

In 2021, Mexico made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government carried out 5,000 more labor inspections compared to the previous year and established a new voluntary labor reporting system for businesses to confirm compliance with the Labor Code. The Commission on the Rights of Refugee and Migrant Children and Adolescents also published a report on its activities during the year aiming to ensure the best interests of migrant and refugee children, including unaccompanied minors. Additionally, the government published and implemented the National Program for Children and Adolescents 2021–2024, and the Benito Juárez Wellbeing National Scholarship Program reached 9.8 million students. However, children in Mexico are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, including in the production of chile peppers, coffee, sugarcane, and tomatoes. In 2021, the government eliminated many social programs that increased educational access and reduced risk for child labor in marginalized communities. Although nearly 60 percent of all employment in Mexico occurs in the informal sector, federal and some state-level labor inspectors carry out inspections in the informal sector only after receiving formal complaints. In addition, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies lacked human and financial resources and the government published limited information on its labor and criminal law enforcement efforts. Social programs to eliminate child labor also do not address all relevant sectors in which child labor is found in Mexico.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mexico are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs. (1-4) Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, including in the production of chile peppers, coffee, sugarcane, and tomatoes. (5,6) Data from the National Child Labor Survey (ENTI 2019), which was funded by USDOL, show that 3.1 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 engage in child labor, with 52 percent of these children engaging in hazardous work. It also shows that 25 percent of child laborers do not attend school, 61 percent of child laborers are boys, and that child labor primarily occurs in the central and southern states of Oaxaca, Puebla, Chiapas, and Michoacán. (7,8) Table I provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Mexico.

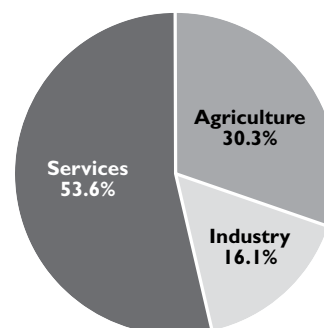
**Table I. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	4.0 (866,293)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	97.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.4
Primary Completion Rate (%)		102.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (9)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Encuesta Nacional de Trabajo Infantil (ENTI), 2019. (10)

**Figure I. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14**



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Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Working in agriculture,† including in the production of avocados, beans, chile peppers, coffee, cotton, cucumbers, eggplants, beans (green), guayabas, melons, nuts, onions, pineapples, sugarcane, tobacco,‡ and tomatoes (5-6,11-18) Cattle raising (19)
Industry	Manufacturing† footwear, furniture, garments, leather goods, and textiles (7,11,19-21) Producing baked goods (7,19,22) Construction,† activities unknown (7,11,19) Mining,† including amber and charcoal (7,19,23-26) Working in woodworking and welding shops (7,11,19)
Services	Street work† as vendors, shoe shiners, beggars, car washers, and porters (5,22,27-30) Working in auto repair garages, beauty salons, restaurants, bars,† and coffee shops (7,11,29) Scavenging in landfills (5,31) Domestic work (7,8,19,32)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, and begging (4,23,30,32-36) Commercial sexual exploitation, including in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-3,11,17,23,37) Use by cartels to perform illicit activities, including the production of poppies for heroin, drug trafficking, and carrying out armed attacks, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,23,38-45)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

In 2021, reports suggest that almost 850,000 children did not continue their basic education. This includes 656,000 students who did not transition from elementary school to lower secondary school. (46,47) Government reports also show that at least 1,200 schools closed between 2020 and 2021. In addition, students reported difficulty accessing distance learning programs as at least half of Mexican households do not have computers or Internet access, while 80 percent of indigenous or rural households lacked computers or Internet access. (47,48) The lack of access to education and school abandonment leaves children more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (4,17,49,50)

