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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza

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, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Israel remained on Tier 2. These efforts included approving the 2022-2026 anti-trafficking implementation plan, recognizing more trafficking victims, and revising victim recognition procedures. The government also modestly increased investigations, prosecutions, and convictions. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government's efforts to hold labor traffickers criminally accountable remained inadequate, and the government did not consistently investigate labor trafficking cases referred by NGOs. The government relied on NGOs to initially identify victims, rather than proactively identifying victims. NGOs continued to report that the government's high evidentiary standard to recognize victims discouraged victims from seeking government assistance. The government's oversight of foreign labor recruitment outside of bilateral work agreements (BWAs), including through foreign contracting companies ("Hevrot Bitzua"), was inconsistent and inadequate to prevent forced labor. In addition, the government's "non-enforcement" policy for Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's war against Ukraine and working on tourist visas in Israel increased their vulnerability to trafficking.

* This section of the report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement lines as well as the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel

occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Significantly increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of labor traffickers, including potential trafficking cases referred by NGOs, and sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms.
- 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 throughout the country to identify trafficking victims to allow for more efficient access to protection services.
- 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, Ukrainian refugees, and vulnerable LGBTQI+ individuals, to ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as for 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, ensuring any recruitment fees are paid by employers, and ensuring any employer-paid recruitment fees are not passed onto workers.
- Create, widely implement, and advertise a policy clarifying a victim’s irregular or temporary immigration status will not factor into victim recognition decisions and ensure all recognized foreign victims receive B1 “rehabilitation” visas.
- Substantially increase anti-trafficking awareness and victim identification trainings for law enforcement and front-line officials, including police, border, immigration, 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) to ensure NATU is able to adequately perform their duties.
- Allocate resources and fully implement the 2019-2024 NAP and 2022-2026 implementation plan to combat trafficking.
- Amend the 2006 anti-trafficking law to include a definition of human trafficking consistent with international law.
- Continue transparently sharing information on government anti-trafficking efforts with civil society.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained overall law enforcement efforts but 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 2022, police initiated 25 total investigations, including two sex trafficking cases involving two suspects, four labor trafficking cases involving three suspects, and 19 child sex trafficking cases involving 19 suspects; one of the forced labor investigations involved labor exploitation of PRC nationals employed by a PRC-national owned construction company. In addition, the government investigated 112 sex trafficking-related crimes but determined all were "prostitution"-related offenses. The government also continued investigating four sex trafficking cases and three cases involving forced labor in the international agriculture internship program initiated in previous reporting periods. This was an increase compared with eight new investigations (three sex trafficking and four labor trafficking investigations), in addition to 118 sex trafficking-related investigations and 33 investigations of engaging in commercial sex acts with a child, in 2021. In 2022, the government initiated 10 new prosecutions, three for child sex trafficking, three for adult sex trafficking, and four for "consumption of prostitution from a minor." In addition, the government initiated four prosecutions for "attempted consumption of prostitution from a minor." This was an increase compared with six new prosecutions (three child sex trafficking and three for attempted solicitation of commercial sex with a child) in 2021. The government continued prosecuting five alleged sex traffickers in a case initiated in 2018. For the second consecutive year, the government did not report initiating any labor trafficking prosecutions; this was despite NGOs referring cases for investigation and NGOs

identifying and referring six labor trafficking victims to the government whom the government officially recognized as trafficking victims. In 2022, courts convicted five traffickers, two for adult sex trafficking and three for child sex trafficking; this was an increase compared with convicting two traffickers (one for adult sex trafficking and one for attempted child sex trafficking) in 2021. For the second consecutive year, the government did not report convicting any labor traffickers; in the total 82 convictions achieved since 2014, the government has only convicted eight labor traffickers. Of the five sentences issued during the reporting period, including cases convicted in previous reporting periods, courts sentenced four traffickers to sentences greater than one year imprisonment.

The government continued to report law enforcement efforts to address government officials allegedly complicit in trafficking-related crimes. In 2022, the government investigated two new cases and continued prosecuting one allegedly complicit official; separately, courts sentenced a complicit official who was convicted in 2021. Prosecutors also appealed the lenient sentencing of two officials originally sentenced in 2021 and 2022; a complicit police officer was re-sentenced from 18 months' imprisonment, which had been suspended, to 27 months' imprisonment in 2022 while the other appeal was pending at the end of the reporting period. The government coordinated with INTERPOL and foreign governments on multiple transnational trafficking investigations involving foreign and Israeli suspects and coordinated with other foreign governments to extradite suspected traffickers.

