

welfare income support and referrals to available services. The national rapporteur called on the government to undertake more prevention efforts regarding Ukrainian refugees, including information on trafficking risks and employment rights.

Fraudulent recruitment by labor recruitment and employment agencies remained a concern; however, the government did not report effective law enforcement measures taken to deter traffickers. Such agencies were required to have a license, and passport withholding was illegal. The WRC did not have the authority to regulate agencies that recruited au pairs, who were allowed to work up to 20 hours per week without the need for a work permit. NGOs reported employers regularly paid au pairs less than minimum wage and forced them to work more than the maximum of 20 hours per week, creating vulnerability to labor trafficking; however, the government did not report any steps taken to address this during the reporting period. Furthermore, an NGO also raised concerns regarding the lack of jurisdiction for WRC inspectors to address violations regarding the number of hours worked on fishing vessels. While the WRC referred these cases to the Marine Services Office, with 15 referrals in 2021, sea fishers were still left with little recourse for recovering unpaid wages. The WRC reported conducting more than 4,400 inspections and recovering nearly €1 million (\$1.13 million) in non-payment of wages. Although no trafficking-related law enforcement efforts were undertaken as a result of inspections, labor inspectors did report referring five potential trafficking victims to the police in 2021. Multiple law enforcement agencies, including OPIU, immigration, and WRC, participated in a joint action day in June 2021 that focused on labor trafficking, targeting industries with a higher likelihood of labor trafficking, such as massage parlors and nail salons, and resulted in screening 53 individuals for trafficking indicators and the provision of accommodation for two potential trafficking victims. The government also participated in an additional joint action day in November 2021, which focused on 58 establishments with a higher likelihood of indicators of sex trafficking and resulted in the identification of one potential trafficking victim. Of the 171 fishing vessels under the scope of the amended AWS, in 2021, the WRC conducted 14 desktop inspections and 37 on-board inspections, identifying zero trafficking victims. WRC inspectors reportedly found several violations of employment and labor law in the fishing sector and referred several employers for prosecution; however, it did not report law enforcement actions against any companies for labor trafficking in 2021. Some experts raised concerns that inspectors viewed possible cases of labor trafficking as administrative employment law violations and did not pursue them as trafficking crimes.

In an effort to address vulnerabilities created by the pandemic when migrant workers became unable to travel or physically apply to extend their immigration status, the government permitted those that became undocumented to access unemployment payments and ensured officials did not report undocumented workers to immigration authorities. The government prohibited convicted human traffickers from being selected for public contracts. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by questioning and investigating at least 77 alleged procurers of commercial sex and by providing €106,050 (\$120,240) for awareness raising projects, an increase compared with €96,050 (\$108,900) in 2019 and 2020. The government continued to provide funding to several anti-trafficking programs abroad. The government did not fund the operation of a dedicated national trafficking hotline assisting all trafficking victims but did operate a hotline that catered to sex trafficking victims and individuals in commercial sex. The government also promoted a general crime hotline for anonymously notifying police about various crimes; police officers staffed the hotline, which was available for 12 hours daily. The government did not report the number of calls received for trafficking-related cases. The national police also had a dedicated email address for reports of trafficking.

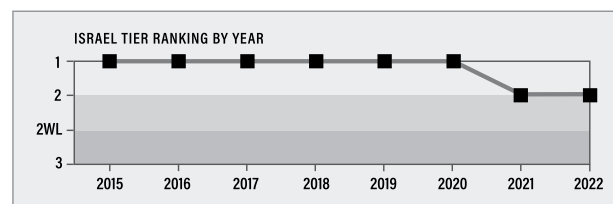
TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Ireland, and traffickers exploit victims from Ireland abroad. Traffickers subject Irish children to sex trafficking within the country. The prevalence of human trafficking in Ireland is likely higher than official statistics report; a comprehensive 2021 study found that from 2014 to 2019, the true number of trafficking victims was likely 38 percent higher than official national statistics. Foreign trafficking