Organized criminal groups recruit and exploit children in illicit activities, including serving as lookouts, carrying out armed attacks against authorities and rival cartels, and in the production, transport, and sale of drugs. Experts estimate that as many as 250,000 children are at risk of being recruited by these criminal groups. (4,43,44,51-53) Most of the time these children abandon school, are unable to access future employment in the formal sector, or go on to commit graver crimes. (4,44,45,51) Children in Mexico are also trafficked internally for commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities, including by organized criminal groups. The state of Tlaxcala is known as the predominant source and transit center for child commercial sexual exploitation in Mexico, but it also occurs in tourist areas such as Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, and Cancun, and in northern border cities such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. (1,2,23,53,54) The states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla, and Veracruz are also source and transit centers for human trafficking for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation. Mexico's National System for Integral Family Development (SNDIF) estimates that each year at least 70,000 children and adolescents are trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (23,55) Reports by Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime found that 25 percent of female trafficking victims in Mexico are under age 18 while 45 percent of child trafficking victims are children of indigenous descent. (1,4,36,56,57)

Child labor in agriculture is more prevalent among boys. Although children engage in agricultural activities throughout the country, the majority of child labor in this sector occurs in the central and southern states of Oaxaca, Puebla, Chiapas, and Nayarit. (7,8) Children's work in agriculture often includes long working hours, use of sharp tools, handling pesticides, and carrying heavy loads. (6,58,59) A 2018 report by the *Centro de Derechos*

*Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan* found that 42 percent of Mexican migrant agricultural worker households had at least one child engaged in child labor. (13,60,61) In addition, organized criminal groups operating in rural areas throughout the country actively recruit children, making some children in agricultural export-producing communities vulnerable to involvement in illicit activities. (16,45,62-64) An April 2022 labor law reform requires the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) to establish regulations regarding hazardous occupations in agriculture, which may allow older children who cannot legally work in agriculture to obtain employment in this sector in the future. (65-67)

Children from indigenous populations are more likely to work across all sectors, including in agriculture, than non-indigenous children. (13,60,68) Children from indigenous populations also work at road intersections, often begging for money or performing juggling acts for motorists at traffic lights. (69) Indigenous children are also less likely to attend school due to the lack of schools near their homes, educational materials, and instruction in native languages. (68,70,71) According to CNDH, because of these low educational levels, as well as linguistic barriers and discrimination, indigenous populations are especially vulnerable to child labor and human trafficking. (36,52,72,73)




Migrants, mostly from the northern Central America countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, who are fleeing violence, instability, and lack of opportunity in their countries of origin, travel through Mexico en route to the United States. In addition, thousands of Haitians, including children, crossed into Mexico, some from Central America, throughout 2021. (74,75) Migrant children, especially those travelling by themselves, are more vulnerable to human trafficking, forced recruitment by organized criminal groups, and other worst forms of child labor. (4,76,77) In addition, many migrant children do not have access to education. (77,78)

The National Institute of Migration (INM) is responsible for enforcing the rights of migrant children in coordination with the SNDIF, and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) is tasked with refugee assistance. However, due to government austerity measures and an increase in the number of migrants, including unaccompanied children, INM, SNDIF, and COMAR did not have sufficient funding to carry out their mandates. (23,79-81) In addition, although the government revised laws in November 2020 to address the best interests of migrant and refugee children, including placement in child protection centers while waiting to be repatriated, some children remained in INM detention centers without access to education during the reporting period. (75,76,82-84) Moreover, many SNDIF shelters, in which migrant families and unaccompanied children are housed, have reached or are nearing capacity, and poor coordination by INM and SNDIF left some of these children and families without access to shelter. (81,85,86) Authorities also did not effectively identify human trafficking victims among migrant populations, and trafficking victims did not have access to comprehensive protections and services. (87)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mexico has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

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The government's laws and regulations are in line with relevant international standards (Table 4).