The Police Anti-Trafficking Coordination Unit (PTC) continued to advise the Israeli National Police (INP) units throughout Israel on trafficking investigations and government policy. Each district had a senior INP officer designated to lead all trafficking investigations and perform initial identification screening to refer victims to the formal recognition procedure. The State Attorney's office has dedicated anti-trafficking coordinators in each district to advise on and coordinate trafficking prosecutions in their district; the district coordinators meet regularly in a forum to share information on ongoing trafficking prosecutions. However, NGOs continued to report the government was, at times, reluctant to investigate complex cases, especially labor trafficking cases, due to lack of dedicated staff, resources, and understanding. 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 challenges gathering victim and witness testimony, which was exacerbated by foreign victims' desire to return to their home countries. To address this gap, the government continued implementing guidelines on early testimony in cases involving foreign victims to create a standard approach. INP continued operating 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. 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 maintained uneven overall victim identification and protection efforts. In 2022, the government reported receiving 128 victim referrals from NGOs and government sources, compared with 58 referrals in 2021. Of the 128 referrals, the government officially recognized 101 individuals, an increase compared with 51 victims recognized in 2021. Of the 101 recognized victims, 73 were victims of sex trafficking, six of forced labor, and 22 of unspecified forms of trafficking. The 101 recognized victims included 67 foreign victims; non-Israeli victims included victims from Ukraine, Russia, PRC, Brazil, Moldova, Ethiopia, West Bank and Gaza, and other European and African countries. The government recognized seven victims exploited in the Sinai prior to arriving in Israel, compared with two victims 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 most victims recognized by the government during the reporting period were initially identified by NGOs; neither the government nor NGOs specified the source of victim identification referrals in overall data. In addition, NGOs reported multiple cases where eventually-recognized victims had multiple interactions with law enforcement and immigration authorities before being recognized as a trafficking victim; in one case, a victim who was exploited before she arrived in Israel and again exploited in sex trafficking in Israel remained unidentified for 11 years despite regularly meeting with Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) officers to extend her stay permit. NGOs continued to report the government's inaction on labor trafficking cases deterred potential forced labor victims from reporting their exploitation.

In previous years, 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. Previously, because the government only authorized two PTC officers to review victim applications throughout the country, the victim recognition process took months for a decision and at times inhibited victims' access to much-needed protection services during the delay. As part of the victim recognition revision process, in October 2021, 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. In March 2022, the government launched a pilot program for victim recognition that transferred official victim recognition authority from PTC to the Ministry of Justice's NATU; NATU formed its decision after consultation with an advisory committee comprised of representatives from relevant government agencies, civil society, and trafficking survivors. Although NGOs acknowledged the transfer in official victim recognition responsibility was an improvement, they noted concerns regarding the bandwidth of NATU to manage the victim recognition caseload in addition to their other duties due to limited staff and resources. In addition, despite the 2021 revisions to official victim recognition procedures, NGOs reported the government still required a high burden of proof from trafficking victims, including requiring third party witnesses, which re-traumatized victims and resulted in a number of victims remaining unrecognized by the government. NGOs also asserted PIBA was overrepresented on the advisory committee which would lead to extraneous immigration considerations leaving foreign and Palestinian trafficking victims under-recognized. In March 2022, the government began a new victim identification initiative at Ben Gurion International Airport in response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's war against Ukraine entering Israel; if a border control official suspected trafficking, the case was immediately flagged for PTC and NATU. In October 2022, an NGO funded a dedicated social worker to participate in the initiative to educate and counsel potential victims of their rights and available services. Individuals voluntarily in commercial sex reported the government's broad interpretation of sex trafficking led to over-identification of sex trafficking "victims," and authorities forced individuals voluntarily in commercial sex to enter the government's shelter system and sign affidavits stating they were trafficking victims even if there was no evidence of force, fraud, or coercion. This over-identification contributed to under-identification of labor trafficking victims, increased strain on limited resources for trafficking victims, and deterred these individuals from reporting other crimes to law enforcement such as theft and sexual assault.

