
Armenia – Tier 1

Armenia is a source country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking; sex and labor trafficking within the country is also a problem. Women and girls from Armenia are subjected to sex trafficking within the country and in the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. Armenian men and women are subjected to forced labor in Russia and Turkey. Armenian men incur debt to pay for travel expenses; this may contribute to their subsequent victimization in destination countries. Their labor recruitment is organized by family members, close acquaintances, and legal but unlicensed private employment agencies. Isolated cases were reported of Armenian boys subjected to forced labor within the country. Some children work in agriculture, construction, and service provision within the country and some children serve as domestic workers in Armenia and Turkey. Russian and Ukrainian dancers in Armenian nightclubs may be vulnerable to trafficking. Child abuse victims and minors departing from child care institutions are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking.

The Government of Armenia fully complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. In 2012, the government's law enforcement and protection activities expanded to address a wide range of trafficking offenses—sex and labor trafficking, domestic and transnational. The government investigated and prosecuted more suspected traffickers than during the previous year and prosecuted a case of domestic forced child begging. The government also continued convicting criminals for subjecting Armenians to forced prostitution within the country. Officials maintained strong partnerships with civil society groups, continued to train hundreds of government personnel, provided in-kind contributions to a counter-trafficking shelter, and maintained strong anti-trafficking prevention efforts. However, the number of victims identified by the government during the year continued to decrease, in part due to a defect in proactive victim identification procedures as well as a deficiency in linking formal victim identification with participation in law enforcement efforts. The lack of formal victim-witness protection, although provided on an *ad hoc* basis, continued to be a concern.

Recommendations for Armenia: Increase efforts to identify victims of forced labor, including by strengthening victim identification training of front line staff, empowering labor inspectors to identify victims through unannounced visits, and having stronger cooperation with law enforcement; increase efforts to investigate and prosecute labor trafficking offenses; improve efforts to investigate trafficking cases even without victim testimony and when the exploitation occurs in a foreign country; educate law enforcement and labor inspectors on how to distinguish between labor trafficking and civil law labor violations; ensure that victims who are unwilling or unable to assist in investigations or prosecutions have access to short- and long-term services and protection; improve efforts to protect victims who consent to serve as witnesses in prosecutions; establish a compensation mechanism for trafficking victims; provide sensitivity training to judges to foster a culture of empathy for trafficking victims; provide legal aid services to trafficking victims, including to improve their ability to obtain civil restitution; establish protection services for male victims; de-link the intermediate and final stages of formal victim identification with participation in law enforcement efforts; continue to provide and expand funding for NGOs that provide victim assistance; license, regulate, and educate local employment agencies and agents so they can help prevent the forced labor of Armenians abroad;

continue to raise awareness on employment assistance available for trafficking victims, and devise measures to ensure victims' confidentiality in accessing this assistance; continue robust partnerships with civil society groups; and expand awareness-raising campaigns to rural and border communities as well as to children leaving child-care institutions.

Prosecution

The Armenian government increased its investigations and prosecutions against alleged human traffickers during the reporting period, and though convictions declined, all convicted defendants received significant sentences. Armenia prohibits both sex trafficking and labor trafficking through Articles 132 and 132-2 of its criminal code, which prescribe penalties of five to 15 years' imprisonment—penalties that are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The government investigated 22 trafficking cases in 2012, compared with 17 in 2011, and prosecuted 18 defendants for trafficking offenses—including one case of child forced begging—compared with prosecutions against 15 alleged traffickers in 2011. Eight traffickers were convicted, including one for transnational labor, compared to 13 convictions in 2011. All eight offenders convicted in 2012 received sentences ranging from four to 11 years' imprisonment; the majority received sentences of eight years. The government provided information about a potential labor trafficking case to Russian authorities; Russian law enforcement bodies, however, were not cooperative or responsive. While observers noted the Armenian police's victim-centered approach, they criticized some judges as aggressive and prejudiced against victims. Human trafficking continued to be included in the curricula of all education facilities of law enforcement bodies including the police academy, the prosecutors' school, and the judicial school. The Government of Armenia did not report any investigations or prosecutions of public officials for alleged complicity in trafficking-related offenses during the reporting period.

Protection

The Government of Armenia maintained efforts to protect identified victims of trafficking, though victim identification remained a concern. The Armenian government sustained strong partnerships with anti-trafficking NGOs, international organizations, and foreign governments to provide anti-trafficking training, including training on victim identification, to hundreds of government officials including prosecutors, police, border guards, members of the judicial system, and labor inspectors. The government certified one male and seven female trafficking victims in 2012—one of whom was subjected to forced begging within the country—and offered assistance, including referrals to NGO shelters, to all of them; seven of these eight certified victims were identified by police. In 2011, the authorities certified 13 victims. NGOs identified at least six additional trafficking victims who were not certified subsequent to criminal investigations; the investigations were stymied because the victims chose not to cooperate with Armenian law enforcement and their exploitation occurred in Russia. The Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) report concluded that the government's system to certify victims was not effective since it excluded victims who were unable or unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement and take part in judicial proceedings against the alleged traffickers. In practice, NGOs and government officials provided short-term assistance to these victims, although the provision of long-term assistance remained a concern. Despite receiving training, the Labor Inspectorate did not identify any victims of forced labor in the reporting period, in part due to legal restrictions on their cooperating with law enforcement and conducting surprise inspections. The government continued to provide the equivalent of

approximately \$16,000 to an NGO-run, long-term shelter, which assisted 26 female victims of trafficking in 2012. Adult victims could leave the shelter at will. The country did not have specialized care centers for male victims; however, existing shelters are able to assist male trafficking victims when necessary. During the reporting period, one trafficking victim received assistance in obtaining employment. In the previous reporting period, by comparison, no victims received this assistance. Law enforcement officers provided victims with security at court proceedings on an ad hoc basis when requested by victims' attorneys or NGOs. In 2012, all certified victims officially recognized by the government assisted police with trafficking investigations. NGOs continued to report the absence of appropriate protections for victims who provide testimony was a concern. The government did not penalize victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of their being trafficked. The government permits foreign victims to stay in the country through temporary residency permits and to obtain temporary employment; however, no foreign victims were identified by the government in the reporting period.

Prevention

The Armenian government demonstrated strong trafficking prevention efforts during the reporting period. The government spent the equivalent of approximately \$21,000 of dedicated funds in the budgets of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Youth and Sport Affairs to further increase public awareness of human trafficking. Government agencies undertook a variety of prevention activities, including an anti-trafficking media contest with a cash prize designed to improve professional journalism and the broadcasting of anti-trafficking public service announcements and other programs on national and regional stations during peak viewing periods. The Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking in Persons, chaired by the deputy prime minister, and the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) against Trafficking in Persons continued to meet regularly and to coordinate the implementation of the government's anti-trafficking action plan in strong partnership with NGOs and international organizations. One result of the sub-groups established by the IAWG in the reporting period was the inclusion of anti-trafficking recommendations from the 2012 TIP Report and GRETA Report in the 2013-2015 TIP National Action Plan, which improves on the previous plan by emphasizing victim identification efforts, including for child laborers. The government approved the 2013-2015 plan in February 2013. An international organization independently monitored the government's implementation of its 2010-2012 action plan and determined that 80 percent of the plan's performance goals had been attained. In 2013, the police added an anti-trafficking component to their hotline for migration-related calls; this number was advertised on their daily television program. The government regularly published reports of its anti-trafficking activities during the reporting period. The government did not take steps to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts during the reporting period. The government provided anti-trafficking training to Armenian troops before their deployment overseas on international peacekeeping missions.