victims identified in Ireland are from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America. In recent years, authorities and media have reported an increase in suspected victims from Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Romania. Brazilian women are vulnerable to fraudulent recruitment and promises of employment in cafes and massage parlors or as au pairs only to be forced into commercial sex upon arrival in Ireland. Traffickers exploit victims of forced labor in domestic work, the restaurant industry, cannabis cultivation, nail salons, food processing, waste management, fishing, seasonal agriculture, hospitality, and car washing services. In March 2022, a human rights group filed a petition with the U.S. government requesting the banning of any seafood imports from Ireland to the United States that were caught or produced using forced labor, specifically highlighting four Irish fishing companies. Lithuanians affected by poverty or substance abuse issues are vulnerable to forced criminality by organized human trafficking networks. In 2022, Ukrainian refugees, predominantly women and children, fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, are vulnerable to trafficking. Undocumented workers in the fishing industry and domestic workers, particularly au pairs, are vulnerable to trafficking. Migrant workers from Ghana, Egypt, and the Philippines are vulnerable to forced labor on fishing vessels. Women from Eastern Europe who are forced into marriage in Ireland are at risk for sex trafficking and forced labor.

ISRAEL: TIER 2

The Government of Israel 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, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Israel remained on Tier 2. These efforts included continuing to operate shelters and other facilities and providing victims a wide variety of immediate and long-term care and rehabilitative services. The government also continued investigating, prosecuting, and convicting officials complicit in trafficking-related crimes. In addition, the government began revising victim recognition procedures to streamline processes and reduce the risk of re-traumatization. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government's efforts to investigate and hold labor traffickers criminally accountable remained inadequate, and the government did not consistently investigate labor trafficking cases referred by NGOs. The government recognized fewer trafficking victims and relied on NGOs to initially identify victims, rather than proactively identifying victims. Despite adding an additional officer, the Police Anti-Trafficking Coordinating Unit (PTC), which remained the only authority to officially recognize victims of trafficking, remained severely understaffed for the sixth consecutive year, which further hindered the efficiency of victim identification procedures and referral of victims to protection services. The government maintained inadequate oversight over foreign labor recruitment outside of bilateral work agreements (BWAs), including through foreign contracting companies ("Hevrot Bitzua"), to prevent forced labor and exploitative labor practices.



PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue expediting processes to proactively identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care without re-traumatizing victims, including those referred by NGOs, and ensure victim identification procedures take a trauma-informed approach. • Authorize more government officials, including throughout the country, to identify trafficking victims to allow

for more efficient access to protection services. • Significantly increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of labor traffickers, including potential trafficking cases referred by NGOs, and sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms. • Ensure all potential victims have full access to services while their case is being reviewed for official victim recognition. • Proactively screen vulnerable populations, including undocumented African migrants, foreign workers, Palestinian workers, and LGBTQI+ individuals, to ensure trafficking victims among these populations are not penalized for unlawful acts traffickers compel them to commit, such as immigration and “prostitution”-associated violations. • Increase enforcement of foreign worker and Palestinian labor rights, including by establishing systems to ensure workers have valid and fair labor contracts, eliminating all worker-paid recruitment fees for all foreign and Palestinian workers, ensure any recruitment fees are paid by employers, and ensure any employer-paid recruitment fees are not passed onto workers. • Substantially increase anti-trafficking awareness and victim identification trainings for law enforcement and front-line officials, including police officers, border officials, and prison officials, at regional and local levels. • Increase the number of labor inspectors, social workers, and interpreters in the agricultural, construction, and caregiving sectors and provide them with training on victim identification procedures. • Expand resources and officials allocated to the National Anti-Trafficking Unit (NATU) and PTC to ensure NATU and the PTC are able to adequately perform their duties. • Allocate resources and fully implement the 2019-2024 national action plan (NAP) to combat trafficking. • Amend the 2006 anti-trafficking law to include a definition of human trafficking consistent with international law. • Transparently share information on government anti-trafficking efforts with civil society. • Designate a Knesset committee or subcommittee to address sex and labor trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased overall law enforcement efforts, and law enforcement actions against labor traffickers remained inadequate. The 2006 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 16 years’ imprisonment for the trafficking of an adult and up to 20 years’ imprisonment for the trafficking of a child. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, the law did not establish the use of force, fraud, or coercion as an essential element of the crime.

