 imprisoned, 22 put under house arrest, and two fined in 2019. Four convicted traffickers received unreported sentences, and seven were granted amnesty (three amnesties in 2019). Uzbekistan's State Security Services also reported unspecified enforcement actions against 102 criminal groups for human trafficking crimes in 2020. Some victims reached financial settlements outside of the justice system, in some cases with the facilitation of low-level officials.

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) maintained an investigatory unit dedicated to trafficking crimes. A 2019 presidential decree mandated the MOI to establish a law enforcement trafficking data repository; this process was significantly delayed in 2020 due to the pandemic, but authorities reportedly resumed the work through a third-party organization prior to the end of the reporting period. In partnership with international organizations and civil society, the government continued to provide trafficking-specific training to police, judges, and other authorities, including the labor inspectorate. In addition to attending state-funded training, government officials participated in seminars and conferences sponsored by the government and led by NGOs, international organizations, and foreign governments.

The labor inspectorate continued to gather evidence against local *hokims* and other officials for their alleged involvement in cotton harvest-related crimes, including trafficking, and for the first time it reported referring six such cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for further investigation; authorities did not report the status of those cases. The government administratively penalized at least 170 officials—including 46 *hokims*, deputy *hokims*, and leaders of banks—for cotton harvest labor crimes during the reporting period, a decrease from 259 officials in 2019; fines totaled 653.2 million soum (\$62,380) (compared with 550 million soum, or \$52,520, in 2019). Amid law enforcement coordination challenges and legislative limitations establishing forced labor in the first

offense as an administrative violation, the government did not criminally charge, prosecute, or convict any government officials for their complicity in human trafficking cases for the ninth consecutive year. Police continued to arbitrarily detain and threaten LGBTQI+ persons under legislation criminalizing homosexuality, at times resorting to threats and physical abuse to extort bribes or coerce them into informant roles or pornography; authorities spuriously charged some LGBTQI+ persons under anti-prostitution provisions.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts. Authorities formally identified 150 victims of trafficking in 2020, compared with 95 in 2019; this marked the first increase in annual victim identification figures since 2012. However, 37 of these cases involved the sale of children, and the government did not report if these included sex trafficking or forced labor indicators in accordance with international law. Of the 150 victims, 138 were women and 12 were men (compared with 90 and five, respectively, in 2019). Sex traffickers exploited 89 of the victims, and labor traffickers exploited 12 victims (compared with 89 and six, respectively, in 2019); authorities did not report on the circumstances of the remaining 49 victims. At least 70 victims endured exploitation in Uzbekistan (15 in 2019), with the remainder exploited abroad. The government again did not identify any victims of foreign origin. NGOs identified and assisted 239 victims during the reporting period (579 in 2018 and 676 in 2017); the government did not report how many of these it referred (171 in 2019). NGOs filed 121 applications to initiate criminal cases on behalf of victims; authorities did not report how many of these culminated in official investigations (compared with 457 in 2018).

With the assistance of international partners, the government completed and promulgated a law that included provisions significantly enhancing victim protection procedures and policies. Per Article 27 of the law, victims of human trafficking were exempted from civil, administrative, and criminal liability for acts committed under coercion. The government also finalized victim identification and referral guidelines originally mandated in a 2019 presidential decree and initiated in conjunction with international partners, but key stakeholder ministries did not report on their implementation in 2020. International observers argued insufficient implementation of these new victim identification guidelines continued to put potential victims at risk of penalization, particularly among individuals in commercial sex and migrant workers. Current law did not explicitly exempt transnational sex and labor trafficking victims from facing a criminal penalty for illegally crossing international borders, which may have deterred some victims from reporting their traffickers. The closure of international borders as a pandemic mitigation measure significantly decreased irregular migration; in previous years, some victims initially faced criminal penalties for illegal border crossings.

The new victim identification and referral procedures outlined an expanded list of ministries authorized to make initial victim identification and approve victims for receipt of government assistance, after which cases would be referred to local trafficking in persons commissions for final verification. Officials authorized to identify trafficking victims could refer them to either a state-run shelter or NGOs for services. Civil society observers expressed concern that this new two-step process was not sufficiently detailed or inclusive of NGO roles, lacked victim-centered approaches outlined in relevant legislation, and was overly bureaucratic in nature, and might therefore incentivize territorial commissions to refer victims to NGO services directly rather than confirming victim designation. Victims were not required to file a criminal complaint to benefit from government-provided protection services; the government did not provide information on how many such individuals received assistance. Local officials regularly referred victims who did not wish to pursue a criminal case to NGO offices for assistance. Some victims were reluctant to contact or cooperate with law enforcement due to distrust in the authorities and fear for their personal and familial safety. Uzbekistan's diplomatic missions abroad helped repatriate 50 Uzbekistani victims during the reporting period (compared with 51 in 2019). The government also worked to repatriate thousands of Uzbekistani migrant workers stranded in Kazakhstan and Russia due to the pandemic-related closure of businesses and borders; authorities did not report specific measures to screen these groups for trafficking indicators. As part of its "*Mehr*" or "Compassion" campaign, the government also located and repatriated hundreds of Uzbekistani women and children who had traveled with their male relatives to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan and had subsequently been confined to camps, often in exploitative conditions. Although the government did not positively identify any of these women or children as victims of trafficking, it funded and provided them with shelter, education, limited psychosocial care, and other medical services for five-week cycles throughout the reporting period. Some NGO observers claimed capacity was low among psychosocial care providers in these facilities. Authorities also held online seminars to share best practices on rehabilitation and reintegration of these communities for Central Asian and Russian government counterparts.

In 2020, the government matched its 2019 allocation of 1.2 billion soum (\$114,590) to operate its Tashkent-based trafficking center for men, women, and children with official victim status. The government assisted 92 victims at this facility in 2020, compared with 220 victims in 2019—a decrease attributable to pandemic-related border closures and limitations on service availability. This center provided shelter, medical and psychological care, legal services, job placement

assistance, and restoration of lost identity documents. The center had the capacity to accommodate foreign victims, but the government has not served any foreign victims in the shelter since its opening in 2009. The government also operated 197 centers to assist women subjected to domestic violence, including trafficking victims; these centers were managed and funded by regional governments, some of which coordinated with local anti-trafficking organizations. Anti-trafficking NGOs continued to report favorable cooperation with the government. During the reporting period the government issued a presidential order affording NGOs additional support and legal protections, including expanded annual funding caps from foreign donors, increased state funding contributions, and administrative penalties for government officials or entities that interfere with their activities. However, civil society observers noted ongoing delays in NGO registration constrained some service provision. The government continued to provide in-kind support to local NGOs for the provision of victim assistance, such as food and clothing, and for the first time in recent years it reported provision of direct funding assistance to some anti-trafficking NGOs. Several NGOs also competed for and received a total of 461 million soum (\$44,020) in grants from a general governmental assistance fund (compared with 817 million soum, or \$78,020, in 2019). New anti-trafficking legislation strengthened language guaranteeing victims' confidentiality, but it was unclear if this applied to the divulgence of victims' identities in court proceedings. Although victims could bring civil suits against traffickers, such instances were rare due to the high cost of legal representation, which was neither provided by the government nor affordable to most victims. With the assistance of an NGO, at least 10 victims received compensation in 2020 (unreported in 2019).

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government maintained its National Commission on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor (the Commission) with the Chair of the Senate serving as the National Rapporteur. The Commission comprised two high-level sub-committees: one on trafficking in persons, chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs, and one on forced labor, chaired by the Minister of Employment and Labor Relations. The Commission directed the activities of regional commissions in 12 regions, one autonomous republic, and one independent city (Tashkent). The Commission continued to convene monthly, and the regional commissions met every 14 days, despite pandemic-related challenges. Members of Uzbekistan's anti-trafficking civil society landscape participated in the national and regional meetings. Some international observers described insufficient coordination and communication between the Commission and civil society partners in the absence of a secretariat structure. The government did not centrally allocate funding for the Commission, which instead required funding contributions from individual member ministries' budgets; this arrangement reportedly led to overreliance on NGO and international assistance. The government updated its national action plan to reflect international input in 2020 but did not provide information on these updates; it also maintained a roadmap developed by an NGO and a series of recommendations submitted to the government by an international organization during a previous reporting period.

Uzbekistan's cotton harvest was unimpeded by the pandemic in 2020. A combination of ongoing robust mechanization efforts, continued awareness-raising activities, continued consolidation of the cotton sector into a privatized "cluster"-based system, increased wages for cotton pickers, some improved recruitment practices, and the government-facilitated voluntary participation of hundreds of thousands of unemployed migrant workers as a pandemic-mitigation measure significantly reduced the incidence of forced labor in the 2020 harvest. According to the ILO, reports of forced labor in cotton picking decreased by 33 percent in 2020. The government continued to implement ILO recommendations, further reduced land allocated for cotton cultivation, and purchased more machinery to work toward the mechanization of the harvest. In 2020, the government reported increasing the total number of private textile-cotton clusters to 96 – nearly 30 more than the previous year – accounting for more than 90 percent of arable production land (an increase from 63 percent in 2019). The clusters processed cotton from cultivation to finished textile products and paid higher wages to workers. Approximately 30 percent of established cluster sites also provided technical services and methodological advice to participating farmers. The government reiterated a March 2020 presidential decree banning the imposition of cotton production quotas and warned local authorities against the harvest mobilization of students, in particular. However, some local officials continued to mobilize adults and children into compulsory cotton picking to meet local harvest benchmarks established in direct violation of the decree. Labor inspectors identified cases in which local *hokims* directed banks to send their employees into the cotton fields or find and/or pay for replacements through unregulated, informal channels; as in previous years, this de facto penalty system generated a lucrative means of extortion for corrupt officials. NGOs continued to report that many of the voluntary pickers preferred to be hired as replacement pickers by those seeking to avoid the cotton fields, as this enabled them to earn income beyond the standard picking wages. Farmers who were unable to fulfill illegal quotas risked losing the rights to farm their government-leased land. Media reports indicated – and some government officials acknowledged – that ongoing development of the privatized cluster system inadvertently generated other vulnerabilities, including avenues for private businesses to subject harvest workers to contract violations, loss of bargaining power or choice of cluster-affiliation, coerced cultivation of cotton under threat of land loss, wage

irregularities, and forced overtime. Some authorities reportedly expropriated land formerly leased or owned by individual farmers for the creation of new cluster sites without adequately compensating them, increasing their vulnerability to forced labor at those clusters. NGO observers noted the absence of a legal framework to ensure oversight of worker contracts and regulate and ensure proper licensing of labor recruitment intermediaries left seasonal agricultural workers vulnerable to forced labor in some cluster sites. The 2020 harvest marked the seventh consecutive year the government conducted a nationwide campaign to raise public awareness of its prohibition of child labor in the cotton harvest. The government continued to uphold this prohibition; while there were isolated reports of children working in the fields—a trend that may have increased due to family-directed mobilization of children in response to pandemic-related school closures and economic hardships—there continued to be no reports of systemic mobilization. The government, in coordination with the ILO, continued to conduct awareness-raising campaigns to ensure citizens were aware of their labor rights.

For the sixth consecutive year, the government allowed the ILO to monitor the cotton harvest for child and forced labor, and ILO monitors had unimpeded access to the cotton fields for observations and to interview laborers. For the first time, the government also issued official monitoring access permits to civil society groups. The ILO assessed that government entities compelled approximately 80,000 pickers out of an estimated two million-member workforce to work in the 2020 harvest—a significant decrease compared with 102,000 in 2019, 170,000 in 2018, and 336,000 in 2017. However, as was the case in previous years, in 2020 the annual rate in the reduction of forced laborers continued to slow. For the third year, authorities granted the ILO access to data acquired through the government's Cotton Harvest Feedback Mechanism, which included dedicated telephone hotlines and messaging applications for reports of labor violations; this mechanism and Federation of Trade Unions system received a total of 970 complaints, including 180 complaints related to wage irregularities and inadequate working conditions and 790 explicit allegations of forced labor, during the cotton harvest season (compared with 1,563 in 2019). The government continued to increase the size of the labor inspectorate, bringing the total number of labor investigators assigned to look into these complaints across the country to 600 (compared with an increase to 400 in 2019). Inspectors reported these complaints resulted in the positive identification of 101 cases of adult forced labor in the cotton harvest, leading to fines for at least 170 officials—a decrease from 259 officials in 2019; fines totaled 653.2 million soum (\$62,380) (550 million soum, or \$52,520, in 2019). Six of these cases were sent to criminal courts for additional investigation for the first time. User assessments of the feedback mechanism were unavailable in 2020; in previous harvests, observers reported concerns about the effectiveness of the mechanism, the credibility and efficacy of ensuing investigations, and fear of retaliation for its use. For the third year, the government included independent human rights activists in harvest monitoring, field interviews, awareness raising activities, and the review of cases gathered through the mechanism. Observers reported isolated incidents in which local government officials harassed and temporarily detained independent civil society activists who attempted to monitor the cotton harvest, at times under the pretext of quarantine requirements. Media, including state media outlets, continued to report on forced labor practices, problems, and violations, generally without penalization or censorship; however, at least one high-profile blogger was subjected to politically motivated arrest, detention, and repeat criminal charges after attempting to report on farmers' dissatisfaction with cluster model-related land management. As with service provision, delays in or refusal of NGO registration constrained some civil society efforts to monitor and assist the victims of forced labor in the cotton harvest. During the reporting period, local authorities reportedly harassed and threatened several activists in response to their efforts to establish Uzbekistan's first independent labor union.

In a prior reporting period, the government encouraged Ministers to use a special fund under the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations to recruit unemployed individuals for public works, instead of subjecting civil servants and students to forced labor therein. In 2020, the government allocated 262 billion soum (\$25 million) to this fund (unreported in 2019; 714 billion in 2018), through which it successfully provided job opportunities to nearly half a million Uzbekistani nationals left suddenly unemployed by the pandemic, assuaging a significant economic driver of potential exploitation. Unlike in 2019, the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations did not provide information on the amount of fines for labor violations it contributed to the fund (6.6 billion soum, or \$630,260, in 2019). An NGO reported the central government continued to set silk cocoon production quotas, which may have incentivized government officials to coerce in-home silk production in some communities. The government continued to call for *hashar*, or volunteer workdays, throughout the country; some local leaders characterized cotton picking and street cleaning as *hashar*.

The government continued to provide support to labor migrants abroad, including victims of forced labor, and allocated a budget of 8.5 billion soum (\$811,690); this significant decrease from 200 billion soum (\$19.1 million) in 2019 was likely attributable to the pandemic-related decline in labor migration. Uzbekistan's Agency for Foreign Labor Migration (the Agency) continued outreach to prospective labor migrants, serving to reduce potential risks of trafficking among this population. The Agency also conducted pre-departure consultations, through which it provided information on primary destination countries' labor and migration laws – especially Russia and Kazakhstan; issued

some prospective migrant workers health insurance; and provided micro-loans to those who could not find work abroad. The government also operated a 24-hour hotline in Russia that provided Uzbekistani labor migrants with legal advice, advised them of their rights, and directed them to the nearest consulate for assistance. The government maintained bilateral employment agreements outlining citizens' labor rights with Japan, Poland, Russia, South Korea, and Turkey; during the reporting period, it signed a new agreement on migrant worker rights with Kazakhstan, negotiated improvements to the aforementioned agreement with Russia, and worked with Moscow municipal authorities to establish a migrant labor recruitment and training center in Tashkent. Private companies, including foreign and local, had official permission from the government to recruit Uzbekistani citizens for jobs abroad and within Uzbekistan. Although the companies were required to obtain recruitment licenses, the government did not report the number of such licenses granted. During the reporting period, the government banned the imposition of recruitment fees on workers seeking employment abroad, addressing a longstanding recommendation from international observers; however, it was unclear to what extent authorities enforced this ban.

