



ETHIOPIA

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Ethiopia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government ratified a Directive to Implement the Reintegration of Victim Migrant Returnees, Number 969/2023, which assigns responsibilities to institutions and includes procedures to follow for the reintegration of human trafficking survivors, including children. The government also approved a new Education and Training Policy, which provides for free universal compulsory education from pre-school through the 12th grade. In addition, the government inspected over 140 recruitment agencies for child trafficking, resulting in the issuance of 178 sanctions and 72 revoked licenses. Regional education bureaus also collaborated with the United Nations Children’s Fund and non-governmental organizations to provide formal and non-formal education and educational materials to 184,993 children in emergency-affected regions. Despite these efforts, Ethiopia’s laws do not meet international standards because they do not criminalize the use of a child for commercial sexual exploitation, and they allow children ages 15 and 16 to engage in hazardous work. In addition, hazardous work protections do not extend to traditional weaving, an area of work in which there is evidence that children use dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools. Ethiopian law also does not include free basic education or a compulsory age for the completion of education, leaving children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Also, social programs to address child labor do not sufficiently target sectors with high incidences of child labor, including agriculture and domestic work. Finally, a boy was detained by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces for alleged association with armed groups; the United Nations Report on Children in Armed Conflict has verified that the captive child was subsequently killed.

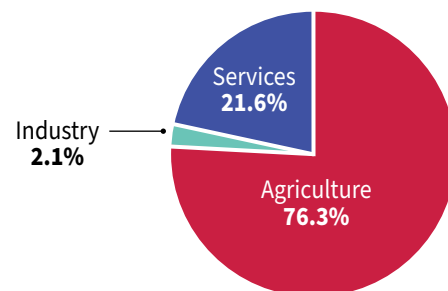


PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	24.3% (6,761,640)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	42.6% (2,841,622)
Attending School	5 to 14	56.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	16.3%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Ethiopia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in domestic work and in commercial sexual exploitation. Children also perform dangerous tasks in traditional weaving.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Planting and harvesting *khat* (stimulant plant), herding cattle, and fishing.



Industry

Mining† gold and quarrying.† Producing handicrafts, including traditional handwoven textiles.



Services

Domestic work and unpaid household services, including carrying heavy loads† of water and firewood. Street work,

including shoe shining, weight measurement, assisting taxi drivers, vending, portering, and begging.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, forced begging, street vending, construction, and traditional weaving.

† 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 Ethiopia’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Criminally prohibit the use of a child for commercial sexual exploitation.

Raise the minimum age at which children may perform dangerous tasks during vocational training to age 16, in line with ILO Convention 138.

Prohibit all types of hazardous work for children that require the use of dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools—including traditional weaving—in compliance with ILO Convention 138.

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

Establish by law free basic education.

Establish by law a compulsory education age that extends to the minimum age for employment of 15 years.

Enforcement

Ensure that children associated with armed groups are referred to social services providers and cease the practice of detaining children as adults.

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 537 to 964 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 38.6 million workers.

Provide labor inspectors sufficient resources to conduct inspections in all sectors, including offices, transportation, fuel, personal protective clothing, and equipment for measuring hazardous conditions.

Publish labor law enforcement information, including labor inspectorate funding, penalties imposed and collected for child labor violations, and cases of worst forms of child labor identified and referred for criminal prosecution.

Significantly increase the capacity of labor inspectors by providing additional training on international child labor standards and strengthen coordination between national and regional enforcement agencies.

Increase funding for criminal enforcement agencies, provide criminal inspectors with training on laws related to the worst forms of child labor, and publish criminal law enforcement information, including the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, and perpetrators convicted for worst forms of child labor crimes.

Investigate both domestic and transnational child trafficking cases, raise awareness of the criminality of child trafficking and worst forms of child labor, including the recruitment of children for armed conflict. Investigate and prosecute all perpetrators through the judicial system.

Coordination

Clarify individual mandates for participants in the National Steering Committee to enhance inter-committee communication, coordination, and collaboration.

Provide adequate funding to coordinating bodies so that they may effectively coordinate activities related to the worst forms of child labor.

Government Policies

Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Development Program, National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy, and National Youth Policy.

