



# MEXICO

## SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Mexico made significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved amendments to the Federal Labor Law and Social Security Law to further safeguard workers' rights and ensure social security, written contracts, and access to essential services, such as childcare. The government also issued a resolution related to prohibiting the importation of goods manufactured with forced or compulsory labor, including forced child labor. In addition, the state secretaries of labor, the federal commission for addressing child labor, and the network of state-level commissions signed a national pact—*Pacto del Mayab*—that established high-level, shared objectives to combat child labor and forced labor in Mexico. Furthermore, the federal commission for addressing child labor issued a guide for employers on general working conditions, regulation compliance, and benefits for legal working adolescents, and a digital handbook to inform adolescents aged 15 to 17 about their labor rights. Lastly, the government published the results of the 2022 National Child Labor Survey. Despite these efforts, some state-level labor inspectors carry out inspections in the informal sector only in response to formal complaints. Further, the 529 federal labor inspectors are insufficient to cover the country's more than 59.2 million workers. Finally, the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare lacks an internal system to track child labor violations.

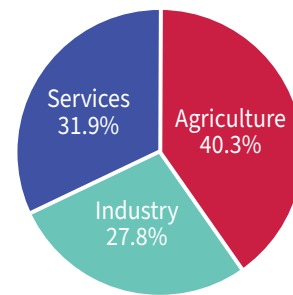


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	4.3% (924,176)
Boys		5.9%
Girls		2.6%
Urban		2.8%
Rural		8.4%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	20.1% (1,409,953)
Boys		27.3%
Girls		12.8%
Urban		16.0%
Rural		32.4%
Attending School	5 to 14	96.9%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	4.2%

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



Children in Mexico are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in the production and trafficking of drugs. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, including in the production of chile peppers, coffee, sugarcane, and tomatoes.

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



#### Agriculture

Working in agriculture,† including in the production of beans (green beans), chile peppers, coffee, cucumbers, eggplants, melons, onions, sugarcane, tobacco,‡ and tomatoes. Cattle raising.



#### Industry

Manufacturing† garments and leather goods. Construction.† Mining.†



#### Services

Street work† as vendors, shoe shiners, beggars, car washers, and porters. Working in auto repair garages and bars.† Scavenging in landfills and recycling. Domestic work.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, and begging. Commercial sexual exploitation, including in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use by cartels to perform illicit activities, including the production of poppies for heroin, drug trafficking, stealing fuel, and carrying out armed attacks, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

† 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 Mexico's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### **Legal Framework**

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

### **Enforcement**

Increase the number of federal labor inspectors from 529 to 3,947 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 59.2 million workers.

Expand access to trainings for federal and state-level labor inspectors on child labor protocols and ensure that guidelines related to identifying, sanctioning, and referring for criminal investigation of child labor violations are followed.

Ensure that the Secretariat for Labor and Social Welfare and state-level labor inspectorates conduct targeted routine and unannounced labor inspections in all sectors, including in the informal sector and in rural areas.

Improve coordination and information sharing between federal and state-level labor inspectorates and among officials in different states.

Publish information at the federal and state levels on the number of child labor violations identified; fines for child labor violations that were collected; and worst forms of child labor investigations, prosecutions, and convictions.

Equip the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare with a case tracking system to identify disaggregated data for child labor violations.

Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies and government service providers receive sufficient funding to conduct investigations and prosecutions related to alleged child labor crimes and to provide services to survivors.

Increase coordination and data sharing among government ministries to ensure adequate criminal prosecutions of suspected perpetrators of child labor crimes.

Increase training for enforcement officials and prosecutors on territorial jurisdictions and on how to perform prosecutorial and police investigative functions. In addition, train prosecutors and judges on prosecuting human trafficking crimes.

### **Coordination**

Ensure the active participation and continued engagement of all states and relevant stakeholders within the framework of the Inter-Institutional Commission for Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and the Protection of Adolescent Workers of the Permitted Age in Mexico.

### **Government Policies**

Adopt policies that address all worst forms of child labor, including the use of children in illicit activities.

### **Social Programs**

Expand access to education by increasing funding to schools, extending school schedules, improving school infrastructure, providing education materials and instruction in native languages, ensuring migrant children have access to birth documentation, and fostering internet access for learning purposes.

Ensure that migrant children are screened for indicators of human trafficking and that children used by organized criminal groups are placed in child protection centers instead of detention centers, provided with adequate social services, and receive access to education.

Provide additional support to indigenous, migrant, internally displaced, and refugee children, and fund social programs to increase their access to education and reduce their risk for child labor.

Ensure that the Benito Juarez Wellbeing Scholarship Program provides sufficient cash transfers to vulnerable students. Also fully monitor and evaluate the This School is Ours program and all other educational programs to reduce mismanagement and increase transparency and prosecute those engaged in corrupt practices.

