



# ECUADOR

## SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Ecuador made significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed the Law Against Human Trafficking and Illicit Trafficking of Migrants, which tasks the Ministry of Interior with leading Ecuador’s inter-institutional committee against trafficking in persons and defines government prevention and protection actions. In addition, all 160 labor inspectors received training on topics pertaining to the prevention and elimination of child labor and national and international legal standards. As part of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, the government distributed to all border checkpoints new guidelines to help identify and prevent trafficking in persons crimes. The Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion also signed cooperative agreements with municipal and provincial governments, civil society organizations, and religious organizations to implement programs to eliminate child labor and referred 12,160 children and adolescents vulnerable to child labor to social services. However, despite these efforts, the Ministry of Labor reported that the resources allocated to the labor inspectorate—including the number of inspectors, transportation, and equipment—are insufficient to conduct inspections in the informal sector. The government also has not conducted a nationwide child labor survey since 2012, and social programs are needed to address the vulnerability of migrant, LGBTQI+, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian children to the worst forms of child labor. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor has not registered certain industry-wide trade unions, including the Trade Union Association of Agricultural and Peasant Workers. 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 in the agriculture sector may go undetected as a result.

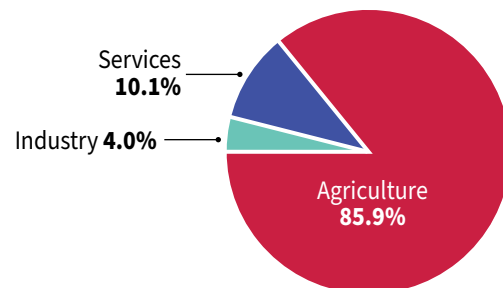


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	7.0% (260,567)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	95.5%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	7.5%

### Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Ecuador are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture.

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



#### Agriculture

Working in agriculture, including with the use of chemical products<sup>†</sup> and machetes,<sup>†</sup> and in the production of bananas, rice, and flowers. Fishing. Raising poultry, hogs, and bovines.<sup>†</sup>



#### Industry

Mining, including gold<sup>†</sup> and small-scale mining.<sup>†</sup> Construction<sup>†</sup> and brickwork. Working in the production of bricks.<sup>†</sup>



#### Services

Domestic work<sup>†</sup> and street work<sup>†</sup> in vending and begging. Working in auto repair garages, including hazardous work involved with using heavy machinery. Working in food

service, including working as waiters and kitchen staff. Scavenging in landfills.



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

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking and robbery, sometimes as result of human trafficking. Forced labor in agriculture, mining, domestic work, street vending, and begging. Use in the production of pornography. Recruitment of children by Colombian non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

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

<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 Ecuador's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### Enforcement

Strengthen referral mechanisms to social services for survivors of child labor, especially for those found in the informal sector.

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 160 to 556 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 8.3 million workers.

Ensure that the labor inspectorate is properly funded so that inspectors receive sufficient resources, including transportation and equipment, to carry out their duties adequately.

Publish data on criminal investigations related to the worst forms of child labor, including the number of prosecutions initiated and perpetrators convicted.

Ensure that laws and regulations governing child labor, especially hazardous labor, are enforced consistently throughout the country, including in rural areas and family-run businesses. Ensure that inspections sufficiently cover sectors in which child labor has been reported, including the informal sector.

Ensure that industry-wide unions, including the Trade Union Association of Agricultural and Peasant Workers, are registered by the Ministry of Labor.

Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient knowledge of existing laws and receive adequate training in victim identification to conduct inspections and refer survivors to social services.

Ensure that criminal investigators receive sufficient resources, such as additional investigators, to investigate cases of suspected child labor crimes and refer victims to social services consistently.

Provide specialized shelters for children that have been victimized by labor or sex trafficking and ensure that funds are distributed to shelters in a timely manner.

Publish child labor data collected through the Unified System of Registering Child Labor.

### Government Policies

Take steps to implement the Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor policy and National Development Plan and publish information about these efforts on an annual basis.

### Social Programs

Conduct a comprehensive child labor survey to ensure sufficient and current data to inform government actions to eliminate child labor.

Ensure that students without identity documents are able to graduate.

Develop social programs to address the vulnerability of migrant and refugee children to exploitative labor practices and establish programs to address child labor where it is most prevalent, including the informal and agricultural sectors.

