

# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Saudi Arabia

## SAUDI ARABIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Saudi Arabia 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, Saudi Arabia remained on Tier 2. These efforts included adding liaison officers to the NRM to improve coordination with law enforcement on potential trafficking cases; proactively screening for trafficking indicators in detention centers; and significantly increasing funding for prevention measures. The government made efforts to prevent trafficking among domestic workers, including by implementing new legal protections, including domestic workers in the Wage Protection System (WPS), and removing the ability for employers to file “absconding” charges against such workers. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The Labor Reform Initiative (LRI) continued to exclude domestic workers, which increased vulnerabilities to labor trafficking. Due to inconsistent screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government did not address ongoing concerns of official complicity, including by government officials and members of the royal family, in trafficking crimes. The government provided limited specialized services to victims, and shelter options for male victims and certain female victims remained inadequate. The government did not fully implement or enforce penalties within the WPS and did not consider severe wage theft as a trafficking indicator, increasing workers’ vulnerability to debt bondage. Obstacles attempting to change jobs without employer permission rendered many workers unable to leave potential trafficking situations.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide equal protections to domestic workers as private sector workers receive under recent labor reforms to ensure domestic workers’ freedom to change jobs or obtain an exit visa without employer consent and not only in abusive employment situations.
- Strengthen efforts to criminally investigate passport confiscation, wage theft, contract switching, restrictions on labor mobility, worker-paid recruitment fees, and worker abuse as potential trafficking crimes.
- Expand labor inspections, particularly of large-scale development projects, labor-supply companies, and recruitment agencies, to identify potential trafficking crimes.
- Ensure adequate implementation of the new Domestic Worker Regulation by raising awareness of new protections with workers and employers, enhancing monitoring of domestic worker employment, and holding noncompliant employers accountable with penalties.
- Remove employers’ ability to unilaterally request an exit visa for a worker as retaliation against job transfer.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked by proactively screening for trafficking among those arrested for immigration and “prostitution” violations, and among foreign workers who flee abusive employers and face countercharges and deportation.
- Enhance oversight of recruitment agencies to deter non-compliant and unlicensed agents from facilitating unconsented transfers of domestic workers to new employers and hold fraudulent labor recruiters and complicit officials criminally accountable.

- Fully implement the WPS, including holding accountable violators with deterrent penalties, ensuring officials screen all wage theft cases for other trafficking indicators, and referring such cases for criminal prosecution.
- Create specialized shelter options for all trafficking victims and provide shelter for male victims and female victims in employment sectors other than domestic work.
- Approve and enact pending amendments to the anti-trafficking law to remove sentencing provisions that allow fines in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking offenses.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for all convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Regularly use and train officials on the NRM, to provide appropriate care to victims among vulnerable populations, including domestic workers, undocumented foreign workers, deportees, persons in commercial sex, Chinese nationals, and Cuban regime-affiliated workers, such as medical professionals.

## PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The 2009 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed punishments of up to 15 years' imprisonment, a fine of up to one million Saudi Arabian riyal (SAR) (\$266,670), or both; penalties increased under aggravating circumstances, including for trafficking crimes involving a female or child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent; however, by allowing for a fine in lieu of imprisonment, the penalties for sex trafficking were not commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as kidnapping, false imprisonment, or sexual abuse. In 2021, the government completed a review of seven suggested amendments to the 2009 law, which included penalties that combined imprisonment and fines for convicted traffickers, establishing a minimum sentence of three years and criminalization of personal document confiscation, such as passports. The Council of Ministers recommended finalizing the amendments, but the government did not pass the amendments for the third consecutive reporting period.

During the reporting period, the government investigated 369 potential trafficking cases (34 sex trafficking, 173 labor trafficking and 162 forced begging and "slavery-like practices") involving 502 alleged traffickers, a significant increase compared with 244 investigations in the previous reporting period. The government prosecuted 137 individuals, a significant increase compared with 89 prosecutions in the previous reporting period. Of the 137 prosecutions, 13 were for sex trafficking, 83 were for labor trafficking, and 41 were for forced begging or "slavery-like practices." Officials reported 18 prosecutions initiated in previous reporting periods remained ongoing. Courts convicted 196 traffickers under the 2009 anti-trafficking law, an increase compared with 141 convictions in the previous reporting period. Of the 196 convictions, 130 were for sex trafficking, 62 were for labor trafficking, and four were for forced begging or "slavery-like practices." Judges sentenced convicted traffickers to terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 days to 25 years. One sex trafficker received fines in lieu of imprisonment, and one labor trafficker received imprisonment for 10 days. Ninety-four percent of convicted traffickers received imprisonment of one year or more (compared with 79 percent and 54 percent in the previous two reporting periods). Unlike previous years, sex and labor traffickers received similar penalties.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees or members of the royal family, complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. In March 2025, media reported government officials and members of the royal family had financial ties to recruitment agencies complicit in exploitative recruitment of East African migrant workers, particularly domestic workers.

The government continued to utilize the specialized anti-trafficking unit within the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO), while local police stations within the Ministry of Interior (MOI) handled

trafficking cases through relevant human rights departments that employed specialized anti-trafficking officers. All stakeholders referred alleged trafficking cases to the MOI's human rights departments for initial investigation; the MOI then referred cases to the PPO to ensure the case received an official case tracking number. The PPO required police to collect evidence within a 24-hour period before referring the case to the PPO's specialized investigators to review such evidence and build the case; finally, the PPO's specialized investigators referred cases to a three-member committee of specialized prosecutors to determine whether an alleged case met the definition of trafficking. If confirmed as a trafficking case, officials referred the case to court and referred all victims involved in the case to care. The PPO maintained 17 trafficking-specific, operational investigative sub-units that worked to identify potential trafficking cases among existing criminal cases. Specialized judges presided over cases in all levels of courts across the country. Some government officials continued to misclassify trafficking cases as administrative, immigration, or labor violations without routinely undertaking criminal investigations, which resulted in lesser penalties and weakened deterrence.

The government, both independently and in partnership with international organizations, provided training for various stakeholders on several anti-trafficking topics, including victim identification and referral, ethical recruitment practices, distinguishing labor violations from labor trafficking, trauma-informed and victim-centered assistance, providing legal assistance to victims, interviewing techniques, inspection procedures, evidence collection, and criminal investigative procedures during trafficking trials, among others. Despite having a limited role in evidence collection for alleged trafficking cases, experts noted law enforcement remained the most likely government entity to interact with potential victims and encouraged an increased focus to train such officials on proactive victim identification.

## PROTECTION

The government made mixed victim protection efforts.

The government identified and referred 536 victims to care, compared with 432 victims identified and 348 referred in the previous reporting period. Of the 536 victims identified, traffickers exploited 212 in labor trafficking, 62 in sex trafficking, and 262 in forced begging and "slavery-like practices." The victims were nationals of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda, the United States, Vietnam, and Yemen. In addition, an international organization identified and referred three female labor trafficking victims to care at the government shelter.

The government allocated 55 million SAR (\$14,666,670) for victim protection, assistance, and shelter management. The government continued to use Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD)-operated shelters managed by a private entity. MHRSD shelters provided assistance for victims of forced begging in Mecca, Jeddah, Dammam, Medina, Qassim, and Abha, in addition to welfare centers for vulnerable populations, such as victims of domestic violence and trafficking, in 13 locations throughout the Kingdom. Child victims received care at MHRSD social care centers. Each shelter provided accommodation, social services, interpretation services, health care, job placement, counseling, education, and legal assistance. The government offered these services to all 536 identified victims during the reporting period; four victims received cash assistance from its victim assistance fund, compared with providing 11 victims cash assistance in the previous reporting period. Of the 536 victims referred to care, the government reported most accepted services the government offered. The government reported some victims sought to immediately repatriate or stay at their embassy-provided shelter. Diplomats from labor-source countries had regular access to their nationals residing in government-run shelters and reported conditions and quality of services in the shelters varied slightly across the Kingdom but were overall satisfactory and safe; observers reported services available at the government shelters met basic needs, while specialized services were provided on a limited basis. Some embassies and

consulates – including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uganda – also operated shelters for their respective nationals.

The government required all licensed and registered recruitment agencies to have shelters available for exploited workers. In March 2025, media reported members of the royal family had financial ties to a recruitment agency providing shelter to workers, including potential trafficking victims; the agency's staff allegedly demanded payments from workers staying in its shelter to enable their return home. The MHRSD welfare centers provided care to female domestic workers and reportedly could provide shelter for male victims or female victims exploited in other sectors; while the government referred 107 identified male victims to shelter, it did not report if the victims accepted shelter or received other assistance. The government previously signed an MOU with a government-supported civil society organization to manage a trafficking shelter in Riyadh; the establishment of the shelter remained pending for the second consecutive year due to government delays in processing the organization's certification.

