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2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Tajikistan

TAJIKISTAN (Tier 2)

The Government of Tajikistan 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, Tajikistan was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, referring more identified victims to care, drafting a new anti-trafficking NAP, and increasing efforts to repatriate trafficking victims from abroad. Additionally, the government trained more officials and conducted awareness-raising activities on the ban on child labor in the cotton harvest for the first time in two years. The government-run National Trafficking in Persons Center assisted the highest number of trafficking victims since 2018. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government prosecuted and convicted fewer traffickers and did not report any criminal investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. Additionally, observers reported allegations of officials mobilizing children in the annual cotton harvest, and there was a lack of oversight in sectors with forced labor risks.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive National Action Plan.

- Using the NRM and victim identification procedures, proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among populations vulnerable to trafficking.
- Invite and grant independent observers full access to freely and independently monitor cotton cultivation and deliver an unfiltered report of the annual cotton harvest and increase oversight of provincial and local authorities' seasonal labor recruitment processes to ensure no adults or children are subjected to forced labor in the cotton harvest, and hold those in violation criminally accountable.
- Increase the availability and quality of protection services – including short-term shelter, long-term housing, counseling, and medical care – for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with civil society service providers.
- Improve the collection of anti-trafficking law enforcement data, including disaggregation of data by type of exploitation (forced labor and sex trafficking) for investigations, prosecutions, and convictions.
- Strengthen the capacity of labor inspectors to identify forced labor victims and to report potential trafficking cases to the police including by allowing labor inspectors unfettered access to worksites, such as farms participating in the cotton harvest, for unannounced inspections and increasing training on victim identifications and procedures.
- Increase anti-trafficking training and guidance for government employees, including law enforcement officers, border guards, and customs officials, to prevent their engagement in or facilitation of trafficking crimes and to increase their capacity to identify and assist victims domestically and abroad, including during repatriations and screening of refugees and asylum-seekers.
- Implement a victim-witness assistance program and train law enforcement and judicial officials on a victim-centered approach for the treatment of victims and witnesses of trafficking crimes during investigations and court proceedings.
- Increase awareness of predeparture and post-return support services available to Tajik migrant workers and strengthen the collection of statistics on labor migration trends.
- Monitor private employment agencies for recruitment fees charged to workers and take steps to eliminate employee-paid fees.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts.

Article 130.1 and Article 167 of the criminal code criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to eight years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to

sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Article 167 defined child trafficking broadly to include illegal adoption without the purpose of exploitation; as such, it was difficult to ascertain how many cases investigated under Article 167 featured elements consistent with the international law definition of trafficking.

In 2024, the government reported investigating 57 trafficking cases – two for forced labor and 55 for unspecified forms of trafficking – compared with 60 investigations in 2023 and continued two ongoing investigations from prior years. The government reported 19 prosecutions involving 25 suspects. Courts convicted 13 traffickers under various statutes, including articles of the penal code not related to trafficking. These efforts compare with 23 prosecutions and convictions in 2023. While the government made efforts to improve its data collection system, authorities occasionally conflated forced labor and sex trafficking crimes with cases involving solely migrant smuggling or illegal adoption.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. The government banned the practice of mobilizing schoolchildren and students for the cotton harvest several years ago; however, sources alleged a small number of authorities mobilized children for the harvest under the guise of “Hashar” (collective community work). The government allegedly used coercive practices to enlist young men into the military.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs had a specialized anti-trafficking section within its Combating Organized Crime Directorate, which continued to identify most trafficking cases in Tajikistan. Throughout the reporting period, the government funded and organized human trafficking trainings for officials at the national, district, and city levels. The government sponsored national training center continued to provide anti-trafficking training to incoming police cadets as part of its curriculum. Additionally, the government collaborated with neighboring countries to facilitate information sharing among regional law enforcement bodies and signed a bilateral mutual legal assistance agreement with the Government of Malaysia. The government did not allocate a separate budget for law enforcement as part of the implementation of the anti-trafficking law or the NAP.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts.