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Article 123 of the Constitution; Article 22 <i>bis</i> of the Labor Code; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents; Article 6 of the General Law on Education (16,88-90)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 175 of the Labor Code (16)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 175 and 176 of the Labor Code (16)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 1 and 5 of the Constitution; Articles 11, 12, and 22 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (88,89,91)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 10 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (89,91)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 202–205 of the Federal Penal Code; Articles 13 and 18 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (89,91,92)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 196 and 201 of the Federal Penal Code; Article 24 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Articles 2, 4, and 5 of the Law on Organized Crime (91-93)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 5 of the Military Service Law (94)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 24 of the Military Service Law (94)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 123 and 201 of the Federal Penal Code; Articles 16 and 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (89,92)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	18	Articles 6 and 129 of the General Law on Education (90)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 3 of the Constitution (88)

In April 2022, Mexico enacted a reform to the Labor Code that would permit children as young as 15 to work in some agricultural employment. Previously, Article 176 of the Labor Code deemed work in agriculture, hunting and fishing as hazardous and, accordingly, prohibited children under the age of 18 from engaging in this kind of work. (16,65,66,95) The reform qualified the language in Art. 176 to prohibit minors from engaging in these activities while using chemicals, handling machinery, operating heavy vehicles, and carrying out other tasks as determined by the competent authority. The STPS has 180 days after the entry in force of the reform to classify activities in Art. 176 and determine which activities would be lower risk and thus permissible for minors. (65,66,95) Proponents of the reform state that permitting minors to work in low-risk agricultural activities may create formal employment opportunities in rural areas. (17,66,67) However, critics suggests that the reform may jeopardize the health and safety of children by exposing them to the hazards and extreme conditions involved in agricultural work. Others view the reform as a setback for child labor protections and note that the reform lacks corresponding mechanisms and resources for ensuring labor law enforcement. (17,66,67)

The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement entered into force on July 1, 2020. The agreement contains a labor chapter with fully enforceable labor obligations, including on internationally recognized labor rights. (96,97) Under this chapter, Mexico committed to adopt and maintain in its statutes, regulations, and practices the effective abolition of child labor and a prohibition on the worst forms of child labor. This chapter also requires each country to prohibit the importation into its territory from other countries of any goods produced in whole or in part by forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory child labor. (97) While the Government of Mexico established a working group to continue reviewing existing laws related to the prohibition of the importation of goods produced by forced or compulsory child labor and is developing a plan to implement the

prohibition, including determining legal sufficiency for subsequent enforcement actions, the working group did not provide an update on the status of the draft plan during the reporting period. (17,53,98)

As the minimum age for work at age 15 is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (16,90)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established relevant institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS)	Leads efforts to enforce child labor laws, conduct labor inspections, and refer cases for investigation. The Federal Prosecutor for the Defense of Work, an independent entity under STPS, prosecutes cases in which workers' rights are violated, including cases with workers under age 18. (16,99-104) The STPS inspectorate is responsible for labor law enforcement in 22 industrial sectors under federal jurisdiction, including the sugar and tobacco industries, 3 types of enterprises, and labor matters affecting 2 or more states. The state-level labor inspectorates are responsible for labor law enforcement in all other situations. (16,88,105)
Attorney General of the Republic (FGR)	Prosecutes crimes involving human trafficking, including criminal violations related to child trafficking and other worst forms of child labor. The FGR's Specialized Unit for Crimes against Women and Trafficking in Persons (FEVIMTRA) and the Specialized Unit on Trafficking in Minors, People, and Organs are responsible for investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases at the federal level. (4,104,106-109) In addition, all 32 states have specialized trafficking in persons prosecutors or units, which are responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of human trafficking at the state level. Some state trafficking in persons units or prosecutors also prosecute cases of gender-based violence. (52,64,110,111) Federal and state trafficking in persons units receive some cases of child trafficking from the National Institute of Migration and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance. (80,83,112-115)
National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH)	Receives complaints and conducts investigations on human rights violations, including cases involving the worst forms of child labor. Independent ombudsman body. (116)
Conciliation and Arbitration Boards and Labor Tribunals and Conciliation Centers	Tripartite boards which mediate and adjudicate labor disputes according to federal and state labor laws, including processing cases in which children between the ages of 15 and 18 request permission to work. Beginning in 2020 and ending in 2022, these boards are being replaced by federal- and state-level Labor Tribunals and Conciliation Centers, which will oversee conciliation and adjudication of labor disputes, respectively. (16,42,88,117-120)
Secretariat of Health's National System for Integral Family Development (SNDIF)	Provides social assistance to child victims, including shelter and legal services. Employs representatives at the national, state, and municipal levels. (89,104,121) At the federal and state levels, also employs special prosecutors to carry out legal action against crimes related to children and adolescent rights, including violations related to the worst forms of child labor. (89,104,121) During school holidays, some state-level SNDIF ministries conduct operations to monitor for child labor in the informal sector. (122-134)

Since 2019, the Government of Mexico has implemented austerity measures that left many secretariats and agencies, including the Attorney General of the Republic (FGR) and CNDH, at both the federal and state levels, without the appropriate personnel, expertise, and leadership to carry out core government functions, including enforcing laws and establishing and implementing policies and programs related to the worst forms of child labor. (17,53,135,136)

Federal and state labor inspectorates carry out labor inspections in formally registered businesses. (99,100,137,138) Although these inspectorates have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections in the informal sector, in practice, inspections in the informal sector are only conducted in response to a formal complaint. As the informal sector accounts for 57 percent of employment in Mexico, including agricultural employment, the lack of inspections in this sector leaves children vulnerable to labor exploitation. (11,98,99,101,137-140)

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### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Mexico took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human and financial resource allocation.

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,420,784 (141)	\$1,536,366 (17)
Number of Labor Inspectors	447 (42)	471 (17)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (138)	Yes (138)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (141)	Yes (17)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (141)	N/A (17)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (42)	No (17)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	29,177 <sup>†</sup> (42)	35,098 <sup>‡</sup> (17)
Number Conducted at Worksite	29,177 <sup>†</sup> (42)	35,098 <sup>‡</sup> (17)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	1 <sup>†</sup> (142)	2 <sup>‡</sup> (17)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (141)	2 <sup>‡</sup> (17)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (141)	Unknown (17)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (42)	Yes (17)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (42)	Yes (17)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (42,138)	Yes (17,138)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (42)	Yes (17)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (42)	Yes (17)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (141)	Yes (17,141)

<sup>†</sup> Data are for federal inspectorate only. (42)

<sup>‡</sup> Data are for federal inspectorate only. (17)

In 2021, 25 out of 32 states provided information on their state labor inspectorates and reported employing a total of 304 labor inspectors. In addition, STPS hired 24 labor inspectors, bringing their total number of labor inspectors to 471. (17) However, the number of labor inspectors at the federal and state levels is likely insufficient for the size of Mexico's workforce, which includes approximately 53 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Mexico would need to employ roughly 3,552 labor inspectors. (143-145)

The STPS initiates routine and targeted inspections based on analysis of compliance data and patterns of complaints. Unannounced inspections for child labor violations are only conducted in response to complaints and must be coordinated with representatives from SNDIF and the local Office of the FGR. (100,104,137,146) The STPS did not report carrying out inspections specific to child labor in 2021. The total number of child labor complaints received is unknown, as the STPS does not have an internal system to track cases of child labor violations. (105,138,147,148)

During the reporting period, STPS identified 2 child labor violations and an additional 8 states out of 32 reported identifying a total of 215 violations related to child labor. However, STPS and the states did not provide information on penalties imposed or collected. (17,42,100,104,122-126) STPS is not authorized to collect any fines and must refer fine collection to the Tax Administration Service (SAT), which rarely enforces fine collection for any labor law violations. Moreover, research could not verify that all state-level labor ministries conducted child labor inspections, sanctioned establishments in violation of the Labor Code, or applied the guidelines on identifying and sanctioning child labor violations as outlined in the "Labor Inspection Protocol to Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Workers". (17,42,98,100,104,122-126) However, the States of Chiapas, Puebla, Queretaro, Tabasco, and Veracruz provided their labor inspectors with training on child labor, including applying labor inspection protocols to identify and sanction child labor violations. (17) In 2021, STPS increased the budget



dedicated to the labor inspectorate by over \$100,000 compared to 2020. In addition, the States of Mexico, Hidalgo, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz provided information on the budget allocated to each state's labor inspectorate for a total of almost \$1.4 million. (17)

