



# LESOTHO

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Lesotho made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government drafted a National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor. However, Lesotho’s compulsory education age of 13 is below the minimum age for work, which is 15, leaving children between these ages vulnerable to child labor. The government also lacks effective coordination mechanisms to address child labor, and labor inspections are not conducted in high-risk sectors, including the informal sector, in which child labor is prevalent.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	30.1% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	93.8%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	32.1%

Children in Lesotho are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in animal herding.

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



#### Agriculture

Herding animals, including cattle,† farming, including planting, applying pesticides, and harvesting.



#### Services

Domestic work, street work.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation and domestic work, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including theft.

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

### Legal Framework

Increase the compulsory education age from age 13 to age 15 to align with the minimum age for work.

### Enforcement

Provide adequate funding, resources, and training to labor inspectors and criminal investigators to carry out mandated duties.

Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in all relevant sectors, including the informal sector.

Establish a mechanism to assess civil penalties for child labor violations.

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

Improve coordination and communication among all coordinating bodies to clarify mandates to address all forms of child labor.

**Government Policies**

Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as livestock herding and commercial sexual exploitation.

**Social Programs**

Institute programs that mitigate the impacts of HIV and support orphans and vulnerable children.

Ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to education, including by providing adequate facilities to meet their needs.

Address educational and logistical gaps resulting in reduced opportunities for secondary education, including the shortage of teachers and schools, the lack of sanitation facilities, and secondary school fees.

Increase efforts to provide birth registration documentation to children to reduce their vulnerability to the worst forms of child labor.

Expand existing programs to address the full scope of the child labor problem, including child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

**CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK**

Due to the high rate of HIV among adults, many children in Lesotho become orphans and are vulnerable to human trafficking. Children, especially orphans, also sometimes voluntarily travel to other countries, including South Africa, for domestic work, and upon arrival they are subsequently detained in prison-like conditions and sexually exploited. In addition, boys involved in animal herding are exposed to harsh weather conditions, sometimes leading to death.

**BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS**

In Lesotho, primary education is free; however, there is a fee for secondary education that is cost prohibitive for many families. Many children also face limited access to education due to a shortage of teachers and schools, which causes them to travel long distances. In addition, the absence of sanitation facilities in schools remains a barrier for many children, especially menstruating girls. Children with disabilities also encounter difficulties with ill-equipped educational facilities. According to the Ministry of Social Development, children must produce copies of birth certificates to qualify for the Orphans and Vulnerable Children program, which provides school fees and uniforms for orphans and vulnerable children. The low number of birth registrations in Lesotho may prevent some children from accessing this program, increasing their vulnerability to child labor because they are unable to attend school. There are also reports that children from ethnic minorities such as Zulus, Xhosa, and Baphuthi are prevented from attending school because classes are not instructed in their native language.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR**

Lesotho has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Lesotho's laws do not meet the international standard on compulsory education age because the compulsory education age of 13 is less than the minimum age for work, leaving children ages 13 and 14 more vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to be in school nor are they legally permitted to work.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>15 Years</b>	✓	Article 228(1) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act; Article 124(1) of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>	✓	Article 230(1) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act; Article 125(1) of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	✓	Articles 230(3) and 231 of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor	✓	Article 7(1) of the Labor Code; Article 9(2) of the Constitution; Article 5 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	✓	Article 5 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act; Anti-Trafficking in Persons (Amendment) Act (2021)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	✓	Article 77 of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act; Articles 10–14 of the Sexual Offenses Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	✓	Article 45(b) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>	✓	Article 22(o) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	Article 22(o) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	✓	Article 22(o) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act
Compulsory Education Age, <b>13 Years</b> ‡	✗	Part I Article 3(a), and Part II Articles 6 and 7(3)(c) of the Education Act
Free Public Education	✓	Part II Articles 4(1)(a) and 4(1)(b) of the Education Act; Article 22(k) of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act

\* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information



## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Lesotho took actions to address child labor. However, a lack of inspections in high-risk areas and funding issues may have hindered enforcement efforts.

### Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

**Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE):** Enforces minimum-age requirements and hazardous work prohibitions while conducting general labor inspections. There is also a Child Labor Unit within the Ministry that conducts trainings on the worst forms of child labor for district child protection teams. Research indicates that MOLE has insufficient resources, including an inadequate budget, and did not conduct enough inspections in areas in which child labor is known to occur, including the informal sector. In 2023, MOLE drafted a National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor, which would become the primary document covering child labor issues.

**National Police:** Investigate criminal violations related to the worst forms of child labor. Manage all trafficking in persons-related cases within the Lesotho Mounted Police Service and refer cases for prosecution to the Public Prosecutor’s Office. Also accompany MOLE officials on inspections related to hazardous work and forced child labor.

**Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts**

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	No	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, **24** labor inspectors conducted **423** worksite inspections, finding **3** child labor violations. It is **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.



**COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS**

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

Lesotho established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of coordination among agencies.

**Program Advisory Committee on Child Labor/National Task Team:** Led by MOLE’s Child Labor Unit and includes representatives from government ministries, trade unions, NGOs, and international organizations. In 2023, the government conducted trainings at schools and public gatherings on child labor issues, and also carried out house-to-house child labor sensitization visits. In addition, the task force held a workshop to discuss how to incorporate the National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor into their overall strategy.

**Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Lesotho established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover all the worst forms of child labor, including livestock herding and commercial sexual exploitation.

**National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Strategic Framework and Action Plan (2021–2026):** Supports national and international obligations and commitments regarding human trafficking in line with the vision to eliminate all forms of trafficking in persons in Lesotho. Provides victim protection, guidance for the successful arrest and prosecution of offenders, and preventive measures. During the reporting period, the government organized three trafficking in persons awareness campaigns: in Ladybrand on August 28, in Ficksburg on August 29, and in Qwaqwa on August 31. The police, labor ministry, refugees’ unit, two NGOs, and representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister participated in the campaigns.

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

**Kingdom of Lesotho: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper—National Strategic Development Plan (2018–2023):** Identified child protection services (from the Child and Gender Protection Unit, social welfare and health agencies, and the justice system) and their capacity to respond adequately to cases of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children, including child labor. Outlined prevention measures. The Government of Lesotho continued to implement this policy during the reporting period.

**Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Lesotho funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address all worst forms of child labor occurring in Lesotho, including child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, due to a lack of funding.

**Orphans and Vulnerable Children Scholarship Program:**‡ Government program that pays for tuition, uniforms, supplies, and boarding fees for orphans and vulnerable children. Benefited over 17,368 orphans and vulnerable children during the reporting period.

**World Food Program:** Provides incentives for primary school children from impoverished backgrounds to attend school and improves retention. Provided meals to over 50,000 pupils in 2023.

† Program is funded by the Government of Lesotho.

**Child Grant Program:** Provides cash transfers to impoverished families and households with orphans and vulnerable children. Implemented by the Ministry of Social Development and funded by the EU with technical support from UNICEF. Benefited 51,177 households during the reporting period.

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