**USSD 2012 TIP Report about Israel**

[**https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/192367.htm**](https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/192367.htm)

SRAEL (Tier 1)

Israel is a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Low-skilled workers from Thailand, China, Nepal, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, and, to a lesser extent, Romania, migrate voluntarily and legally to Israel for temporary contract labor in construction, agriculture, and caregiving industries. Some subsequently face conditions of forced labor, including through such practices as the unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on movement, inability to change or otherwise choose one’s employer, nonpayment of wages, threats, sexual assault, and physical intimidation. Many labor recruitment agencies in source countries or brokers in Israel require workers to pay exorbitant recruitment fees to secure jobs in Israel – ranging from the equivalent of $4,000 to $20,000 – a practice that contributes to forced labor once migrants are working in Israel.

Based on many documented victim testimonies, an increasing number of migrants and asylum seekers – primarily from Eritrea, Sudan, and to a lesser extent Ethiopia – arriving in Israel are reportedly held for ransom and forced into sexual servitude or labor during their captivity in the Egypt’s Sinai. The Israeli government improved its system of identifying and providing medical care for these victims, who are trafficked and abused before they arrive in Israel. Some isolated cases of women from the former Soviet Union, China, and South America are subjected to forced prostitution in Israel, although the number of women affected continues to decline since the passage and implementation of Israel’s 2006 anti-trafficking law. Some NGOs report that Israeli women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking in Israel, but police have found no evidence indicating such internal trafficking.

The Government of Israel fully complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The Israeli government sustained strong law enforcement actions against sex trafficking and strong overall prevention efforts during the year. Efforts to address labor violations of foreign workers that could lead to trafficking vulnerability continued to lag, though the government convicted two individuals for labor trafficking during the reporting period. The government continued to fund and refer victims to two NGO-run shelters for trafficking victims. The government failed to protect some vulnerable populations, including some exploited foreign workers, foreign migrants, and asylum seekers arriving from Egypt who were forced into sexual servitude or forced labor during their captivity in the Sinai.

**Recommendations for Israel:** Increase the number of labor inspectors and translators in the agriculture, construction, and homecare sectors, ensuring that they are adequately trained in identifying trafficking cases; increase enforcement of foreign worker labor rights; evaluate employers and recruitment agencies for histories or indicators of abusive practices before referring migrant workers to them for new employment; continue to strengthen victim identification of migrants and asylum seekers arriving from the Sinai, continue to accord those trafficking victims protections and medical treatment, and ensure trafficking victims are not penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, such as immigration violations; adequately train regional district police units in victim identification and enforcement of labor and sex trafficking laws; and increase investigations of forced prostitution of Israeli nationals.

**Prosecution**

The Government of Israel sustained its strong law enforcement efforts against sex trafficking during the reporting period; it also made marked progress against labor trafficking. The government prohibits all forms of human trafficking through its Anti-Trafficking Law of 2006, which prescribes penalties of up to 16 years’ imprisonment for trafficking of an adult, up to 20 years’ imprisonment for the trafficking of a child, up to 16 years’ imprisonment for slavery, and up to seven years’ imprisonment for forced labor. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. During the reporting period, the government conducted 18 investigations of sex trafficking and two investigations of forced labor under Israel’s trafficking statute. Israeli courts convicted 15 sex trafficking offenders, some of whom were charged under the trafficking statute but convicted under related statutes due to limitations of available evidence in trafficking cases, and were given sentences ranging from eight months to five years’ imprisonment. In a precedential case in February 2012, the government convicted two individuals for forced labor of a Filipina domestic worker under the trafficking statute. While there was no evidence of physical violence inflicted upon the victim, the court recognized this case as an offense of “holding a person under conditions of slavery” and withholding of a passport; the sentence was pending at the end of the reporting period and the victim had been referred to a trafficking shelter. In a separate case, the government also convicted one alleged labor trafficker under a non-trafficking statute, and sentenced him to eight years’ imprisonment. At the end of the reporting period, the prosecution of 10 sex trafficking offenders and two labor trafficking cases remained pending. At the end of the reporting period, prosecution had not yet begun of an employer who has been under investigation since May 2010 for forcing a caregiver from Moldova to have sex with the employer’s disabled son over a sustained period of time.

As in the previous reporting period, police did not uncover cases in which Israeli women were forced into prostitution, yet a local NGO observed that the majority of women in prostitution are Israeli citizens, and some are restricted from leaving the brothels where they work. NGOs continued to report that the majority of alleged labor trafficking complaints were made by NGOs, and that the government failed to provide sufficient funding and staffing for police enforcement, particularly in the field. The SAAR unit – which was established in 2009 as the central anti-trafficking police unit – was decentralized in July 2011, and regional districts became responsible for handling trafficking investigations, overseen by an Israel National Police headquarters component. A smaller coordination unit was preserved from the previous SAAR unit, which traditionally operated as an economic crimes unit. NGOs claimed the decentralization would hurt the police’s ability to manage complex field investigations, gather intelligence, and build evidence for successful prosecutions, but the Israeli High Court found no evidence of a decrease in the government’s ability to fight trafficking. Furthermore, the government asserted that the decentralization was designed to improve enforcement and coordination at local levels and that there was no reduction in resources allocated for anti-trafficking efforts. Law enforcement entities continued to rely largely on information from NGOs to investigate most instances of alleged labor trafficking. For example, an Israeli NGO identified several hundred victims of serious labor rights abuses in the agricultural sector in 2011, which prompted an investigation that identified no victims of trafficking. Through the National Anti-Trafficking Unit, the government continued to provide numerous anti-trafficking trainings, workshops, and seminars for law enforcement officers, judicial officials, labor inspectors, officials from various government ministries, social workers, and NGOs.

**Protection**

The Government of Israel continued to improve its strong protection of trafficking victims over the reporting period, although it lacked effective procedures to identify and protect some trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including migrant workers and other migrants who entered from the Sinai. As a result, some unidentified victims may have been penalized for unlawful acts, such as immigration violations, committed as part of being trafficked. Israeli law enforcement authorities employed systematic procedures for identifying foreign sex trafficking victims among high-risk persons with whom they came in contact. The police established a new pilot program coordinated with an NGO to help identify sex trafficking victims during police raids of brothels. During the reporting period, police did not identify any children or Israeli women forced into prostitution, though press reports cited the existence of underage prostitution in Tel Aviv. An NGO noted that some victims who were trafficked in the Sinai and later entered Israel remained in Saharonim prison for several weeks, but were then transferred to trafficking shelters. Additionally, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor lacked Thai translators during inspections in the agriculture sector, thus inspectors were unable to communicate with and receive complaints from the predominantly Thai migrant workers in the sector. The government provided victim identification training and workshops to judges, social workers, law enforcement and prison officials, labor inspectors, and NGOs which resulted in marked improvement in the identification of trafficking victims.

The government continued to fund its 35-bed Maagan shelter for foreign female trafficking victims and the 35-bed Atlas shelter for foreign male trafficking victims, both of which were open and allowed shelter residents to freely leave. NGOs and international organizations praised the efforts of these shelters but also claimed that they were insufficient to treat the scale of trafficking victims who were not officially identified in Israel, particularly among migrants and asylum seekers arriving from the Sinai. The government opened new apartments as needed to handle additional identified victims. Law enforcement and judicial officials referred 16 women to the Maagan shelter and 10 men to the Atlas shelter in 2011; while the number of women referred to the shelter was similar with the previous year, referrals of men dropped significantly compared to 2010. In 2011, the shelters housed 26 trafficked women, 13 men, and six children. No child victims of trafficking were referred to the shelter this year, but the children of some adult trafficking victims were housed in the shelter with their parent. The shelter staff maintained contact with trafficking victims after they had left the shelter to assist victims with long-term reintegration into Israeli society and to ensure future work conditions were not exploitative. The government continued to fund and supervise the shelters and legal and medical services, allocating the equivalent of approximately $811,000 in 2011 to fund the NGO-operated Atlas and Maagan facilities. These shelters offered job training, psychosocial support, medical treatment, language training, and other services. The Legal Aid Branch of the Ministry of Justice continued to provide free legal aid to victims and included a special representative with expertise in handling human trafficking cases. In 2011, the Branch granted legal aid to 54 possible victims of trafficking, including victims of sex trafficking and forced labor, as well as those who entered from the Sinai and allegedly experienced conditions of forced labor and sex trafficking in Egypt. The government encouraged victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking but did not require it. During the year, the government issued or extended several temporary B1 visas to trafficking victims that allowed victims to work legally and without restriction; these were not contingent on their participation in investigations or prosecutions. Some NGOs complained that identified victims of trafficking who suffered abuses in Egypt were not accorded B1 visas in Israel, but were instead issued standard deferred deportation orders that served as de facto work permits.