The government continued to provide a wide range of protective services for victims. The government continued to operate in cooperation with an NGO 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. 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; these shelters could accommodate LGBTQI+ victims and in 2022 the women's trafficking shelter assisted a transgender woman. In 2022, the women's shelter assisted 43 adult victims, the men's shelter assisted 26 victims, and the transitional apartments assisted seven women and their children. Shelter staff could adjust operations to accommodate deaf and

deaf-mute victims including by contracting an interpreter. NGOs reported the two shelters had substandard living conditions and alleged the shelters were overcrowded, lacked adequate food, and had multiple health hazards. NGOs also alleged psychological services were ill-equipped for complex trauma needs, and training for staff was insufficient due to frequent turnover. NGOs also reported the shelters were not suitable for labor trafficking victims who require more flexibility in treatment options. In recognition of these shortcomings, the government included revision of the shelter model in its implementation plan for the NAP to explore more flexible housing and assistance models for victims.

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 victims waiting for 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 2022, the center provided services to 101 male and 97 female victims, as well as 189 children. The government funded and NGOs operated 14 “HaLev” (Heart) centers for girls and young adults and three additional centers for adult women 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 HaLev 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 officially recognized trafficking victims living outside of shelters. In December 2022, the Ministry of Health launched a dedicated mental health clinic at a hospital in Tel Aviv-Jaffa to treat victims of torture camps in the Sinai, including potential unidentified trafficking victims; NATU planned to refer the first group to the clinic in early 2023.

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 past policy guidance to collect early testimony in cases involving foreign victims if foreign victims requested repatriation before the conclusion of their case. A 2021 amendment to the Procedures (Examination of Witnesses) Law allowed 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 2021 procedures 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. In 2021, 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 remained pending at the end of the reporting period. In 2022, the LAA received 69 legal aid requests to assist potential trafficking victims. The government allowed recognized foreign trafficking victims to work during the investigation and prosecution of traffickers if issued a B1 “rehabilitation” visa. Following the conclusion of criminal proceedings, trafficking victims could request a B1 “rehabilitation” visa for an additional year; the government extended B1 “rehabilitation” visas on an ad hoc basis. However, NGOs reported the government issued approximately only 20 percent of eligible trafficking victims a B1 “rehabilitation” visa during 2017-2021 and instead issued the majority of foreign victims permits under article 2(a)(5) of the Entry to Israel Law which allowed deportation orders to still apply to these permit holders. The government forfeiture fund, which used property and money confiscated from traffickers to assist victims, allocated 807,463 shekels (\$229,520) to 105 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 2022. The anti-trafficking law dictated the court must explain any decision to abstain from awarding restitution in its verdict, making restitution the default; the government did not report the amount awarded in restitution in 2022. The government maintained guidelines discouraging the prosecution of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. 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 did not report the number of records fully or partially expunged in 2022.

PREVENTION

The government modestly increased efforts to prevent trafficking; however, government policies towards many foreign workers remained insufficient to address their vulnerability to trafficking. NATU continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts among relevant ministries and NGOs; NATU had 10 staff members in 2022 including the national coordinator,

three 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. In September 2022 and after three years of pending finalization, the government approved its implementation plan for its NAP; the implementation plan is valid for 2022-2026 but is pending a government resolution for resources to implement seven of the 42 recommendations. In December 2022, NATU published its first report on the government's anti-trafficking efforts with data covering 2017-2021. In addition, NATU initiated surveys and studies on implementation of some bilateral work agreements (BWAs), Palestinian workers, and implementation of the government's law prohibiting consumption of commercial sex. Despite these improvements, 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 – at times in coordination with NGOs – including education programs for students, national television commercials, radio broadcasts, and lectures for government officials, shelter staff, and academics; in response to Russia's war against Ukraine and the subsequent influx of Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers, the government also published awareness materials in Ukrainian, Russian, and other languages.

