**USSD 2018 TIP Report about Israel**

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ISRAEL: Tier 1

The Government of Israel fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore Israel remained on Tier 1. The government demonstrated serious and sustained efforts by improving victim identification procedures and identifying an increased number of victims. It continued to operate shelters and other facilities that provided victims a wide variety of immediate and long-term care and rehabilitative services, and it referred all identified victims to care. The government continued to prosecute and convict sex trafficking offenders, and it prosecuted an increased number of perpetrators in comparison to the previous reporting period. Although the government met the minimum standards, it convicted a significantly lower number of sex trafficking offenders than in the previous reporting period, and it continued to issue weak sentences that were inconsistent with the seriousness of the crime. It also did not prosecute or convict any forced labor perpetrators. Despite improvements to victim identification procedures, some victims referred by NGOs did not receive appropriate protection services. While the government identified and provided some care to trafficking victims among the irregular African migrant population, because of inadequate screening procedures it continued to punish victims among this population for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking, such as immigration violations. The government also implemented policies that subjected potential trafficking victims among this population to deportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ISRAEL

Impose stricter sentences on convicted traffickers, consistent with the seriousness of the crime; proactively screen irregular migrants, particularly those who endured abuses in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, to ensure trafficking victims among this population are not penalized, including by detention and summoning to detention, for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking; improve the process to officially recognize identified trafficking victims, including victims referred by NGOs, to allow for quicker access to protection services; increase methods of evaluating effectiveness of training for law enforcement, including police and prison officials, in victim identification, and enforcement of labor and sex trafficking laws; continue to provide protection for all trafficking victims, including shelter and medical and psycho-social treatment; increase and train the number of labor inspectors, social workers, and interpreters in the agricultural, construction, and caregiving sectors; negotiate full-scale bilateral labor agreements, to include protection mechanisms for workers, in the caregiving sector; and increase enforcement of foreign worker labor rights.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained efforts to prosecute sex traffickers but it did not prosecute or convict any forced labor offenders; convicted sex traffickers continued to receive lenient sentences. The 2006 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 16 years imprisonment for the trafficking of an adult, 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. Under 376A of the Penal Law 5737-1977, holding a person’s passport against their will carried a penalty of three to five years imprisonment.

In 2017, police initiated 231 investigations of potential sex trafficking crimes, compared to 310 investigations in 2016. Police did not initiate any investigations for potential forced labor crimes. In 2017, the government initiated 10 prosecutions (four for adult sex trafficking crimes and six for child sex trafficking), but zero for forced labor; these numbers compared to three sex trafficking and zero forced labor prosecutions in 2016. In 2017, the government convicted three individuals (one for sex trafficking and two for child sex trafficking), but zero for forced labor; these numbers compared to 17 convictions in 2016 (16 for sex trafficking, including eight for child sex trafficking, and one for forced labor). In 2017, the prosecution unit within the Ministry of Interior’s Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) filed 143 criminal indictments against employers of foreign workers who violated labor laws that resulted in 114 sentences that included providing financial compensation to workers; however, none of these employers were prosecuted or convicted for potential forced labor crimes. In 2017, the government issued sentences for six sex trafficking offenders that ranged from community service to four to six years imprisonment, while one forced labor offender received a sentence of 15 months imprisonment. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in trafficking offenses.

The government continued to provide extensive anti-trafficking training, awareness-raising workshops, and seminars to more than 320 officials. In addition, the government provided training to 130 police officers on child sex trafficking, and distributed materials on the offenses related to child sex trafficking to district investigation and intelligence officers and every police station in the country.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts; however, it continued to punish identified and potential trafficking victims among the African migrant population for immigration violations, thereby preventing these victims from accessing appropriate protection services. The government continued to circulate trafficking victim identification guidelines widely to relevant ministries. Government officials referred more potential trafficking victims to the police during the reporting period, in comparison to previous years in which NGOs were the only source of victim referrals. The Israeli National Police (INP) granted official trafficking victim status to 73 individuals in 2017—including 24 women and 49 men—which was an increase from the 47 victims identified in 2016. The INP was the only government entity with authority to grant referred individuals official trafficking victim status, which also allowed a victim full access to protection services. During the majority of the reporting period, only one police officer in the country was authorized to interview and adjudicate applications for victim status, which led to significant delays. Recognizing this deficiency, in January 2018 the government appointed two full-time police officers to handle and process victim applications, with the intent of accelerating the process. In addition, during the reporting period, the National Anti-Trafficking Unit (NATU) coordinated with the INP to institute a fast-track procedure to more efficiently identify trafficking victims and eliminate a backlog of hundreds of applications for victim status. Nevertheless, an NGO reported that the INP’s evidentiary standard for victim referrals from NGOs became stricter in 2017 by requiring witness testimony, thereby impeding efforts to officially recognize and provide at least 37 victims identified by an NGO with appropriate care.