Expand social protection programs throughout the country for victims of child labor in all relevant sectors, including in commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Indigenous and Afro-descendant children, migrant and refugee children, children from rural communities, and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to child labor in Mexico, as they are more likely to face conditions of extreme poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and abuse, and have less access to education and social protection services. Girls in Mexico are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, as they make up 80 percent of victims. Migrant children traveling by themselves can be exposed to mistreatment and violence, pushing them into informal child labor while they seek sources of income. In addition, children from indigenous populations are more likely to work across all sectors than non-indigenous children. Organized criminal groups also force Mexican children to carry out assassinations, serve as lookouts, and produce, transport, and sell drugs, including opium poppies; an estimated 30,000 children have joined criminal groups in Mexico.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Mexico has committed to providing free and compulsory education for children. However, 5 million students, primarily from rural areas, dropped out of school from 2022 to 2023 due to the lack of schools and internet connectivity and/or computers for virtual learning. In addition, there are not enough schools in rural agricultural states, which has prevented children of agricultural workers, who are mostly migrants and/or of indigenous origin, from receiving an education. Indigenous children are also less likely to attend school due to the lack of schools near their homes, lack of educational materials and instruction in native languages, and the presence of organized crime at schools.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mexico has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. In addition, Mexico'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 123 of the Constitution; Article 22 <i>bis</i> of the Labor Code; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents; Article 6 of the General Education Law
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 23 and 175 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 175 and 176 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 1 and 5 of the Constitution; Articles 11, 12, and 22 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Article 10 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 200–205- <i>bis</i> of the Federal Penal Code; Articles 13 and 18 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 196 and 201 of the Federal Penal Code; Article 24 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Articles 2, 4, and 5 of the Law on Organized Crime
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 5 of the Military Service Law

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 24 of the Military Service Law
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Articles 123 and 201 of the Federal Penal Code; Articles 16 and 47 of the Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents
Compulsory Education Age, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 6 and 129 of the General Education Law
Free Public Education		Article 3 of the Constitution; Article 7, Section IV of the General Education Law

In 2023, the Mexican Congress passed amendments to the Federal Labor Law and Social Security Law that include significant fines for non-compliance. These amendments mandate that workers receive social security; written copies of their signed work contracts; access to food, water, and healthcare during the workday; safe transportation for workers residing at the workplace; and childcare services. However, Mexico’s minimum age for work at age 15 is lower than the compulsory education age of 18, which could encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Mexico took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of unannounced labor inspections in all sectors, as well as insufficient financial resources, hindered enforcement efforts.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Secretariat for Labor and Social Welfare (STPS):** Responsible for labor law enforcement in 22 industrial sectors under federal jurisdiction (including the sugar and tobacco industries), three types of enterprises, and labor matters affecting two or more states. The state-level labor inspectorates are responsible for labor law enforcement in all other situations. The STPS conducts unannounced inspections in the informal sector for child labor violations in response to complaints, and child labor inspections must be coordinated with representatives from the Secretariat of Health’s National System for Integral Family Development (SNDIF) and the local Office of the Attorney General of Mexico. The Federal Attorney for the Defense of Labor, a decentralized unit of the STPS, receives and prosecutes cases involving workers under age 18. Mexico’s Secretariat of Economy issued a resolution on February 23, 2023, prohibiting imports produced with forced labor. That resolution, which identifies the STPS as the agency responsible for investigating allegations of forced labor in imports, went into effect on May 18, 2023.

**Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (FGR):** The FGR’s Specialized Unit for Crimes against Women and Trafficking in Persons (FEVIMTRA) and the Specialized Unit on Trafficking in Minors, People, and Organs are responsible for investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases at the federal level, while the Specialized Office for Organized Crime investigates and prosecutes cases linked to commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition, all 32 states have specialized trafficking in persons prosecutors, who are responsible for cases of human trafficking at the state level. Federal and state trafficking in persons units also receive referrals from the National Institute of Migration and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance. In August 2023, FEVIMTRA held its seventh national-level meeting for prosecutors and specialized units on trafficking in persons. In 2023, two individuals were sentenced to 15 years in prison for exploiting an indigenous child in forced labor. The government also rescued 82 victims of child pornography and arrested 93 sexual offenders. One of the highest sentences imposed was 82 years and 6 months in prison.

## 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, 665 labor inspectors conducted 48,180 worksite inspections, finding an unknown number of child labor violations at the federal level. However, the state of Chihuahua labor inspectorate identified 42† child labor violations. While the government conducted investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor and convicted perpetrators of crimes, the total number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions is unknown.