In 2021, STPS implemented a new voluntary reporting system called the Voluntary Labor Verification Program (VELAVO), which allows formally registered businesses to enroll and self-identify as compliant with the program's requirements related to working conditions, including provisions related to child labor. Registered businesses deemed to be in compliance according to the documentation submitted will be exempt from routine labor inspections for one year, although this does not prevent the STPS from conducting complaint-based labor inspections in these businesses. (149, 150)

The STPS and state-level labor ministries share enforcement authority of child labor laws and are authorized to establish agreements for coordination of inspection duties. However, due to limited information sharing between federal and state-level inspectorates, some establishments may not be inspected for labor law violations. (99, 138, 148) Moreover, concerns remain with Mexico's lack of enforcement of laws governing the minimum age for employment in rural areas or at small and medium enterprises, particularly in the agricultural sector. (53, 66, 151)

Even though federal labor inspectors have the authority to assess penalties for most labor infractions, child labor and forced labor infractions are considered criminal offenses. In such cases, inspectors are required to file a citation with the STPS's Directorate of Judicial Affairs to initiate sanctioning procedures with the state-level finance ministries or the FGR, who are then responsible for collecting fines or initiating criminal sanctions. (17, 99, 137, 141, 148)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mexico took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient financial resource allocation.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (85)	Yes (17)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (42)	Unknown (17)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (85)	Yes (17)
Number of Investigations	845 (54)	484‡ (54)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (85)	Unknown (17)
Number of Convictions	43† (85)	42† (53)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (85)	Yes (17, 53, 152)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (85)	Yes (17)

† Data reported may not be complete (53, 85)

‡ Data are for January 1, 2021 through July 31, 2021. (54)

Between January and October 2021, the Secretariat for Security and Citizen Protection (SSPC) conducted 638 investigations into potential cases of human trafficking, representing an increase of almost 10 percent from the previous year. As a result of these inspections, the SSPC identified 650 trafficking victims. (153, 154) However, the SSPC did not disaggregate the number of child and adult victims. (153, 154) In addition, research conducted by the Consejo Ciudadano, which operates the National Trafficking Line, found fraudulent job offers for work in factories and in agriculture was the main form of recruitment used by human traffickers during the reporting period. The National Trafficking Line also registered an increase in the proportion of calls involving children being trafficked, making up as many as 47 percent of calls to the hotline, up from 32 percent in 2019. (155)

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During 2021, the FGR's Specialized Unit for Crimes Against Women and Trafficking in Persons (FEVIMTRA) had a budget of \$3.3 million, and conducted 16 investigations related to trafficking in persons and identified 3 child trafficking victims. The states of Chiapas and Guanajuato each reported carrying out four child trafficking investigations while Zacatecas reported conducting one child trafficking investigation. (17,53,54) Moreover, the State of Mexico achieved 5 convictions for child trafficking, Michoacán reported 2 child trafficking convictions, the states of Guanajuato, Morelos, and Queretaro each reported 1 child trafficking conviction, and 15 individuals were prosecuted for trafficking in persons by the states of Chiapas, Hidalgo, Puebla, and Zacatecas. (17,53,54) These investigations included at least six public officials accused of involvement in crimes related to trafficking in persons, and in February 2022, a police officer in Mexico City was convicted of possession of child pornography and sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment. (53,54, 152) Additionally, the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF), which detects and combats criminal operations using illicit funds, identified 201 possible cases of trafficking in persons, of which 43 cases involved minors. (53)

Reports indicate that the lack of training for criminal law enforcement officers on how to perform prosecutorial and police investigative functions, and confusion over territorial jurisdictions, has hampered their ability to adequately investigate and prosecute cases involving the worst forms of child labor. (4,17,53,54) In addition, the insufficient capacity of prosecutors and judges to try criminal cases related to human trafficking meant that many suspected traffickers were incorrectly prosecuted for minor offenses or were acquitted. (4,17,53,54) Moreover, state prosecutors had limited financial resources available for investigations, training, and outreach. (54,156,157)

