

COLOMBIA

SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Colombia made significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor provided technical assistance and awareness-raising campaigns on child labor issues in over 550 municipalities. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute reached over 100,000 children and adolescents vulnerable to recruitment by armed or organized criminal groups through a program which uses cultural, sports, and science events. The government also introduced a new national action plan that provides monetary support to vulnerable groups affected by armed conflict, and another national action plan to guarantee uninterrupted education and safe spaces at schools in areas affected by armed conflict. In addition, the Governments of Colombia and Ecuador designed new data collection and assistance mechanisms to support children engaged in child labor in mining in the border region between the two countries. However, despite these efforts, the number of labor inspectors is insufficient to fully cover a workforce of over 24.6 million workers. In addition, social programs in Colombia are not adequate to address the scope of the country's child labor problem, particularly in areas impacted by armed conflict. Moreover, migrant children, refugee children, and children separated from their families require additional assistance to prevent them from being recruited and used by criminal or armed groups, including for illicit activities and commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced labor.

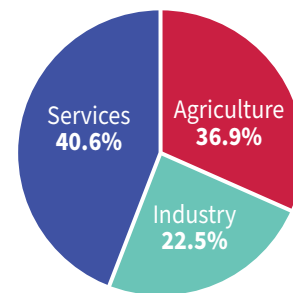


PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	1.3% (110,393)
Boys		1.6%
Girls		1.1%
Urban		0.6%
Rural		3.3%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	10.3% (258,990)
Boys		14.7%
Girls		5.7%
Urban		7.0%
Rural		19.3%
Attending School	5 to 14	93.4%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	1.4%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Colombia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, forced street vending, forced begging, and recruitment by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Working in animal husbandry,† forestry, agriculture,† fishing,† and hunting, including in the production of coca, coffee, sugarcane,† pome and stone fruits, and grapes.



Industry

Mining† coal, emeralds, and gold. Construction,† particularly in large-scale projects. Producing bricks.



Services

Street work,† including vending and helping shoppers carry bags in urban markets,† begging,† and guarding cars and motorcycles.† Domestic work,† including caring for children,† cooking, gardening, and shopping for the home. Working in retail establishments, hotels, and restaurants. Recycling.†



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in the production of pornography. Forced street vending and forced begging. Use in illicit activities by illegal armed groups and criminal organizations, including committing homicides, extortions, trafficking drugs, and the production of coca (stimulant plant), each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

† 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.



SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Legal Framework

Raise the minimum age for work from age 15 to age 18 to align with the compulsory education age.

Enforcement

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 1,159 to 1,642 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 24.6 million workers.

Publish information on the number of children removed from child labor due to inspections and the number of children referred to social services.

Ensure that labor inspectors do not encounter any barriers to conduct inspections in private residences if child labor is suspected.

Enhance the Attorney General’s Office’s case management system to track entire criminal proceedings beyond sentencing, to include information on the sentences and penalties handed down after conviction.

Ensure that all children rescued from child labor situations are provided social services.

Social Programs

Improve education access for all children, especially those in rural and marginalized urban environments, including by ensuring adequate transportation to school, improving school infrastructure, and addressing violence affecting school attendance.

Expand social programs to sufficiently address the scope of the worst forms of child labor, particularly commercial sexual exploitation, forced begging, and recruitment for use in illicit activities.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

In Colombia, migrant, refugee, and indigenous children are economically disadvantaged and, as a result, are more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Venezuelan and Ecuadorian migrant and refugee children are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation and street work. Refugee and unaccompanied migrant children, as well as those who got separated from their families while transiting through areas of the country where state institutions have limited capacity, are at greater risk of being recruited and used by criminal organizations and armed groups for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Afro-Colombian and indigenous children in the departments of Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, and Valle del Cauca are at high risk of child soldier recruitment or use by non-state groups for armed conflict, as well as recruitment by criminal organizations. In addition, girls living in areas with foreign tourism, in mining communities, and in areas with large construction projects are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced labor.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Children in rural and marginalized urban parts of the country face barriers to accessing education due to poor school infrastructure, violence at school, and living long distances from schools combined with a lack of adequate transportation. While children under age 18 are eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), migrant and refugee children face difficulties in obtaining TPS—without which they cannot attend school—due to their adult guardians’ lack of familiarity with the process, thereby increasing barriers to education access and vulnerability to child labor. In 2023, 135,000 migrant children from Venezuela did not attend school. In addition, 27 attacks on schools took place and 18 schools have been used by armed groups in 2023.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Colombia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, as Colombia's minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Article 35 of the Child and Adolescence Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Article 117 of the Child and Adolescence Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Article 3 of Resolution 1796
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 17 of the Constitution; Articles 141 and 188A of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Article 17 of the Constitution; Articles 188A–188C and 231 of the Penal Code; Law No. 2168
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 213–219B of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 162, 188D, and 384 of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 81 of Law 1861
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 4 of Law 1861
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 162 of the Penal Code; Article 20 of the Child and Adolescence Code; Article 14 of Law 418
Compulsory Education Age, 18 Years		Decree 4807 of 2011
Free Public Education		Articles 2.3.1.6.4.1 and 2.3.1.6.4.2 of Decree 1075; Article 1 of Decree 4807; Article 28 of the Child and Adolescence Code



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Colombia took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human and financial resource allocation hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor (MOL): Receives complaints of labor law violations and conducts labor inspections, including inspections to verify labor conditions for adolescent workers and compliance with other child labor provisions through its Inspection, Monitoring, Control, and Territorial Management Directorate. Also oversees the Internal Working Group on Child Labor Eradication. Additionally, the Directorate of Fundamental Rights' Unit for Labor Protections operates the Comprehensive Child Labor Information System (SIRITI), a child labor monitoring system that identifies children engaged in or at risk of child labor.