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 investigated two cases of withholding passports in 2022. In 2022, the Ministry of Economy and Industry (MOEI), which employed 210 labor inspectors, issued 464 administrative warnings, imposed 64 fines totaling 7.513 million shekels (\$2.14 million), and filed four indictments for labor violations that resulted in one conviction. In addition, through MOEI inspections, employers returned 1.6 million shekels (\$454,800) of withheld wages to 90 foreign workers in 2022. PIBA's enforcement unit opened 346 criminal investigations but did not report filing any indictments against employers of foreign workers for suspected violations of labor laws. This represented a decrease from 2021 when the government opened 489 criminal investigations for suspected violations of labor laws, filed 114 indictments, and rendered 69 sentences with sanctions and compensation totaling 5.35 million shekels (\$1.52 million). PIBA restricted the permits of 75 employers and revoked 35 permits to employ foreign workers (30 in the caregiving sector and five from the agriculture sector). NGOs continued to report there were not enough labor inspectors, especially in the construction and agricultural sectors, interpreters, social workers, or staff in the Office of the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Labor Rights to sufficiently monitor and enforce labor laws. NGOs continued to report 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 2022, the government ratified a new BWA with Uzbekistan in an unspecified sector. The government maintained BWAs with 10 other countries for agriculture, construction, caregiving, and domestic work sectors; in 2022, 43,228 of the 110,890 foreign workers in Israel arrived through these agreements. Foreign workers recruited under BWAs had triplicate standardized labor contracts held by the worker, employer, and the government. Previously, 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 (\$800) in the agricultural sector. However, the government published new regulations in June 2022 allowing companies recruiting in the caregiving sector to require workers pay three recruitment fee payments totaling 6,107 shekels (\$1,740); as a result, the Government of the Philippines suspended its BWA alleging the policy change contravened the BWA. NGOs noted foreign workers in the caregiving sector working outside of BWAs have to pay the new fees on top of their already high 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. NGOs reported 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. The government

did not report the number of requests to change employers that were denied – for technical or other reasons – in 2022, but it did report approving requests from 5,406 agriculture workers, 4,434 workers in home-based caregiving, 94 workers in caregiving institutions, and 12,204 workers in construction (including foreign construction companies). However, NGOs reported “futility” in submitting transfer requests resulted in a chilling effect, particularly for workers employed by foreign contracting companies or foreign construction companies, making workers unwilling to submit transfer requests in part out of fear of retribution from their company or home government. In addition, workers in the caregiving sector were excluded from labor protections related to rest days and limiting work hours, leaving caregivers vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. 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, manufacturing, and service sectors to allow Palestinian workers to change employers more easily; NGOs reported enforcement of trading permits for Palestinian workers increased but noted reform efforts remain insufficient and employers and middlemen continue to solicit illicit fees from Palestinian workers which left Palestinian workers vulnerable to labor violations. In 2022 the government implemented changes to its agriculture student internship to provide greater oversight over training centers to prevent misconduct and labor exploitation; the government suspended one training center for misconduct and, following a hearing, resumed engagement with the training center with more restrictive conditions. However, NGOs reported the changes were insufficient and they continued to identify students in the program who experienced labor exploitation, including trafficking. In 2022 the government published a proposed regulation restricting and narrowing the types of work for asylum-seekers and Ukrainian refugees, prohibiting work in 17 localities across Israel other than certain sectors such as construction, agriculture, or hospitality; the regulation had not yet been implemented but NGOs reported concerns it would increase the vulnerability of refugees and asylum-seekers to trafficking.

Since the April 2020 repeal of 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, the government reported returning a total of 212.9 million shekels (\$60.52 million) to 14,800 workers, and that 2,986 workers did not receive reimbursement (of which 180 are pending completion of documents by the worker and 2,806 workers had not yet contacted the government). 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 2022, the hotline received 5,114 calls; similar to previous years, the majority of calls were from workers in the construction sector (3,954 calls). In 2021, the hotline received 3,603 calls including 2,323 calls from construction sector workers. Although 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 Area C of the West Bank, which is under Israeli military control, the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Labor Rights managed inquiries from foreign workers via email, phone, and social media sites. The Child Protection Bureau Hotline, which handled online offenses against children, reported addressing 7,000 cases in 2022, compared with 11,771 in 2021; however, the hotline did not report identifying any suspected cases of trafficking. The government made efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex acts; 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. Foreign workers, primarily from South and Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza migrate to Israel for temporary work in construction, agriculture, and caregiving; traffickers exploit some of these workers in forced labor. As of the end of 2022, data from the Israeli government and NGOs indicated there were approximately 110,890 legal foreign workers and approximately 197,866 non-citizens present in Israel, many of whom are without legal status, including Palestinian workers in Israel. In 2022, 34,053 foreign workers entered Israel compared with 31,370 in 2021, 10,662 in 2020 and approximately 23,138 in 2019. Israeli and foreign employers exploit foreign workers, including in labor trafficking, particularly Turkish, PRC nationals, Palestinian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Serbian men, in the construction sector. 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 and manufacturing sector – 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 (\$3,130) effectively creating situations of debt bondage. Over the past four years, trafficking victims were identified in five 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. NGOs reported students in these programs who experienced exploitation and abuse were reluctant to report details due to threats of retaliation and deportation, fear they and their family will face harassment by their home governments, or face other retaliatory action. Caregivers are at high risk for 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 documented 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 (\$27,960). 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 Georgian applications; however, they were replaced by increased numbers of Russian and Moldovan workers following the same pattern. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, government and NGO sources reported increased vulnerability of Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women and girls, to sex trafficking in Israel. 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. In 2022, NGOs and a foreign government reported Palestinian children were fraudulently recruited for agricultural work on Israeli settlements in Area C of the West Bank, which is under Israeli military control, and experienced conditions amounting to labor trafficking including coercion, dangerous work without adequate safety equipment, and less pay than advertised.