In 2021, police initiated eight total investigations, including three sex trafficking cases involving nine suspects and five forced labor cases involving three suspects; the government also investigated 33 cases involving 43 individuals suspected of engaging in commercial sex acts with a child. In addition, the government investigated 118 sex trafficking-related crimes but determined all were “prostitution”-related offenses. This was a slight decrease compared with 11 total investigations (one sex trafficking, eight forced labor, and two child sex trafficking investigations), in addition to 91 sex trafficking-related investigations, in 2020. In 2021, the government initiated six new prosecutions, three for child sex trafficking and three for attempted solicitation of commercial sex with a child; this was a decrease compared with nine total prosecutions (three adult sex trafficking, one forced labor, and five child sex trafficking) in 2020. The government continued prosecuting 24 alleged traffickers in cases initiated in previous reporting periods: 13 for sex trafficking, one for forced labor, and 11 for unspecified forms of trafficking. In 2021, courts convicted two traffickers, one for adult sex trafficking and one for attempted child sex trafficking; this was a decrease compared with convicting 12 traffickers (nine for adult sex trafficking, two for forced labor, and one for child sex trafficking) in 2020. Of the two sentences issued during 2021, including cases convicted in previous reporting periods, only one trafficker received a sentence greater than one year imprisonment. Judges sentenced one convicted trafficker to four months’ imprisonment and probation and ordered them to pay restitution to the victim; and sentenced the other trafficker to 13 months’ imprisonment and probation. Such lenient sentencing undercut efforts to hold traffickers accountable and did not serve to deter the crime or adequately reflect the nature of the offense. The government continued to report law enforcement efforts to address government officials allegedly complicit in trafficking-related crimes. In

2021, the government investigated four cases and prosecuted six allegedly complicit officials, and courts convicted two officials in trafficking-related crimes; prosecutors also appealed the lenient sentencing of an official convicted in 2020. In 2021, the Israeli National Police (INP) investigated and referred to the State Attorney’s Office a Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) official who allegedly coerced asylum-seekers to perform sex acts in exchange for permits. The government coordinated with a foreign government to investigate an alleged child sex trafficking case involving foreign and Israeli suspects and coordinated with other foreign governments to extradite suspected traffickers.

The INP assigned a second officer to the PTC in 2021. However, NGOs continued to report the government was, at times, reluctant to investigate complex trafficking cases due to lack of dedicated staff and resources. NGOs also alleged that despite sharing evidence of potential forced labor cases, the government often did not investigate them, especially those involving foreign workers, in a timely manner. The government reported difficulties gathering victim and witness testimony, which was exacerbated by foreign victims’ desire to return to their home countries during the pandemic. To address this gap, the government continued implementing guidelines on early testimony in cases involving foreign victims to create a standard approach. To address challenges in reporting trafficking crimes during the pandemic, the INP established an online system to file police complaints for all offenses, including trafficking complaints, for victims hesitant to meet with law enforcement officials, including undocumented migrant workers. During the reporting period, the government appointed police focal points in all districts to lead all trafficking investigations and to perform initial identification screening to refer victims to the formal recognition procedure. As in previous years, the government provided extensive anti-trafficking training, awareness-raising workshops, and seminars, at times in coordination with NGOs, to law enforcement, judicial officials, social workers, medical staff, labor inspectors, and other officials on victim identification and referral, investigating trafficking cases, and providing trauma-informed care to victims.

PROTECTION

The government decreased overall victim identification and protection efforts, recognizing fewer victims. In 2021, the government reported receiving 58 victim referrals from NGOs and government sources, compared with 74 referrals in 2020. Of the 58 referrals, the government granted official trafficking victim status to 51 individuals, a decrease from the 69 victims recognized in 2020. Of the 51 recognized victims, 17 were victims of sex trafficking, and 34 were victims of forced labor. The government recognized two male victims exploited in the Sinai prior to arriving in Israel, compared with one victim exploited in the Sinai recognized during the previous year. The government continued to circulate trafficking victim identification guidelines widely to relevant ministries. However, NGOs remained critical of the government’s ability to proactively identify victims and reported more than half of all victims recognized by the government during the reporting period were initially identified by NGOs; of the 51 recognized victims, NGOs referred 31, and government sources referred 20 to the PTC. The PTC was the only government entity with the authority to grant individuals official trafficking victim status, which allowed a victim full access to protection services. NGOs continued to report that the government’s inaction to investigate labor trafficking cases deterred potential forced labor victims from reporting their exploitation. While NGOs reported improvement in the PTC’s ability to recognize victims referred by NGOs with the addition of a second officer during the reporting period, NGOs reported the PTC continued to suffer from delays recognizing trafficking victims due to understaffing. Because the government only authorized two PTC officers to review victim applications throughout the country, the victim recognition process was significantly delayed for months and at times inhibited victims’ access to much-needed protection services during the delay. To address these delays and other issues during the victim recognition process, the government held consultations with NGOs, academics, and government stakeholders to revise victim recognition procedures and developed a plan for phased implementation during the reporting period. As part of the revision process, in October 2021, the PTC published new procedures for applying for victim status, clarifying recognition criteria and establishing an appeal process. PTC’s new

