

**QATAR: TIER 2** The Government of Qatar does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore Qatar remained on Tier 2. These efforts included opening its first trafficking-specific shelter and identifying and referring trafficking victims to protective services for the first time in several years. Officials also expanded the labor law to include vulnerable domestic workers and expatriate government employees in its rescission of the problematic exit permit requirement for migrant laborers. The government investigated one case of forced labor, which it subsequently sent to the prosecutor's office to be tried under the anti-trafficking law. It established new e-visa centers in eight critical labor-sending countries to reduce instances of contract substitution, and it increased prosecutions of trafficking-related crimes. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. It did not report convicting any Qatari employers or recruitment agencies for forced labor, and sex trafficking convictions declined. The government did not routinely investigate for trafficking indicators among other related crimes, such as passport retention, withholding of wages, labor violations, and complaints of abuse. Authorities reportedly arrested, detained, and deported potential trafficking victims for immigration violations, prostitution, or fleeing their employers or sponsors.

**PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:** Increase the number of trafficking investigations, especially by investigating potential crime indicators such as passport retention, withholding of wages, labor violations, and complaints of abuse. • Increase efforts to prosecute trafficking offenses, particularly forced labor crimes, and to convict and punish traffickers under the anti-trafficking law. • Undertake serious efforts to prevent penalization of trafficking victims by screening for trafficking among those arrested for immigration violations, prostitution, or those who flee abusive employers and face counter-charges and deportation. • Routinely apply formal procedures to proactively identify and refer to care victims of all forms of trafficking, including any North Korean workers whom the North Korean government may have forced to work, and institute regular QATAR 414 trainings for all officials on how to employ these procedures. • Continue to implement reforms to the sponsorship system so it does not provide excessive power to sponsors or employers, such as by eliminating the No Objection Certificate (NOC). • Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) and institute trainings for officials to fully implement the 2018 domestic worker law. • Continue to financially and logistically support the operationalization of the new trafficking shelter. • Increase regular trainings for government officials on the identification of forced labor crimes, targeting the judicial sector and labor inspectorate. • Broaden implementation of the Labor Dispute Resolution Committees (LDRCs) to expedite cases pertaining to contract or employment disputes and refer suspected trafficking cases for criminal investigative proceedings. • Provide adequate staff and resources to manage the 14 existing Qatar Visa Centers (QVCs) to reduce instances of contract substitution. • Ensure the Wage Protection System (WPS) covers all companies and individuals.

**PROSECUTION** The government maintained overall anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. The 2011 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 250,000 Qatari riyal (\$68,680) for offenses involving adult male victims, and up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to

300,000 Qatari riyal (\$82,420) for offenses involving an adult female or child victim. Heads of recruiting agencies found guilty of trafficking faced up to five years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 200,000 Qatari riyal (\$54,950). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Under Law number 4 of 2009, the government criminalized the confiscation of workers' passports by a sponsor, punishable by a maximum fine of 25,000 Qatari riyal (\$6,870).

The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs (MADLSA) reported the investigation of two potential trafficking cases—one notable forced labor case and the other for sex trafficking—and subsequent referral to the Public Prosecution Office (PPO) for criminal proceedings under the anti-trafficking law; both cases remained ongoing at the close of the reporting period. The government did not prosecute any Qatari or foreign employers or recruitment agencies for trafficking crimes under the anti-trafficking law, despite case referrals. The government did not report any trafficking convictions during the year; in the previous reporting period, it convicted six sex traffickers and sentenced them to prison time and ordered deportation. The PPO prosecuted, under Qatari labor laws, an unspecified number of trafficking-related cases exhibiting various trafficking indicators. The government administered the maximum sentence of three years in prison plus fines to the vast majority of these perpetrators during the year. One prosecutor within the PPO specialized in trafficking crimes, and the government continued to build up its newly established, dedicated police and prosecution units, which investigated one trafficking case during the year. The LDRC received 11,703 labor-related complaints, from which ensued 7,561 judiciary verdicts, an increase from 1,339 out of 6,161 the previous period. The remainder resulted in amicable out-of-court settlements or archived grievances due to incomplete evidence. In more than 84 percent of total workplace grievances, the government reported it issued verdicts in favor of the employees rather than their employers. For the first time, the government reported referring more than 2,500 workplace violations to the PPO for criminal proceedings, but analogous to previous years, it did not disaggregate or classify any potential trafficking indicators among these cases. The law mandated the LDRCs must reach resolution within three weeks for any contract or labor dispute. While the law aimed to help reduce the heavy financial burdens placed on laborers often left without income or housing while waiting on case closure, the report suggested in practice cases took significantly longer to resolve. The government did not provide data on cases pertaining to non-payment of wages and passport retention, or on whether it investigated any instances as potential trafficking offenses. In contrast, during the previous reporting period the government reported settlements in 197 cases of salary withholding and prosecutions of 43 cases of passport confiscation. The government did not report investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials for complicity in human trafficking offenses.