Publish activities undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor on an annual basis, including the National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Social Programs

Repair and reopen school buildings, remove all armed groups from educational facilities, and protect the peaceful gathering of students and teachers for schooling.

Increase education access for all children by removing fees for uniforms, supplies, and food; ensure student safety en route to and from school; ensure a sufficient number of teachers, and sanitation facilities, especially for girls; and end the use of corporal punishment. Finally, accommodate language needs for children, especially the internally displaced children, who may not speak the local language.

Provide training to teachers and ensure that schools are accessible so students with disabilities are able to attend classes.

Ensure that the social services necessary to prevent and eradicate child labor, such as rehabilitation and reintegration centers, are available throughout the country, and develop or expand social protection programs to address child labor in all sectors, including in agriculture and domestic work.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

An estimated 200,000 children are living and working in the streets of Ethiopia, with a further 1 million children at risk of being on the street. Children living on the street are at significant risk of exploitation and abuse and are sometimes recruited by private businesses for child labor and criminal groups to commit illegal activities. Further, ongoing internal armed conflict, drought, and flooding has created an estimated 2.73 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and an additional 924,000 refugees throughout the country in 2023, including children. Internally displaced children are at higher risk of engaging in child labor due to a lack of educational and economic opportunities.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Internal armed conflict or natural disasters prevent an estimated 3.6 million children from obtaining an education in Ethiopia. Research indicates that approximately 9,382 schools have been partially or entirely damaged, and 4,262 schools have been forced to close due to these crises. Specifically, children in the Amhara, Afar, Tigray, and Oromia regions face abduction, kidnapping, sexual violence, unexploded military munitions, and recruitment by armed groups on their way to and from school. The United Nations verified 12 armed attacks on schools, as well as military appropriation of educational facilities by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Tigrayan forces. In addition, children throughout the country face other barriers to education, including the requirement to pay for uniforms and supplies, a lack of teachers, gender-based violence on the way to and from school, lack of sanitary facilities for menstruation, long distances to schools, and corporal punishment in schools. While students with disabilities are not denied access to education, they do face additional barriers, including insufficient infrastructure and lack of trained teachers and professionals to support them. Finally, language barriers present obstacles for children, especially IDP children, who may not speak the local languages.







LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Ethiopia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Ethiopia’s laws do not meet international standards on prohibitions against hazardous work because the law allows children aged 15 and up to engage in certain forms of hazardous work during a government-approved and inspected vocational training course.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Articles 4.1, 89.1, 89.2, 90, and 186(e) of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 15 Years		Article 36.1(d) of the Constitution; Article 89 of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 89.3, 89.4, and 186.1 of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019; Directive on the Restating of Activities Prohibited for Young Workers No. 813/2021
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 18.3 of the Constitution; Articles 596, 597, and 637 of the Criminal Code; Articles 2–4 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Article 18.2 of the Constitution; Articles 597 and 635–637 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 634–636 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 525 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020

Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years ‡		Article 270 of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Articles 3.1, 3.2, and 4.1–4.3 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants
Compulsory Education Age		
Free Public Education		

* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In May 2023, the government ratified the Victims of Trafficking Reintegration Directive No. 969/2023, which assigns responsibilities to institutions and includes the procedures that institutions should follow for the reintegration of human trafficking survivors. This directive lays out procedures for the repatriation and reintegration of children and families of Ethiopian nationality who are survivors of human trafficking. While Ethiopia has a hazardous work list, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children does not include traditional weaving, an area of work in which there is evidence that children use dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools. Moreover, Article 89.5 of the Labor Proclamation allows children aged 15 and up to engage in certain forms of hazardous work during a government-approved and inspected vocational training course. This contradicts ILO Convention 138, which prohibits hazardous work for all children under the age of 16. Lastly, while the Ministry of Education has a policy encouraging public funding of education, Ethiopian laws do not guarantee free public education or set a compulsory age for education.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Ethiopia took actions to address child labor. However, inadequate funding for law enforcement agencies hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS): Conducts labor inspections of formal worksites through its federal and regional Bureaus of Labor and Skills. Through its National Referral Mechanism, MOLS coordinates the referral of survivors to social services providers. In 2023, MOLS conducted a full internal audit of the Bureau of Labor and Industry, Economy, and Development’s supervision of recruitment agencies, which serve as a major channel for internal and international child trafficking in Ethiopia. Monitoring inspections were also made at over 140 recruitment agencies, which led to 178 sanctions and 72 licenses revoked.