According to public sources, the government conducted 484 investigations between January and July 2021, and made at least 42 convictions at the federal and state levels for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor; however, the complete number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, and convictions achieved is unknown. (53,54,85) Although the government provided some information on its criminal law enforcement efforts related to the worst forms of child labor at the federal level and for some states, weak coordination and inconsistent data sharing among government agencies prevented comprehensive statistics from being compiled. (17,53,54) Research also identified that inconsistent data collection and the lack of coordination amongst government ministries may hinder criminal prosecutions and impact government efforts to provide victim services. (17,53,54,64,158,159)

## IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including inefficacy in accomplishing mandates.

**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor**

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-Institutional Commission for Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and the Protection of Adolescent Workers of the Permitted Age in Mexico (CITI)	Coordinates Mexico's activities to develop policies, approve programs, and coordinate, monitor, and evaluate efforts to eliminate child labor, especially its worst forms. Chaired by STPS and includes representatives from the secretariats of the Interior, Economy, Foreign Affairs, Wellbeing, Agriculture, Transportation, Education, Health, Tourism, Social Security, SNDIF, and FGR. (17,141) Meets on a quarterly basis and includes NGO networks and international technical and financial partners, such as UNODC and IOM. During the reporting period, the CITI finalized the Plan of Action on Child Labor 2021–2024. (17,141,148)
Inter-Institutional Commission for the Prevention, Sanction and Eradication of Crimes Related to Trafficking in Persons and for the Protection and Support of Victims of those Crimes	Defines policy and coordinates efforts to address human trafficking in Mexico. Chaired by the Secretariat of the Interior and includes representatives from STPS, secretariats of numerous other government ministries, NGOs, and international technical partners. (91,160) Although the commission met seven times in 2021, research was unable to determine what activities this committee carried out during the reporting period. (17,53)
National System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA)	Coordinates national child protection policy and programs. Chaired by the Secretariat of the Interior and made up of a steering committee from multiple other ministries and representatives of civil society groups. (90) During the reporting period, SIPINNA was active and held various meetings to review, finalize, and publish the National Program for Children and Adolescents (PRONAPPINA) 2021–2024. (17)



**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor (Cont.)**

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
State Committees for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and for the Protection of Young Persons (CITI <i>Estatales</i> )	Implement and evaluate activities related to the elimination of child labor through the 32 state and Federal District committees. These committees also compile, analyze, and report their activities to the federal CITI. (42,101) Research could not confirm whether all state committees met during the reporting period. (17)
Commission for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children and Adolescents	Coordinates, develops, monitors, and evaluates strategies and programs to protect the rights of migrant and refugee children. Chaired by SIPINNA. (141,161,162) During the reporting period, the Commission published an annual report on its activities, including efforts to ensure the best interests of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children. (163)

## V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including lack of coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
National Program for the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (2020–2024)	Aims to strengthen the fundamental rights of work and to increase labor force participation in the formal sector. The plan prioritizes addressing child labor as part of STPS' social inclusion strategy. (164) During the reporting period, a training program on child labor and the rights of children and adolescents was developed for representatives from each of the 32 federal entities, federal labor inspectors, and STPS staff. (17,165)
National Program for Children and Adolescents (PRONAPPINA) 2021–2024†	Aims to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents by establishing mechanisms to support their growth and development. (166)
Plan of Action on Child Labor 2021–2024†	Aims to promote a culture of prevention against child labor and to protect the human and labor rights of children and adolescents. (167)
National Human Rights Program (2020–2024)	Aims to increase the national well-being of the general population and to ensure equality and equity. Includes actions to ensure children's rights and address child labor. (141,168) Research confirmed that during the year Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB's) Sub-Secretariat of Human Rights, Migration, and Population held meetings with 16 of the 32 federal entities to design and establish policies at the state level linked to the National Human Rights Program 2020–2024. (17,169)
National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2019–2024)	Supports inclusive education for vulnerable children, including migrant and indigenous children. (170,171) During the 2020–2021 school year, approximately 53,221 students with special needs benefited from the program. (17)
Integral Development Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y México	Aims to support strategic economic development in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries to address the root causes of migration and increase employment in the region. (172-175) Research confirms that the plan was implemented during the year, although only 7 percent of the \$90 million promised for the plan implementation have thus far been disbursed. (174,175)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government has other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (176)