Eritrean and Sudanese male and female migrants and asylum-seekers are highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking in Israel. As of the end of 2022, there were approximately 24,995 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. 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 to 5,000 of these migrants still present in Israel, the government had only recognized approximately 400 to 500 as trafficking victims but that the actual number was much higher. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, approximately 14,000 Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers ineligible for immigration based on the Law of Return were in Israel as of March 2023; most of this population arrived on tourist visas which have been regularly renewed and are working under a "non-enforcement" government policy. NGOs reported this unstable situation and unclear work permit policy has increased the vulnerability of this population to sex and labor trafficking. In 2022 and into 2023, NGOs identified domestic servitude victims from Ethiopia's Tigray region in Israel. The women were fraudulently recruited in Tigray by registered Ethiopian recruitment agencies for domestic work in Jordan where they experienced conditions amounting to forced labor before being "sold" to other employers in the

West Bank and eventually finding assistance with NGOs in Israel; NGOs reported assisting at least 25 Tigrayan trafficking victims who experienced these patterns of exploitation between October 2022 and March 2023.

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 Palestinian women and girls from the West Bank 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 LGBTQI+ men and boys and Palestinian transgender women in Israel are vulnerable to abuse and sex trafficking due to their lack of legal status and restrictions on work eligibility for Palestinians in Israel. Traffickers subject women from Central and Eastern Europe, PRC, Ghana, and Eritrea 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. The government and NGOs reported the re-emergence of traffickers using drug addiction as a means of control over sex trafficking victims. In 2020, 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.

WEST BANK AND GAZA**

West Bank and Gaza residents are subject to the exercise of authority or control by separate entities. Oslo Accords-era agreements divide the West Bank into three territorial areas: Areas A, B, and C. West Bank Palestinian population centers mostly fall into Areas A and B, with Palestinian agricultural lands and rural communities in Area C. Area C comprises more than 60 percent the West Bank and is under Israeli military control. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian, British Mandatory, and Ottoman statutes in effect before 1967, military ordinances enacted by the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, and, in the relevant areas, Palestinian Authority (PA) law, as well as shari`a law. Israelis living in the West Bank are subject to military ordinances enacted by the military commander and per Emergency Regulations to

Israeli law and prosecution. The PA exercises varying degrees of authority in the areas of the West Bank where it exercises control. Although PA laws apply in Gaza, along with Egyptian, British Mandatory, and Ottoman statutes, and shari`a law, Hamas continues to exercise general de facto control over the area.

Civil affairs in Areas A and B of the West Bank and Gaza are governed by a complicated network of Palestinian Basic Law and decrees as well as Jordanian and Egyptian laws and laws from the British Mandate and Ottoman eras. Area C of the West Bank is administered solely by Israeli military law. This network of laws does not fully criminalize sex and labor trafficking in the West Bank and Gaza. Article 310 of the Jordanian Penal Code of 1960 criminalized some forms of child sex trafficking in the West Bank and prescribed penalties of three months to three years' imprisonment and a fine of five to 50 Jordanian dinars (\$7-\$70). Article 311 of the same law criminalized some forms of adult sex trafficking in the West Bank and prescribed penalties of one to three years' imprisonment. However, both provisions only applied to offenses involving female victims and did not apply to offenses where the victim was considered a "common prostitute or of known immoral character," thereby wrongfully excluding individuals from protection. Article 317 of the same law separately criminalized detaining a woman for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and prescribed penalties of two months to two years' imprisonment. None of the penalties prescribed under these provisions were sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The 2004 PA Minister of Labor Decree No. 1 on Hazardous Work prohibited the "sale and trafficking of children" and forced or compulsory labor of children in the West Bank and Gaza but did not specify penalties. Article 261 of the 1936 Penal Code 74 for the British Mandate High Commissioner for Palestine criminalized some forms of labor trafficking in Gaza and prescribed penalties up to one year imprisonment. These penalties were not sufficiently stringent. An international organization reported it was supporting the PA to draft a comprehensive anti-trafficking law and that the PA submitted the draft law to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval in November 2022.