Authorities identified 272 victims of trafficking (238 victims of forced labor and 34 victims of sex trafficking), compared with 47 victims during the

previous reporting period. The government referred 52 victims to services, compared with 11 victims referred in the previous reporting period. The government continued to use an NRM that included formal written procedures outlining screening for victim identification and referral. The government also reported its relevant ministries, including law enforcement, labor inspectors, and social welfare departments had procedures to identify and assist trafficking victims. The government reported it previously drafted uniform victim identification procedures in collaboration with an international organization, but did not adopt them. However, unlike the previous year, the government collaborated with an international organization to train officials on implementation of the NRM and victim identification procedures. Observers previously reported unclear roles and responsibilities among key anti-trafficking officials and a lack of uniform victim identification procedures inhibited protection efforts.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoH) managed the National Trafficking in Persons Center, the government-run shelter with specialized care for trafficking victims, which also assisted victims of domestic violence. The shelter provided food, psychological care, and some medical assistance, and assisted 52 trafficking victims in 2024, a significant increase compared with 25 victims in 2023. The government placed child victims in Ministry of Interior Affairs-operated reception centers and returned some to their families. Funding for victim services and training for shelter staff was limited, and the government heavily relied upon civil society organizations for the provision of victim assistance, including for legal services. The government allocated 1,406,407 somoni ($139,540) total for victim services compared with 1,454,267 somoni total ($144,306) in 2023. The government funded several NGO-run shelters for victims of domestic violence, which could also assist trafficking victims. Some women among sex trafficking victims were reluctant to seek protection services because of social norms that stigmatized women among victims of sexual exploitation. The government did not provide protection for victim-witnesses or their advocates. The government provides victims of human trafficking with a lawyer during criminal proceedings. The 2014 anti-trafficking law also called for the establishment of a victim compensation fund, which had not yet been established. Foreign victims who agreed to cooperate with law enforcement could request temporary residency, subject to a one-year extension upon completion of criminal proceedings; the government did not report issuing such status in 2024. In previous years, there were reports of intimidation and threats faced by civil society organizations assisting trafficking victims, which affected their ability to provide protection services. The law did not link other benefits to victims' participation in trials, and protection services were available regardless of legal status or prior consent to participate in criminal justice proceedings. The government provided assistance to 51 vulnerable labor migrants returning from Russia with the support of foreign donors and international organizations.

Law enforcement officers reported screening for potential sex trafficking victims during law enforcement operations involving businesses suspected of engaging in commercial sex. The government increased efforts to repatriate Tajik victims identified abroad, repatriating 13 Tajik victims, including seven Tajik citizens from Iran, and collaborated with an international organization to repatriate six more victims (three from Myanmar, two from the United Arab Emirates, and one from Russia).

PREVENTION

The government slightly increased efforts to prevent trafficking.

The Inter-Ministerial Commission on Combatting Trafficking in Persons (the Commission), led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, coordinated anti-trafficking efforts and met twice during the reporting period. The government continued implementation of the 2022 – 2024 NAP and developed a new NAP for 2025 – 2027, which remained pending by the end of the reporting period. The government continued to implement national strategies on migration and on human rights, which had activities devoted to combating trafficking. With support from an international organization, the government operated a 24-hour hotline for potential victims, which did not result in any victim identifications according to observers. The government collaborated with civil society (including by providing in-kind support) for awareness-raising activities on human trafficking, and supported awareness-raising activities addressing the ban on child labor in the cotton harvest for the first time in two years.

The government reported training labor inspectors and conducting inspections in several sectors, including cotton harvesting, and identified nine cases of child labor in 2024. The government also reported conducting 106 unannounced inspections in sectors vulnerable to trafficking. Observers reported officials had no oversight of working conditions in construction projects affiliated with China-based companies where locals and Chinese nationals work, which increased vulnerabilities to forced labor. The government required entities engaged in worker recruitment for employment abroad to have a license from migration authorities, with penalties for violations. As part of the development of the new 2025-2027 NAP, the Commission created a working group, which in part developed a set of recommendations to improve government oversight of employment agencies, individual recruiters, and sub-brokers. The government maintained labor recruitment agreements with Kazakhstan, Russia, South Korea, Qatar, and several European countries. The Ministry of Labor (MOL), in collaboration with international organizations, continued to operate pre-departure counseling centers in different regions to conduct anti-trafficking awareness raising and pre-departure orientations. The MOL additionally offered labor migrants assistance before leaving the country and provided information on

