

# Stop Trafficking!

# Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • September 2023 • Vol. 21 • No. 9

FOCUS: This issue highlights the findings of the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report.

## The 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report

[The Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\) Report](#) is an annual update on the state of global anti-trafficking efforts. This year's report was initially released in June without the narratives for 188 countries and territories; these will be made available later. The role of intentional and consistent collaboration and partnership on many levels to prosecute, protect and prevent human trafficking is highlighted. The report shares lessons learned and highlights elements and examples of effective partnerships between governments, international organizations, civil society, private sector entities, and other stakeholders.

Partnerships focusing on technological innovations to combat human trafficking increasingly evolve among multidisciplinary stakeholders. Governments can learn from and replicate innovative tech applications and collaborate among the private sector and civil society to improve their efforts to advance responsible supply chains, for instance, by strengthening supply chain management with risk mapping and due diligence tools, bolstering worker engagement through the provision of rights-based information and training; and driving worker empowerment through technologies designed to reinforce responsible recruitment and grievance mechanisms. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Another section focuses on insights and perspectives from four survivors and their lived experiences of human trafficking. The four explore themes such as cultural barriers to survivor inclusion, equity in survivor leadership, and the role of culture in human trafficking. Governments are increasingly prioritizing survivor engagement, and by ensuring that anti-trafficking programming and policies reflect the realities of human trafficking and integrate trauma-informed, survivor-informed, and victim-centered approaches, they see improved outcomes.

Topics of special interest, an update on the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, and the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Heroes are included. Finally, each country is graded on the strength and effectiveness of its efforts to end human trafficking within its borders. The report utilizes a tier system to rank countries and evaluate each government's actions to combat trafficking assessed against specific criteria such as law enforcement effectiveness, criminal accountability, victim protection, government funding, and more.

*A recent example of a failed partnership is the Qatar World Cup 2022. The Fédération Internationale De Football Association (FIFA) had an opportunity to work with labor protection organizations, human rights organizations, and the International Labor Organization to ensure workers were treated fairly by employers and hold the Qatari government accountable for abuses. They failed to do so.*

*Leading up to, during, and after the World Cup, workers reported widespread abuses, including debt bondage, wage theft, abusive hours, and having their documents withheld. Qatar has been accused of bribery and backsliding on even the nominal reforms they did put in place. Although months have passed, there has been no resolution for the workers. If prevention and protection had the backing of real political will, the situation for migrant workers in Qatar could look very different.*

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Trafficking in Persons Report Tiers

The primary goal of the TIP report is to assess how well governments address exploitation within their borders and to provide a snapshot of countries' efforts on prosecution, protection, and prevention of trafficking. Notably, the three tiers of the TIP system don't rank the state of human trafficking in a particular country. Instead, they rank each nation's response to the problem.

- Tier 1: Countries that receive a Tier 1 ranking are not necessarily free of trafficking but are considered fully aligned with the TVPA's minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking.
- Tier 2: Countries designated as Tier 2 do not meet the TVPA minimum standards but are implementing substantial efforts to align and comply with the standards.
- Tier 2 Watchlist: Countries are placed on the Watchlist when the U.S. government feels that their response to combat trafficking is not to scale with the levels of trafficking in the country. This rating can represent a decrease in the effective prosecution of traffickers, a lack of assistance and support to victims, or even a degree of government involvement in human trafficking. These countries must meet specific standards the following year to ensure they are not downgraded to Tier 3 in the next TIP Report.
- Tier 3: This is the lowest rating. Countries designated as Tier 3 fail to meet the TVPA's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. A Tier 3 ranking has serious financial consequences for those governments. Outside humanitarian relief, including restricting foreign assistance from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Overall, there are 24 tier-ranking upgrades and 20 downgrades this year. Thailand and Taiwan remain in Tier 2 and Tier 1, respectively, despite calls by the Seafood Working Group to downgrade both countries. Globally, downgrades this year highlight systemic gaps such as governments not reporting their anti-trafficking efforts, not screening for trafficking indicators, not tackling forced labor adequately, not effectively monitoring protection systems, and not equitably implementing anti-trafficking measures.

On the other hand, the global tracking of prosecutions, convictions, and victims identified increased compared to the 2022 totals. Prosecutions were higher than in the years immediately preceding the pandemic, and convictions continued to grow.

### *Viable and effective partnerships include:*

1. *The governments in the European Union working together to protect Ukrainians from becoming victims of trafficking while fleeing Russia's invasion*
2. *A collaboration between PayPal and Polaris that is interrupting traffickers' cash flows and facilitating prosecutions for financial crimes*

*The United States has also neglected Protection. Trafficking survivors remain unhoused and impoverished, even years after escaping captivity. Funding is needed for the most basic protections: shelter, food, health care, and case management.*

*(Freedom Network USA)*



## Multi-Stakeholder Approaches to Addressing Impacts of Climate Change on Human Trafficking

Climate change can force people to leave their homes in long-term events, such as drought, and short-term events, storms, flooding, etc., making people vulnerable to human trafficking. Environmental changes can also amplify existing stressors, such as economic hardships, gender or identity-based discrimination, weak national frameworks of protection, underlying conflict, and insecurity.

Antitrafficking and environmental movements often operate in silos, hindering efficient and sustainable efforts. A multisectoral approach to address climate change is necessary to develop responses that mitigate risks and unintended consequences leading to exploitation. Partnerships are essential to developing solutions that account for the risk factors, socio-cultural behaviors, and adaptive strategies associated with climate change and human trafficking to protect the world's most vulnerable people from further exploitation.

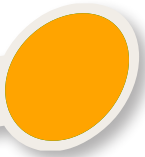
Cross-cutting partnerships are emerging as a crucial aspect of uniting environmental and antitrafficking efforts, including the following recent steps:

- The Rights Lab, assisted by Delta 8.7 and the World Wildlife Fund, hosted a roundtable event to harness the knowledge of antitrafficking experts and environmental actors and develop a roadmap for using a multi-stakeholder approach to address the nexus between human trafficking, environmental degradation, and climate change.
- The International Institute for Environment and Development, in partnership with AntiSlavery International and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, are partnering to examine the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on deepening inequality, driving migration, and creating vulnerability to human trafficking, including forced labor, within and across borders. This will bring development actors, climate change specialists, and antitrafficking experts together to develop joint recommendations for policymakers.
- In Bangladesh, Winrock International is partnering with the Government of Bangladesh and the University of Pennsylvania's Development Research Initiative to integrate antitrafficking policies into the government's existing policies, plans, and responses to address vulnerabilities due to climate change while building the resilience and adaptation of communities.
- In East Africa, IOM is partnering with leading environmental experts to address human trafficking due to vulnerabilities and displacement exacerbated by climate change in Kenya.

The impacts of climate-change-induced vulnerability to human trafficking cannot be addressed by one party alone. Proactive solutions to create systemic change require participation from governments, civil society, and the private sector and expertise from environmental and antitrafficking specialists and communities affected by this issue.

[2023 TIP report, pg. 36](#)





# Advocacy

## Annual Report on the Use of Child Soldiers

Each year, the Trafficking in Persons Report submits an update on the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA). The countries in violation of the standards under the CSPA in 2022, identified as having governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces or government-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers include Afghanistan, Burma, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Mali, Russia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen. It was noted that this Report was not final at the time of publication of the TIP Report.

## Forced Labor & Detention of Uyghur Population in China

The 2023 TIP Report reveals the disturbing reality of the arbitrary detention, forced labor and coercive practices inflicted upon the Uyghurs, an ethnic minority in China.

Thousands are in internment camps and affiliated manufacturing sites in East Turkistan and China.

China remains in Tier 3 due in part to human trafficking and forced labor faced by the Uyghurs and other Turkic communities in East Turkistan. Recommendations outlined in the report include abolishing arbitrary detention and forced labor in internment camps, in government and non-government facilities, and the termination of so-called “vocational training programs.”

## When the Government is the Trafficker

Some governments force their citizens into sex or labor trafficking. From forced labor in local or national public work projects, military operations, economically important sectors, or as part of government-funded projects or missions abroad to sexual slavery on government compounds, officials use their power to exploit their nationals. Governments coerce their citizens into sex or labor trafficking by threatening the withdrawal of public benefits and withholding salaries, manipulating the lack of legal status of stateless individuals and other minority groups, and threatening to punish family members.

The 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report includes the following 11 governments with a documented “policy or pattern” of human trafficking, trafficking in government-funded programs, forced labor in government-affiliated medical services or other sectors, sexual slavery in government camps, or the employment or recruitment of child soldiers: Afghanistan, Burma, People’s Republic of China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan.

[TIP Report, pg. 66](#)

## Topics of Special Interest:

### Unscrupulous Manufacturers Conceal Forced Labor and Other Labor Abuses

Globalization has increasingly allowed companies to outsource production to manufacturers in areas with lower costs. Often, these companies target countries with weaker labor and environmental safeguards and less capacity to enforce existing protections. Consumers, advocacy groups, and governments have sought to hold companies sourcing from these manufacturers accountable in the wake of increasing reports of forced labor, including forced child labor, and past high-profile factory disasters, including fires and collapse.

Companies have embraced various voluntary codes of conduct in response to this demand for increased transparency and accountability. They have turned to “social audits” that examine a supplier’s treatment of its employees and impact on society, as well as certification bodies, which accredit companies as fulfilling their social-compliance obligations.

A single social audit that does not document violations can draw new customers to a manufacturer and form the basis of lucrative multiyear contracts. But an audit that uncovers serious labor rights and human rights abuses can incur significant remediation costs, reputational costs, and millions of dollars in lost business.

With so much riding on the outcome of a social audit, audited manufacturers have a strong incentive to ensure they pass, even if it means deceiving auditors. Human rights reporting from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Transparentem, and Clean Clothes Campaign have revealed

## Topics of Special Interest (cont.)

that many manufacturers employ a variety of tactics to conceal evidence of labor trafficking and human rights abuses from auditors. Moreover, a new industry of consultants has emerged to help manufacturers pass audits, sometimes by intimidating workers, creating false employment records to conceal underpayment or underage workers, or, in extreme cases, by outright bribing auditors.

### Falsifying Records

Recent reports indicate companies may falsify records to conceal the withholding of wages and excessive overtime, both recognized by the ILO as indicators of forced labor. For example, companies may create a second set of fabricated records, known as “double bookkeeping,” to convince auditors they have been correctly paying workers their wages, retirement contributions, and other benefits when they have not. In other cases, manufacturers may alter pay slips to conceal prohibited wage deductions or overtime work. Employers may also falsify their workers’ identities.

### Concealing Passport Retention

Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation when employers retain their identity documents, such as passports, a standard indicator of forced labor recognized by the ILO.

### Manipulating Workers

Employers may coach workers to lie about conditions, such as their pay, working hours, or overtime. Manufacturers have sometimes instructed underage workers to hide from auditors, either off-site or in hidden factory areas during the audit. In extreme cases, auditors are invited to “model factories” that ostensibly comply with regulations while the actual manufacturing is conducted at other facilities.

[TIP Report, pg. 51,53](#)

### Trafficking of Boys

Boys are the fastest-growing segment of victims in human trafficking. UNODC's 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, released in January 2023, notes that the percentage of boys identified as victims of human trafficking more than quintupled between 2004 and 2020, a much more significant increase than for men, women, or girls. The same report notes males account for 40 percent of all identified victims of human trafficking. While women constitute about twice the

percentage of identified trafficking victims as men, the percentage of trafficking victims who are boys and girls is almost identical.

As Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted in his address at the release of the TIP report, “For years there’s been a widely held perception that trafficking affects exclusively female victims. This false perception has had some quite frankly devastating, intangible consequences” as fewer resources are allocated to protect and identify boy victims and to support boy survivors. There is also a misperception that boys are only trafficked for forced labor and that their involvement in commercial sex is always voluntary. Male victims are more likely to view their situation as due to bad luck or even their gullibility rather than due to being exploited.

This section makes specific recommendations to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments on how to help male survivors. These include:

- Public awareness and training on the prevalence and unique needs of male victims.
- Safe housing and comprehensive medical and mental health care that is trauma-informed and culturally appropriate to meet the needs of male victims.

As more data emerges, the narrative around trafficking is gradually changing to acknowledge that anyone, regardless of sex or gender identity, can be targeted by human traffickers.

[TIP Report, pg. 55-56](#)

### Online Recruitment of Vulnerable Populations for Forced Labor

As job seekers increasingly use the internet to find employment opportunities worldwide, a lack of safeguards can enable traffickers access to vulnerable and marginalized populations. Traffickers also use online dating platforms to identify vulnerable and marginalized individuals for exploitation, including for forced labor.



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## Topics of Special Interest (cont.)

Usership of social media and mobile applications has proliferated worldwide due to increasing digital connectivity, smartphone adoption in developing economies, and societal shifts to online spaces related to the pandemic.

Anonymity and false information in online profiles allow traffickers to misrepresent themselves and deceive targeted individuals. Governments, civil society, and technology companies all have a role in addressing the misuse of digital tools. A crucial part of these efforts includes enhancing awareness of the abuse of technology and increasing digital literacy, which is critical to protect users from exploitation, disinformation, privacy intrusions, and financial scams.

Understanding the signs of potential exploitation in online spaces is vital for individuals to protect themselves. Therefore, it is crucial to develop awareness campaigns to educate job seekers about their rights, protect individuals from fraudulent online relationships, and share the resources available when obtaining employment abroad or working with a licensed and regulated labor recruiter. Mandates for employers to provide proof of legitimacy before advertising on technology platforms could increase job seekers' access to validated employers.

Technology companies should continue to invest in methods informed by workers and those with lived experiences of human trafficking to increase the detection of fraudulent and predatory behavior while being mindful of privacy, trust, and security issues. Governments should also bolster training and resources for law enforcement to detect and monitor fraudulent offers and investigate human trafficking online.

[TIP Report, pg. 57-58](#)

### Human Trafficking and Cyber Scam Operations

Fearing a significant decrease in revenue stemming from pandemic-related restrictions, and witnessing widespread unemployment during the pandemic, traffickers in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Ghana, and Türkiye, including some with connections to the People's Republic of China (PRC), saw an opportunity in cyber scam operations. Shell companies operating in rented spaces, especially within remote areas known for human rights impunity and minimal law enforcement, sprang up.

The traffickers used fake job listings to recruit adults and children from at least 35 countries. Many people have responded to job offers for what they think are work in IT, casinos, or other seemingly legitimate businesses. Instead, these individuals are forced to participate in cyber scams under impossible quote arrangements, making them increasingly indebted to traffickers. Traffickers use this debt to exploit victims in forced labor and sex trafficking and subject them to a wide range of abuses and violations, including withheld travel and identity documentation; imposition of arbitrary debt; restricted access to food, water, medicine, communication, and movement; and threats, beatings, electric shocks, and even death if they try to escape. More than 10,000 estimated victims remain in exploitation in individual compounds in Cambodia alone.

The scam operations include quota-based fraudulent sales; illegal online gambling and investment schemes; and romance scams, in which the victim is forced to enter a fake online relationship with and extract money from unsuspecting targets.

Survivors who escape with their lives are often met with administrative or criminal charges for immigration violations at home or in the countries to which they fled rather than being identified as trafficking victims. Many also owe hefty recruitment fees to locally based recruiters, exacerbating their vulnerability to threats, exploitative debt, and re-trafficking when they return home. Watchdog organizations have traced beneficial ownership directly to high-level officials in some countries.

In 2022, Taiwan located and repatriated hundreds of individuals from cyber scam operations in Cambodia and indicted dozens of Taiwanese individuals allegedly complicit in their initial recruitment. In 2021, Laos began cooperating with international authorities to recover Lao victims from the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Bokeo and initiated investigations into labor trafficking allegations. Hong Kong has created a web-based application for victims and family members to report cases of cyber-scam operations.

No government can do this alone but must foster, cooperate with, and enhance their support for a free and healthy civil society. Countries can build deterrent power while better assisting their citizens in searching for safe employment through secure migration channels and regular labor pathways.

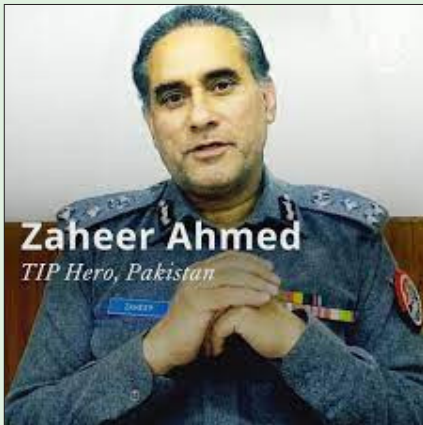
[TIP report, pg. 64-65](#)



Shortly after the TIP report was released, the Global Labor Justice – International Labor Rights Forum (GLJ-ILRF) and Greenpeace USA released a statement questioning Taiwan's ranking on behalf of the Seafood Working Group (SWG). The SWG has been pushing for greater regulation of Taiwan's fishing industry to combat trafficking and forced labor for years. They believe Taiwan should have been downgraded from a Tier 1 to a Tier 2 ranking. "We are disappointed by the Biden administration's decision to rank Taiwan as Tier 1, despite concerns from workers about the Taiwanese government's failure to make appreciable progress in protecting them from human trafficking and in prosecuting such occurrences," said Greenpeace Senior Human Rights Advisor Sari Heidenreich in a release.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report Heroes



### TIP Hero: Zaheer Ahmed, Pakistan

Zaheer Ahmed is a Deputy Inspector General in Pakistan's Police Service and previously served as Director of the Federal Investigative Agency's (FIA) Anti-Human Smuggling Unit. Mr. Ahmed was instrumental in increasing Pakistan's efforts to combat human trafficking as Director of this unit. Through the tireless efforts of his Anti-Human Smuggling Unit, Mr. Ahmed helped drive the modernization of Pakistan's antitrafficking and anti-smuggling laws and the formulation and implementation of a National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling. His team's efforts laid the groundwork for the Federal Cabinet's approval in 2021 of bylaws to the 2018 laws on human trafficking and migrant smuggling. He also lobbied successfully for Pakistan's ratification of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which Pakistan acceded to in November 2022.

### TIP Hero: Eumelis Moya Goitte, Venezuela

Eumelis Moya Goitte is the coordinator of the Office of Human Rights of Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB) Guayana. She investigates human trafficking in Bolivar state, focusing on the Orinoco Mining Arc—a strategic development zone in Venezuela. Ms. Mora has drawn international attention to human trafficking crimes in the mining sector and supported international efforts to prevent the human trafficking of vulnerable populations, particularly hard-to-reach groups like Indigenous communities.





# Action

## TIP Heroes: Iman Ali Abdulabbas Al-Sailawai and Basim al-Amri, Iraq

Iman Ali Abdulabbas Al-Sailawi and Basim al-Amri have worked together to combat human trafficking in Iraq since 2003 when they began providing support services and shelter to migrant workers stranded due to military operations, a lack of public security, and sectarian violence.

Mrs. Iman and Mr. Basim officially registered their anti-trafficking organization, "Fate" (Masser in Arabic) 2014. Fate remains the only Iraqi NGO dedicated to fighting and ending human trafficking.