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 and six beds for male victims. Shelter residents were allowed to leave freely and, by law, all victims residing in the shelters were provided B1 visas—unrestricted work visas. These shelters offered one year of rehabilitation services, including job training, psycho-social support, medical treatment, language training, and legal assistance. The INP referred all 73 identified victims to shelters, but some declined to enter a shelter and instead utilized rehabilitative services at a government-run day center. In 2017, the women’s shelter assisted 41 victims, including four children; the men’s shelter assisted 57 victims; and the transitional apartments assisted 24 men and women, including eight children. The majority of victims at the men’s shelter were Ethiopian and Eritrean. The Ministry of Social Affairs continued to operate a day center in Tel Aviv for male and female trafficking victims who were either waiting for a space at a shelter or who chose not to reside at a shelter. The day center provided psycho-social services and food aid, and social workers at the center were trained to identify individuals at risk of trafficking and refer them to shelter services. In 2017, the center provided services to 256 men and women. The government also operated 12 centers for adult and child sex trafficking victims, which provided medical and rehabilitation services; the government assisted 350 individuals at these centers in 2017. Additionally, for identified trafficking victims who opted not to stay in shelters, the government continued to provide an official letter that protected them from potential arrest for immigration violations and emergency contact numbers for shelters and relevant ministries. Identified trafficking victims living outside of shelters were also entitled to receive one-year of free medical coverage at various government-funded health facilities. In 2017, the government provided medical care to 106 male and female trafficking victims.

The Ministry of Justice Legal Aid Administration (LAA) continued to provide free legal aid to trafficking victims. In 2017, the branch received 202 legal aid requests to assist potential trafficking victims, including 125 irregular migrants who may have been subjected to trafficking in the Sinai. In 2017, the government issued 20 initial B1 visas and 19 extensions to sex and labor trafficking victims. It also issued 65 visas preventing the deportation of trafficking victims and 25 extensions of such visas in 2017. The government continued to encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers, but did not require their participation as a condition for receiving visas and protective assistance; victims could also opt to leave the country pending trial proceedings. The government also allowed trafficking victims to work during the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers. The government forfeiture fund, which used property and money confiscated from traffickers to assist victims, disbursed 886,960 shekels ($255,530) to victims in 2017.

The government published new guidelines in May 2017 discouraging the prosecution of forced labor victims for offenses committed during their exploitation; similar guidelines for sex trafficking victims were already in effect prior to the start of the reporting period. Nevertheless, the government continued to punish some trafficking victims—specifically those among the irregular African migrant population, some of whom were exploited in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula—as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking. During the majority of the reporting period, the government lacked an effective process to identify or proactively screen for victims among this population, and as a result, authorities regularly detained or summoned to detention victims for immigration violations under the Law of Infiltration for one year without trial or conviction in the Holot facility and Saharonim and Giv’on prisons. Although the government characterized Holot as an open facility to detain “infiltrators,” NGOs and Holot residents claimed it was a de facto detention center due to its remote location in the desert and restrictions on movement. In November 2017, PIBA implemented a revised questionnaire for officials to utilize to screen for trafficking among irregular migrants who were summoned to Holot. However, PIBA did not investigate claims that at least one trafficking victim remained at Holot after an NGO identified the victim in early 2017, nor did it attempt to release the victim. During the reporting period, the LAA gained the release of three men from Saharonim prison after INP identified them as trafficking victims; LAA also secured exemptions from detention in Holot for an additional 26 men after INP identified them as victims. LAA also requested that PIBA suspend the summons of three migrants to Holot while INP reviewed their applications for trafficking victim status. Both government and NGO officials reported that detention, threat of detention, or summoning to detention triggered severe post-traumatic stress symptoms—including depression, fear, and eating disorders—among migrants that experienced abuse, and in some cases trafficking, in the Sinai. In December 2017, the Knesset approved a plan to close Holot and deport all detained migrants, some of whom may be trafficking victims, to third countries; PIBA further issued regulations in January 2018 establishing procedures to implement this plan.