Mexico became a Pathfinder country under Alliance 8.7 in 2019 to accelerate commitments toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, which calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking by 2030, and the eradication of child labor by 2025. (177,178) As a Pathfinder country, the government developed and implemented the Alliance 8.7 Roadmap to Eradicate Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Trafficking in Persons, which includes the goals of improving information generation on child and forced labor, strengthening coordination between the CITI and the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Prevention and Punishment of Human Trafficking Crimes, and establishing preventative actions to address child and forced labor in supply chains. (177,179) In addition, as part of the efforts to improve information generation and coordination between the CITI and the Inter-Institutional Commission on Trafficking, STPS led the Working Group on Information Strategies and Preventative Campaigns between the two Commissions. STPS is also developing a Labor Inspection Program for 2022 focusing on the agricultural industry and the carbon-mining sector to prevent child labor and forced labor in these supply chains. (180)

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During the reporting period, the government finalized the Plan of Action on Child Labor 2021–2024 and published the National Program for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (PRONAPPINA) 2021–2024. In addition, the government published the National Program for Equality between Men and Women (PROIGUALDAD) 2020–2024, which includes actions to improve the labor conditions of young women and girls and actions to reduce child labor. (17,166,167,181) However, even though the government drafted the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons 2020–2024 in 2019, this plan has not been officially approved. (17,182) Although the government has policies to address some worst forms of child labor, research found no evidence of a policy to address commercial sexual exploitation or the use of children in illicit activities. (141,164,168)

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

The government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the inadequacy to address the problem in all sectors and in all states.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
Benito Juárez Wellbeing National Scholarship Program†	Secretariat of Public Education cash transfer program that offers two types of scholarships for families living in poverty and students at risk of school desertion. The Wellbeing Basic Education Family Scholarship provides bi-monthly payments of \$80 per household for all children under age 15 enrolled in school, while the Benito Juárez Scholarship provides bi-monthly payments of \$80 to each child enrolled in high school. (183-185) Although the program reaches a high number of students, it has been criticized for providing insufficient cash transfers, lacking monitoring and evaluation, and having implementation issues. (186-190) In 2021, the program reached 9.8 million students. (191)
Support for Indigenous Education Program‡	Implemented by the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples to support educational access of children from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities through scholarships, boarding houses, and nutritional support. (192) In 2021, the program assisted 63,049 children through the program's <i>Casas y Comedores de la Niñez Indígena</i> and <i>Casas y Comedores Comunitarios del Estudiante Indígena</i> . (193)
Assistance for At-Risk Children and Adolescents Program (PAMAR)†	Implemented by the SNDIF at the state and municipal levels to assist youth at risk for child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and in illicit activities, by providing shelters, psychosocial assistance, and training. In 2021, this program was implemented by the SNDIF in 26 states and 445 municipalities benefiting 68,503 children and adolescents, but it is not implemented across all states and municipalities in which the program is needed. (17,53)
USDOL-Funded Projects	USDOL-funded projects that aim to eliminate child labor through research, increase labor inspection capacity, and expand participation in education, training, and social protection programs. <i>Campos de Esperanza</i> is an \$11 million project implemented by World Vision which has worked with the sugarcane sector to help improve working conditions for over 5,300 sugarcane workers in targeted agricultural communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz. MAPI6 is an ILO-implemented global project, with \$2.4 million dedicated to support the National Child Labor Survey (ENTI 2019) with the results released in 2020. (7,194,195) MAPI6 also supported the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor (RILAC) program to develop maps that show communities at risk of child labor and has worked with local government in the States of Mexico and Chiapas to develop policy responses. (7,194,195) Other projects include: <i>Senderos</i> , an \$8 million project implemented by Verité to address child and forced labor in the sugarcane and tobacco sectors in Jalisco and Nayarit; EQUAL, a \$5 million project implemented by World Vision to increase women's and adolescent girls' economic empowerment in the agricultural sector; COFFEE, a \$2.2 million project implemented by Verité in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to promote social compliance and develop tools for businesses to establish systems to prevent, detect, and combat child and forced labor in coffee supply chains; and Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in Selected Supply Chains in Mexico – A Vision Zero Fund, a \$5 million project implemented by the ILO's Vision Zero Fund to improve the occupational safety and health of workers, with a focus on COVID-19, female workers, and workers in vulnerable conditions. Two new additional projects include: Building a Comprehensive Government of Mexico Approach to Combating Child Labor and Forced Labor*, a \$13 million ILO-implemented project to strengthen the capacity and enhance the effectiveness of the Government of Mexico to collect and analyze data on child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking for the purposes of informing federal policies and programming; and <i>Sustentar</i> *, a \$5 million project implemented by Social Accountability International to increase private sector stakeholders' accountability to uphold core labor standards focusing on the chile pepper and tomato sector. (196-201) In 2021, USDOL-funded projects trained 130 labor inspectors and 399 teachers on identifying and preventing child labor and provided over 1,400 children in child labor or at risk of child labor with education services. (195,196,198) For additional information, please visit our website.