The government continued to utilize its NRM to identify potential victims and refer them to care. The government reported the threshold for a case to be included in the NRM was low, given the large foreign worker population in the Kingdom and the inherent vulnerability to trafficking. Officials entered data on the identification and referrals of potential trafficking victims in the NRM system through various hotlines, apps, and social media, or through MHRSD when labor inspectors identified potential victims; NRM liaison officers in each province were the first to receive a victim or case when it entered the NRM and were responsible for determining whether a case exhibited trafficking indicators, versus labor exploitation or other abuse, and referring potential trafficking cases to law enforcement for further investigation. In September 2024, the Minister of Interior issued a circular to nominate additional law enforcement representatives – including those from public security, immigration and border guard units – to act as liaison officers within the NRM to expedite case referral. The government continued to implement the second edition of the NRM and its procedural manual to ensure expedited and trauma-informed provision of services to all potential victims immediately following identification. In September 2024, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) established a working group to fully digitize the NRM in an effort to streamline referral procedures and enhance coordination between entities and liaison officers. The government continued to implement an NRM policy requiring police to allow potential victims to spend at least three days at the shelter before taking a statement and beginning a formal investigation. The government coordinated with labor-source country embassies on victim identification and referral and received 29 referrals of potential trafficking cases from such embassies.

Migrant workers, media, and rights groups continued to report workers were subjected to exploitative labor practices, including unpaid wages, passport retention, physical or sexual abuse, unlawful worker-paid recruitment fees, denied freedom of movement and/or substandard working conditions – all trafficking indicators. The government mandated law enforcement, including immigration officials and detention staff, to screen all migrants in detention centers pending deportation proceedings for trafficking indicators. NCCHT's previously established screening committees continued to manage the identification of potential victims at detention centers following screening procedures. The PPO continued to direct all its branches and law enforcement agencies to cease deportation of any potential trafficking victims or anyone involved in an active trafficking case without the PPO's prior approval, and the government continued to instruct each circuit court to screen defendants for potential trafficking indicators and to drop pending charges against identified trafficking victims. The government reported immigration officials identified 128 victims of unspecified exploitation while in detention via screening and referred them to care; this was a significant increase from the identification of three potential victims during such processes in the previous reporting period.

Due to inadequate screening among populations vulnerable to trafficking, such as migrants in detention, migrant workers, and individuals in commercial sex, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Reports indicated Saudi authorities regularly detained, fined, and/or jailed foreign migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, for

immigration violations or “prostitution” offenses committed as a result of being trafficked. In some cases, particularly in rural communities, police returned individuals exhibiting indicators of trafficking to their employers without being screened for trafficking indicators, increasing their risk of re-trafficking. In February 2025, MOI established a police unit – the General Directorate for Community Security and Combating Human Trafficking – to target “immoral acts” and begging. Media and observers reported the unit focused on arresting individuals in commercial sex, including potential trafficking victims, rather than sex traffickers or buyers.

The government provided all identified trafficking victims the option of remaining in the country during judicial proceedings – either in a shelter or via transfer to a new employer, or alternatively an immediate exit visa; these benefits were not dependent on cooperation with law enforcement or case outcome. The government reported it provided legal alternatives to the removal of foreign trafficking victims to countries where they might face retribution or hardship and could coordinate with international organizations to repatriate a victim to a third country if needed. The government repatriated 85 individuals to their countries of origin. The government continued to allow victims and potential victims to work while their labor dispute or criminal case was adjudicated, regardless of whether they resided in a shelter and if their work permits had expired; the government reported 61 victims received work permits during the reporting period. The government reported allowing victims to submit testimony in written form or remotely via recording, and it ensured victims’ identities remained confidential. The government reported law enforcement only took a potential victim’s testimony with informed consent. The government continued to allow all potential trafficking victims who desired to proceed with a legal case, but also wanted to voluntarily be repatriated, to be assigned a pro bono attorney. The law entitled trafficking victims to legal assistance, security protection, translation services, and the right to immediate repatriation or continued residence in Saudi Arabia until resolution of the case, in addition to medical and psychological care, shelter, and rehabilitation. Ministerial Resolution No. 329 of 2024 granted judicial officials the authority to ensure necessary protections for witnesses and victims against threats, assault, intimidation, or retaliation, and the government established a whistleblower protection center in April 2024.