procedures also limited the need for extensive victim interviews as a last resort to reduce re-traumatization; previously, NGOs reported the PTC's high evidentiary standard re-traumatized victims, as they recounted and "proved" their exploitation. The remaining victim recognition procedure revision steps, including plans to transfer recognition authority from the PTC to NATU, were pending at the end of the reporting period.

The government continued to provide a wide range of protective services for victims of all forms of trafficking. The government continued to operate a 35-bed shelter for female trafficking victims, a 35-bed shelter for male trafficking victims, and transitional apartments with 18 beds for female victims. In response to the pandemic, the government divided shelter residents into "bubbles" to limit transmission, and each shelter designated quarantine areas for isolating residents potentially exposed to COVID-19. Shelter residents could leave freely. These shelters offered one year of rehabilitation services, including job training, psycho-social support, medical treatment, language training, and legal assistance. In 2021, the women's shelter assisted 47 adult victims, the men's shelter assisted 43 victims, and the transitional apartments assisted seven women and 18 children accompanying their mothers; in 2020, the women's shelter assisted 40 adult victims and three children of victims, the men's shelter assisted 32 victims, and the transitional apartments assisted nine women and 18 children accompanying their mothers. Shelter staff could adjust operations to accommodate deaf and deaf-mute victims, including by contracting an interpreter. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services (MLSS) continued to operate the National Center for Survivors of Slavery and Trafficking in Persons, formerly known as the "day center," in Tel Aviv for male and female trafficking victims who were waiting for a space at a shelter, chose not to reside at a shelter, or had completed one year at a shelter. The center provided psycho-social services and food aid, with social workers trained to identify individuals at risk of re-trafficking. In 2021, the center provided services to 113 male and 99 female victims, as well as 168 children; this is compared to 2020 when the center provided services to 133 male and 106 female victims, as well as 160 children. The government also operated 14 "HaLev" (Heart) centers for girls and young women exploited in commercial sex throughout the country, which provided psycho-social services, medical assistance, vocational training, and other assistance; the Tel Aviv-Jaffa center was open 24/7 and the Tel Aviv and Haifa centers catered to all genders including nonbinary individuals. The government continued to provide free medical treatment for one year at various government-funded health facilities for recognized trafficking victims living outside of shelters.

The government continued to encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers but did not require their participation in court cases as a condition for receiving visas and protective assistance; victims could opt to leave the country pending trial proceedings. The government continued implementing policy guidance established during the previous reporting period for collecting early testimony in cases involving foreign victims if foreign victims requested repatriation before the conclusion of their case. In December 2021, the government fully approved and published an amendment to its Procedures (Examination of Witnesses) Law to allow victims or witnesses to provide testimony not in the presence of the defendant but, rather, in the presence of the defense attorney in specific offenses including trafficking. The government continued implementing new procedures established in March 2021 for managing sex crimes, including sex trafficking, by designating a contact person at every court to coordinate victims' security during proceedings, arranging private waiting rooms, and enabling video testimony. The Legal Aid Administration (LAA) continued to provide free legal aid to trafficking victims to assist in civil procedures, immigration procedures, and—in sex trafficking cases—criminal proceedings; forced labor victims did not have automatic access to LAA assistance in criminal proceedings. During the reporting period, the government drafted an amendment to the Legal Aid Law to expand legal aid in criminal proceedings to all victims of trafficking, including labor trafficking victims; the amendment was pending at the end of the reporting period. In 2021, the LAA received 135 legal aid requests to assist potential trafficking victims, compared with 76 legal aid requests in 2020. The government allowed trafficking victims to work during the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. The government provided all recognized victims with work

