

# 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Korea

## REPUBLIC OF KOREA: Tier 1

The Government of the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore South Korea remained on Tier 1. These efforts included prosecuting more offenders for trafficking-related crimes, identifying and providing services to 11 victims of labor trafficking, and drafting guidelines aimed at increasing protections for migrant fishermen. In March 2021, the National Assembly adopted the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, Etc. and Victim Protection Act, which will go into effect in 2023 and included a definition of “trafficking in persons, etc...” that aligned more closely with the international definition of trafficking and will require the government to make future anti-trafficking efforts. Although the government meets the minimum standards, officials did not consistently utilize victim identification guidelines and the government did not track the number of trafficking victims identified by authorities. Courts sentenced the majority of offenders convicted for trafficking crimes to less than a year imprisonment, fines, or suspended sentences. Government officials penalized foreign sex trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit and often deported victims without providing them adequate services or investigating their traffickers. Numerous NGOs stated that due to the absence of penalty provisions, it was unlikely the new law passed in March would improve efforts to bring traffickers to justice.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure police, immigration, labor, and social welfare officials consistently use victim identification guidelines to increase identification of victims of labor and sex trafficking. • Proactively screen for victims among vulnerable populations, including individuals in commercial sex, fishermen, and migrant workers. • Criminalize all forms of trafficking in persons, in line with the definition of trafficking under the 2000 UN TIP Protocol, and that prescribes penalties that are sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes. • Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, particularly for labor trafficking, including for those who use forced labor on South Korean-flagged fishing vessels. • Cease the penalization of victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, including by improving coordination between police and immigration in cases involving foreign victims. • Punish the majority of convicted traffickers to significant prison terms exceeding one year. • Provide trauma-informed training to law enforcement to ensure they use victim-centered approaches in investigations and victim protection. • Establish and implement formal procedures for police, immigration, labor, and social welfare officials to refer both sex and labor trafficking victims to support services. • Increase efforts to train law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judicial officials, and social service providers to better understand “trafficking” as defined by international law. • Take steps to increase and enforce protections for migrant fishermen,

including by reducing the amount of time high-risk vessels are able to legally remain at sea without returning to port, and develop a more consistent and effective system for inspecting the labor conditions of fishing vessels. • Improve the quality of specialized services provided to trafficking victims, especially male, child, foreign, and disabled victims. • Establish a system to collect trafficking law enforcement and victim protection data that distinguishes trafficking from other crimes such as commercial sex. • Increase interagency coordination on efforts to combat both sex and labor trafficking. • Prohibit the confiscation of workers' identity documents, including passports, and take steps to enforce this prohibition and punish violators. • Take steps to eliminate recruitment and/or placement fees charged to workers by labor recruiters in the ROK and workers' home countries and ensure any recruitment fees are paid by employers.

## **PROSECUTION**

The government maintained law enforcement efforts, but continued to make inadequate efforts to prosecute labor traffickers, especially in the fishing industry. Various articles under Chapter 31 of the Criminal Act, when read together, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 15 years' imprisonment for trafficking crimes, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, Article 289 ("trafficking in persons") limited the definition of trafficking to require the buying or selling of another for exploitation and did not include a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion as an essential element of the crime. However, Articles 288 ("kidnapping, abduction, etc. for the purpose of indecent acts, etc.") and 292 ("receiving, harboring, etc. of person kidnapped, abducted, trafficked or transported") could apply to trafficking offenses not covered under Article 289. Similarly, Article 12 of the Act on the Protection of Children and Juveniles Against Sexual Abuse incorrectly defined child sex trafficking to require transnational movement of the victim. However, various other articles under the law could be applied to child sex trafficking offenses that did not involve such movement. The absence of a criminal offense that defined trafficking consistent with international law resulted in varying understanding of the crime among law enforcement and prosecutors. Government officials frequently believed trafficking required the buying and selling of a person, and conflated trafficking with related crimes such as commercial sex, kidnapping, domestic violence, and other forms of sexual abuse. In March 2021, the government adopted the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, Etc. and Victim Protection Act, which will come into effect in January 2023. While the law included a definition of "trafficking in persons, etc..." which aligned more closely with the international definition of trafficking, it did not include penalty provisions. The government stated penalty provisions were unnecessary because officials could prosecute traffickers under various statutes in the existing legal framework and that a new criminal statute could harm existing efforts to prosecute traffickers. However, numerous NGOs and anti-trafficking experts noted the government has not effectively used the existing legal framework to prosecute traffickers and many traffickers often go unpunished; therefore, it is unclear that this new law will result in increased trafficking prosecutions and convictions.

While the government maintained general statistics on victims and offenders across all subsections of the criminal code, it did not adequately distinguish trafficking cases from related crimes such as commercial sex and kidnapping. This made it difficult to determine which law enforcement actions reported by the government involved human trafficking as defined by international law. In 2020, the government did not report the number of trafficking cases investigated in 2020 (13 in 2019) but reported it indicted 133 suspects (90 in 2019) and convicted 59 traffickers (77 in 2019) for crimes related to trafficking. The government reported sentencing 28 traffickers to at least one year imprisonment (30 in 2019). While a greater percentage of traffickers were sentenced to at least one year of imprisonment than in 2019, the majority of those convicted for trafficking-related crimes were sentenced to less than one year imprisonment, suspended terms of imprisonment, or fines. This weakened deterrence and undercut the government's overall anti-trafficking efforts. In one high-profile case, a court sentenced one offender to 40 years' imprisonment for leading an organization that forced more than 100 women and girls to create videos of sex acts and images that were uploaded to and sold on an online chat room; several accomplices were also sentenced to significant prison terms. Observers reported the government's failure to sentence the majority of traffickers to significant terms of imprisonment resulted in impunity for traffickers in ROK and some instances of previously convicted offenders resuming trafficking activities.

The government did not report any criminal investigations or prosecutions of South Korean men who, according to anecdotal reports prior to the pandemic, engaged in child sex tourism abroad. While the government reported investigating four cases of labor trafficking involving Korean victims with intellectual disabilities in 2020, it did not identify any cases of labor trafficking on Korean-flagged fishing vessels, despite ongoing reports that forced labor of migrant fishermen remained widespread in Korea's distant and coastal water fishing fleets. NGO experts reported the government did not implement adequate or frequent inspections of fishing vessels, which resulted in minimal regulation and impunity for boat captains and others who exploited migrant workers, including in forced labor. The government's efforts to investigate trafficking in the fishing industry were also ineffective due to its interview methods of workers, which often involved preannounced visits and were conducted in locations such as the offices of labor unions where fishermen were not comfortable speaking openly. Article 167(3) of the Seafarer's Act prohibited forced labor on fishing vessels, but the government has reportedly never used this provision to convict trafficking on Korean-flagged vessels. The government also did not report prosecuting any cases involving the exploitation of migrant workers in forced labor in other industries, despite widespread reports from NGOs that this continued to occur. NGOs working with labor trafficking victims reported that immigration officials and labor inspectors continued to lack an understanding of the crime, which resulted in officials treating potential labor trafficking cases as administrative labor violations.

The Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) included anti-trafficking education in five police trainings in 2020, included modules on identifying victims of sex trafficking in its

police academy training, and reported that all police station employees received training on the prevention of sex trafficking once per year. As in previous years, trainings for law enforcement did not specifically address labor trafficking, and some officials reportedly demonstrated a lack of understanding of the crime, particularly in cases involving debt-based coercion. Some NGOs noted trainings for law enforcement were not effective at improving anti-trafficking efforts. Police, prosecutors, and government-provided interpreters did not use trauma-informed practices when interviewing victims, which inhibited their ability to effectively collect evidence and testimony from victims to pursue charges against their traffickers. Law enforcement did not proactively investigate trafficking cases and declined to pursue charges in some suspected trafficking cases for unclear reasons, sometimes due to a lack of understanding of tactics used by traffickers. In previous years some NGOs expressed concern that the government often did not prosecute cases involving debt-based coercion due to a perceived lack of jurisdiction over recruitment that generally originated in a victim's home country. The lack of an option to provide foreign trafficking victims with long-term or permanent residency discouraged victims from participating as witnesses in investigations of their traffickers. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, there were anecdotal reports of corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes.

## **PROTECTION**

The government maintained efforts to protect sex trafficking victims but made inadequate efforts to protect labor trafficking victims and prevent the penalization of foreign victims. Officials continued to be unable to track or provide the number of trafficking victims identified or referred to services, thereby making some aspects of their overall protection efforts unclear. The government continued to distribute victim identification guidelines created by the National Human Rights Center of Korea (NHRCK) to police, prosecutors, and coast guard officials but the government lacked formal procedures to refer victims to care. MOGEF also continued to distribute the Guidelines for the Identification of Sex Trafficking Victims to some officials. Nonetheless, law enforcement often did not take steps to proactively identify victims, failed to identify many victims, and many officials did not adequately implement identification procedures. One NGO reported that despite the existence of the NHRCK and MOGEF screening tools, immigration and other law enforcement officials did not use them in practice. Labor inspectors did not utilize victim identification guidelines during inspections. KNPA continued to train investigators on the NHRCK guidelines. MOGEF provided training to 262 of its staff working in facilities that support victims of sex trafficking in 2020. The Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL) conducted annual trainings for labor inspectors on labor laws, including the prohibition of forced labor.

MOGEF conducted outreach in “red-light districts” to assist individuals in commercial sex but did not report how many trafficking victims it identified through these efforts. Law enforcement referred individuals in commercial sex to support facilities operated or funded by MOGEF but did not identify how many were victims of sex trafficking. MOGEF provided

services to 6,743 individuals in its support facilities in 2020, compared to 6,924 in 2019. The government reported providing services to four South Koreans, including three with intellectual disabilities, identified as victims of labor trafficking. However, despite ongoing concerns that migrant workers are exploited in labor trafficking in various industries, the government reported identifying only seven migrant workers exploited in labor trafficking during the reporting period. The government did not assist in the repatriation of any Korean victims exploited abroad during the reporting period. KNPA operated teams that were responsible for guiding all crime victims, which could include trafficking victims, from the initial point of contact with law enforcement to protection and support systems. However, the government did not have a formal referral process to guide officials in referring trafficking victims to services. Police did not consistently use a victim-centered approach in investigations, and instead used practices such as subjecting victims to lengthy interviews immediately after their identification resulting in re-traumatization. Officers were sometimes unaware of the rights of trafficking victims, and asked NGOs for information on government laws and policies related to trafficking. A Thai NGO working with Thai sex trafficking victims exploited in South Korea expressed concern about the quality of care the victims had received from the government in the ROK before they were repatriated to Thailand. In addition, when exploited workers contacted government hotlines or migrant support centers, some officials reportedly did not take steps to screen cases for potential indicators of trafficking or refer victims to services, and instead often encouraged workers to remedy their situation through their employer. As part of a new education program created in 2020, MOEL trained 35 officers in charge of issuing employment permits to migrant workers in identifying human trafficking cases. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) reported it continued to implement regulations established in January 2020 that require entertainer visa holders to complete a sex trafficking identification questionnaire when renewing their visa status. However, NGOs continued to note concerns that this measure required victims to self-identify, that victims' well-founded fears of penalization and deportation made it unlikely they would reveal their exploitation through such questionnaires, and that the government did not establish corresponding guidelines for immigration officials on what steps they should take if a visa holder reported any indicators of trafficking.

MOGEF supported 96 facilities that provided services to victims of crime. These facilities were available to assist trafficking victims through counseling services, shelter, education, and rehabilitation support; however, the government did not report providing services designed specifically for trafficking victims. While these facilities primarily served female victims, the government made some services, such as counseling, medical, and legal assistance, available to male victims. Nonetheless, NGOs continued to report that the quality of victim care was insufficient, particularly for male, disabled, foreign, and child victims, and also that assistance was inconsistently provided to foreign victims. In addition, the government did not provide undocumented victims some services unless they cooperated with law enforcement in the investigation of their traffickers. An amendment to the Act on the Protection of Children and Youth against Sexual Offenses adopted in May 2020 defined children under the age of 19 in commercial sex as victims who should be provided counseling, medical assistance, legal support, and other assistance. Victims could file civil

suits to receive compensation; the government did not report whether any victims received such compensation. The government issued G-1 visas to foreign victims of crimes, which allowed victims to stay and work in South Korea for up to one year while cooperating in investigations and prosecutions; because the government did not track identified victims, it was unable to provide the number, if any, of trafficking victims it issued G-1 visas. MOJ also reported foreign victims of sexual violence and trafficking were exempt from immigration penalties for remaining in the country beyond the permitted period of stay; five victims benefited from this provision during the reporting period, although it is unclear how many of these were victims of trafficking. Despite these benefits, the government did not provide legal alternatives to foreign victims' removal to countries in which they face retribution or hardship and authorities frequently detained or deported foreign victims.

NGOs also continued to report that some government officials' lack of understanding of all forms of trafficking resulted in the misidentification and penalization of some victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. The government detained some foreign sex trafficking victims during investigations against their traffickers and deported them after investigations were completed. In addition, police arrested foreign sex trafficking victims, including at least one child during the reporting period, did not screen them for trafficking, and instead interrogated and penalized them for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. KNPA, MOJ, and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) acknowledged some such instances of deportation of foreign trafficking victims, including some who self-reported, and attributed it to a breakdown in communication between investigators and immigration authorities. KNPA reported it had a policy to not inform immigration officials of the illegal status of victims who self-reported their exploitation to authorities; however, this policy was not extended to victims who did not self-identify or were not accompanied by legal counsel or other service providers. The lack of a comprehensive policy across ministries to protect foreign trafficking victims from arbitrary deportation may have disincentivized KNPA from communicating with immigration to the detriment of information-sharing on trafficking trends and ensuring KNPA thoroughly investigated cases. Some police also reportedly believed KNPA policy required the detention and deportation of undocumented foreign victims whom traffickers had forced to commit unlawful acts; according to one NGO, police reported they were required to refer victims to immigration authorities within 48 hours. During raids against entertainment establishments, where sex trafficking was common, police did not investigate trafficking, did not use guidelines to screen for trafficking victims, and often investigated victims rather than their traffickers.

## **PREVENTION**

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. The government continued to coordinate efforts to prevent sex trafficking. An interagency taskforce established in March 2020 drafted the Act on the Prevention of Trafficking, etc. and Victim Protection and solicited feedback from civil society groups; the National Assembly adopted the legislation in March 2021. The legislation, which will not go into effect until 2023, will require the creation of a national anti-trafficking policy coordinator council, national action plans every five

years, and 18 trafficking victim protection centers, among other initiatives. However, anti-trafficking NGOs widely criticized the legislation for its lack of penalty provisions for human trafficking and the usage of the term “human trafficking, etc.” which they stated is unlikely to address ongoing misunderstandings of the crime among government officials. The government continued efforts to raise awareness of sex trafficking through public broadcasting programs and ad campaigns on social media. However, while the coast guard issued press releases on its efforts to identify human rights violations against seafarers and persons with disabilities working in the fishing industry, the government did not make sufficient efforts to raise awareness of labor trafficking. Some NGOs reported an absence of effective or widespread anti-trafficking education campaigns, which contributed to low levels of awareness of human trafficking among the public. MOGEF continued to distribute trafficking awareness leaflets to Korean diplomatic missions abroad and anti-trafficking organizations in countries where Koreans were vulnerable to trafficking. To reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, officials provided schools, government agencies, and other public organizations with anti-commercial sex and trafficking education programs, and it publicized the illegality of child sex tourism in airports. The government did not operate a hotline specifically for reporting potential trafficking crimes, but MOGEF continued to operate hotlines in 13 languages that were accessible to trafficking victims. MOF operated two call centers to provide counseling for migrant seafarers. The hotlines provide counseling and interpreting services in Indonesian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Burmese languages. In 2020, the two call centers made 31 and two referrals, respectively.

NGOs continued to report traffickers exploited migrant workers through the government’s Employment Permit System (EPS). MOEL provided pre- and post-arrival education on labor and occupational safety, health laws, and sexual abuse to migrants working under EPS, and provided training to 2,356 ROK employers of foreign workers on the same subjects. MOEL provided interpretation, medical treatment, and counseling services to migrant workers through 44 support centers that were partially funded by the government. NGOs expressed concern that the government did not adequately investigate unscrupulous recruitment agencies. The government’s restrictions on the ability of migrant workers employed under EPS to change employers increased their vulnerability to exploitation. The government asserted it permitted workers who reported exploitation or labor violations to MOEL to change their employers while MOEL investigated their claims. According to NGOs, however, MOEL reportedly did not adequately investigate workers’ claims and instead workers spent months attempting to prove their exploitation to MOEL before receiving permission to change their place of employment. In addition, employers who exploited their workers often only received small fines or suspended sentences. During the reporting period, MOEL established a training program for officials in charge of issuing employment permits to migrant workers; it trained 35 officials on human trafficking definitions and indicators through this program. MOEL extended the employment period of some migrants who worked in agriculture, the fishing sector, and in other industries under EPS and who were unable to leave the ROK due to travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

Traffickers capitalized on gaps in Korean labor laws to exploit foreign fishermen in forced labor. The Seafarers Act exempted migrant workers from the legal working and rest hours, overtime pay, and paid holidays prescribed for Korean fishermen. The Seafarer's Act stated that the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries can set the minimum wage of seafarers (including fishermen), and while the Labor Standards Act applied to all seafarers and prohibited discrimination on the grounds of nationality, the annual Ministerial Notification on the Minimum Wage of Seafarers only set a minimum wage for Korean crewmembers. This allowed employment and fisheries associations, as well as the National Distant Water Fisheries Trade Union, to ultimately decide the minimum wage of migrant fishermen. These wages were not made public, but one NGO reported the minimum wage for migrant fishermen was ten times less than the minimum wage of Korean fishermen and that migrant workers often did not receive holiday or overtime pay. Furthermore, the government did not mandate fishing vessels return to ports for routine labor inspections. NGOs reported that unless they required maintenance, vessels were able to avoid returning to port and that many vessels remained at sea for more than a year at a time. The law also did not prohibit exploitative wage deductions or prohibit worker-charged recruitment fees, which enabled traffickers to use debt-based coercion to exploit migrant fishermen, as well as workers in other industries. To address some of these gaps, the government worked with employers and labor unions to develop and release two sets of guidelines and measures for protecting migrant fishermen in June and December 2020. These guidelines aimed to improve the transparency of wage payments, improve regulation of recruitment agencies in sending countries, guarantee rest hours, introduce a standard labor contract, and ensure the provision of potable drinking water. However, NGO experts reported these newly announced measures would not be permanent or codified in law, and noted they did not include measures to ensure workers had access to their identify documents or ban the confiscation of passports. In addition as part of these measures, MOF announced that it would allow the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives (NFFC), which NGOs reported was not a government agency, to regulate the migrant worker recruitment process. NGOs expressed concern that this would not improve exploitative recruitment practices as similar arrangements with NFFC had been made in the past and unscrupulous practices continued. In addition, they noted the following gaps in the announced measures: a standard labor contract was already required by the Seafarers Act but not adequately enforced by the government; the planned measures with regards to minimum wages of migrant fishermen would still violate the Labor Standards Act ban on discrimination based on nationality; the measures allowed for flexible provision of rest hours which could still result in workers receiving minimal consecutive rest hours; the measures did not clearly define what would constitute a recruitment fee, (which the measures stated would be paid by the ship-owning company) thereby allowing workers to be charged recruitment costs under other terminology; and the measures allowed vessels to remain at sea for a maximum of 15 consecutive months. Furthermore, the government did not clearly explain how it would enforce these measures, especially when it did not require routine inspections.

The Korean Coast Guard and MOF conducted surveys of working conditions for fishermen and other marine workers in May and June 2020, which resulted in 103 arrests of ship



owners, captains, fish farm operators, and others in 2020. MOEL inspected 7,137 workplaces and 493 residential facilities for migrant workers to ensure their suitable living conditions. Nonetheless, NGOs reported some migrant workers continued to live in inadequate conditions which likely exacerbated the exploitation of those in forced labor conditions. MOEL often provided employers advance notice of when inspections would take place, allowing unscrupulous employers to hide indicators of trafficking and coach victims for interviews ahead of inspections. MOGEF revised regulations related to the marriage brokerage business to prohibit international marriage advertisements that commercialize sex acts. Local governments encouraged and provided financial assistance to South Korean farmers to pursue marriages to foreign women through brokers; some of these women are exploited in sex trafficking and domestic servitude.

## **TRAFFICKING PROFILE**

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in South Korea, and traffickers exploit victims from South Korea abroad. Traffickers exploit South Korean women and children, including children who run away from home and victims of domestic violence, in commercial sex including in bars, nightclubs, and other entertainment establishments, or through internet-advertised escort services. Traffickers increasingly utilized smartphone and chat applications to recruit and coerce victims to engage in commercial sex acts and to facilitate trafficking by communicating with purchasers of commercial sex. Chat room operators recruit Korean women and children, including child sex trafficking victims, and threaten them with the release of compromising photographs to coerce them to participate in the production of pornographic materials. Traffickers exploit South Korean women overseas, including in the United States, in sex trafficking in massage parlors, salons, bars, and restaurants, or through internet-advertised escort services, often through debt-based coercion. Traffickers subject men and women primarily from China, Thailand, Russia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Morocco, and other countries in Asia, the Middle East, and South America, to forced labor and sex trafficking in South Korea. Traffickers force victims who owe debts to entertainment establishment owners or loan sharks into commercial sex. Sex traffickers exploit some foreign women on E6-2 entertainment visas—many from the Philippines and Thailand—in bars and clubs, including “foreigners only” bars near ports and U.S. military bases. However, many of the clubs that catered to U.S. military personnel remained closed since early 2020 due to the pandemic. Job brokers, unscrupulous recruitment agencies, and managers or owners of bars and clubs recruit foreign women under false promises of jobs as singers or performers but instead coerce victims to work excessive hours selling juice and alcohol, and to engage in commercial sex acts in clubs. Recruiters and owners of massage parlors fraudulently recruit women for work as professional masseuses in Korea, but force them to engage in commercial sex acts, sometimes through passport confiscation, physical violence, and threats of deportation or violence. Some victims are not provided an adequate number of days off, face harassment, verbal and physical abuse, and are paid less than the minimum wage or have their wages withheld to discourage them from leaving Korea or seeking new employment. Some bar managers reportedly confiscate victims’ passports or alien registration cards and restrict their ability to go outside their workplace. Women from the Philippines and other countries in Asia