Several government entities did not routinely categorize forced labor as human trafficking, but rather as criminal assaults and immigration or labor law violations. Prosecutors almost universally used the Qatari penal code to address trafficking crimes rather than the anti-trafficking law. They did so due to perceived swiftness and higher likelihood of successful prosecutions under charges that were easier to prove and more straightforward, which weakened deterrence of the crime. Consequently, authorities rarely punished trafficking offenders with

dissuasive penalties. Instead, authorities prosecuted victims regularly for immigration and prostitution rather than identifying them as trafficking victims and referring them to care. The government lacked a clear and efficient judicial process to prosecute trafficking offenses or enforce labor law violations. Its primary solution for resolving labor violations continued to be a transfer of employer sponsorship, mandated back payment of wages, fines, and blacklisting of companies. The specialized units tasked with addressing trafficking crimes remained overburdened with thousands of cases related to violations of residency and labor laws; MADLSA's enforcement efforts were dependent on the PPO, as it lacked the formal authority to issue fines or other stringent penalties.

As in previous years, the National Human Rights Committee alongside other government entities financed and conducted specialized, extensive trainings on trafficking issues. The Police Training Institute of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) held an unknown number of courses and workshops for officers and staff, including departments of passports, border crossings, search and followup, human rights, and criminal investigations, which investigate and deal with trafficking cases. The government coordinated with several international organizations and NGOs to improve training programs for government workers in disciplines with a trafficking nexus, such as labor inspection. Qatar University's Law Clinic conducted training related to human trafficking at the local police-training center. In February 2020, a group of Qatari officials representing various authorities, such as the PPO, Ministry of Justice, and the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), received targeted training in the UK from British anti-trafficking prosecutors.

**PROTECTION** The government increased its protection efforts by improving its institutional capacity to care for trafficking victims. In February 2020, after consulting two foreign NGOs on shelter best practices and SOPs, the government opened its inaugural trafficking specific shelter designated for both male and female victims, which consisted of six refurbished villas for a maximum capacity of 200 residents, and signed an agreement with the Qatari Red Crescent Society to manage the shelter. The shelter was equipped with a health center, computer lab, dining facility, and laundry room, and had a budget of nearly \$823,000 per annum. Since its opening, the government identified and referred 10 trafficking victims for housing and protective services there, compared with zero victims identified or referred to care the prior two years. The government-funded Aman Protection and Social Rehabilitation QATAR 415 Center shelter continued to provide basic medical care, social services, psychological treatment, housing, rehabilitation, repatriation assistance, and reintegration for female and child victims of domestic abuse, including female workers who fled their sponsors. Aman provided adequate assistance to those who wished to return to their home countries after ensuring they were properly rehabilitated and protected. Aman had a budget of approximately \$3.8 million annually. Victims had the right to leave of their own volition without supervision, although chaperones were on call in the event security was needed. Victims were also able to access the shelter even if their employers filed charges against them. Several foreign diplomatic missions ran all-purpose shelters for their female nationals, which an unknown number of trafficking victims used.

During the previous year, the government revised the national victim referral system to coordinate victim identification and referral efforts between government authorities and NGOs; the referral system included the provision of shelter, health care, and legal assistance to trafficking victims. Officials did not customarily use established protocols to proactively screen vulnerable individuals for trafficking indicators. The Ministry of Labor worked with labor-sending embassies to determine which cases it should refer to the new shelter. Some officials reportedly used an existing manual to identify potential trafficking victims, but law enforcement personnel and other government entities did not report proactively screening for any trafficking indicators among domestic workers, a vulnerable population typically isolated and mostly excluded from protections under labor laws. Several government agencies did not categorize the abuse of domestic workers as forced labor or human trafficking cases due to a lack of evidence or witnesses and therefore sometimes failed to identify victims; however, some domestic workers voluntarily left the country in lieu of filing complaints or pursuing charges against their traffickers. The government took several steps to prevent forced labor including: The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SCDL), the lead Qatari agency for preparation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, began paying recruitment fees of company employees and continued throughout the reporting period. The government extended this practice to Ashghal, the government's public works authority, and private sector companies started to incorporate it as part of the tendering of contracts. The quasi-governmental Qatar Foundation and the SCDL also published mandatory protective standards documents for workers, which injected workers' rights into corporate social responsibility to provide contractual incentives to contractors and subcontractors to follow the labor law or risk losing lucrative, multiyear projects. The SCDL and other entities did not classify any workers specifically as trafficking victims from among these populations.