The Israeli government continued to grapple with the influx of foreign migrants and asylum seekers arriving from the Sinai, primarily from Eritrea, Sudan, and to a lesser extent Ethiopia, many of whom were victims of torture prior to their entry into Israel, and some of whom were identified as victims of trafficking. NGOs noted the government’s improved procedures in Israeli prisons to identify trafficking victims among this large group of migrants and referral of victims to service providers. The government continued to improve its system of identifying victims and providing medical treatment, even to those victims who were abused and trafficked prior to arriving in Israel. Judges identified, released from detention, and referred to shelter services 30 possible trafficking victims who had entered Israel from the Sinai. Police, who can officially identify trafficking victims and refer them to the shelters, only authorized the referral of 15 of these victims to the shelters, based on detailed assessments. Police recognized the other 15 as torture victims, not as trafficking victims; therefore, they were not authorized access to the trafficking shelters. The government indicated it did not have the capacity to provide assistance to the large numbers of trafficking victims among the migrants arriving from Egypt. In March 2011, the government reported that it ceased the practice of “hot returns” of migrants and asylum seekers back to Egypt, citing the lack of effective coordination by Egyptian authorities receiving the migrants. NGOs filed two complaints to the State Attorney’s office in August 2011 regarding prior incidents of hot returns, but there were no reported cases of new hot returns since July 2011. According to international organizations and NGOs, immigration officials pressured some migrants who may have been trafficking victims with disputed nationalities not to claim citizenship of Sudan or Eritrea, because nationals of those countries have received temporary protective status from deportation. As a result, these possible trafficking victims were not offered protection, which includes shelter and B1 visas. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) deported some asylum seekers who arrived from the Sinai and were determined to be Ethiopian without determining if they were victims of trafficking. Moreover, judges referred at least two of these migrants to police as trafficking victims, yet police did not validate the initial assessment, and the MOI deported the victims.

**Prevention**

The Israeli government made sustained progress in preventing human trafficking over the reporting period. In December 2011, the government held its fourth annual ceremony to present awards to individuals or organizations that made a significant contribution against human trafficking. The Knesset Subcommittee on Trafficking in Women held frequent meetings during the reporting period that were open to the public and covered by the media. As a continuation of the government’s efforts from the previous reporting period, the country’s national coordinator for human trafficking published an annual summary of the Israeli government’s anti-trafficking efforts. The government conducted 20 investigations of recruitment agencies, of which 12 cases were referred for prosecution. NGOs continued to raise concerns over amendments to the Law of Entry, which passed in the Knesset in May 2011 and might further bind foreign workers to particular sectors, employers, and geographic regions. These amendments specifically affect work permits issued to migrant workers in the caregiving sector in Israel. The government continued to distribute a labor rights brochure to foreign workers arriving at Ben Gurion Airport. Under the November 2010 amendment to the Foreign Workers Law, labor inspectors entered and inspected private residences in which migrant workers were employed. In efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, in February 2012, a government committee endorsed a bill prohibiting the procurement of prostitution that was pending in the Knesset at the end of the reporting period. The government also opened 293 cases of managing a property for the purpose of engaging persons in prostitution and eight cases of advertisement of prostitution services.