Attorney General’s Office (AGO): Investigates and prosecutes cases of child recruitment for use in armed conflict and illicit activities, commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, and human trafficking. With support from the Office’s Technical Investigation Unit, advises the Attorney General in the design of policies and strategies related to the role of judicial police investigators. Oversees the Articulation Group for Addressing Trafficking in Persons, which includes prosecutors, analysts, and judicial police engaged in addressing organized crime and human trafficking.

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, **1,159** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections and found **7** child labor violations. The AGO also conducted **2,248** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated **734** prosecutions, and convicted **1,908** perpetrators.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Colombia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p>Interagency Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Protection of the Adolescent Worker (CIETI): Coordinates efforts to address the worst forms of child labor. Chaired by MOL, includes 21 government agencies and representatives from trade unions, business associations, and civil society organizations. Oversees department-level CIETIs throughout the country, each comprising municipal-level committees. In 2023, the committee convened twice.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Colombia established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.</p>	<p>National Policy Guidelines to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor and Protect the Adolescent Worker (2017–2027): Aims to address child labor in the agriculture sector, develop child labor prevention strategies, improve the quality and coverage of child protection services, protect adolescent workers from hazardous work, create strategies to address child labor in domestic work, and establish evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assess progress. Contains a roadmap to prevent and eliminate child labor in mining and a cooperative agreement between the Ministry of Mining and Energy and the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (<i>Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar</i> [ICBF]) to prevent child labor in mining. In 2023, MOL provided targeted support to the department of la Guajira through CIETI. It also provided a \$25,000 grant to the department and reported that it would address 308 cases of child labor.</p> <p>National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (2018–2028): Guides government actions at the national, departmental, and municipal levels for the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation, survivor assistance, and the strengthening of sentencing for perpetrators. As a core part of this strategy, the government maintains an “Eyes in All Places” (<i>Ojos en Todas Partes</i>) public awareness campaign, which aims to prevent child sex tourism. The campaign is led by MOL through the National Consulting Interagency Committee. The Committee consists of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism; ICBF; the Attorney General’s Office; the National Police; UNICEF; the Foundation <i>Renacer</i>; and regional and municipal authorities.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>‡ The government has other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</p>	<p>National Policy for the Prevention of Recruitment, Use, and Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents by Illegal Armed Groups of Organized Criminal Groups (2018–2028): Directs government actions to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, address violence against children, and improve interagency coordination. The government also has a roadmap that establishes protocols to assist child survivors of armed conflict.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Colombia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem.</p> <p>† Program is funded by the Government of Colombia.</p> <p>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</p>	<p>Campaigns Against Child Labor:† ICBF campaigns to increase coordination for the protection of children and adolescents with other government agencies at the national, departmental, and municipal levels, while leading the Family National Welfare System. In 2023, ICBF organized awareness-raising events and workshops, conducted capacity building exercises, and distributed materials.</p> <p>Programs Addressing Trafficking in Persons:† Aim to raise awareness of child trafficking crimes. AGO oversees the “Don’t be Fooled” (#EsoEsCuento) public awareness campaign to prevent human trafficking. The National Police also implement their own public awareness and child protection program, “Open Your Eyes” (<i>Abre Tus Ojos</i>). The program aims to protect children from exploitation in the worst forms of child labor. In 2023, the National Police continued organizing workshops, as well as recreational and sports events, for children, adolescents, parents, and teachers. In 2023, the Ministry of Interior launched the “What is Trafficking?” (<i>De Que Trata la Trata</i>) public awareness campaign to educate the public on human trafficking and available resources, including a national anti-trafficking hotline.</p> <p>Development for Social Prosperity Programs:† Families in Action (<i>Familias en Acción</i>) uses a conditional cash transfer program to address poverty and build human capital; United Network (<i>Red Unidos</i>) coordinates actions to reduce inequality and end extreme poverty; Healthy Generations (<i>Generaciones con Bienestar</i>) operates a children’s rights program offering cultural and recreational activities for children ages 6 to 17 identified as vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor; and Youth in Action (<i>Jóvenes en Acción</i>) provides technical job training and conditional cash transfers to vulnerable urban youth ages 16 to 24.</p>

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects

**WORKER RIGHTS SPOTLIGHT**

Violence, threats, harassment, killings, and other practices against trade unionists are common in Colombia. The government did not adequately enforce laws protecting freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, resulting in a continued high degree of impunity for violators. As labor unions are integral to reporting and advocacy on the identification and prevention of child labor, violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses may go undetected when unions’ ability to operate freely is curtailed.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports