

A photograph of a busy street in a Middle Eastern city. The street is lined with multi-story buildings. On the left, a building has a large vertical sign that says "HOTEL" and a horizontal sign for "Hashem Sons Restaurant" which also features a Pepsi logo and lists "Fool - Hummos - Falafel - Salad". Below this, there are more shops and people walking. On the right, another building has a sign for "Bukhara Restaurant" which lists "Bukhari Rice - Beryani Rice - Turkish Chicken - Grilled". The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene depicts a vibrant, everyday urban environment.

RESEARCH GUIDE MIDDLE EAST

PREPARED BY

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JORDAN • LEBANON • SYRIA • IRAQ IRAN • CYPRUS • TURKEY QATAR • YEMEN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES SAUDI ARABIA • KUWAIT BAHRAIN • OMAN • EGYPT • ISRAEL PALESTINE

Egypt is geographically identified as a country in North Africa, but often politically and culturally considered a part of the Middle East. It is included in both research guides for this reason.

This research guide follows the regional division defined by the United Nations Statistics Division.

MAJOR FORMS OF TRAFFICKING:

- Migrant trafficking/ forced labor of migrant workers
- Forced labor/ labor exploitation
- Forced/exploitative begging
- Trafficking for ransom
- Sex trafficking
- Forced marriage/ child marriage
- Child labor/ child labor trafficking
- Child soldiers
- Organ trafficking

SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Kafala/ Sponsorship System: The Arabic term “kafala” contextually means sponsorship or guarantee. This system exists in Jordan and Lebanon, as well as in the majority of the Gulf countries including Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait. Under the kafala system, migrant workers are legally required to have a local sponsor who oversees their migration and legal status. Overwhelmingly, sponsors are direct employers of migrant workers. The system was instituted to provide a large

supply of cheap labor, particularly in the construction and domestic labor sectors. Sponsors are allowed a lot of control over workers, including where they work, their wages, and movement outside of the country. Given the workers’ dependence on their sponsor to live and stay in the country, they are highly vulnerable to labor exploitation. Race and gender also play a role in this problematic labor system, and darker-skinned South Asian and African workers are often recruited to less-desirable jobs while women in domestic labor positions face abuse and sexual violence.

Sinai Trafficking: Egypt’s Sinai Desert has been the site of kidnapping, hostage holding, and trafficking of tens of thousands of African refugees and migrants, primarily between



2007 and 2014. The majority (around 90%) of victims came from Eritrea, but also Sudan and Ethiopia. Victims paid human smugglers to help them escape the political violence and instability in their home countries. Instead of escape, they often faced egregious human rights violations such as being held hostage and tortured for ransom, being forced into labor and sex trafficking, or having their organs harvested for sale. Many people were reportedly taken by force from refugee camps in Sudan. Immigration laws and border close-offs with surrounding countries such as Egypt and Israel exacerbated the issue. This made it harder for refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants to travel safely. The Sinai Desert became a hotbed for trafficking due to the lack of security forces in the region. This was a result of political instability in Egypt stemming from the Arab Spring in 2011. Under the current government, however, security forces have made a return, and similar trafficking schemes have shifted to neighboring Libya and other routes.

Temporary/Seasonal Marriage: While prostitution is illegal in most countries across the region, the practice of “tourist” or “seasonal marriages” exists as a loophole that enables sexual exploitation in several areas of the Middle East. Some interpretations of Islamic law allow for these temporary marriages, which range from a few minutes or hours to several months, and often exploit girls as young as 10. Temporary marriages heavily privilege the husband as opposed to traditional Islamic marriage, and are often used as a way to exploit and prostitute women through brokers. Families living in poverty sometimes make these arrangements for their daughters as a way of providing income. The practice is common among wealthy men from the gulf, especially in Egypt where it is codified into law under Ministerial Regulation No. 9200, also known as the seasonal marriage law. The Egyptian government claims that the law is in place to help impoverished families in Egypt; however, critics say that the practice is formalized sex trafficking.

Trafficking for Ransom: This form of trafficking occurs when people are smuggled, kidnapped, abducted, and tortured in order to force victims’ families to pay ransom fees sometimes as large as 50,000 USD. In recent years, this issue has impacted refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan fleeing to Europe and parts of the Middle East. The Sinai Desert in Egypt is a major hotbed for this form of trafficking due to it being a popular route for smugglers and traffickers.

Forced/Exploitative Begging: This recently identified form of trafficking occurs across the globe. Regionally it is connected mainly to the trafficking crisis in the Sinai Desert. Victims are forced to beg through threat of severe violence or torture. With many migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers passing through or resettling across the Middle East, there remains a large number of victims to exploit as forced beggars, including children.

FIFA World Cup 2022: The 2022 FIFA World Cup will take place in Qatar. Migrant labor makes up the vast majority of Qatar’s workforce and has played a critical role in the



construction for hosting this worldwide sporting event. Due to the kafala system across Gulf region, the event has repeatedly raised serious concerns of exploitation and poor conditions of the migrant labor force. Although Qatar has passed reforms to the kafala system under pressure from human rights groups and FIFA, many labor exploitation issues remain due to lack of implementation and enforcement.

ISIS and Human Trafficking: Scholars and IOs have explored links between terrorist groups and human trafficking, noting that many terrorist groups use human trafficking as a tool for recruitment, financing, and as a form of psychological torture of their enemies. ISIS, one of the more prominent terrorist groups in the region, has taken part in several forms of human trafficking including trafficking Yazidi women and girls for sexual exploitation and slavery and also for organ trafficking. Other possible ISIS trafficking victims include religious and ethnic minorities such as Assyrians and Christians. Read more about this issue in the HTS blog post Survivors of ISIS Trafficking in Kurdistan-Iraq: Jiyan Foundation's Psychosomatic Clinic for Women.

Crisis in Lebanon: With the devastating port explosion in Beirut in 2020, the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, and severe socio-economic crisis, conditions for the majority of people across Lebanon have been increasingly dire. Lebanon's most vulnerable populations are suffering the most severe consequences, particularly the 250,000 or more migrant workers whose employment in the country is dictated by the kafala system. Due to the economic downturn and with few legal protections, migrant workers face increasing wage cuts and withheld paychecks. In some cases, workers have been completely discarded by their sponsors, being dropped off outside of embassies without money, their belongings, or a way home.

2022 TIP REPORT

In the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report from July of 2022, most of the countries in the Middle East were classified as Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, or Tier 3 states. Bahrain and Cyprus were both

listed at Tier 1, as Cyprus was upgraded from a Tier 2 state in last year's report. Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Cyprus, Turkey, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, and Israel appeared on the report as Tier 2. Kuwait received a worse rating than in 2021, moving down to a Tier 2 Watch List country. Iran and Syria both ranked as Tier 3 countries. Yemen was reported as a special case for the seventh consecutive year due to the ongoing civil conflict and humanitarian crisis. Palestine was not listed as a separate country as the government of the United States does not officially recognize the State of Palestine; discussion of Palestinian trafficking victims was incorporated into the reporting on Israel.

TRAFFICKING ROUTES:

- Syria → Lebanon/Jordan
- Southeast Asia → the Gulf/ Lebanon/ Jordan
- Horn of Africa → the Gulf/ Lebanon/ Jordan
- Horn of Africa → Israel/ Palestine
- Occupied Palestinian Territories → Israel



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KEY ORGANIZATIONS:

There are several helpful organizations that aid victims of human trafficking within the Middle East, especially migrant workers experiencing exploitation or forced labor. The International Organization for Migration has worked in or with every country in the Middle East. Jordan, Iran, Cyprus, Turkey, Yemen, Egypt, and Israel are all member states and Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain are all observer states of the IOM.

Notable local organizations include:

- [End Child Prostitution and Trafficking \(ECPAT\)](#),
- Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel (ASSAF),
- Dubai Foundation for Women and Children,
- Iraqi-Kurdish NGO [Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights](#),
- the [Egyptian Center for Women's Rights](#),
- the Iraqi-Kurdish NGO [Asuda for Combating Violence against Women](#),
- [Sawa](#) - All the Women Together Today and Tomorrow
- [Migrant Workers Protection Society Bahrain](#)
- [Tamkeen For Legal Aid and Human Rights](#) (Jordan)
- [Beirut Bar Association](#)
- [Dar Al Amal](#) (Lebanon).
- Lebanese NGO [KAFA \(Enough\) Violence & Exploitation](#)

The [Global Modern Slavery Directory](#) and [End Slavery Now's Antislavery Directory](#) include other anti-trafficking organizations working in the Middle East. Several countries have instituted their own anti-trafficking national councils or committees. These include but are not limited to, the United Arab Emirates' [National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking](#), Jordan's [Anti-Human-Trafficking National Committee](#), Iran's [National Trafficking in Persons Commission](#), and Bahrain's [National Referral System for Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#).

ANTI-TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION:

Most countries in the Middle East have anti-trafficking legislation specifically dedicated to outlawing most forms of slavery and providing appropriate punishment. Yemen and Iran are the only countries in the Middle East that have not signed or ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the [United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#).

The ILO's law database includes anti-trafficking legislation under "forced labor" for Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Cyprus, Turkey, Qatar, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt, and Israel. In 2021, Jordan approved amendments to the country's Anti-Human-Trafficking Law, originally passed in 2009, creating greater penalties for traffickers and providing more comprehensive victim services. Saudi Arabia passed [anti-trafficking legislation](#) in 2009. Palestine does not have comprehensive human trafficking legislation, however, some anti-trafficking provisions of the [Jordanian Penal Code](#) apply to the West Bank.



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KEY RESOURCES:

There are several standard worldwide publications that discuss human trafficking and modern-day slavery in the Middle East including the [Global Slavery Index's 2018 report](#) on the Middle East, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2020 "[Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#)," and the US Department of State's 2022 [Trafficking in Persons Report](#). Other regional reports include:

- the International Labor Organization's report, "[Tricked and Trapped: Human Trafficking in the Middle East](#),"
- ILO's "[Child Labour in the Arab Region \(A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis\)](#),"
- ECPAT's report, "[The Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Middle East and North Africa](#),"
- ENACT's [Global Organized Crime Index](#),
- the human trafficking in the Middle East section of the [IOM's Migration Data Portal](#),
- [UNODC's country profiles](#) of North Africa and the Middle East,
- Anti-Slavery International's "[Trafficking in Women Forced Labour and Domestic Work in the Context of the Middle East and Gulf Region](#)"

More specific country or region reports include but are certainly not limited to:

- ECPAT's country reports on [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Iraq](#), [Israel](#), [Egypt](#), and [Turkey](#) (additional)
- Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative reports on [Turkey](#), [Yemen](#), [Syria](#) and [Iraq](#), [Jordan](#), and [Lebanon](#),
- "[Trafficking and Forced Prostitution of Palestinian Women and Girls: Forms of Modern Day Slavery](#)" by Sawa - All the Women Together Today and Tomorrow, supported by UNIFEM
- the International Centre for Migration Policy Development report on Syrian refugees, "[Targeting Vulnerabilities: The Impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons](#),"
- Freedom Fund's report, "[Struggling to Survive: Slavery and Exploitation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon](#),"
- ILO's "[The Fight Against Forced Labour and Trafficking for Labour Exploitation in Qatar](#),"
- UNODC's report, "[Combatting Trafficking in Persons in Accordance with the Principles of Islamic Law](#),"
- Global Alliance against Traffic in Women's report, "[Enabling Access to Justice: A CSO Perspective on the Challenges of Realizing the Rights of South Asian Migrants in the Middle East](#),"
- Human Rights Watch's report on Sinai trafficking, "[I Wanted to Lay Down and Die': Trafficking and Torture of Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt](#),"
- Amnesty International's report, "[Egypt/Sudan: Refugees Face Kidnapping for Ransom, Brutal Treatment and Human Trafficking](#),"
- Europe External Policy Advisors and Tilburg University's joint report, "[Human Trafficking in the Sinai: Refugees between Life and Death](#)."

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