

# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Law enforcement officers participated in workshops to further their knowledge of labor exploitation issues. The State Coordinator's Office also provided four non-governmental organizations with financial support (totaling approximately \$73,000) to operate assistance programs and shelters for victims of human trafficking. However, social programs dedicated to assisting children involved in forced begging do not have adequate resources, and representatives from both entities' Ministries of Labor are not included in the National Anti-Trafficking Strike Force, which limits coordination efforts. Furthermore, most child labor is in the informal sector, and laws on the minimum age for work do not meet international standards because they do not apply to children who are self-employed or those working outside of formal employment relationships. Finally, the government does not have an official mechanism to refer children found in child labor to social services providers.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	8.9% (44,017)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	83.7%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	10.6%

Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging.

### Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



#### Services

Street work, including vending and washing car windows.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor<sup>‡</sup>

Forced begging and forced domestic work. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Illicit activity, including pickpocketing.

<sup>‡</sup> Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor per se under Article 3(a)-(c) of ILO C. 182.



## SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### Legal Framework

Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships.

Criminalize forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from human trafficking in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District.

Criminally prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, including the use, procurement, and offering of a child for the production and trafficking of drugs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## *Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont.)*

Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including street begging.

Criminally prohibit using children for prostitution, production of pornography, and pornographic performances in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Enforcement**

Collect and publish information on labor and criminal law enforcement efforts, including labor inspectorate funding and whether criminal investigators receive training.

Create an official mechanism for referring children identified during labor inspections to social services providers.

Ensure that children are not penalized for being victims of the worst forms of child labor.

Ensure that law enforcement, judiciary officials, and social services providers are trained on indicators of child trafficking—including trafficking of migrant children—and are able to properly identify victims, classify violations, use referral mechanisms, and prosecute offenders.

Ensure that labor inspectors receive training on all sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including hazardous work in agriculture.

### **Government Policies**

Ensure that the government publishes information on activities conducted under policies that address child labor, including the Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Canton Sarajevo.

### **Social Programs**

Provide inclusive education initiatives with adequate funding to support the needs of vulnerable children.

Ensure that all children have access to education by accommodating children with disabilities and preventing discrimination against minority students.

Ensure that all children have access to birth registration or identity documentation required to enroll in school.

Allow Bosniak children in Republika Srpska to access education in the Bosnian language and end the “Two Schools Under One Roof” practice to eliminate discrimination in schools based on ethnicity in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Provide programs such as Daily Centers and Centers for Social Welfare with adequate financial and technical resources to assist vulnerable families and survivors of child labor.

Provide sufficient funding for social services to assist survivors of domestic or international human trafficking, including unaccompanied minors.

Establish programs to support street children living outside of Sarajevo.



## **CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK**

In BiH, Roma children are the most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor due to barriers to accessing education. Some Roma students face linguistic and cultural discrimination from teachers, peers, and school administrators, resulting in a disproportionate number of Roma children being enrolled in schools for children with intellectual disabilities despite no prior medical evaluation that would indicate a need to be enrolled in a special education program. In addition, some Roma children lack birth registration documents, which are required to attend school in BiH. Reports from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees indicate that some children in BiH were still designated as being at risk of statelessness in 2023. Children who are classified as stateless are at higher risk for labor exploitation. Additionally, migrants—particularly unaccompanied children—from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and other countries who travel through BiH are potential targets for human traffickers.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Schools in the Republika Srpska (RS) entity deny the right of some Bosniak children to receive instruction in the Bosnian language; as a result, these children sometimes travel long distances to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) entity to receive education in their language. In addition, discrimination persists under the “Two Schools Under One Roof” practice between Bosniaks and Croats in FBiH. Under this system, Bosniak and Croat children are in segregated classes following separate curricula in the same school building. This creates obstacles for students who wish to attend schools other than those that match their ethnic identity and enables ethnic discrimination in schools, which can lead to absenteeism. Children with disabilities also face barriers to accessing education, which may make them vulnerable to child labor. Sources indicated that the government has not allocated enough financial resources for adequate implementation of inclusive education initiatives, particularly for students with disabilities.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, BiH’s laws do not meet the international standard for child trafficking because BiH’s Criminal Code fails to specifically outlaw forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from trafficking in persons.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>15 Years</b>		Articles 20 and 171 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 57 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 42, 57, and 171 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 185, 186, and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Article II of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 185, 186, and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 186 and 187 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 195 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 9 of the Law on the Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	<b>N/A*</b>	Article 9 of the Law on the Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 173(e) of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Compulsory Education Age, <b>15 Years</b> ‡		Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Free Public Education		Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

\* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The labor laws of FBiH, RS, and Brčko District (BD) do not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age to work because the labor laws do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships. In addition, FBiH, RS, and BD do not include street begging in their lists of hazardous occupations prohibited for children. Although the Criminal Code of BiH criminalizes human trafficking for forced labor, it fails to specifically outlaw forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from trafficking in persons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District. Laws related to illicit activities in BiH are also not sufficient because using, procuring, and offering children for the production and trafficking of drugs are not criminally prohibited. Moreover, the laws of BiH and FBiH do not meet international standards for the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and legislation in BiH, FBiH, RS, and BD does not meet international standards for the recruitment of minors by non-state armed groups, as their criminal codes fail to explicitly prohibit this offense.



## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in BiH took actions to address child labor. However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

### Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

**Ministries of Labor and Social Policy:** Enforce labor laws, including those on child labor. The Cantonal-Level Labor Inspectorates (FBiH), the Ministry of Labor and Veterans' Labor Inspectorate (RS), and the Administrative Support Department (BD) enforce labor laws at the canton, entity, and district levels, respectively.

**State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) and Border Police (SBP):** SIPA investigates human trafficking crimes and enforces anti-trafficking laws across the entire country. SBP identifies victims of human trafficking at the border.

### Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes

In 2023, **179** labor inspectors conducted **196,039** worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. The government also conducted investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, however it is **unknown** whether prosecutions were initiated or perpetrators were convicted.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

### Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Bosnia and Herzegovina established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

**Department of the State Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons (State Coordinator) within the Ministry of Security (MOS):** In conjunction with the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force, coordinates human trafficking survivor protection and rehabilitation efforts involving both relevant ministries and NGOs. Oversees the human trafficking database, which includes data from NGOs, SIPA, SBP, and police agencies and prosecutors' offices at all levels. During the reporting period, the State Coordinator's Office provided four NGOs with financial support (totaling approximately \$73,000) to operate assistance programs and shelters for victims of trafficking.

**Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)**

<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b> Bosnia and Herzegovina established policies related to child labor. However, there is insufficient funding for the regional monitoring teams.</p> <p><i>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</i></p>	<p><b>Strategy to Suppress Trafficking in Human Beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020–2023):</b> Included activities to prevent forced labor, including hazardous child labor as a result of trafficking in persons. During the reporting period, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to support mobile identification teams in eight major cities to locate children in need of social assistance, particularly children involved in forced begging. The mobile teams identified a total of 243 children involved in forced begging in 2023; 33 of these children were further designated as potential victims of trafficking and were referred to social welfare centers.</p> <p><b>Guidelines for Work of Regional Monitoring Teams:</b> Enhance the cooperation of monitoring team members and the National Referral Mechanism. During the reporting period, the regional monitoring teams were active but continued to face budgetary challenges which impacted their ability to follow the Guidelines and ensure the continuity of their work.</p> <p><b>Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Sarajevo Canton:</b> Prevents begging, exploitation of children, and abuse of children in Canton Sarajevo. Sets rules on state cooperation for victim protection and mandates the provision of physical, psychological, health, and social protection for children. Research was unable to determine whether the Protocol was active during the reporting period.</p>
<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b> Bosnia and Herzegovina funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these programs do not have adequate funding.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of BiH.</i></p>	<p><b>Daily Centers:</b>† Centers for Social Welfare-supported and NGO-operated drop-in centers in seven locations across the country, designed to assist vulnerable street children. Provide direct assistance to children, including educational activities, counseling, food, and hygiene. Sarajevo’s Center for Social Welfare Mobile Team also engages in daily outreach to children on the streets and to families in vulnerable communities throughout the capital region. However, Sarajevo’s Mobile Team staff continue to lack sufficient resources for their work, especially reliable transportation. Daily Centers also lack consistent financial and technical support, which may limit the ability of these centers to identify and assist children working on the streets. In addition, support for street children outside Sarajevo varies significantly. Although the government provides some social services for low-income families through the Centers for Social Welfare, many families do not receive enough assistance to reduce their reliance on child labor, especially begging.</p> <p><b>Assistance for Trafficking Victims:</b>† Government program that allocates small grants to local NGOs for the provision of shelter and social services to survivors of human trafficking, including counseling, educational assistance, and job training for domestic survivors, and visa and legal services for foreign survivors of human trafficking. During the reporting period, anti-trafficking NGOs continued to provide direct assistance to victims of trafficking.</p> <p><b>Prevention and Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina:</b> Joint project by the EU and the Council of Europe with \$790,720 in funding over 3 years to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to better identify victims of human trafficking and heighten public awareness of human trafficking. Activities include training for labor inspectors, police officers, healthcare providers, and education professionals.</p>

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit [dol.gov/ILABprojects](https://dol.gov/ILABprojects)

During the reporting period, the government continued to allocate funds to the Roma community under the 2021–2025 Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma. The funding totaled approximately \$772,000 and was allocated towards housing, employment, healthcare, and educational support.

For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)