The government's expanded labor inspectorate reported conducting 16,671 inspections and investigations in 2020, although it did not specify how many were initiated by worker complaints (compared with 21,172 inspections and 8,322 complaint investigations in 2019). These inspections and investigations culminated in the identification of more than 15,000 employment law violations. As in previous years, the inspectorate did not report screening for trafficking indicators or referring any cases for criminal investigation as part of these inspections. Labor inspectors were not empowered to bring criminal charges for first time violations of the law against forced labor, and international observers noted some inspectors also demonstrated limited comfort with their administrative enforcement mandate. Authorities continued to conduct public awareness efforts on transnational sex and labor trafficking, including through events, print media, television, and radio, often in partnership with and in-kind support to NGOs. Authorities worked with a diaspora organization in Tashkent to secure citizenship documentation for over 150 previously stateless Uyghur residents. The government maintained a 24-hour hotline; in 2020 the line received 318 trafficking-related phone calls, from which 93 were identified as trafficking cases (422 and 75, respectively, in 2019). An NGO maintained a foreign donor-funded hotline. The government did not conduct efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit Uzbekistani victims domestically and abroad, and some foreign nationals may be vulnerable to trafficking within Uzbekistan. Forced labor in the annual cotton harvest continues to decrease as a function of ongoing national reforms within the sector; however, local officials in several areas of the country continue to subject thousands of students, teachers, emergency personnel, medical workers, soldiers, and other civil servants into cotton picking in furtherance of illegal local production quotas. Some adults who refuse to pick cotton, are unable or unwilling to pay for a replacement worker, or do not fulfill their daily quota, at times face the loss of social benefits, termination of employment, or other forms of harassment. Some employees and market vendors choose to hire a replacement picker directly, pay a fee for the mobilizer to find a replacement picker, or pay a fine, rather than pick cotton; this generates a coercive arrangement that penalizes those who choose not to participate in the harvest while also creating a lucrative means of extortion for corrupt managers and officials. Private companies in some regions mobilize employees for the harvest under threat of increased government inspections of, and taxes on, their operations. Farmers forced to vacate and remit their land to private cotton operators are at high risk of forced labor, including in the cluster sites established on their former land, due to disruption of livelihoods and ensuing economic hardships.

The government subjects adults to forced labor in other sectors as well. Some local officials reportedly provide silkworms to farmers and force them to sign contracts stating they will agree to cultivate silk cocoons in furtherance of national production quotas. Despite a 2018 government prohibition on the practice, some local officials continue to force teachers, students (including children), private businesses employees, and others to work in construction and other forms of non-cotton agriculture, and to clean parks, streets, and buildings. Officials occasionally cast these compulsory tasks as part of Uzbekistan's traditional *hashar* system, under which community members are expected to perform voluntary work for communal benefit. Criminalization of same-sex relationships between men makes some members of Uzbekistan's LGBTQI+ communities vulnerable to police abuse, extortion, and coercion into pornography and informant roles; widespread social stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals also compound their vulnerability to family-brokered forced marriages that may feature corollary sex trafficking or forced labor indicators. Children in institutions are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Uzbekistani nationals domestically in brothels, clubs, and private residences.

Traffickers exploit Uzbekistani nationals in sex trafficking and forced labor in the Middle East, including in Bahrain, Iran, and United Arab Emirates; in Europe, including Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, and Turkey; and in Central, South, and East Asia, including in Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, respectively. Uzbekistani nationals are subjected to forced labor in these regions in the

construction, transportation, oil and gas, agricultural, retail, and food sectors. Hundreds of thousands of Uzbekistani migrant workers are at elevated risk of trafficking within Russia, where employers and authorities charge high work permit fees that catalyze debt-based coercion, subject them to poor living and working conditions, and garnish or withhold their wages; these vulnerabilities are often compounded by Russian employers' failure to register Uzbekistani migrant workers with the relevant authorities. Over half of Uzbekistani migrant workers reportedly forego the complex bureaucratic processes required to obtain proper documentation, exacerbating their vulnerability within the system. Some Uzbekistani men travel to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to fight alongside or seek employment within armed groups and are subsequently subjected to forced labor in cooking, cleaning, and portering. Uzbekistani women and children traveling with these men are also vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor on arrival; many are reportedly placed alongside other Uzbekistani family members in makeshift camp communities, where their travel and identity documentation is confiscated and their freedom of movement is restricted. Many of these women report having lost their husbands to armed conflict, after which their economic hardships and confinement in the camps make them vulnerable to coercive local marriages that may feature corollary sex trafficking or forced labor indicators.

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