Criminal Enforcement Agencies: The Ethiopian Ministry of Justice prosecutes criminal violations of child labor laws, including through its Special Investigative Unit for Women and Children. The Ethiopian Federal Police Commission also enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It addresses child trafficking and assists vulnerable children through its Special Child Protection Units in Addis Ababa. Cases are referred to the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, which develops and implements programs to protect vulnerable children, maintains rehabilitation centers, and coordinates foster families for children rescued from the worst forms of child labor.

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	Unknown
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	Unknown

In 2023, **537** labor inspectors conducted **46,603** worksite inspections, finding **122 child** labor violations. The government identified **102** suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor identified; however, it is **unknown** whether investigations were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Ethiopia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, overlapping mandates, limited budgets, and ineffective collaboration among key agencies hindered coordination efforts.

National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: The committee develops action plans and coordinates activities to address the worst forms of child labor. In 2023, the committee met twice, and its working group met quarterly.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Ethiopia established policies related to child labor. However, no activity to implement the National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor was reported.

National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2021–2025): Includes guidelines on child labor identification, withdrawal, reintegration, and education. Overseen by the National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor and created with input from government ministries, the ILO, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, the Confederation of Ethiopian Employers Federation, and other NGOs. MOLS did not provide any update on the status of this national action plan for the reporting period.

Five-Year Strategic Plan for Migration Management (2021–2025): Aims to prevent and suppress trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; supports safe, humane, and orderly migration; and supports efforts to reduce child labor as it occurs in the context of human trafficking and migration. In 2023, the government continued to carry out activities under this plan and partnered with the International Organization for Migration to conduct a midterm evaluation of the National Strategic Plan, with the final report expected to be presented in mid-May 2024.

† The government approved the policy during the reporting period.

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

Education and Training Policy 2023:† Promotes universal free, compulsory education from pre-K to 12th grade. This plan was approved in 2023.

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Ethiopia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors, including in agriculture and street work.

† Program is co-funded by the Government of Ethiopia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

Freedom Fund: Works to reduce the prevalence of children in domestic work with cooperation from the Government of Ethiopia and the U.S. Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. In 2023, the project conducted outreach activities with over 6,500 employers, which resulted in improved treatment of children in domestic work. The project also set up referral systems in 2 bus stations and trained over 200 transport workers to detect cases of child trafficking. As a result, over 100 children were identified and referred to relevant services. In addition, over 550 child domestic workers received care and support at shelters, with 262 children successfully reunited with their families. Services provided included vocational training for 205 children, catch-up classes for 535 children at risk of domestic servitude, and training for 361 enforcement officials on how to protect child domestic workers and enforce the rule of law.

Multilateral Projects: The Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity (2017–2025)† is a \$583 million World Bank-funded program implemented by the Ministry of Education and development partners to improve education quality and access. In 2023, the project increased primary education enrollment rates and improved the girl-to-boy ratio in grade 8. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) funded initiatives, including Child-to-Child and Accelerated School Readiness programs, which extended educational opportunities to internally displaced children. In June 2023, Ethiopia and the World Bank signed a \$400 million agreement to establish the Human Capital Operation, a program focused on providing nutrition and education in drought-affected areas and refugee-hosting communities, expected to impact 7 million Ethiopians and 800,000 refugees. UNICEF, the Swedish International Development Agency, and MOLS also jointly funded the Urban Productive Safety Net Program, which aims to address nutritional and educational outcomes in Amhara and Addis Ababa through cash transfers and linking participants to basic social services. In October 2023 alone, Regional Education Bureaus collaborated with UNICEF and NGO partners to provide over 68,000 children in emergency-affected regions with formal or non-formal education. Additionally, a total of 184,993 children benefitted from the provision of educational materials.

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

 **WORKER RIGHTS SPOTLIGHT**

Anti-union practices among employers are common in Ethiopia, and the government has placed restrictions on the right to strike and to collective bargaining. 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