Systemic hurdles continued to limit victim protection and access to justice. The March 2018 Domestic Worker Law stipulated domestic workers were required to have government-verified contracts; to receive adequate employer-provided food, accommodation, medical benefits, one day off per week, limited 10-hour workdays, sick leave, return flight tickets once each year, three weeks paid vacation per year, and full end-of-service payments; to be guaranteed access to the new dispute resolution committees to resolve workplace grievances; and to be given allowances to leave their employers in cases of exploitation or violation of contract terms. However, enforcement and knowledge of the law remained very low, leaving significant vulnerabilities to forced labor among this population and victims without care or justice. The government sometimes charged and deported victims for contravening Qatari labor and immigration laws. The Qatari legal system lacked adequate privacy laws to protect victims against potential retribution and often did not provide adequate assistance or protection for victims during legal proceedings. Victims who lodged complaints were sometimes the subject of spurious counter charges by their employers that resulted in administrative deportation proceedings. Officials reported "absconding" charges were not considered until after the resolution of existing labor disputes, though labor attachés and worker advocates noted in practice it was often difficult for workers to overcome the burden of such charges. Police often detained workers without legal status for immigration violations and fleeing their employers or sponsors, including potential trafficking victims. Police sometimes detained workers for their sponsors' failure to register

them or renew their residency documents as required by Qatari law. Authorities sometimes charged some potential sex trafficking victims with zina (sex outside of wedlock) and subsequently deported them; according to a preliminary UN report on arbitrary detention, Qatari officials allegedly detained 26 women as a result of this prescribed crime during the reporting period. The government generally encouraged victims to testify against their traffickers by providing free legal counseling, assuring their safety, and allowing them to pursue financial compensation. However, such protections were not offered in all cases, and many workers still opted to return home rather than remain in country to assist prosecutors in convicting traffickers. Through the MOI, victims could change employers in cases of violated contractual terms, such as employers not paying the victim or forcing them to work excessive hours. The government did not report how many victims received legal support or were granted transfer-of-employer approval during the reporting year.

In September 2018 the amir signed Law No.13 for 2018, which legally granted the vast majority of expatriate workers covered under the labor law the right to depart the country without employer approval during the course of an employment contract. In January 2020, the prime minister issued Ministerial Decision No. 95 for 2019 to extend the abolishment of the exit permit requirement to include expatriates whom the labor law did not cover previously. The beneficiaries of the new decision also included employees at government institutions and most notably, the vulnerable domestic workers populace. Employers in the private sector still have the right to designate as critical no more than five percent of their workforce, who require employer approval prior to exiting the country. During the year, MADLSA reported moving 2,157 workers to new employers after the initial employers failed to pay the workers on time. MOI also reported transferring 6,531 workers who suffered some form of abuse or violation of their contracts in 2019. Interior officials had the authority to extend the residency of a domestic worker pending the resolution of a case. The law states the complaining party can reside in Qatar pending resolution of legal proceedings. The government reported it did not deport those who faced retaliation or retribution in their country of origin.

**PREVENTION** The government continued robust efforts to prevent trafficking. The NCCHT collected inputs from a foreign government, Qatar University's Law Clinic, and two international organizations to redraft its national action plan to combat trafficking, which spanned 2017-2022 and prioritized prevention, protection, "judicial pursuits", and regional and international cooperation. In addition to the NCCHT's action plan, the Supreme Judiciary Council began drafting its own strategic action plan with specific goals related to trafficking, increasing judicial awareness and enhancing practices to identifying and addressing forced labor cases. MADLSA, in consultations with an international organization, compiled comprehensive research on trafficking-related topics germane to Qatar and concluded several action items to improve its overall anti-trafficking prevention program. The government funded Aman Center continued to promote campaigns that raised QATAR 416 awareness on various forms of abuse, including trafficking, and outlined places offering victims assistance; these campaigns targeted women, domestic workers, and employers. MADLSA and MOI continued a regular series of lectures, town halls, and media publications to explain the ongoing anti-trafficking and sponsorship reforms and solicited feedback from representatives of the major labor-sending countries. The

Slavery Museum in Doha—part of a government museum consortium and chaired by the wife of the Father Amir—hosted regular visits from school groups and senior diplomatic delegations and held public ceremonies to highlight trafficking issues that received wide local press coverage. The government maintained its publication and distribution of manuals for expatriates in Arabic, English, and several labor sending country languages on proactive victim identification, domestic worker rights, and ways to combat trafficking in Qatar. It continued to publish and disseminate “worker rights” pamphlets in English, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, and Tagalog that contained relevant articles from the labor and sponsorship laws. Officials maintained multiple hotlines for vulnerable migrant workers, including trafficking victims; as in the previous year, the government did not report the number of calls each hotline received. The government made discernible efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government’s Diplomatic Institute held a train-the-trainer style course that provided information about legal employer obligations for Qatari diplomats posted abroad.