PREVENTION

The government maintained strong efforts to prevent and raise awareness of human trafficking among the public and government officials. NATU continued to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts effectively among relevant ministries and NGOs during the reporting period, and NATU officials continued to appear regularly in the media to raise awareness of trafficking. NATU did not, however, complete a draft national action plan to combat trafficking that would replace the existing plan from 2007. The Knesset Subcommittee on Trafficking in Women and Prostitution met regularly and held 16 hearings and discussions during the reporting period. In 2017, the Ministry of Health funded a study conducted by a government-run health clinic and an NGO to study prostitution in the Eritrean migrant community. The government provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

In June 2017, the Knesset passed an amendment to the Foreign Workers Law to revoke an employer’s license to employ a foreign worker if the employer was convicted of a severe crime, including human trafficking. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services, which employed 261 labor inspectors and contracted translators during routine inspections, issued 1,242 administrative warnings, imposed 45 fines, and processed one criminal complaint that resulted in a sentence of 100 hours of community service on employers for labor violations in 2017. Nonetheless, NGOs reported 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 work force companies, nor combat criminal networks that recruited foreigners for the construction and caregiving fields and for prostitution. In April 2017, the government signed a bilateral agreement to allow 20,000 Chinese workers to enter Israel’s construction sector; however, the agreement required workers to pay licensed employment recruiters up to $1,000 in recruitment fees and costs, which could increase their debt and vulnerability to forced labor. The government did not complete a plan to prevent exploitation of Thai workers from forced labor in the agricultural industry. In accordance with PIBA procedures for recruitment agencies in the caregiving sector, it 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.

The government, 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 11 interpreters in seven languages: Chinese, Thai, Bulgarian, Russian, Nepalese, Sinhalese, and Romanian. In 2017, the hotline received 1,398 calls, the majority from Thai agricultural workers. The government also maintained an emergency hotline for women and girls in prostitution, but it did not provide data on its operations in 2017. The government continued efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts and to address sex tourism. In September 2017, the INP conducted an enforcement campaign on child sex trafficking, during which it conducted 19 raids on prostitution establishments, resulting in the arrests of two individuals and transfer of five children to social services. The government also temporarily shut down five brothels in 2017. In February 2018, the Ministry of Tourism led representatives of the Israeli tourism industry to sign the UN World Tourism Organization Code of Ethics, which included measures to prevent trafficking.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Israel is a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking, as well as a source country for men, women, and to a lesser extent children, subjected to sex trafficking within Israel. Foreign workers, primarily from South and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Palestinian territories migrate to Israel for temporary work in construction, agriculture, and caregiving; some of these workers are subjected to forced labor. As of January 2018, the Israeli government reported there were 88,171 legal foreign workers and 18,059 illegal foreign workers, including Palestinian workers, in Israel. Foreign workers in the construction sector suffer from labor rights abuses and violations, some of which may be trafficking. Some employers in the construction sector 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. Some Thai men and women are subjected to forced labor in Israel’s agricultural sector and face conditions of long working hours, no breaks or rest days, withheld passports, and difficulty changing employers due to limitations on work permits. 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 that caregivers are subjected 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. According to the Israeli government, as of June 2017 there were 49,100 foreign caregivers in Israel, 80 percent of whom are women; these caregivers constituted 57 percent of all legal foreign workers in the country. Networks of workforce agencies recruit Ukrainian and Georgian workers to Israel through a fraudulent asylum-claim process and charge workers high mediation fees and sell them fake documents; these workers are vulnerable to exploitation.

Eritrean and Sudanese male and female migrants are highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking in Israel. According to an international organization, as of September 2017, 72 percent of the 38,000 irregular migrants in Israel are Eritrean and 20 percent are Sudanese. According to NGOs, these migrants and asylum-seekers became increasingly vulnerable to trafficking following the government’s implementation of a policy in May 2017 that reduced net wages for this population. Economic distress among women in this population greatly increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. 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, has dramatically decreased to zero in 2017. Many of these migrants were kidnapped in the Sinai and subjected to severe abuse, including forced labor and sex trafficking, at the hands of criminal groups in the Sinai before reaching Israel.

Women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, China, and Ghana, as well as Eritrean men and women, are subjected to sex trafficking in Israel; some women arrive on tourist visas to work willingly in prostitution—particularly in the southern coastal resort city of Eilat, but are subsequently exploited by sex traffickers. Some traffickers reportedly recruit sex trafficking victims with false, fraudulent, or misleading job offers on the internet, sometimes through legitimate employment websites. NGOs report some Palestinian LGBTI persons in Israel are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, due to their legal status and restrictions on work eligibility for Palestinian nationals in Israel. Israeli transgender persons are also highly vulnerable to sex trafficking. Some transgender persons are sexually exploited in prostitution in order to be able to afford gender-affirming care. Some transgender children as young as 13 years old, some of whom run away from home, are exploited in sex trafficking.

**TAGS**

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