visas. Following the conclusion of criminal proceedings, trafficking victims could request a "rehabilitation" visa for an additional year; the government extended "rehabilitation" visas on an ad hoc basis. The government forfeiture fund, which used property and money confiscated from traffickers to assist victims, allocated 937,190 shekels (\$302,420) to 89 applicants for the provision of various protection services, including housing, counseling, and vocational training for victims, monetary compensation ordered by courts, and funding for NGOs in 2021; no funds were allocated in 2020 due to insufficient resources. The anti-trafficking law dictated the court must explain any decision to abstain from awarding restitution in its verdict, making restitution the default; in 2021, the government did not report the amount awarded in restitution. The government maintained guidelines discouraging the prosecution of trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. However, the government did not systematically screen for trafficking among the undocumented African migrant population, foreign workers employed by foreign construction companies, or individuals in commercial sex, and as a result, authorities may have penalized unidentified and some identified victims for immigration violations or "prostitution"-associated offenses. The government continued a program to expunge the records of individuals convicted of "prostitution"-associated offenses for individuals not sentenced to prison terms, including potential sex trafficking victims; the government fully or partially expunged five records in 2021.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking; however, government policies towards many foreign workers were insufficient to address their vulnerability to trafficking. NATU within the Ministry of Justice continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts among relevant ministries and NGOs during the reporting period; NATU had nine staff members in 2021, including the national coordinator, two legal advisors, an intern, three law students, one secretary, and one national service volunteer. NGOs reported that while NATU demonstrated political will and was knowledgeable about trafficking, it was not always effective influencing other parts of the government and lacked the resources to fully meet its mandate. The government maintained its 2019-2024 NAP to combat human trafficking. However, for the third consecutive year, the government did not finalize its implementation plan nor allocate additional funds for the NAP. Throughout 2021, the four inter-ministerial teams, each focusing on key objectives outlined in the NAP, held discussions with NGOs, civil society organizations, and government stakeholders; the teams presented their recommendations to the Committee of Directors General for approval in September 2021. One of the four inter-ministerial teams was tasked with conducting research on the scope and characteristics of trafficking in Israel; the government approved the team's research plan during the reporting period and provided a budget. Unlike previous years, the Knesset did not re-establish the Subcommittee on Trafficking in Women and Prostitution; however, the Knesset established a committee on migrant workers, which discussed labor trafficking, among other issues. While the government produced an annual report on its anti-trafficking efforts and regularly updated information on NATU's website, the report was not publicly available; NGOs reported difficulty obtaining information on the government's anti-trafficking efforts, and the government did not respond to most information requests from NGOs. The government conducted various national awareness-raising campaigns, including education programs for students, national television commercials, radio broadcasts, and lectures for government officials, shelter staff, and academics. In May 2021, Israel acceded to the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings.

376A of the Penal Law 5737-1977 prohibited holding a person's passport against their will and carried a penalty of three to five years' imprisonment; the government did not report specific law enforcement action under this law during the reporting year. In 2021, the Ministry of Economy and Industry (MOEI), which employed 210 labor inspectors, issued 196 administrative warnings, imposed 45 fines totaling 5.27 million shekels (\$1.7 million), and filed two indictments for labor violations involving child labor that resulted in five convictions; in 2020, the MOEI issued 196 administrative warnings, imposed 66 fines totaling 9.96 million shekels (\$3.2 million), and filed two indictments for labor violations. In addition, through MOEI inspections, employers

returned 829,120 shekels (\$267,540) of withheld wages to foreign workers in 2021. Authorities opened 489 criminal investigations and filed 114 indictments against employers of foreign workers for suspected violations of labor laws; courts rendered 69 sentences with sanctions and compensation totaling approximately 5.35 million shekels (\$1.73 million). This represented an increase from 2020 when the government opened 1,145 criminal investigations for suspected violations of labor laws, filed 94 indictments, and rendered 77 sentences with sanctions and compensation totaling 3.7 million shekels (\$1.19 million). NGOs continued to report there were not enough labor inspectors, especially in the construction and agricultural sectors, to sufficiently monitor and enforce labor laws. Additionally, NGOs reported the government did not effectively regulate foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), nor did it effectively prevent the exploitation of foreign workers in the construction and agriculture sectors recruited outside of established BWAs. In 2021, the government implemented new BWAs with the Philippines and Sri Lanka in home-based long-term care sectors and with Nepal and Georgia in the institutionalized long-term care sector. The government maintained BWAs with 10 other countries for agriculture, construction, caregiving, and domestic work sectors; in 2021, 9,387 of the 31,370 foreign workers who arrived in Israel did so through these agreements. Foreign workers recruited under BWAs had triplicate standardized labor contracts held by the worker, employer, and the government. Private Israeli recruitment agencies could not charge worker-paid recruitment fees in the domestic caregiving sector, and worker-paid recruitment fees were capped at 2,814 shekels (\$910) in the agricultural sector; the government did not report other actions to prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees. While Israeli law required employers of foreign workers to provide detailed labor contracts in a language the worker understands, there was not adequate government oversight to ensure contracts for workers not covered by BWAs met labor standards, which left workers vulnerable to exploitative employment practices, including long work hours, violations of work and living conditions, and exploitative promissory notes. NGOs reported foreign workers often paid exorbitant fees to recruitment agencies in their country of origin or the Israeli manpower agency; NGOs reported many foreign workers financed the fees through high interest rate loans from informal or illicit lenders in Israel, further increasing workers’ vulnerability to trafficking.

While most foreign workers could change employers without their previous employers’ permission, foreign construction workers were limited to being able to change employers on a specified date each quarter and otherwise required employers’ permission to change employers. However, workers employed by foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), primarily in the construction sector, were not authorized to change employers unless it was to another foreign contracting company. PIBA procedures for recruitment agencies in the caregiving sector continued to require every agency to hire a licensed social worker responsible for supervising the conditions of foreign caregivers, including home visits, and for informing relevant authorities about labor violations. While the government contended that workers’ visas were not tied to a specific employer, government policies restricted foreign caregivers’ ability to change employers by allowing them to work only in a specific geographical area, preventing them from changing employers more than three times, and preventing them from changing employers after being in Israel for 63 months. In 2021, the government reported 13,734 requests to change employers in the caregiving sector were denied due to technical reasons including those previously outlined. NGOs also reported that if a foreign caregiver abruptly left their employer, including due to physical or sexual violence, government policy allowed employers to unilaterally revoke their visa, and foreign caregivers were not entitled to an immigration hearing. PIBA continued implementing a new policy regarding Palestinian work permits in the construction, industry, and service sectors to allow Palestinian workers to change employers more easily; however, NGOs reported the new policy did not take sufficient steps to inform Palestinian workers about the policy change or implement mechanisms to facilitate the job search process and left Palestinian workers vulnerable to labor violations.

The government continued returning deducted wages to workers after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in April 2020 the “Deposit

Law” (article 4 of the Prevention of Infiltration Law), which required employers to deposit a certain percentage of undocumented migrants’ wages—including those of identified trafficking victims—into a fund that migrant workers could not access until they departed the country. Workers could request their deducted wages be returned through PIBA’s website. As of December 2021, the government returned more than 212 million shekels (\$68.41 million) to 14,712 workers; the government coordinated with an international organization to advertise the website to encourage an additional 3,070 workers to request the return of their funds. However, the government did not report whether any investigations were opened during the reporting period into employers who deducted funds from 231 workers but did not deposit funds. In October 2020, the MLSS rejected proposals by Knesset members to require the government to repay money owed to workers or to provide workers with legal assistance to sue their employers; for the second consecutive year, the government did not address how to return money owed to this group of workers. The government continued to incentivize undocumented African migrants to “voluntarily” depart Israel to third countries in Africa, which included a paid plane ticket in most cases and a \$3,500 stipend in some cases; however, NGOs and an international organization confirmed that migrants who arrived in a third country in Africa did not receive residency or employment rights upon arrival.