Neither the PA nor Hamas, which exercises de facto control in Gaza, comprehensively collected data on trafficking cases. According to an international organization, the PA preliminarily identified cases involving human trafficking such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, and forced begging arising from cases related to gender-based violence or labor violations; however, the PA did not report any specific statistics nor did Hamas in Gaza. An international organization provided anti-trafficking trainings in Jericho and Ramallah to PA officials from the Ministries of Interior, Education, Women's Affairs, Health, Justice, Social Development, as well as the Public Prosecution, police, Statistics Bureau, and the Fatwa and Legislation Bureau. PA officials generally had low understanding and awareness of trafficking issues but also noted when they did suspect

potential trafficking cases, they were frequently unable to fully investigate due to lack of access and authority in Israeli settlements and Area C, which is under Israeli military jurisdiction.

Neither the PA nor Hamas, which exercises de facto control in Gaza, had standard procedures to identify victims nor mechanisms to refer trafficking victims to care. The PA and Hamas did not report identifying any trafficking victims or referring any potential victims to assistance. An NGO reported identifying and providing services to 38 forced labor victims in 2022. The PA Ministry of Social Development operated three centers for vulnerable children, including child trafficking victims, which provided shelter, psycho-social support, and reintegration assistance; two centers for boys in Ramallah and one for girls in Bethlehem. However, one of the centers may also operate as a detention center for juvenile offenders. Aside from these centers, there were no appropriate services available for trafficking victims in the West Bank and Gaza aside from limited services from NGOs and international organizations.

Neither the PA nor de facto authorities in Gaza had a designated lead official, agency, or coordinating body to address trafficking nor efforts to prevent trafficking. The PA and de facto authorities in Gaza did not report policies to prevent exploitation of Palestinian workers in Israel or Palestinian migrant workers abroad.

Human traffickers exploit Palestinian victims in the West Bank and Gaza and traffickers exploit Palestinian victims abroad. Palestinian women and children working as domestic workers were vulnerable to forced labor in the West Bank and Gaza. In 2023, an NGO reported an increase in Ethiopian women from Tigray seeking employment as domestic workers in Jordan. Upon arrival in Jordan, they were exploited in forced labor and unable to leave the homes of their employers; they later reported being transported to the West Bank and Gaza where they experienced further exploitation before seeking assistance in Israel. Palestinian women and girls were allegedly exploited in sex trafficking in the West Bank and Gaza and Israel but stigmas and cultural taboos likely result in severe under-reporting of these cases; Palestinian LGBTQI+ individuals were vulnerable to sex trafficking. Palestinian workers in Israel were vulnerable to forced labor due to third-party brokers charging exorbitant worker-paid recruitment fees for Israeli work permits. Palestinian children are fraudulently recruited for work in agriculture in Israeli settlements in the West Bank; children initially work voluntarily but receive lesser pay, perform more strenuous work than advertised, and work in coercive environments. Traffickers also exploit children, including children under 10 years old, in forced labor as street vendors. Children in Gaza work in exploitative conditions that may amount to labor trafficking collecting scrap metal, street vending, or working in other hazardous conditions. Traffickers, including sometimes through organized networks, exploit Palestinian children in forced begging in Israel. In some cases, family

members arrange for Palestinian children to go to Israel where they stay by themselves or with older children to beg; these children stay for weeks before “rotating” out or Israeli authorities arrest them and return them to the PA. Palestinian children are also vulnerable to recruitment or use as child soldiers. Some Palestinian armed groups organize regular camps for children that involve firearm instruction and military training that serve as recruitment events; armed wings of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas have allegedly recruited and used children in the past and the Nassar Salah al-Din Brigades in Gaza recruited or used a child during the reporting period.

*** This section of the report covers the West Bank and Gaza, and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.*

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