enter Korea on tourist visas after receiving false promises of short-term work in factories or other industries but then have their passports confiscated by traffickers who force them to work in clubs and engage in commercial sex acts; however, this likely occurred less frequently during the reporting period due to pandemic-related restrictions on the issuance of visas. Some women from China, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia, who are recruited for marriages to South Korean men through international marriage brokers, are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor after their arrival. Some South Korean men reportedly engage in child sex tourism in other Asian countries; however, this likely occurred less frequently during the reporting period due to the pandemic. Travel restrictions and quarantine requirements related to the pandemic prevented traffickers from recruiting some foreign trafficking victims during the reporting period; this resulted in the increased exploitation of migrant women who were already in Korea. As the entertainment industry experienced a loss of business, some traffickers also used increased levels of violence and other forms of exploitation to force victims into commercial sex. Some brokers also force Korean women who worked in clubs prior to the pandemic into commercial sex.

Traffickers have forced some physically or intellectually disabled South Korean men to work on fishing vessels, and fish, salt, and cattle farms. Unscrupulous labor recruiters contribute to the forced labor of migrant workers, especially those from Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Mongolia through debt-based coercion by charging workers excessive fees, sometimes leading to thousands of dollars in debt. Approximately 200,000 migrant workers employed under the government's Employment Permit System work in fishing, agriculture, livestock, restaurants, and manufacturing. Undocumented workers are also employed in these sectors, though there are no official statistics on their numbers. Some workers, both documented and undocumented, face conditions indicative of forced labor. Many migrant workers in the agriculture sector are forced to live in inadequate housing, sometime in greenhouses, shipping containers, or dormitories. South Korea is a transit point for Southeast Asian fishermen subjected to forced labor on fishing ships bound for Fiji and other ports in the Pacific. There are ongoing reports of widespread abuse, including forced labor, of migrant workers in the Korean fishing fleet, one of the world's largest distant water fishing fleets. Recruiters, boat owners, captains, and job brokers often use debt-based coercion to exploit migrant fisherman in forced labor on Korean-flagged or -owned vessels. Reports estimate that nearly 4,000 migrant workers, mainly from Indonesia, are employed on these vessels. Korean distant water fishing vessels frequently use at-sea trans-shipment of catches and can often stay at sea for a year or longer without visiting a port, limiting the ability of workers to report exploitation to authorities or to safely leave their exploitation. According to one study, Korean longline fishing vessels spend the longest amount of time at sea, travel the furthest distances, and have the longest daily fishing hours when compared with the world's 25 largest longline fishing fleets. Recruitment agencies and job brokers often charge fishermen excessive recruitment fees, sometimes as much as \$13,000 for Indonesian and Vietnamese fisherman working on vessels in coastal waters, increasing their vulnerability to debt-based coercion. Migrant fishermen on distant water vessels often have the first three months of their wages withheld to serve as a "deposit" that they are unable to receive back until the completion of their contract. These workers are often

then forced to work excessive hours, up to 20 hours per day, with limited rest hours or days off, face physical and verbal abuse by boat captains, salary deductions, are not provided adequate food and water, and are forced to live and work in unsanitary conditions. It is common for recruitment agencies, captains, and skippers, to retain coastal and distant water fishermen's passports to prevent them from leaving their employment.

Anecdotal reports indicated government officials were occasionally complicit in trafficking and related crimes. Traffickers reportedly utilized partnerships with some law enforcement authorities to threaten victims with penalization and deportation. In one reported instance, an employer received information from corrupt police and immigration officials ahead of raids or immigration checks. NGOs reported some government employees, including police, sexually exploited children and solicited individuals in commercial sex, some of whom may have been sex trafficking victims.