The government did not have a trafficking-specific hotline. PIBA, in collaboration with an NGO, continued to operate a 24-hour hotline to assist foreign workers who were in Israel under bilateral agreements. The hotline employed 13 interpreters in seven languages: Chinese, Thai, Russian, Nepali, Sinhalese, Ukrainian, and Tagalog. In 2021, the hotline received 3,603 calls; similar to previous years, the majority of calls were from People’s Republic of China (PRC) national construction workers (2,323 calls). In 2020, the hotline received 2,874 calls including 1,828 calls from PRC national construction workers. There was no comparable hotline for documented migrant workers who worked in Israel through private recruitment, nor for Palestinian workers in Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Child Protection Bureau Hotline, which handled online offenses against children, reported addressing 11,771 cases in 2021, an increase from around 10,000 in 2020; however, the hotline did not report identifying any suspected cases of trafficking. The government made efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex acts by coordinating an online awareness campaign stating consumption of commercial sex is illegal in Israel, in both Hebrew and Arabic. In addition, courts could sentence individuals found guilty of purchasing commercial sex to participate in educational workshops instead of paying a fine. The government did not report efforts to prevent child sex tourism.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Israel. Palestinians and foreign workers, primarily from South and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, migrate to Israel for temporary work in construction, agriculture, and caregiving; traffickers exploit some of these workers in forced labor. As of March 2021, data from the Israeli government and NGOs indicated there were approximately 203,000 legal foreign workers and 183,000 non-citizens present in Israel, many of whom are without legal status, including Palestinian workers, in Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. As pandemic-related travel restrictions eased in 2021, 31,370 foreign workers entered Israel in 2021, compared with 10,662 in 2020 and approximately 23,138 in 2019. Israeli and foreign employers exploit foreign workers, particularly Turkish, PRC national, Palestinian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Serbian men, in the construction sector where they suffer from labor abuses and violations and labor trafficking. Some employers or intermediaries illegally charge Palestinian workers monthly commissions and fees, and in many cases, employers illegally hire out Palestinian workers to other workplaces; these workers are vulnerable to forced labor. The employer-based work permit system for Palestinians—except those working in the construction sector and select other sectors—binds Palestinian workers to specific employers, which enables some employers to exploit workers in forced labor. Furthermore, as a condition of their overnight permits, employers retained identity documents of some Palestinian workers, effectively restricting their movement in Israel. The approximately 1,500 Jordanian day workers are vulnerable to forced labor in construction, agriculture, and other

sectors, primarily in the resort city Eilat, due to limits on entry permits and the geographic isolation of Eilat. Traffickers subject some Thai men and women to forced labor in Israel's agricultural sector by imposing conditions of long working hours, no breaks or rest days, withheld passports, poor living conditions, and difficulty changing employers due to limitations on work permits. Some traffickers in the agricultural sector recruit agricultural students to take part in an agricultural study program on student visas and force them to work in the industry upon arrival, effectively circumventing the BWA process; observers reported the programs contain no academic content and students are bound by tuition fees—which NGOs reported were de facto recruitment fees—of up to 11,000 shekels (\$3,550), effectively creating situations of debt bondage. Over the past three years, trafficking victims were identified in four of the six academic agriculture programs in Israel, including a group of Guatemalan and Honduran agricultural engineering students in 2020. In 2021, the government recognized 10 Vietnamese agricultural students as trafficking victims after they were forced to endure 14-16 hour work days, were confined to company-controlled housing, and had their passports confiscated; participants were also under a threat of a \$30,000 promissory note for breaching their contract. Another 30 students were offered recognition but declined due to fear of retaliation upon their return to Vietnam. Caregivers are highly vulnerable to forced labor due to their isolation inside private residences and their lack of protection under the labor law; local NGOs report traffickers subject caregivers to excessive recruitment fees, fraudulent work contracts, long work hours, confiscation of passports, underpayment of wages, physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse, denial of severance pay, and poor housing, including—in some cases—living in the same room as their employer. Foreign caregivers constitute the second largest share of all legal foreign workers in the country; the vast majority of these workers are women. During the reporting period, NGOs continued reporting foreign contracting companies (“Hevrot Bitzua”), primarily PRC- and Turkish-owned construction companies, in Israel compelled PRC and Turkish nationals to work under the threat of debt bondage or coercive promissory notes. Foreign workers who entered Israel on “expert” visas—a visa procedure intended to facilitate the recruitment of highly skilled workers to fill hard-to-fill jobs—are vulnerable to trafficking as the construction and manufacturing sectors increasingly use the visa system to recruit workers for low-wage jobs. In 2021, an estimated 13,148 foreign workers entered Israel on “expert” visas, primarily from the PRC and low-income countries, and paid recruitment fees as high as 98,350 shekels (\$31,740). Networks of workforce agencies recruit workers to Israel through a fraudulent asylum-claim process, charge workers high facilitation fees, and sell them fake documents; these workers are vulnerable to exploitation. The government's policy of refusing fast-track asylum claims has resulted in fewer claims from Ukrainian and Georgian applications; however, they were replaced by increased numbers of Russian and Moldovan workers following the same pattern. Some Bedouin Israeli children are reportedly vulnerable to forced labor, experiencing long working hours and physical violence. Traffickers exploit Palestinian children in forced begging in the Northern District of Israel and Jerusalem. NGOs also reported large numbers of Arab children in Israel exploited in various forms of labor exploitation during the reporting due to pandemic-related school closures.

