



PAKISTAN

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Pakistan made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Punjab’s provincial assembly passed the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act of 2023, which prohibits the employment of children under 15 years in home-based work. Labor inspectors in Punjab also conducted over 85,000 child labor inspections, yielding 87 arrests, and carried out 8,580 inspections in brick kilns, finding 771 child labor violations, resulting in 34 arrests. Further, Child Protection and Welfare Bureaus across Pakistan rescued around 10,000 children from child labor and reunited them with families or placed them in shelters. In addition, in January 2024, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa labor department released the results of its 2022–2023 child labor survey and the government’s Child Protection Helpline 1121 received 1,292 calls, leading to the rescue of 600 children. Pakistan’s federal and provincial laws do not meet international standards for minimum age for work or hazardous work, as they both do not extend to all children in the country. Furthermore, Pakistan has neither federal nor provincial laws prohibiting the use of children in illicit activities. In addition, provincial labor inspectorates lack sufficient human and financial resources, and national enforcement data are unavailable. Finally, police corruption, particularly the taking of bribes from suspected perpetrators to ignore child labor crimes, and a lack of willingness to conduct criminal investigations, hindered Pakistan’s ability to address child labor throughout the country.

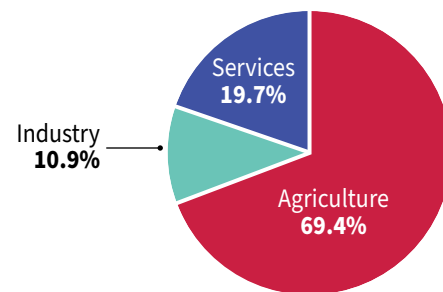


PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	10 to 14	9.8% (2,261,704)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	10 to 14	78.0%
Combining Work and School	10 to 14	0.8%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Pakistan are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, and brick manufacturing.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Farming, including planting, harvesting, and tending crops such as cotton, sugarcane, wheat, and rice. Fishing, including deep-sea fishing,† sorting, and peeling fish. Livestock farming, including raising bovines.



Industry

Manufacturing glass bangles† and surgical instruments.† Weaving carpets,† producing garments and textiles, and tanning leather.† Producing furniture, bricks, baked goods, and dairy products. Mining coal† and gemstones, and crushing stone.† Construction.



Services

Domestic work. Working in hotels, wedding venues, food stalls, small shops, restaurants, gas stations. Automobile

repair, and shoe shining. Scavenging† and sorting garbage and recyclables, begging, and street vending.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in brickmaking, carpet weaving, and coal mining. Forced domestic work. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict. Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking and production of drugs.

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

Legal Framework

Extend minimum age protections to all sectors, including the informal economy, at the federal level as well as in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh Provinces.

Prohibit the employment of children under age 18 in hazardous work, such as brickmaking and mining, at the federal level and in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh Provinces; and domestic work at the federal level and in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh Provinces.

Criminally prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs, at the federal level and in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces.

Criminally prohibit the recruitment and use of children under age 18 by non-state groups, including at the federal level and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan Provinces.

Raise the minimum age for work from 15 to 16 to align with the compulsory education age.

Establish a minimum age for voluntary recruitment by the state military in accordance with international standards.

Enforcement

Ensure that there are at least 4,388 labor inspectors to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 65.8 million people, and that provincial labor inspectorates have enough financial and human resources to conduct inspections, including funding for travel outside of major cities.

Establish District Vigilance Committees in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces and ensure that they can conduct public outreach and report and file bonded labor cases.

Create a centralized repository for enforcement data and a mechanism for reporting enforcement data, including information about funding for provincial labor inspectorates; the number of labor inspectors, worksite inspections conducted, child labor violations found, and unannounced inspections conducted; and whether penalties were imposed and collected.

Establish a referral mechanism between law enforcement authorities and social service providers in all provinces.

Conduct unannounced inspections, hold accountable individuals preventing labor inspectors from accessing worksites, and provide labor inspectors with regular training on child labor issues.

Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies have adequate human and financial resources and training to carry out investigations and prosecute perpetrators. Publish information about investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions achieved, and sentences imposed.

Establish sufficient laws to end police corruption, particularly the taking of bribes from suspected perpetrators to ignore alleged human trafficking crimes and not to pursue criminal cases against released bonded laborers.

Ensure that workers, including workers in rural areas, can formally register their employment at brick kilns with the government and access social welfare benefits under provincial laws. Prosecute and penalize those who employ bonded laborers and ensure that survivors are protected from future retaliation for bringing their cases to court.

Investigate, prosecute, and when appropriate, convict and sentence members of non-state armed groups complicit in facilitating child labor, including the recruitment of children.

Coordination

Establish an adequate number of Child Protection Units in all provinces and ensure they receive sufficient human and financial resources.

Social Programs

Improve and expand existing programs to address the scope of Pakistan's child labor problem, including providing adequate protection and rehabilitation services for child domestic workers, bonded child laborers, children working and begging in the streets, and other children working in the informal sector.

Provide rehabilitation and reintegration services for children who were kidnapped or forcibly recruited from *madrassas* by non-state militant groups.

Establish programs that ensure children are protected from sexual abuse in schools, including *madrassas*.

Ensure that all children, including children from minority ethnic groups, children with disabilities, and undocumented stateless children, have access to free and compulsory education, as required by law, by implementing programs to address teacher absenteeism, inadequate facilities, school fees, lack of transportation, lack of classes in minority languages, unreliable internet access in rural areas—especially in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province—and the use of corporal punishment.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Some children from Pakistan are kidnapped or sold into organized begging rings, domestic servitude, gangs, and sex trafficking in Iran. Traffickers also force Afghan, Iranian, and Pakistani children into drug trafficking, drug and contraband production, and smuggling of goods in the border areas. Climate-related disasters have increased Pakistani children’s vulnerability to child labor. In the aftermath of the nationwide flooding that occurred in July 2022, more children entered domestic work to pay for food and to service family loans. Stateless children, many of whom are ethnic Bengali born in Pakistan, as well as Afghan and Rohingya refugee children, are vulnerable to child labor in the fishing industry near coastal areas due to a lack of identity documents that limits their access to government services. Afghan refugee children engage in scavenging, whereas Pakistani children with disabilities are used for begging, exposing them to criminal organizations. Moreover, non-state armed groups reportedly kidnap children as young as age 12, coerce parents with threats, and recruit children forcibly from *madrassas*—Islamic religious schools that provide free education and meals to Pakistan’s poorest children—to spy, fight, and carry out suicide attacks.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

In 2022, an estimated 22.8 million children in Pakistan were out of school. Insufficient internet coverage in rural areas, especially in the newly merged tribal districts of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, hampers children’s access to learning. Many other children face barriers to education, including teacher absenteeism, inadequate facilities, lack of transportation, school fees, corporal punishment, and sexual abuse, all of which may deter them from attending school. Children from minority ethnic groups, including native speakers of Sindhi, Pashtun, Saraiki, Baloch, and others, have difficulty accessing education, which is offered in Urdu and English. Non-Muslim and Ahmadi Muslims are sometimes denied enrollment in schools because of their religious identity. For cultural and religious reasons, some parents do not send girls or transgender children to school, and some schools may deny them enrollment. Most schools in Pakistan are not accessible to children with disabilities. Stateless children, including ethnic Bengali children born in Pakistan and Afghan and Rohingya refugee children, cannot access school due to lack of identity documents. Sexual abuse of children in *madrassas* is also of significant concern. The 2022 floods further affected children’s access to schools, particularly in rural areas, where 27,000 schools were severely damaged. Schools in Pakistan are also vulnerable to attacks by armed groups, disrupting children’s learning.









LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Pakistan has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, its laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for work because the federal law and the laws in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh Provinces do not extend to informal employment; minimum age for hazardous work as the age at the federal level and in Balochistan Province is less than age 18; and the use of children in illicit activities because federal and provincial laws in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa do not prohibit the use of children in drug production and drug trafficking.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Section 50 of the Factories Act; Sections 2, 20, and 27 of the West Pakistan Shops and Establishments Ordinance; Sections 2 and 26 of the Mines Act; Sections 3 and 11 of the Road Transport Workers Ordinance; Sections 2, 3, 7, and 14 of the Pakistan Employment of Children Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 14 Years		Sections 2 and 3 of the Employment of Children Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Parts 1 and 2 of the Schedule of the Employment of Children Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Sections 2, 3, 4, and 7 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Sections 2, 4, 11-12 of the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act; Sections 367, 370, and 374 of the Penal Code

Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Sections 2, 3, 4, and 7 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Sections 366A, 366B, 370, 371, 371A, and 371B of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Sections 366A, 366B, 371A, 371B, and 377A-B of the Penal Code; Sections 2, 3, 4, and 7 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A*	
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, 16 Years		Section 3 of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act
Free Public Education		Section 3 of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act

*Country has no conscription

In January 2023, Punjab Province enacted the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act of 2023 that, among other things, prohibits the employment of children under 15 years in home-based work. However, the federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provincial minimum age for work laws do not extend to informal employment, such as domestic work. In addition, the minimum age for hazardous work at the federal level and in Balochistan Province is less than age 18, which does not meet international standards. While the federal government and the four provinces have identified hazardous occupations and activities for children, hazardous work prohibitions do not cover brickmaking, for which there is evidence that children are exposed to environmental health hazards, or child domestic work, for which there is evidence that children are exposed to physical abuse. Punjab limits domestic work for children ages 15 to 18 to part-time work that is not likely to harm their health, safety, and education, but does not prevent children under age 18 from engaging in this work. Although laws in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh Provinces prohibit children under age 18 from working in underground mines or above-ground quarries, federal law—which also applies in Balochistan—does not prohibit children ages 15 to 18 from working in mines, and there is evidence that children in Balochistan are engaged in coal mining, where they are exposed to hazardous substances, underground work, and lethal accidents.