The government reported victims and potential victims participated in law enforcement proceedings at various stages, with 128 participating in trial, 164 receiving legal services, and five appointed a pro bono attorney. Officials permitted victims to obtain compensation directly from the government and/or by filing civil suits against traffickers; however, such settlements rarely took place and generally occurred outside of civil court proceedings through government-supported mediation efforts. These proceedings often did not entail criminal prosecution, and officials preferred to reimburse back-wages informally and/or assist in repatriating the victims. The government could award restitution during criminal proceedings; one victim was awarded restitution totaling 228,400 SAR (\$60,907) during the reporting period.

## **PREVENTION**

The government increased prevention efforts.

The NCCHT – composed of members of relevant government ministries – led government anti-trafficking efforts; it met 11 times as a full committee and dedicated additional sub-meetings to discuss and coordinate NCCHT responses to specific trafficking cases identified via the NRM. The government continued to implement its 2024-2027 NAP in coordination with two international organizations. The NCCHT, through its members, allocated 36,502,844 SAR (\$9,734,092) to support prevention efforts, including the committees’ activities, training programs, awareness campaigns, and implementing its NAP; this was a significant increase compared with allocating 15,542,182 SAR (\$4,144,582) in the previous reporting period. In December 2024, the government renewed an agreement with an international organization to continue cooperation and build capacity to combat human trafficking, including implementation of the NAP. MHRSD organized four workshops with embassies of several labor-source countries to identify challenges and coordinate on requests related to labor conditions of migrant workers, highlight available MHRSD services,

and educate diplomats on foreign workers' legal protections in the country. In January 2025, the government adopted a National Policy for the Elimination of Forced Labor, which aimed to take measures to eliminate forced labor, protect victims and enhance access to justice, and require stricter labor monitoring and stronger penalties for abuses.

The government continued to raise awareness of trafficking, targeting employers, migrant workers, labor-source country embassies, and the general public. The NCCHT and HRC made awareness materials publicly available via their websites, social media, and in printed materials. The HRC also launched a specific campaign focused on the new domestic worker regulations, targeting both workers and employers. The HRC cooperated with the King Abdulaziz Center for International Dialogue to publish a questionnaire to measure community awareness of human trafficking to inform future awareness raising efforts. The NCCHT, in coordination with an international organization, organized an exchange visit with the Government of Austria to discuss best practices on interagency coordination, engaging with victims, and referral mechanisms.

MHRSD officials operated a 24-hour call center that could receive calls in nine major labor-source country languages; the hotline number was included in pamphlets given to all foreign workers who entered the Kingdom. The MOI's crime reporting app, "Kolna Amn," allowed users to report trafficking crimes and was available in Arabic and English. The HRC operated a separate call center staffed with operators trained on identifying potential trafficking cases. The NCCHT continued to allow individuals to submit information on potential trafficking crimes through its website and reported receiving 52 trafficking-related reports. The government regularly shared all hotline numbers on social media platforms; furthermore, all hotline operators had standard checklists to screen for trafficking indicators and used the NRM to refer potential trafficking cases. The government identified 130 potential trafficking victims via its hotlines (HRC, MHRSD, and MOI). The government referred all potential victims to relevant entities in the NRM to handle their cases and provided care to an unknown number of potential victims.

Laws regulating private sector workers and domestic workers prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees. For private sector workers, employers who do not pay recruitment fees and other recruitment costs (work permit, return airfare, exist and re-entry visas) could be fined up to \$2,665 per violation. New domestic worker regulations stipulated a fine of 20,000 SAR (\$5,333), a recruitment ban, or both for charging domestic workers recruitment costs. Rights groups and NGOs reported recruitment agencies, often in their home countries, subjected migrant workers to exorbitant recruitment fees to secure employment in the Kingdom, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking through debt-based coercion. An international human rights group reported Saudi hiring companies sometimes imposed costs on recruitment agencies that were subsequently passed down to workers; in other cases, when hiring companies did cover recruitment costs, subcontractors in host countries or recruiters in origin countries charged both the hiring company and the worker, suggesting weak oversight of labor recruitment companies and inadequate enforcement of regulations, including worker-paid recruitment fees.