Eritrean and Sudanese male and female migrants and asylum-seekers are highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking in Israel. As of March 2022, there were approximately 27,000 African migrants and asylum-seekers in Israel, most of whom were from Eritrea or Sudan. Asylum-seekers received temporary stay permits but did not have the explicit right to work in Israel and routinely worked low-wage jobs in unsafe environments. According to NGOs, these migrants and asylum-seekers were increasingly vulnerable to trafficking due to the government's implementation of the Deposit Law that reduced net wages for this population; the government repealed this law in April 2020, but the government was not able to return all funds to workers due to fraudulent practices by employers. NGOs reported nearly 80 percent of this population experienced some type of unemployment at the peak of the pandemic in 2020, further increasing their risk to exploitation. Economic distress among women in this population, especially Eritrean women, greatly increases their vulnerability to sex trafficking. Approximately 400 female asylum-seekers engaged in survival sex prior to the pandemic;

the government estimates that figure tripled during 2020. Since 2007, thousands of African migrants entered Israel via the Sinai Peninsula. The flow of these migrants arriving in Israel, peaking at more than 17,000 in 2011, dramatically decreased to zero in 2017. Many of these migrants were kidnapped by criminal groups in the Sinai and subjected to severe abuse, including forced labor and sex trafficking, before reaching Israel. In 2020, an NGO reported that of the approximately 4,000-5,000 of these migrants still present in Israel, the government had only recognized approximately 400-500 as trafficking victims but that the actual number was much higher.

Israeli children, Israeli Bedouin and Palestinian women and girls, foreign women, and transgender adults and children are vulnerable to sex trafficking in Israel. Traffickers use social media websites, including dating apps, online forums and chat rooms, and Facebook groups to exploit girls in sex trafficking. Israeli Bedouin and West Bank Palestinian women and girls are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking after family members force them into marriages with older men; these women and girls experience physical and sexual abuse, threats of violence, and restricted movement. Russian, Ukrainian, Eritrean, and Ethiopian women are also vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking through online-facilitated forced marriages. NGOs report some Palestinian LGBTQ+ men and boys and Palestinian transgender women in Israel are vulnerable to abuse and sexual exploitation due to their lack of legal status and restrictions on work eligibility for Palestinian nationals in Israel. Some Israeli transgender women and girls are sexually exploited in commercial sex to be able to afford gender-affirming care. Some transgender children as young as 13 years old, many of whom ran away from home, come under the mentorship of transgender women in commercial sex; sometimes these “mentors” then exploit these transgender children in commercial sex. Traffickers subject women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, PRC, and Ghana, as well as Eritrean women, to sex trafficking in Israel; some women arrive on tourist visas to work willingly in commercial sex—particularly in the southern coastal resort city of Eilat—but sex traffickers subsequently exploit them. Some traffickers reportedly recruit sex trafficking victims with false, fraudulent, or misleading job offers on the internet, sometimes through legitimate employment websites. During the previous reporting period, Israeli authorities indicted a suspect for allegedly holding people in conditions of slavery while operating a religious cult by allegedly forcing women and children to provide any earnings to the suspect and to perform involuntary domestic work; media reporting also alleged the suspect sexually exploited the victims.

ITALY: TIER 2

The Government of Italy 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 Italy remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing prosecutions and convictions compared with the prior year. The government continued to implement its three-year plan to combat labor exploitation in agriculture by increasing training for labor inspectors and informing vulnerable populations, like foreign workers in agriculture, of their rights. The government approved its first national referral mechanism (NRM) for the identification and assistance of labor trafficking and exploitation victims in the agricultural sector. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government reported fewer trafficking investigations compared with the prior two years and remained without a national action plan (NAP) or national rapporteur, hindering efforts to coordinate national and local anti-trafficking actions. The government assisted fewer victims compared with the prior year and did not report awarding compensation or restitution to any victims. Gaps in victim identification systems persisted, and the government again did not identify any Italian nationals as victims and very few children, despite high estimates by civil society. The government also continued to lack legal safeguards to protect victims