

U.S. Department of State

Diplomacy in Action

Iran

OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

[2018 Trafficking in Persons Report \(http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/index.htm\)](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/index.htm)

Tier 3

IRAN: Tier 3

The Government of Iran does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so; therefore Iran remained on Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including steps to ratify the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). However, the government did not share information on its overall anti-trafficking efforts. Trafficking victims reportedly continued to face severe punishment, including death, for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. Government officials were allegedly complicit in the coerced recruitment of Afghan men and boys as young as 13 years old residing in Iran to fight for Iranian-supported militias operating in Syria. The Iranian government also provided financial support to militias fighting in Iraq that recruited and used child soldiers. Despite these credible reports, the government did not investigate or hold any complicit officials accountable for their involvement in trafficking crimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRAN

Cease the forcible and otherwise illegal recruitment of adults and children for combat in Syria, and cease support for armed militias that recruit and use children in Iraq; ensure trafficking victims are not punished for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking; institute procedures to proactively identify trafficking victims, particularly among vulnerable populations such as persons in prostitution, street children, and undocumented migrants; while respecting due process, investigate, prosecute, convict, and adequately sentence sex trafficking and forced labor perpetrators, including complicit officials; offer specialized protection services to trafficking victims, including shelter and medical, psychological, and legal assistance; develop partnerships with civil society and international organizations to combat trafficking; increase transparency of anti-trafficking policies and activities; and become a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

PROSECUTION

The government did not report anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts and officials continued to be complicit in trafficking crimes, including the coerced recruitment and use of adults and children in armed conflict in the region. Iranian law did not criminalize all forms of trafficking. A 2004 law criminalized trafficking in persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abuse of power, or abuse of a victim's position of vulnerability for purposes of prostitution, slavery, or forced marriage. The prescribed penalty under this law is up to 10 years imprisonment for the trafficking of adults and a penalty of 10 years imprisonment if the offense involved a child victim. Both penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with the penalties prescribed for kidnapping. The 2002 Law to Protect Children and Adolescents prohibited buying, selling, and exploiting children; the punishments for such crimes are six months to one year imprisonment and a fine, which

were not sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with other serious crimes such as kidnapping. The constitution and labor code prohibited forced labor and debt bondage, but the prescribed penalty of a fine and up to one year imprisonment is not sufficiently stringent. Courts accorded legal testimony by women only half the weight accorded to the testimony by men, thereby restricting female trafficking victims' access to justice. Moreover, female victims of sexual abuse, including sex trafficking victims, faced prosecution for adultery, which is defined as sexual relations outside of marriage and is punishable by death.

The government did not report statistics on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, or sentences of traffickers. A report from the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) in July 2017, however, noted a court in Tehran sentenced 10 perpetrators to 10 years imprisonment each for their involvement in a trafficking network. There was no evidence the government held complicit officials accountable for trafficking offenses, despite continued reports that officials were directly involved in or condoned alleged cases of trafficking. Multiple reports alleged that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and officials from other government institutions continued to actively recruit and use—through threats of arrest and deportation—Afghan immigrant men and children as young as 13 years old for combat in IRGC-organized and commanded militias in Syria. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to its officials.

PROTECTION

The government made negligible efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims. The government did not report identifying any trafficking victims during the reporting period. In July 2017, a report from HRANA noted that officials identified 800 women victimized by a trafficking network during the course of an investigation; however, it was unknown if the government provided the victims with appropriate protection services. The government reportedly continued to punish trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking, such as prostitution and illegal immigration. The government continued to hold migrants, some of whom may be trafficking victims, in detention centers and jails pending deportation where some experienced severe physical abuse that sometimes led to death. As in previous years, the government reportedly continued to severely punish victims of sexual abuse and women in prostitution, some of whom may be trafficking victims, through lashings, public shaming, forced confessions, and imprisonment. During the reporting period, officials reportedly detained and deported Afghan migrants, including children, who did not comply with coerced recruitment by Iranian officials to fight in Syria. In December 2017, government officials in Tehran rounded up and detained in camps 300 Iranian and foreign street children, a population vulnerable to trafficking.

The government did not provide comprehensive protection services for trafficking victims. The Iranian state welfare organization reportedly operated emergency centers for vulnerable populations, including those at risk of trafficking, which offered counseling, legal services, and health care; however, the government did not report if it assisted any trafficking victims at these centers in 2017. Though government-operated health clinics reportedly offered health services to potential trafficking victims, the government did not report if it provided services to any victims in these clinics in 2017. The government did not report providing support to NGOs that offered limited services to populations vulnerable to trafficking. The government did not encourage trafficking victims to assist in the investigation or prosecution of traffickers and did not provide witness support services. It did not provide foreign trafficking victims legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution.

PREVENTION

The government made negligible efforts to prevent human trafficking. The government's lack of efforts to prevent complicity further exacerbated trafficking in the country and the region. The government made no efforts to prevent its officials from recruiting Afghan men and boys through coercive means to serve in combat brigades deployed to Syria. The government did not have a national anti-trafficking coordinating body, nor did it dedicate resources to address human trafficking in the country, despite reports that suggested trafficking—particularly child sex trafficking—was increasing in Iran. The government did not improve transparency on its anti-trafficking policies or activities, nor did it make discernible efforts to partner with NGOs or international organizations to combat human trafficking. The government did not report on efforts to regulate foreign labor recruiters for fraudulent recruitment practices. The government made no discernible efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, forced labor, or child sex tourism by Iranian citizens traveling abroad. The government did not implement anti-trafficking awareness campaigns. Children of Afghan refugees—either registered or unregistered—continued to have difficulty obtaining legal documentation, while children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers were not Iranian citizens under law and therefore remained undocumented; these policies increased these populations' vulnerability to exploitation. In 2017, the government agreed to strengthen cooperation with the governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey to combat terrorism, violent extremism, and other transnational organized crimes, including human trafficking. In January 2018, the Iranian parliament approved a bill to join the UNTOC; however, the government did not ratify it. Iran is not a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Iran is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Iranian women, boys, and girls are vulnerable to trafficking in Iran, Afghanistan, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), Pakistan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Europe. In 2016 and 2017, there was a reported increase in young Iranian women in prostitution in Dubai; some of these women are trafficking victims, experiencing confiscation of passports and threats of violence. Reports suggest that Iranian women are also vulnerable to sex trafficking in Turkey, particularly in Turkish cities close to the Iranian border. Media reports from 2015 and 2016 noted Iranian girls were subjected to sex trafficking in brothels in the IKR, especially Sulaimaniya; in some cases this exploitation was facilitated by Iranian trafficking networks. The media and regional experts reported in 2015 that officials from the Kurdistan Regional Government were among the clients of these brothels. Some Iranian women who seek employment to support their families in Iran, as well as young Iranian women and girls who run away from their homes, are vulnerable to sex trafficking. The use of "temporary" or "short-term" marriages, lasting from one hour to one week, for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, is reportedly widespread in Iran. Reports suggest that police and other Iranian authorities, religious clerics, and parents of victims are allegedly involved in or turn a blind eye to sex trafficking crimes. According to a regional scholar, trafficking rings reportedly use Shiraz, Iran, as a transit point to bring ethnic Azeri girls from Azerbaijan to the UAE for commercial sexual exploitation.

Street children in Iran are highly vulnerable to trafficking. The number of children working in transport, garbage and waste disposal, brick factories, construction, and the carpet industry is reportedly increasing; these children may be exposed to harmful working conditions and some may be vulnerable to trafficking. Organized criminal groups kidnap or purchase and force Iranian and migrant children, especially undocumented Afghan children, to work as beggars and street vendors in cities, including Tehran. These children, who may be as young as three years old, are coerced through physical and sexual abuse and drug addiction. Reports indicate that some children are also used in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking and smuggling of fuel and tobacco.

Afghan migrants, including women and children, are highly vulnerable to forced labor, debt bondage, and sex trafficking, while Pakistani migrants are also vulnerable to forced labor in Iran. Afghan girls are vulnerable to forced marriage with men living in Iran, which frequently led to forced labor, domestic servitude, and commercial sexual exploitation. Afghan boys in Iran are vulnerable to forced labor in the service industry, such as car washing, domestic work, and drug trafficking, experiencing debt bondage, non-payment of wages, and physical or sexual abuse. Afghan boys in Iran are also vulnerable to sexual abuse by their employers and harassment or blackmailing by the Iranian security services and other government officials. Traffickers subject Afghan migrants, including children, to forced labor in construction and agriculture in Iran. Trafficking networks smuggle Afghan nationals living in Iran to Europe and force them to work in restaurants to pay off debts incurred by smuggling fees. Pakistani men and women migrants in low-skilled employment, such as domestic work and construction, are targeted by organized groups and subjected to forced labor, debt bondage, restriction of movement, non-payment of wages, and physical or sexual abuse. Increasingly, despite labor code protections for registered foreign workers, employers seek adjustable contracts that increase these workers' vulnerability to exploitative work practices such as coerced overtime and denial of work benefits.

An international organization and the media continue to report the Iranian government coerced male adult and child Afghans resident in Iran, including boys as young as 13 years old, to fight in Iranian-sponsored Shia militias deployed to Syria by threatening them with arrest and deportation to Afghanistan. Since 2015, the Iranian government has provided funding to the militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) —also known as the League of the Righteous—operating in Iraq; according to civil society organizations and local contacts in Iraq in 2017, certain brigades within the AAH recruited children mostly out of schools for use in combat. In 2015 and 2016, AAH reportedly organized training camps in southern Iraq for high school and university students, some of whom may have been under the age of 18. According to an Iraq-based source in 2016, the Iranian government also provided funding to the militia Abu Fadhl al-Abbas Brigades, which used children in combat on the front-line in Fallujah, Iraq in 2016.

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