Research was unable to locate laws explicitly establishing a minimum age for voluntary state military recruitment or prohibiting the compulsory recruitment of children by the state military. The federal and provincial governments in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have not enacted laws that prohibit the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by non-state groups. In addition, federal and provincial laws in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces do not prohibit the use of children in drug production and drug trafficking. Moreover, as the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

 **ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Pakistan took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human and financial resources, as well as corruption, hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Provincial and Regional Labor and Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies: Pakistan’s provinces are responsible for enforcing labor laws. Provincial labor inspectors inspect industrial areas and markets to identify child labor violations, pursue legal action against employers, collect enforcement data at the district level, and refer children taken into custody to Child Protection Officers. Provincial labor courts assess penalties for labor violations. In addition, provincial and regional police enforce violations of federal and provincial criminal laws concerning child labor.

Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Anti-Trafficking Unit: Operates under the Ministry of Interior and enforces transnational human trafficking-related laws, particularly the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act. Oversees the implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (2021–2025) and publishes an “Annual Red Book” of the government’s most wanted human traffickers and smugglers.

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	Unknown	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, it is **unknown** how many labor inspectors conducted worksite inspections or whether child labor violations were found at the federal level or in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or Sindh Provinces. It is also **unknown** how many investigations into suspected child labor crimes were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted either at the national or provincial levels. However, Punjab inspectors conducted **85,188** child labor inspections under the Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act and **8,580** inspections under the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labor at Brick Kiln Act 2016, finding **1,585** violations, filing **1,562** First Investigation Reports, making **121** arrests, and initiating **47** prosecutions.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Pakistan established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there is inadequate funding and human resources at the provincial level for Child Protection Units to initiate interventions against child labor.</p>	<p>Child Coordination Bodies: Provincial Child Protection Units (CPUs) coordinate interventions at the provincial level; take into custody at-risk children, including those rescued from exploitative labor situations; provide case management services; and present cases to the Child Protection Court or other authorities. There are 14 CPUs in Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with additional CPUs in Punjab. In addition, Pakistan has several provincial child protection commissions, bureaus, and authorities in each province with different mandates related to enhancing safety and rights of children, such as Child Protection and Welfare Bureaus (CPWBs) and Child Protection Institutes (CPIs). In 2023, the CPWBs across Pakistan rescued around 10,000 children from child labor and reunited them with families or placed them in shelters.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Pakistan established policies related to child labor.</p>	<p>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Labor Policy: Seeks to eradicate child labor, collect child labor statistics, enforce the compulsory education law, assist children through referral mechanisms, and educate families and other stakeholders about the negative effects of child labor. In January 2024, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Labor Department released the results of its 2022–2023 child labor survey.</p> <p>Punjab Labor Policy: Seeks to improve working conditions; eradicate child and bonded labor, including in brick kilns; and establish social safety nets for workers and their families. Implemented by independent monitoring groups that include members of government, police, and civil society and are responsible for carrying out inspections, victim identification, and rehabilitation of survivors. In 2023, the Punjab Labor Department hired 10 new inspectors, established “Helpline 1314,” and referred 472 child laborers to 9 CPIs across the province.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p>	<p>Sindh Labor Policy: Seeks to protect vulnerable workers by enforcing hazardous child labor laws, extending the minimum age for employment to domestic and home-based work, ensuring minimum wages for working children, and increasing access to education and training. In 2023, the Sindh government released funds to continue its child labor survey, undertaken since 2021, with door-to-door canvassing scheduled for January 2024.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Pakistan funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these programs do not address the problem in all sectors where child labor has been identified, including providing services for child victims of bonded labor and domestic work.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of Pakistan.</i></p>	<p>Bait-ul-Mal Programs:† Aim to remove children from child labor and increase access to education. Includes the Schools for the Rehabilitation of Child Labor, which enrolled over 17,000 children in 159 schools. In 2023, the program provided social protection and education to orphaned girls, including cash transfers of \$21 to \$42 (PKR 6,000 to PKR 12,000) to each family per fostered orphaned girl.</p> <p>Hotlines: Ministry of Human Rights-operated helpline for reporting human rights violations, including child labor, and for providing referrals to legal aid and a network of NGOs. The ministry also operates the Zainab Alert mobile application, used by district police stations to track missing children and child labor cases. In 2023, this application received over 2,000 complaints, including reports of child labor. The FIA also operates a 24/7 hotline to address human trafficking. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has a dedicated helpline for child protection and labor issues. In 2023, government’s Child Protection Helpline 1121 received 1,292 calls and referred cases to the CPWBs, leading to the rescue of 600 children.</p>

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

 **WORKER RIGHTS SPOTLIGHT**

Pakistan imposes restrictions on unions, authorities often fail to register unions within the legally required timeframe, and the government has failed to investigate and prosecute cases of anti-union discrimination. This can create a climate of fear that hinders workers’ ability to organize, advocate for their rights, and report labor abuses, including child labor.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports