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SYRIA (Tier 3)

Between December 8, 2024, and March 31, 2025, the United States did not recognize the Syrian Interim Authorities, or any other entity, as the government of Syria. All references to the Assad regime refer to events prior to December 8, 2024. References to the Syrian Interim Authorities reflect events between December 8, 2024 – March 31, 2025. On May 13, 2025, the United States recognized the Syrian Interim Authorities as the Government of Syria.

This report only assesses the Assad regime and all references to the “government” or “Government of Syria” below are made in reference to the Assad regime.

The Assad Regime did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and did not make significant efforts to do so; therefore, Syria remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period, there was a government policy or pattern of human trafficking and employing or recruiting child soldiers. The Assad regime exploited its nationals in forced labor in its compulsory military service by forcing them to serve for indefinite or otherwise arbitrary periods. The regime’s officials did not demobilize most individuals from military service after their mandatory period of service; rather, they forced citizens to serve indefinitely under threats of detention, torture, familial reprisal, or death. The regime did not hold any traffickers criminally accountable, nor did it identify or protect any trafficking victims. The regime’s actions directly contributed to the population’s vulnerability to trafficking, and the regime continued to perpetrate human trafficking crimes routinely. The security situation and the regime’s restriction on freedom of movement, press, and internet access limited reporting, including of official complicity in human trafficking and child soldiering crimes. The regime and pro-Assad regime-affiliated militias forcibly recruited and used child soldiers. The former regime did not report efforts to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate child soldiers, nor did it report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting officials complicit in the recruitment or use of child soldiers. The regime did not protect or prevent children from recruitment or use by armed opposition forces and other non-state armed actors, including U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations. The regime continued to arrest, detain, and severely abuse trafficking victims, including child soldiers, and inappropriately penalized them for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Enact and implement an anti-trafficking law that criminalizes all forms of human trafficking and, with respect to sex trafficking, prescribes penalties commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes.
- Cease or otherwise mitigate the forcible recruitment or use of child soldiers by government forces and pro-regime militias.
- Enforce limits on the length of compulsory military service, demobilize individuals who have exceeded the service limit, and cease and mitigate the deceptive and coercive recruitment of returning refugees.
- Cease and mitigate the inappropriate penalization of trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including children recruited or used as child soldiers.
- Proactively identify victims of all forms of trafficking and provide them with appropriate protection services, including long-term care for demobilized child soldiers from government forces and non-state armed groups.
- Develop a formal procedure to refer all victims to appropriate care and train officials on its use.

- Investigate, prosecute, and convict perpetrators of sex and labor trafficking and the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, including complicit officials.
- Increase the availability of protection services – including short-term shelter, long-term housing, counseling, and medical care – for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with civil society service providers.
- Make efforts to raise awareness on all forms of human trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The Assad regime did not report any anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Decree No.3 of 2010 appeared to criminalize some forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking, but it did not include a clear definition of human trafficking. This decree prescribed a minimum punishment of seven years' imprisonment and a fine, a penalty that was sufficiently stringent but, with respect to sex trafficking, not commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

Violent conflict continued to amplify the magnitude of human trafficking crimes occurring in Syria. The regime did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting any suspected traffickers. Regime forces – including the National Defense Forces, (NDF), a pro-regime militia organized by and in close collaboration with the regime – recruited and used children in combat roles. Military service remained compulsory for Syrian men between the ages of 18 and 42, for 18 to 21 months; however, the regime forced soldiers and reservists to serve an indefinite period of time, and it did not discharge some draftees even after nine years of military service. NGOs reported the regime, including commanding officers, detained, tortured, and at times killed conscripts if they were suspected to be anti-regime, refused an order, or deserted; there were also reports the regime harassed, detained, and in some cases, tortured the families of draft evaders and deserters – further exacerbating the coercion of its citizens in forced labor. In addition, reports indicated the regime deceived and potentially coerced returning refugees into military service.

An NGO reported the Assad regime and regime-aligned armed groups subjected women, men, and children in detention to conditions amounting to sexual slavery. An international organization reported regime officials financially extorted Syrian women, including returning refugees, at military checkpoints and public administration offices; if women were unable to pay bribes, regime officials exploited them in sex trafficking by coercing them into performing sex acts in order to pass checkpoints or to access civil documentation or employment. Regime officials exploited women detained by the regime in forced labor by coercing them to dance or serve food to their captors, at times while naked. The regime did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting government employees complicit in human trafficking, including some child soldiering crimes. The regime did not provide anti-trafficking training for law enforcement officials.

No information was available on the Syrian Interim Authorities' anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts during the reporting period.

PROTECTION

The Assad regime did not report any victim protection efforts.