† Data reported is state level data and does not reflect federal level information.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>Mexico established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, inconsistent levels of participation by state authorities in coordinating mechanisms diminishes their effectiveness.</p>	<p><b>Inter-Institutional Commission for Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and the Protection of Adolescent Workers of the Permitted Age in Mexico (CITI):</b> Coordinates Mexico's efforts to eliminate child labor. Meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the STPS. There are also state-level (CITI <i>Estatales</i>) and municipal-level committees. In October 2023, the first formal convening was held in Merida Yucatan between the federal and state commissions on child labor. During the 3-day event, the National Conference of Labor Secretaries and the ILO signed a national pact (known as the <i>Pacto del Mayab</i>) that established high-level, shared objectives to combat child labor and forced labor. In June 2023, CITI also issued a guide for employers on general working conditions, regulation compliance, and benefits for legal working adolescents, and a digital handbook to inform adolescents aged 15 to 17 about their labor rights. However, some states do not have active CITI committees, and not all states collaborated with CITI at the federal level. The Federal CITI has a Plan of Action on Child Labor (2021–2024), which requires the CITI Secretariat to conduct monitoring activities on a quarterly basis, but it lacks an accompanying budget for activities.</p>
<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>Mexico established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover all worst forms of child labor.</p>	<p><b>National Program for the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (2020–2024):</b> Seeks to strengthen workers' rights and increase the participation of workers in the formal sector. The program prioritizes addressing child labor as part of the STPS's social inclusion strategy. Between September 2022 and June 2023, the program carried out 31 actions in 68 agricultural centers, addressing issues such as recruitment and child labor prevention, benefiting 30,555 agricultural workers.</p> <p><b>National Program for Children and Adolescents (PRONAPPINA) (2021–2024):</b> Aims to guarantee the rights of children by establishing mechanisms to support their growth and development. Has an accompanying action plan, as well as a Strategy for the Prevention of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. In September 2023, the Comprehensive Systems for the Promotion and Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPPINNA) co-sponsored the program's fourth Inter-American forum. In their yearly report, PRONAPPINA highlighted several key achievements for 2023: Promoted proper nutrition, healthy lifestyles, water consumption, and physical activity; ensured access to and completion of compulsory education, including tailored plans for indigenous, disabled, Afro-descendant, and multilingual children and adolescents; designed and implemented programs to protect vulnerable children and adolescents, such as migrants, refugees, street children, child laborers, and adolescents in conflict with the law; and promoted discrimination-free and violence-free environments, training federal personnel on children's rights and cybersecurity for minors.</p>

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

<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</p>	<p><b>National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (PNTdP) (2022–2024):</b> Published by the Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB), guides the government’s public policy on human trafficking. The PNTdP has five key objectives: (1) strengthening the legal framework, (2) outlining coordination efforts, (3) strengthening services to survivors, (4) conducting research to inform actions and public policies, and (5) promoting the human rights of survivors. Also directs the work of the Interagency Commission to Prevent, Sanction, and Eradicate Crimes of Human Trafficking and for the Protection and Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking. In 2023, the PNTdP proposed a reform of the general law on human trafficking, which is pending approval; established state-level coordination committees (CIES) mirroring the national Inter-Ministerial Commission to ensure consistent policy implementation, supported by training and national projects; enhanced victim care and reintegration via updated instruments and training programs, including the issuance of an operating manual for shelters and halfway houses that provide assistance to trafficked persons; disseminated new annual informational materials and collaborated with various sectors to raise awareness and promote reporting of trafficking; and created the Crime Prevention Group, where crime prevention actions with a territorial approach are promoted and carried out.</p>
<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>Mexico funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, there is a lack of programs to address child labor in all sectors and in all states.</p> <p>† Program is funded by the Government of Mexico. ‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</p>	<p><b>Benito Juarez Wellbeing National Scholarship Program:</b>† A \$39.3 million Secretariat of Public Education cash transfer program that offers scholarships for families living in poverty and students at risk of school desertion. The scholarship provides bimonthly payments of \$92 per household for all children under age 15 who are enrolled in school. Although the program reached over 10 million students in 2023, it has been criticized for providing insufficient cash transfers, lacking monitoring and evaluation, and having implementation issues.</p> <p><b>Education Programs:</b>† Managed by the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Education Support Program (PAEI) promotes access to public education for children from indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities through scholarships, lodging, and nutritional assistance. With funding close to \$110 million, the program helped 81,944 students in 2023. The School is Ours (LEEN) program serves to build and improve educational infrastructure and provide meal services. However, an audit of the program’s 2021 expenses found instances of funds sent to deceased beneficiaries and accounts not registered in the database. It also discovered that support meant for a school committee in Chiapas was deposited into a different bank account, leading to its misuse. In addition, treasurers in 75 schools took resources without returning them. As a result, the audit recommended administrative sanctions and investigations into the irregularities by public servants involved in managing the program.</p> <p><b>Assistance for At-Risk Children and Adolescents Program (PAMAR):</b>† Implemented by SNDIF at the state and municipal levels to assist youth at risk for child labor by providing shelters, psychosocial assistance, and training. PAMAR also provides educational assistance that allows participants to complete their schooling, vocational training such as cosmetology, guitar workshops, and sports and recreational activities. In 2023, four new centers were established in the State of Hidalgo in the neighborhoods of La Militar, PRI-Chacón, Campestre Villas del Álamo, and Colinas de Plata.</p>

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)