During the reporting year, MADLSA reported conducting 24,745 worksite and 18,836 accommodations visits, which resulted in 2,553 violation reports and referrals to the PPO but no reported trafficking cases. The government was unable to provide data on the following: the number of companies blacklisted for violation of the WPS, domestic worker complaints, non-payment of wages filings, and other migrant worker-reported grievances related to the visits. Furthermore, the government did not report if it criminally investigated, prosecuted, or convicted any of these companies, or their owners or staff. During the previous year, it conducted 496 inspections of recruitment companies, resulting in the issuance of warnings to 19 companies and the cancellation or revocation of the licenses of nine companies that MADLSA’s routine monitoring mechanism found to be noncompliant with Qatari labor law. The government also blacklisted more than 14,000 companies for contravening the WPS. The government continued its rollout of the WPS, which requires employers to pay workers electronically and increases penalties for labor code contraventions. Reportedly, 96 percent of laborers in Qatar received payments via the WPS, and more than 76,000 companies registered for wage disbursements through this mechanism. The government also permitted the ILO’s Doha office to strengthen anti-trafficking operating capacity and generate sustainable labor reform efforts throughout Qatar. The government maintained 50 bilateral agreements and five memoranda of understanding with labor-sending countries that addressed recruitment issues and worker rights. The government also worked with individual countries to certify vetted labor recruitment offices to reduce fraud or excessive debts that could facilitate labor trafficking.

As of December 2019, the government opened 14 QVCs in eight critical labor source countries, which provided 80 percent of the total workforce in Qatar, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The centers were responsible for finalizing all procedural elements pertaining to labor recruitment, including fingerprinting, medical examinations, verifying educational certificates, signing contracts in local languages, issuing Qatari residency permits prior to source country departure, opening bank accounts for workers, and attempted to ensure employers pay all fees. The QVCs aimed to reduce instances of contract bait-and-switch, in which recruiters lured workers under one contract in home countries and subsequently forced

them to sign new ones with lower wages upon arrival in Qatar. In doing so, the government ensured one unified contract was concurrently filed abroad and in Qatar.

**TRAFFICKING PROFILE** As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit foreign victims in Qatar. Men and women from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uganda, and other countries voluntarily migrate to Qatar as unskilled laborers and domestic workers, often paying illegal and exorbitant fees to unscrupulous recruiters in the labor sending countries, thereby increasing their vulnerability to debt bondage. Many migrant workers subsequently face conditions indicative of labor trafficking, to include restricted movement, delayed salaries or payment withholding, denial of employment associated benefits, passport confiscation, threats of deportation, and refusal to provide NOCs to allow workers to transfer to new jobs; in a small number of cases, migrant workers face physical, mental, and sexual abuse, as well as threats of serious physical or financial harm. Anecdotally, traffickers force some women who migrate for legitimate employment offers to work in prostitution. Some North Korean laborers in Qatar may have been forced to work by the North Korean regime. In 2019, there were at most 20 total North Korean workers in Qatar, but by the end of the year the government terminated such contracts. Nearly all of these workers had departed Qatar.

Qatar's unskilled migrant workers are the largest group at risk of trafficking; those employed as domestic workers remain the most vulnerable. Unscrupulous recruiters in source countries and employers in Qatar exploit economic migration to prey on prospective workers. Predatory recruitment agencies in labor sending countries extract inflated fees from aspiring migrant workers or lure them to Qatar with fraudulent employment contracts, rendering workers vulnerable to forced labor once in the country. Among foreign workers, female domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, as Qatar's culture of privacy can lead to isolation in private residences due to officials' lack of authority to enter them. Since January 2020, domestic workers have the right to leave the country without permission from their employers. Despite this, awareness and enforcement of the law providing these rights remain limited. Additionally, individuals in Qatar sell "free" visas to migrants and occasionally demand regular payments, enabling migrant workers to work illegally and without legal recourse against their respective sponsors. Many businesses reportedly fail to pay their expatriate employees in a timely manner, or at all, forcing workers to choose between leaving the country with heavy debts or staying in Qatar with the hope of eventually receiving payment. The bankruptcy of several large companies employing hundreds of workers during the reporting period put great strain on the government and civil society organizations attempting to assist them.

Qatar's employment-based sponsorship system, which continues to undergo significant reform, places control disproportionately in the hands of employers. These employers have unilateral power to cancel residence permits; up until the current reporting period, employers were also able to prevent workers from changing employers and deny them permission to leave the country. Debt-laden migrants who face abuse or are misled often avoid reporting their exploitation due to fear of reprisal or deportation, the protracted recourse process, or lack of knowledge of their legal rights, thereby exacerbating or prolonging their forced labor situation.

Many migrant workers often live in confined, unsanitary conditions, and many complain of excessive working hours and hazardous working conditions. Reports allege the vast majority of expatriate workers' passports were in their employers' possession, despite laws against passport confiscation.