† Program is funded by the Government of Mexico.

\*Program was launched during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (42,141,202-206)

During the reporting period, the government eliminated many social programs that increased education access and reduced risk for child labor for indigenous children, migrant and refugee children, and children from other vulnerable groups. These programs included the Indigenous People's Education Diversity Program (PADEI), Educational Program for Migrant School Population (PAPEM), and the Full-Time Schools Program (PETC). (17,207-211) Research could not confirm whether these programs will be replaced by new programs in future years.

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Mexico (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work to align with the compulsory education age of 18.	2019 – 2021
Enforcement	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors in accordance with the ILO's technical advice to provide adequate coverage of the workforce.	2019 – 2021
	Conduct refresher trainings and train federal and state-level labor inspectors on the Labor Inspection Protocol to Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Workers and ensure its guidelines related to identifying and sanctioning child labor violations are followed.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare at the federal and state levels conduct targeted routine and unannounced labor inspections in all sectors, including in the informal sector and in rural areas.	2019 – 2021
	Improve cooperation and information sharing between federal and state-level labor inspectorates.	2019 – 2021
	Publish information at the federal and state level on the number of child labor violations found and the number of child labor penalties imposed and collected.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare case tracking system allows for comprehensive identification of labor law violations, including violations of child labor law.	2019 – 2021
	Enforcement	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies receive sufficient funding to conduct investigations and prosecutions related to the worst forms of child labor and provide services to victims.
Increase coordination among government ministries to ensure adequate criminal prosecutions of perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor.		2019 – 2021
Increase training for enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges to ensure adequate criminal law enforcement related to the worst forms of child labor.		2019 – 2021
Publish complete information at the federal and state level on the number of investigations and prosecutions initiated and convictions secured.		2019 – 2021
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and able to carry out their mandates.	2019 – 2021
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities.	2019 – 2021
Social Programs	Expand access to education by increasing school infrastructure, providing education materials and instruction in native languages, expanding internet access, and ensuring that all children are able to attend school, including those in migrant or indigenous communities.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that unaccompanied migrant children are placed in child protection centers instead of detention centers and receive access to education.	2019 – 2021
	Remove children from organized criminal groups and ensure that they are provided with adequate social services.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that government agencies assisting migrants and refugees effectively coordinate and fund programs to assist these populations.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that the Benito Juárez Wellbeing Scholarship Program provides sufficient assistance to vulnerable students and receives regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation.	2019 – 2021
	Implement or expand social protection programs throughout the country for victims of child labor in all relevant sectors, including in commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities.	2019 – 2021

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