The regime did not report any efforts to identify trafficking victims or provide services since 2010. The regime reportedly operated centers to assist orphaned children, child victims of crimes, including trafficking, and juvenile criminal offenders; however, observers reported poor conditions in these centers, which were not adequately equipped to provide specialized assistance to trafficking victims. In addition, the regime did not report assisting any child trafficking victims at these centers. The regime did not protect children from forcible recruitment and use as soldiers and in support roles by regime forces and pro-regime militias, non-state armed groups, and terrorist

organizations. The regime continued to severely punish victims, such as child soldiers and sex trafficking victims, for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as child soldiering and “prostitution.” The regime routinely arrested, detained, raped, tortured, and executed children for alleged association with political opponents, armed groups, and terrorist organizations and made no effort to screen for trafficking indicators or offer these children protection services. Isolated reports continued of the regime detaining women and children – including unaccompanied children – across Syria for suspected family ties to foreign ISIS fighters; some of these individuals were unidentified trafficking victims. The regime did not provide foreign victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution.

No information was available on the Syrian Interim Authorities’ efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims.

PREVENTION

The Assad regime did not report any prevention efforts.

The regime did not have an agency or coordinating body mandated to combat human trafficking. The regime did not raise awareness of trafficking. Law No.11/2013 criminalized all forms of recruitment and use of children younger than the age of 18 by the Syrian armed forces and armed groups; however, the regime made no efforts to prosecute child soldiering crimes perpetrated by regime and pro-regime militias, non-state armed groups, and designated foreign terrorist organizations. The regime also did not implement measures to prevent children from unlawful recruitment and use as combatants and in support roles by pro-regime militias, non-state armed groups, and terrorist organizations. The regime did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or provide anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

No information was available on the Syrian Interim Authorities’ efforts to prevent human trafficking.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Syria, and traffickers exploit Syrian victims abroad. Conditions in Syria continue to deteriorate amid the ongoing conflict between the regime, along with its Russian and Iranian allies, and non-state armed groups exerting control over wide geographic swaths of the country’s territory. Military service is compulsory for Syrian men between the ages of 18 and 42, for 18 to 21 months; however, since the start of the conflict in 2011, regime officials do not demobilize most individuals from military service after their mandatory period of service; rather, they force citizens to serve indefinitely under threats of detention, torture, familial reprisal, or death.

More than half of Syria’s pre-conflict population of 23 million have been displaced; Syrians displaced in the country and those living as refugees in neighboring countries are extremely vulnerable to trafficking. Syrian children are reportedly vulnerable to forced and early marriages, including to members of terrorist groups such as ISIS – which can lead to sexual slavery and forced labor – and traffickers continue to subject children displaced inside the country to forced labor, particularly by organized begging rings. Armed groups, community members, and criminal gangs exploit women, girls, and boys in Syria – particularly vulnerable populations, such as IDPs and persons with disabilities – in sex trafficking in exchange for food or money. After the February 2023 earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye, NGOs and international organizations reported increased vulnerability to sex trafficking, forced labor, and recruitment or use of children by armed groups – including among already vulnerable populations such as IDPs in Syria, Syrian refugees in Türkiye, and unaccompanied and separated children. As reported by an international organization, ISIS

militants' system of organized sexual slavery and forced marriage is a central element of the terrorist group's ideology and systemic means of oppression. While it controlled territory in Syria, the group routinely subjected women and girls from minority groups into forced marriages, domestic servitude, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence. ISIS subjected girls as young as nine years old, including Yezidi girls abducted from Iraq and brought to Syria, to sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence. Despite the territorial defeat of ISIS at the beginning of 2019, approximately 2,700 Yezidi women and girls remain unaccounted for; reports indicate some of these women and girls remain with ISIS in eastern Syria or in the Al-Hol camp.

The recruitment or use of children in combat and support roles in Syria remains common, and international observers report continued incidents of recruitment and use by armed groups, though the prevalence of the practice differs by group. The Assad regime forces, pro-regime militias, and non-state armed groups – including groups affiliated with the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Democratic Union Party-affiliated Revolutionary Youth Movement, the Kurdish People's Protection Units, Women's Protection Units, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), ISIS, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and al-Qa'ida – recruit and/or use boys and girls as child soldiers. HTS and ISIS have used children as human shields, suicide bombers, snipers, and executioners. Some armed groups and militias also use children for forced labor and as informants, exposing them to retaliation and extreme punishment. Some armed groups fighting for the Assad regime, such as Hizballah, and the NDF, or "shabiha," forcibly recruit children as young as six years old. Armed groups abducted or recruited children to be used in hostilities outside Syria, in particular in Libya. ISIS forces continue to deploy children – some as young as eight years old – into hostilities. Despite the territorial defeat of ISIS, it continues to target children for indoctrination at schools and displaced persons camps, including Al-Hol and Roj camps, increasing these children's vulnerability to trafficking.