They expanded their work to help free people enslaved by ISIS. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they secured the release and repatriation of dozens of migrant domestic workers who were abused, exploited, and stranded in Iraq without resources or documents, including 27 Bhutanese women whose employer had not paid them for a year. Their consistent advocacy for increased action against trafficking in persons and improved support services have made Mrs. Iman and Mr. Basim targets of criticism and threats. They have trained officials and practitioners interacting with trafficking victims and engaged lawmakers on anti-trafficking legislation.



## TIP Hero: Paola Hittscher, Peru

Paola Hittscher is a provincial prosecutor in Peru's Public Prosecutor Office, specializing in human trafficking crimes in the Loreto region. The Peruvian government has a limited presence in the Loreto region, and migrant smuggling and human trafficking are rampant. Ms. Hittscher has been a critical figure in the fight against human trafficking in Loreto since

2016. Ms. Hittscher regularly travels into the jungle with police officers to conduct operations, despite knowing the potential for gunfire, injury, and even loss of life.

Despite limited funding and minimal staff, she has made significant strides to advance investigations and seek prosecutions of human trafficking cases. Facing a shrinking budget, she has often used her vehicles and money to ensure proper support for trafficking victims. Ms. Hittscher was a crucial actor in designing, planning, and implementing the U.S.-Peru Child Protection Compact Partnership.

## TIP Hero: R. Evon Benson-Idahosa, Nigeria

R. Evon Benson-Idahosa is a Nigerian native, thought leader, and expert on the intersectionality of human trafficking and the economic empowerment of women in sub-Saharan Africa. Through her NGO,

Pathfinders Justice Initiative, she has provided holistic prevention and protection services for more than 3,000 women and girls. In her role as an innovative facilitator and trainer, she has organized numerous high-level national and international conferences, including Nigeria's first ever Gap Analysis on Human Trafficking and unsafe migration. her work has culminated in the production of Nigeria's first national guidelines for recovery service providers, law enforcement officers, judges and prosecutors on human trafficking; the creation of [www.HERSAfrica.com](http://www.HERSAfrica.com), the continent's first one stop online hub of resources for survivors; and Edo State's Coordinated Care Mechanism, Nigeria's first state referral mechanism for local service providers.





## TIP Hero: Pureza Lopes Loyola, Brazil

Pureza Lopes Loyola is a respected activist whose quest to find her son led the Government of Brazil to create the Mobile Inspection



Group (GEFM) in 1995. Brazil's GEFM brought together federal police officers and labor prosecutors to identify and support thousands of victims of labor exploitation, including labor trafficking, annually.

Ms. Lopes Loyola's search for her son led her through gold mines, charcoal production units, and farms. She discovered a pervasive system of workers forced to cut down large expanses of the Amazon rainforest to convert the area into pasture for cattle. She found the inner workings of exploitative practices like forced labor. She witnessed and heard dramatic accounts of workers threatened or killed when they resisted or tried to leave these situations.

With the help of the Pastoral Land Commission, an antiexploitation organization affiliated with the Catholic Church, Ms. Lopes Loyola approached officials in Brasília to denounce the awful conditions she had seen firsthand.

Officials and lawmakers were reluctant to believe her; some discredited her testimonies. With incredible determination and armed with a camera and an audio recorder, Ms. Lopes Loyola returned to the farms, thoroughly documented the exploitation, and through her persistent advocacy, spurred a national movement and a critical shift in the public's understanding of forced labor.

## TIP Hero: Mech Dara, Cambodia

Mech Dara is a Cambodian journalist who covers politics, human trafficking, social justice, and human rights. He previously worked at Voice of Democracy before Cambodian authorities revoked its media license in February 2023. Mr. Dara has since used social media platforms to continue sharing news content, including information about human trafficking and exploitation in Cambodia.

Mr. Dara's reporting on increased incidents of human trafficking in Cambodia connected to global cyber scams were some of the first in-depth investigative pieces on the subject, bringing improvements in the Cambodian government's anti-trafficking response.



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September 28-30, 2023

Doubletree by Hilton Chicago North Shore Conference Center

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