



SERBIA

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Serbia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the Anti-Trafficking Council met for the first time after several years of inactivity and appointed a new coordinator to direct its activities. In addition, the Institute for Statistics and the International Labor Organization published the final results of the 2021 National Child Labor Survey, and the labor inspectorate received a substantial increase in funding, raising its budget to approximately \$4.7 million. The government also increased the monthly child allowance amount paid to eligible families and expanded the scope of the cash benefit program to include minors who had previously been excluded. However, despite these efforts, policy and social barriers to education remain for disadvantaged populations, and the country's social welfare centers are overwhelmed with cases, which limits efforts to provide services to victims of child labor.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	18.8% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	97.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	20.6%

Children in Serbia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Working in agriculture, including farming, forestry, and fishing.



Industry

Manufacturing and construction.



Services

Street work, including washing cars, collecting scrap material, vending, and begging. Trading, including wholesale and retail. Working in food service.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging. Domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including in petty crime.

‡ 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 Serbia's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Enforcement

Ensure that criminal investigators and agencies addressing human trafficking conduct thorough investigations.

Publish data pertaining to labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of child labor penalties imposed and collected.

Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate is fully staffed and equipped to conduct an adequate number of inspections per international labor standards.

Coordination

Establish a mechanism to coordinate efforts to address all worst forms of child labor, including agriculture and street work.

Government Policies

Publish information on activities conducted under the Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Institutions and Organizations Working with Children Involved in Life and Work on the Streets of Belgrade.

Use research and data from the National Child Labor Survey to develop and implement policies to address the full scope of the child labor problem in all sectors.

Social Programs

Address policy and social barriers to education via targeted programming for disadvantaged populations, including improving access to birth registration documentation; increasing access to education for children with disabilities; and increasing educational access and retention rates for minority populations, particularly migrant children, Roma children, and girls.

Ensure that staff members at Social Welfare Centers have sufficient resources, such as personnel and funding, to address the specific needs of child trafficking victims.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children from Roma communities, particularly girls, and children living in rural areas have higher rates of victimization by internal trafficking, including for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Undocumented migrants are also at a significantly higher risk of human trafficking for forced labor and sexual exploitation.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Constitutional and legal protections prohibit discrimination in the education system against individuals with disabilities. However, some individuals with disabilities, especially Roma children, face difficulties in accessing education due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure and social prejudices. Some Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptian children in Serbia also experience challenges in obtaining birth registration, which may make school enrollment difficult, and increase their vulnerability to child labor. In addition, placement in non-mainstream schools sometimes discourages Roma children from attending school. Roma children are also more likely to begin school at a later age and drop out of school more frequently than their non-Roma peers.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Articles 24, 25, and 274 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Articles 25 and 274 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 25, 84, 87, and 88 of the Labor Law; Regulation on Hazardous Labor of Children
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 112, 388, and 390 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 112 and 388 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 112 and 183–185, and 388 of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 246 and 388 of the Criminal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 4 of the Law on Military, Labor, and Material Obligation; Article 39 of the Law on the Army
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	Article 4 of the Law on Military, Labor, and Material Obligation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 24 of the Law on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; Article 388 of the Criminal Code
Compulsory Education Age, 15 Years ‡		Article 71 of the Constitution; Articles 94 and 98 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System
Free Public Education		Article 71 of the Constitution; Article 91 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System

* No conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Serbia took actions to address child labor.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs (MOLEVSA): Through the Labor Inspectorate, inspects businesses, including unregistered businesses. Through the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV), identifies victims of child trafficking and those at risk, conducts needs assessments, contributes to human trafficking research projects, and refers victims to social services.

Ministry of the Interior (MOI): Oversees the General Police Directorate and enforces laws prohibiting commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through the Criminal Police Department. Informs the Centers for Social Work (CSWs) of any child labor violations found and transfers children found eligible for assistance to CSWs.

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	Yes

In 2023, **223** labor inspectors conducted **66,896** worksite inspections, finding **27** child labor violations. The government also conducted **36** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor, initiated **19** prosecutions, and convicted **13** perpetrators.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Serbia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, the coordinating mechanism does not cover all worst forms of child labor in the country.

National Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Anti-Trafficking Council):

Sets government policies on human trafficking and drafts annual standard operating procedures for the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV). Chaired by MOI, with the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons acting as the Secretary of the Council. In September 2023, the government appointed a new National Coordinator of Activities in the Fight Against Human Trafficking and in December 2023, the Council met after a multi-year period of inactivity. Additionally, MOI began drafting a new national anti-trafficking program and action plan.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Serbia established policies related to child labor. However, it has not mainstreamed into relevant national policies all child labor issues in high-risk sectors, including begging, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation.

Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Institutions and Organizations Working with Children Involved in Life and Work on the Streets of Belgrade:

Aims to enhance institutional cooperation among MOI, the Criminal Police Directorate, the Communal Police, city Social Welfare Centers, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Education, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Health, and civil society organizations. Stipulates lead institutions, rules, and procedures for interacting with children engaged in street labor, including begging. Research was unable to determine whether the policy was active during the reporting period.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Serbia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, gaps exist in addressing social barriers to education.

† Program is funded by the Government of Serbia.
‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

National Child Labor Survey: Conducted by the Republic of Serbia Institute for Statistics and the ILO. During the reporting period, the government published its final analysis of the 2021 Child Labor Survey, providing insight into the sectors in which children in Serbia perform hazardous labor.

Belgrade Children's Shelter:† Social welfare institution funded by the City of Belgrade; opened in 2019. Provides accommodation services and daytime shelter services to meet the needs of young people and street children who are subsequently referred to judicial authorities, as well as to the CSWs for healthcare and educational support. The government continued to support the shelter during the reporting period.

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