The SDF continues to implement the UNSCR-mandated action plan to end the recruitment and use of children and demobilize children in SDF ranks; however, an international organization reported SDF-affiliated armed groups recruited and used children in 2022 and 2023. The Revolutionary Youth Movement continues to recruit children into the radical Kurdish youth organization through fraudulent announcements for educational courses in northeast Syria; NGOs and international organizations report the Revolutionary Youth Movement continues to fraudulently and forcibly recruit and use children. Observers report these children have undergone military training in the Qandil Mountains of Iraq, where NGOs alleged some Popular Mobilization Forces-affiliated militias in Iraq previously recruited boys in Iraq to fight in Syria. In previous reporting periods, credible sources widely reported Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Iranian Basij Resistance Force, and IRGC-supported militias actively recruit and use – including through force or coercive means – Afghan children and adults, Afghan migrant and refugee men and children living in Iran, Syrian children, and Iranian children, to fight in IRGC-led and -funded Shia militias deployed to Syria.

Terrorist groups, including ISIS, reportedly force, coerce, or fraudulently recruit Syrians and foreign nationals to join them; HTS reportedly forcibly and fraudulently recruited Syrians and foreign nationals in previous reporting periods. ISIS forcibly held Syrian and foreign national women in "guesthouses," where they were subjected to abuse until they agreed to marry ISIS fighters; some of these women reported further sexual exploitation and domestic servitude in the context of these forced marriages. Foreign national women, and some Syrian women, traveling with men to Syria are also vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor on arrival; many are reportedly placed alongside other family members in makeshift camp communities where their travel and identity documentation is confiscated and their freedom of movement restricted. Many of these women report having lost their husbands to armed conflict, after which their economic hardships and confinement in the camps make them vulnerable to coercive local marriages that feature corollary sex trafficking or forced labor indicators. As of January 2025, approximately 42,000 people – including 25,000 children, 16,000 Syrians, and 26,000 foreigners, including approximately 20,000 Iraqis and 6,000 third country nationals from 66 countries or territories– remained in Al-Hol and Roj camps in northeastern Syria, and some had suspected family ties to foreign ISIS fighters; some of these individuals were unidentified trafficking victims. Some children and young adults in

camps across northeastern Syria, including Al-Hol and Roj, were potential human trafficking victims used as child soldiers in direct hostilities or in support roles by armed groups, including ISIS.

As in previous reporting periods, the Assad regime, NDF, SDF, and SNA detained children, including trafficking victims, for their alleged association with armed groups or terrorist organizations. In 2024, an international organization reported regime officials financially extorted Syrian women, including returning refugees, at military checkpoints and public administration offices; if women were unable to pay bribes, officials exploited them in sex trafficking by coercing them into performing sex acts in order to pass checkpoints or access civil documentation or employment.

Traffickers subject foreign domestic workers from Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, to forced labor in Syria. Traffickers fraudulently recruit Filipino domestic workers for employment in the United Arab Emirates before transporting them to Syria where traffickers exploit them in forced labor.

The Syrian refugee population is highly vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in neighboring countries, particularly Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Türkiye. International organizations report a high number of child and early marriages of Syrian girls among refugee populations, which increases their vulnerability to trafficking. Syrian refugee women and girls are also vulnerable to forced or “temporary marriages” – for the purpose of commercial sex and other forms of exploitation – and other forms of sex trafficking in refugee camps and in non-camp settings in Lebanon, Jordan, and cities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, including Sulaimaniya. Commercial sex rings in Türkiye and Lebanon compel Syrian refugee women and girls into sex trafficking. In Türkiye, traffickers reportedly exploit some Syrian refugee women in sex or labor trafficking after accepting fraudulent job offers to work in hair salons, modeling, entertainment, or domestic work. An NGO reported Syrian boys, especially unaccompanied and separated boys, were vulnerable to sex trafficking in exchange for the cost of being smuggled across the border to Türkiye and further destinations. In Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan, Syrian refugee children engage in street begging or peddling goods, some of which is forced or coerced. Syrian children are also observed working in Türkiye’s agricultural sector and informally in textile workshops and the service sector, where they experience long working hours, low wages, and poor working conditions; children in these sectors are vulnerable to forced labor. In Jordan and Lebanon, traffickers force Syrian refugee children to work in agriculture alongside their families; in Lebanon’s Beka’a Valley, Syrian gangs force refugee adults and children to work in agriculture under harsh conditions, including physical abuse, with little to no pay. Media previously reported unidentified middlemen subjected Syrian refugees to forced or exploitative cyberbegging via social media apps. In these cases, traffickers allegedly provided Syrian refugees with phones and British SIM cards to produce online begging livestreams; however, Syrian refugees received negligible benefits from the proceeds. Isolated media reporting in 2020 alleged Syrian men were fraudulently recruited to fight in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, believing they were going to Azerbaijan for work opportunities. In 2023, media reported brokers fraudulently recruited Syrians to fight for Russia in Ukraine; the recruited Syrians believed they would be guarding mines in Russia and would be granted Russian citizenship but were instead sent to perform combat roles in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.