Eliminate barriers to and make education accessible for all children, including indigenous and refugee children and children from rural areas, by increasing classroom space and teachers, addressing teen pregnancy issues, providing adequate transportation, and easing the economic burden of buying school supplies.

Provide quality services to survivors of human trafficking in all provinces of Ecuador, including to migrant children.

Update the social registry—which contains information on low-income families and informs the provision of social assistance—to include families most vulnerable to child labor.

Ensure that social programs address the vulnerability of migrants, LGBTQI+ individuals, and indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian girls at risk of human trafficking.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Migrant and refugee children from Colombia and Venezuela are vulnerable to street work, forced begging, and exploitative labor practices in the fishing sector, in artisanal mining, and in agriculture. The Ecuadorian government, UN, and civil society organizations (CSOs) agree that Venezuelans with irregular migration status are especially vulnerable to trafficking, along with LGBTQI+, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian girls. Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian children are also vulnerable to child labor. In addition, some indigenous children are recruited under false promises of employment and are subjected to forced begging, domestic servitude, or forced labor in sweatshops and commercial vending.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Vulnerable children in Ecuador face numerous barriers to accessing education, including lack of space and teachers, economic difficulty in buying uniforms and school supplies, inadequate school infrastructure, teen pregnancy, and a lack of transportation for children who must attend schools far from their homes. Reporting also indicates that many school-age Venezuelan refugee and migrant children are not enrolled in Ecuador's educational system due to non-institutional barriers like a lack of resources and local discrimination. In addition, undocumented students face difficulties graduating from secondary school as national authorities are unable to grant diplomas without identity documents.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Ecuador has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. In addition, Ecuador's laws and regulations are in line with relevant international standards.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>15 Years</b>		Article 46 of the Constitution; Articles 82 and 95 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 2 and 87 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 5, 6, and 8 of Resolution No. 016 of 2008; Article 5 of Ministerial Accord MDT-2015-0131
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 82, 91, 105, and 213 of the Integral Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 47, 91, and 92 of the Integral Penal Code; Article 117 of the Organic Law on Human Mobility
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 91 and 100–104 of the Integral Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 47, 219, and 220 of the Integral Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 127 of the Integral Penal Code; Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution

**Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)**

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Compulsory Education Age, <b>15 Years</b>		Articles 38, 42, and 43 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law
Free Public Education		Article 4 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law; Chapter 5, Article 28 of the Constitution

\*Country has no conscription



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Ecuador took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human resource allocation and a lack of specialized shelters for boys who are survivors of human trafficking hindered enforcement efforts. The Ministry of Labor has also not registered certain industry-wide trade unions, including the Trade Union Association of Agricultural and Peasant Workers. 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 in the agriculture sector may go undetected.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Ministry of Labor (MOL):** Enforces child labor laws in the formal sector through the Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups. Monitors and identifies cases of child labor, assesses penalties, promotes public awareness campaigns to prevent child labor, provides technical assistance to local governments on child labor, and identifies victims of child labor for the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) to provide special services. MIES is also responsible for conducting routine inspections in the informal sector. Using the Unified System of Registration of Child Labor, MOL collects information on child laborers and refers children to appropriate government services.

**Attorney General’s Office:** Enforces criminal laws against child labor and hazardous child labor, including the prosecution of cases. The Attorney General’s Specialized Victim Witness Protection Program provides immediate support and shelter to survivors and witnesses willing to press charges and testify against their abusers, and coordinates referrals for further assistance with other government agencies. In 2023, 2 individuals were sentenced to 10 years in prison for commercial sexual exploitation of a minor. A separate individual was also sentenced to 10 years in prison for the commercial sexual exploitation of a minor during the reporting period.

**Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts**

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

In 2023, **160** labor inspectors conducted **11,371** worksite inspections of which **663** were specifically for child labor, finding **5** child labor violations. The government also conducted **332** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes; however, it is **unknown** how many prosecutions were initiated. In addition, **2** perpetrators were convicted of worst forms of child labor crimes.



**COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS**

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>Ecuador established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p><b>Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups:</b> Serves as the primary coordinating mechanism for the elimination of child labor. During the reporting period, MOL approved Ministerial Regulation No. MDT-2023-112, delegating to the Directorate the responsibility to prevent, promote, and protect the labor rights of priority attention groups. The Directorate is also tasked with contributing to the elimination of child labor through the application and strengthening of public policies, regulations, and national and international instruments with a gender focus.</p>
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### Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Ecuador established policies related to child labor. However, Ecuador lacks an active and permanent policy to address child labor.

**Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor (2021–2025):** Promotes employment for parents and the prevention of child labor through inspections. Developed through the National Council for Intergenerational Equity’s National Agenda for Intergenerational Equity, which was created as a technical planning instrument for the formulation of public policies at the national and local levels. Although the Noboa administration continued to support the Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor policy during the reporting period, research was unable to determine whether activities were carried out under this policy during the reporting period.

**National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2019–2030):** Aims to prevent, investigate, and impose legal sanctions against human trafficking, with a focus on human rights, mobility, and gender, as the majority of victims in Ecuador are women. The Action Plan includes U.S.-funded support through the International Organization for Migration and is the government’s first multisectoral plan on human trafficking that establishes goals for every public sector institution to address human trafficking. As part of the Action Plan, the Government of Ecuador trained 580 public officials in Tulcan, Lago Agrio, Huaquillas, and Macara. These public officials came from migrant control units, Ecuador’s Red Cross chapter, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, MIES, and the Ministry of Health. The Government of Ecuador also developed several guides and internal procedures that would assist in the training of border police officers in trafficking in persons crime identification and prevention.

**National Development Plan (Plan de Creación de Oportunidades) (2021–2025):** Creates employment opportunities for Ecuadorians and aims to establish a plan for future policy areas. These include economic, social, integral security, ecological transition, and institutional policy areas. In the social axis listed in the plan, the Ecuadorian government lays out its objective to protect families, guarantee their rights and services, eradicate poverty, and promote social inclusion. In order to meet this objective, Ecuador has set a goal of decreasing the percentage of children between the ages of 5 and 14 who engage in child labor. This plan aims to reach the goal of decreasing child labor from 6.1 percent to 4.4 percent and increase the number of child labor inspections to 504 by 2025. During the reporting period, the number of child labor inspections conducted was 663, surpassing the target number.

### Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Ecuador funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs do not address the worst forms of child labor in all relevant sectors.

**Child Labor Eradication Service:** MIES program that aims to provide social and educational inclusion of children and adolescents in situations of child labor. Currently serves as the primary government-funded social program that is tasked with eliminating child labor in Ecuador. The program seeks to restore the rights of children in situations of child labor through sustained individual, family, and community interventions. During the reporting period, the Child Labor Eradication Service assisted 12,160 children and adolescents and referred them to the appropriate social services. MIES signed cooperative agreements with municipal and provincial governments, CSOs, and religious organizations to implement this program.

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

<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p><i>* Program was launched during the reporting period.          † Program is funded by the Government of Ecuador.          ‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p><b>Service for the Protection of Vulnerable Migrant Population in Host Cities:</b><sup>*†</sup> MIES service that aims to provide access to public or private social protection services to vulnerable migrant populations, with emphasis on girls, boys, adolescents, and their families. Also delivers services to migrant pregnant women, people with critical illnesses, people with disabilities, victims of violence, and LGBTQI+ individuals. MIES provides orientation and information for the regularization of participants' immigration and refugee status, and raises awareness about irregular practices such as begging, child labor, domestic violence, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, xenophobic conduct, and other rights violations, through inter-institutional coordination and socio-cultural integration with host communities. This program was implemented during the reporting period.</p> <p><b>Rights with Dignity:</b><sup>*†</sup> MIES program that aims to prevent begging and child labor through the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns and containment actions. This program is carried out within the framework of the National Intersectoral Table for the Prevention of Begging and Child Labor, with the support of 24 state institutions and 6 NGOs. The program's containment actions include a mechanism in which a citizen or state institution can report a case of begging or child labor, and in response, a technical team will be deployed to verify the case and provide government services. Donations of clothing, non-perishable food, and toys are also made to vulnerable families as part of the program.</p>
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For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit [dol.gov/ILABprojects](https://dol.gov/ILABprojects)

 **WORKER RIGHTS SPOTLIGHT**

The government puts restrictions on unions, including allowing only Ecuadorian citizens to hold leadership roles and permitting the government to dissolve unions that engage in political activities. In addition, the Ministry of Labor is not permitted to register industry-wide trade unions, including the Trade Union Association for Agricultural and Peasant Workers. 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.

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