Council of Ministers' Decision No. 166 prohibited withholding workers' passports as a violation punishable by fines. New domestic worker regulations also explicitly prohibited confiscating a domestic worker's passport, albeit without penalties. However, diplomats and observers continued to report document confiscation – both of passports and residency visas – remained pervasive, particularly among domestic workers, ultimately preventing such workers from feeling safe to leave their employer's home, even on their required day off. The government penalized 94 employers for passport confiscation but did not report referring any complaints or violations to law enforcement for criminal investigation as a potential trafficking crime – despite it being a well-known trafficking indicator.

The government continued to make efforts to prevent labor trafficking through its WPS, electronic verification of employment contracts, and labor mobility reforms for private sector migrant workers. The government's WPS continued to require employers to pay foreign workers by electronic transfer via a Saudi bank, thereby permitting the government to track disbursements and non- or delayed payment of wages. For any employer or firm that failed to maintain at least 80 percent compliance on a monthly basis or failed to submit monthly WPS data, the government

could impose penalties, including suspension of government services, recruitment privileges, and fines; MHRSD reported identifying 194,166 violations against companies for noncompliance with the WPS during the reporting period. MHRSD separately reported 25,607 violations against employers who did not pay workers on time per WPS regulations or withheld all or partial amounts of a worker's salary. NGOs reported the government rarely enforced penalties for WPS violations and only took action after a worker filed a case, limiting the use of the system as a deterrent for wage abuse. MHRSD did not report penalizing any employers for noncompliance or referring any violating companies for criminal investigation for potential trafficking crimes, despite wage theft being a key trafficking indicator. NGOs, advocates, and media continued to report evidence of widespread wage theft among migrant workers, including one report citing 46 percent of workers formally employed by Saudi-based construction companies as part of 2034 World Cup preparations reported delayed or withheld wages during employment.

The government remained without an effective mechanism to ensure payment to workers. In October 2024, the government implemented an insurance scheme that would cover up to six months of unpaid wages and a return flight for migrant workers in the private sector who experienced wage theft for more than six months. Observers expressed concern with the insurance scheme's six-month timeline and that the scheme did not cover unpaid end-of-service benefits and only included companies in which 80 percent or more of employees experienced delayed or defaulted wage payments for more than six months. One rights group reported significant eligibility barriers for workers; workers whose employers failed to register their contracts with the government or who worked for unregistered companies, including trafficking victims who experienced contract switching or deceptive recruitment, were unable to seek remedy through the insurance scheme. The insurance scheme did not include domestic workers, among others, rendering this population further at risk of trafficking. The government did not report if workers utilized the insurance scheme during the reporting period.

MHRSD continued to implement a standard electronic contract for private sector workers, enabling MHRSD to electronically account for, authenticate, and monitor all employment contracts in the private sector. Employers and employees verified each contract filed through the Qiwa electronic platform. The platform provided nine million employees access to their contract and ensured MHRSD could impose sanctions on establishments that broke contract terms; the contract on file could also serve as evidence in a potential labor dispute. However, experts reported Qiwa included contracts from instances where employers forced workers to sign contracts, often not in their native language, upon arriving to Saudi Arabia that included significantly decreased salaries or alternative jobs than promised. The government continued to implement the LRI, which allowed private sector workers to travel abroad (obtain an exit and re-entry visa), obtain final exit visas, or change employers at the conclusion of their contract or after one year without their employer's permission. Workers could use the Qiwa electronic application to automate the process for transferring employment, notify an employer of their departure and re-entry, and receive a final exit visa. This reform intended to provide increased freedom of movement and therefore may have reduced the risk of labor trafficking for private sector workers.

Observers reported ongoing challenges for workers seeking to transfer sponsorship without previous employer approval, including retaliatory measures taken by employers. Such action rendered workers – including trafficking victims – vulnerable to further exploitation or deportation. Employers could submit a request to terminate an employee under the status “discontinued from work,” through the Qiwa app, which did not confer the criminal liability previously associated with “absconding” charges. While the removal of “absconding” charges from the Qiwa system enabled workers to rectify their legal status and prevented further vulnerability to trafficking, observers reported employers adjusted to using exit visas to retaliate and control worker's movements.

Ministerial Decision No. 40676, implemented in October 2024, provided protections for domestic workers, which included male and female household workers, private drivers, gardeners, and security guards. The new decision included a prohibition on passport confiscation and establishment of maximum working hours, a mandatory day off, and minimum age of domestic workers at 21 years old, as well as new occupational safety and health requirements, and increased penalties against employers who violated the law. It also required employers use the standard



MHRSD contract and Musaned, the government's online domestic labor portal. Domestic worker contracts required insurance that mandated compensation to an employer if the employee stopped working, left, or was unable to continue their contract; it also compensated domestic workers in case of work-related disability or employers failing to pay salaries. One rights group noted that while the new domestic worker regulations included critical new provisions and greater clarity on existing ones, it did not address minimum wage – a key trafficking indicator – or include enforcement mechanisms to hold traffickers accountable.

The government continued to operate and utilize the Musaned app for recruitment, electronic contracts, domestic worker complaints, and transfer requests; the system included 872 private registered recruitment offices eligible to recruit domestic workers; agencies not registered in the system could not recruit such workers. This system consisted of a website and smartphone app that allowed potential employees in various sectors and individual employers to verify the license of a recruitment agency, review materials on employee and employer rights and responsibilities, complete and electronically sign contracts, and request a visa. The system intended to eliminate unregulated brokers, increase transparency and accountability of recruitment agencies and work contracts, and reduce the risk of labor trafficking; it also included a complaints resolution mechanism and served as a way to authenticate contracts for domestic workers in their home countries. In July 2024, the government began mandatory inclusion of domestic workers into the WPS via the Musaned app; implementation began with workers hired under new contracts and employers with more than four domestic workers. The government reported all domestic workers were required to be paid through the WPS by January 2026. Officials reported Musaned monitored payments automatically, comparing employment contract stated salaries with the amount paid in the WPS; in cases of discrepancies, the system flagged an alert for the case to be further screened for trafficking indicators. However, MHRSD did not specify punitive measures for noncompliant domestic worker employers and did not report if it had penalized such employers during the reporting period. The government did not report how many domestic workers were paid through the WPS since implementation began.

Despite these new protections, NGOs, media, and diplomats continued to report domestic workers experienced non-payment of salaries, forced confinement, food deprivation, excessive workloads, contract switching, document confiscation, and severe psychological, physical, and sexual abuse – all key indicators of trafficking. Further, authorities only sought authorization to enter a home if there was overwhelming evidence of a crime, which often left victims without protection. In October 2024, the government began requiring all complaints – by domestic workers and employers – to be submitted online via Musaned, removing the requirement to submit a complaint in person at a MHRSD office. This policy increased accessibility to grievance mechanisms for domestic workers, including potential trafficking victims, who felt unable or were prevented from leaving their employer's home. However, experts reported barriers for domestic workers in submitting online complaints, including lack of access to technology, language barriers, and the complexity of navigating the Musaned app. During the reporting period, MHRSD penalized 269 employers, suspended licenses of 57 domestic worker recruitment agencies, and withdrew licenses of 122 agencies for violating domestic worker regulations but did not report referring any of these violations for criminal investigation as potential trafficking crimes.

Despite increased legal protections, domestic workers remained excluded from LRI reforms; this increased this population's already high vulnerability to trafficking. Domestic workers could transfer sponsorship in certain circumstances without employer permission, including transferring the services of the worker to another employer without the worker's consent, three months of non-payment of wages, and the employer's failure to issue or renew residency permit for the worker, among others. Otherwise, domestic workers could change employers with their sponsor's permission at any time and only without sponsor permission after two years of employment. In July 2024, the government removed criminal liabilities – including immediate detention and deportation – associated with “absconding” charges for domestic workers, which may have prevented further trafficking.

MHRSD labor inspectors – all whom received training on identifying trafficking indicators – conducted more than 1,375,000 labor inspections to monitor the application of employment and



recruitment laws. The government required inspectors to screen for trafficking indicators and provided a questionnaire for labor inspectors to complete when they suspected a trafficking crime; inspectors sent completed forms following an inspection to MHRSD's anti-trafficking department to be referred for criminal investigation. The government did not report if it identified instances where trafficking indicators existed during inspections or referred any as potential trafficking cases for criminal investigation. Separately, MHRSD received 68,807 worker complaints; most grievances involved passport retention, non-payment of wages, and not having a contract on file – all common indicators of trafficking – and reported identifying three potential cases from such complaints. Observers reported the government did not conduct labor inspections or take other measures to prevent trafficking among migrant workers supporting the government's economic reform plan — Vision 2030 — and its hosting of the World Cup in 2034, despite well-documented labor trafficking vulnerabilities within such large-scale projects.

The government maintained several bilateral labor agreements with labor-source countries, which set minimum wage standards and regulated protections and benefits for migrant workers. During the reporting period, the government signed an agreement, encompassing 22 Asian and African governments, to formalize recruitment processes, prevent contract switching, and establish mechanisms to monitor recruitment pathways and identify trafficking indicators and trends. MHRSD continued to send Saudi labor attachés to key labor-source countries abroad to enhance coordination on suspected trafficking cases and ensure workers from labor-source countries were adequately informed of their rights before arriving in Saudi Arabia; the government assigned labor attachés in India, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, and the Philippines. 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 Saudi Arabia. Adults – primarily from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa – voluntarily migrate to Saudi Arabia to work in a variety of sectors, including construction, agriculture, hospitality, retail, domestic service, and in labor supply companies. Approximately 13.2 million foreign workers – primarily from Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Yemen – make up 77 percent of the total workforce in Saudi Arabia. Reports indicate 3.97 million foreign workers are domestic workers employed as maids, drivers, gardeners, and nannies. Some traffickers or unscrupulous labor brokers illegally recruit migrants to work in Saudi Arabia and subsequently exploit them in domestic servitude. The Kingdom's migrant worker population continues to be the largest group at risk of human trafficking, particularly female domestic workers due to their isolation inside private residences and vulnerability to employer abuse. Non-payment or late payment of wages, instances of employers withholding workers' passports, illegal worker-paid recruitment fees, not having a contract on file and significant limits to job mobility – all key indicators of trafficking – remain common among foreign workers. Traffickers include businesses of all sizes, private families, recruitment agencies in both Saudi Arabia and labor-source countries, gangs, and organized criminal elements, to include third-country nationals.

Observers report migrant workers in construction, hospitality, private health, retail and for labor supply companies in Saudi Arabia, including on large-scale development projects supporting the government's economic reform plan – Vision 2030 – and its hosting of the World Cup in 2034, are exploited in labor trafficking. In July 2024, a global labor union submitted a formal complaint to the ILO regarding Saudi Arabia's hosting of the 2034 World Cup; the complaint detailed workers experiencing wage theft, passport confiscation, restriction of movement, intimidation and threats, debt bondage, abusive working and living conditions, and excessive overtime. Fraudulent recruiters increasingly use “General Services Offices” to facilitate illegal recruitment and transfer of workers to new employers without the worker's consent; employers reportedly “sell” their domestic workers to another employer through these offices. Reports indicate traffickers in Saudi Arabia regularly sell and “trade” Ugandan domestic workers using an online marketplace. Traffickers increasingly use

technology, including social media, chatbots, and deepfakes, to deceptively recruit victims through fraudulent employment opportunities that could lead to exploitative work conditions.

Migrants who enter Saudi Arabia continue to be exploited by traffickers/smugglers and Saudi employers; for example, one report noted traffickers/smugglers who transported migrants into the Kingdom made arrangements with Saudi employers to receive salaries of migrants directly – mostly in the domestic work sector. Reports indicate some migrant women exploited in Yemen consent to marriage with traffickers/smugglers to escape situations of forced labor or forced criminality and enter Saudi Arabia to find employment as domestic workers. In many of these arrangements, the women’s “husbands” mislead Saudi employers to receive the women’s salary directly, exploiting the worker in forced labor.

Chinese nationals employed in Saudi Arabia at worksites affiliated with China’s Belt and Road Initiative remain vulnerable to conditions of labor trafficking, including debt bondage, restriction of movement, passport confiscation, excessive overtime, lack of adequate healthcare, and being sold to other employers for which they do not have signed contracts. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated workers in Saudi Arabia to work. As of January 2025, 147 Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals in Saudi Arabia are operating under contracts between the worker and the Saudi Ministry of Health. In 2021, one Cuban doctor working in Saudi Arabia alleged the Cuban regime takes 70 percent of the salary Cubans employed on medical missions earn – or roughly \$2,000 per month. One NGO reported that while the Kingdom pays Cuban regime-affiliated workers a salary, the Cuban regime forces workers to deliver between 75 and 90 percent of their salary to the Cuban regime; Cuban workers remain vulnerable to other abuses, including sexual harassment, forced enrollment into the medical mission program, surveillance, exploitation, restriction of movement, and passport confiscation. The government’s WPS does not monitor Cuban medical worker contracts, as the system is only for private sector workers. The large Rohingya population in the country also remains highly vulnerable to labor trafficking.