diversifying geographical options for work abroad. However, with limited data collection and a lack of interagency coordination continuing to constrain effective prevention measures among labor migrants, some Tajik migrant workers were not aware of available support services. The government distributed awareness material on safe migration for labor migrants. The government continued to support returning migrants with employment assistance, vocational training, financial services, and employment in paid public works. In 2024, the government repatriated 334 citizens of Tajikistan from Syria including 259 children. The government provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel. The government made no 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 victims from Tajikistan abroad and, to a lesser extent, traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims within Tajikistan. Labor traffickers exploit Tajik men and women in the service, agriculture, and construction sectors primarily in Kazakhstan, Latvia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in other neighboring Central Asian countries, Türkiye, and Afghanistan. Labor traffickers exploit men in agriculture, construction, and at markets in Tajikistan. Citizens of Tajikistan are subjected to forced criminality in online scam operations in Burma. According to an international organization, most internal trafficking cases involved women and girls in sex trafficking or domestic servitude. Sex traffickers exploit women and children from Tajikistan most commonly in Russia, Türkiye, and the UAE, but also in Afghanistan, Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, and Saudi Arabia and within Tajikistan. Traffickers primarily recruit through job offers via friends, neighbors, or illegal employment agencies.

Migrants from Tajikistan, particularly inmates in Russian prisons and those that are undocumented, are vulnerable to forced recruitment to fight in the Russia-Ukraine war recruited with the promise of Russian citizenship. Nationals from Tajikistan employed by Russian companies operating in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory have reportedly experienced situations that featured corollary forced labor indicators. Some children of Tajik ISIS combatants in Iraq and Syria are reportedly trained for deployment in combatant roles. Traffickers transport Tajik women and girls to Afghanistan and force them into marriages featuring elements of sex trafficking and forced domestic service, including through debt-based coercion. Traffickers exploit Tajik children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including forced begging and forced criminality, in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Tajik adults may have been subjected to forced labor in agriculture during Tajikistan's cotton harvest, and some schoolchildren and university students were also compelled to participate in the harvest. Tajik farmers report some local authorities impose annual cotton production targets, which could create pressure to mobilize citizens into the cotton harvest. Prior reports noted the government mobilized some citizens to perform public works – including state employees, as part of provincial authorities' efforts to increase participation in the annual cotton harvest, and children and young adults to perform at state-led events which included indicators of forced labor. Private companies reportedly used "subbotnik" (a Soviet-era volunteering tradition) to get their employees to work overtime without pay. The government banned the practice of mobilizing schoolchildren and students for the cotton harvest several years ago; however, in previous years sources alleged authorities mobilized children for the harvest under the guise of "Hashar" (collective community work). The government reportedly uses coercive methods to recruit young men into the military. The government reportedly subjects some citizens to participate in public works. Gaps in social protections, discrimination against women, and limited access to education and employment in Tajikistan increase vulnerabilities to trafficking for rural women, with the majority working in the informal sector. Tajik nationals employed by Chinese government owned companies engaged in infrastructure projects experience wage irregularities, threats of termination, and other labor rights violations that may be indicative of forced labor. Some Afghan and Bangladeshi citizens are victims of forced labor in Tajikistan, including in the construction industry. According to an international organization, there are over 12,000 refugees, stateless inhabitants, and asylum-seekers in Tajikistan, mostly Afghans, who are vulnerable to trafficking. The process to obtain refugee status often involved paying excessive bribes, increasing vulnerabilities to trafficking; many face the risk of deportation, even with official refugee status. Tajik nationals are vulnerable to forced labor in illegal "artisanal" coal mines located near formalized commercial mining operations. Some individuals are vulnerable to trafficking on the basis of their sexual orientation or identity.

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