

# SRI LANKA

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Sri Lanka made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Sri Lanka Department of Labor trained 357 labor officers on laws related to child labor and organized several specialized training programs, including cybercrime investigation and forensic interviewer skills for child survivors. It also expanded its school meal programs to cover 1.6 million students in primary schools across the country and launched a social welfare program to provide financial benefits to 1.7 million families at high risk for labor exploitation, including child labor. Although the government made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas during the reporting period, it is unknown whether the government initiated prosecutions or convicted perpetrators for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor. Research also indicates that some children in rural areas face barriers to accessing education, including long distances to school, an inadequate number of teachers, and challenges in securing necessary documents for enrollment. Furthermore, the labor inspectorate lacked sufficient staffing and funding to carry out an adequate number of inspections, including in factories in the northern and eastern provinces.

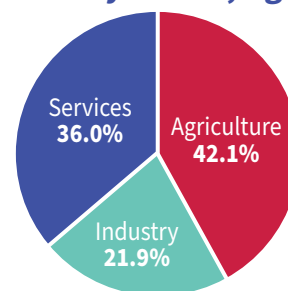


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	0.8% (28,515)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	98.0%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	0.9%

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



Children in Sri Lanka are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced domestic work. Children also engage in child labor in mining and construction.

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



#### Agriculture

Farming, including raising livestock. Fishing, including deep-sea fishing† and processing and selling fish.



#### Industry

Manufacturing and food processing. Mining‡ and construction.†



#### Services

Domestic work. Vending, in stores and on the streets, and begging. Working in hotels, restaurants, and offices.

Providing security for people and property. Transportation. Painting and washing buildings.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking. Forced domestic work.

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

### **Enforcement**

Provide criminal law enforcement investigators with additional funding and adequate resources—including personnel, transportation, fuel, computers, and facilities to record evidence—to adequately investigate the worst forms of child labor.

Hire and place additional labor inspectors in the northern and eastern provinces to increase inspections of factories.

Authorize labor inspectors to inspect private residences for violations against child workers if they have reasonable suspicion of child labor violations occurring, regardless of whether an official complaint is received.

Address the delays and gaps in referrals among the Department of Labor, National Child Protection Authority, and Sri Lankan Police.

Collect and make available information on the number of prosecutions initiated and the convictions obtained related to the worst forms of child labor.

### **Social Programs**

Ensure that the definition of child labor used in national child labor surveys to calculate child labor statistics aligns with international standards so that the estimated population of children in child labor in the Child Activity Survey is correct.

Improve access to education by increasing programs to offset educational costs, improve transportation to schools, address teacher shortages, increase secondary schools in rural areas, and facilitate access to enrollment documents.

Institute programs to address vulnerabilities to child labor, particularly for ethnic minorities, in tea estates and in coastal, agricultural, mining, and firewood-producing areas.



## **CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK**

Children living in coastal and agricultural areas, mining areas, and firewood-producing areas are at higher risk of child labor. Increasing debt for housing and accommodations among workers at private and smallholding tea estates, many of whom also faced ethnic discrimination, increase the risk of child labor in the tea sector. The plantation community in the central province is also susceptible to lower income and nutrition levels, making children vulnerable to labor in domestic work. In addition, smallholder farmers face increased labor and production costs, as well as labor shortages during harvest times, and often rely on children under the age of 12 to help during the harvest period.



## **BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS**

Although the government provides free, compulsory education, some children face barriers to accessing education due to a lack of transportation and an inadequate number of teachers. There is a lack of high schools in some rural areas and plantations, and children are particularly susceptible to leaving school early. Additionally, there have been reports that children who are unable to provide birth certificates, such as children born abroad to Sri Lankan mothers and non-Sri Lankan fathers, are denied access to education. The 2016 Child Activity Survey’s definition of child labor does not align with international standards because children ages 5 to 11 working less than 15 hours per week and children ages 12 to 14 working less than 25 hours per week in agriculture are not counted as child laborers. These issues may have led to an underestimation of the population of children in child labor in the Child Activity Survey.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Sri Lanka has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor and the government’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>16 Years</b>	✓	Sections 7, 9, 13, and 34 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act; Section 6 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Amendment Act; Section 2 of the Shop and Office Employees (Regulation of Employment and Remuneration) (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–7 of the Factories (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–4 of the Minimum Wages (Indian Labor) (Amendment) Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>	✓	Section 20A of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	✓	Hazardous Occupations Regulations No. 01; Section 20A of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor	✓	Sections 358A and 360C of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	✓	Sections 360C, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	✓	Sections 286A, 360B, 360A(2), 360A(4), and 360E of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	✓	Sections 288, 288A, 288B, and 360C of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>	✓	Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	✓	358(1)(d) of the Penal Code; Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act
Compulsory Education Age, <b>16 Years</b>	✓	Section 43 of the Education Ordinance; Compulsory Attendance of Children at Schools Regulation No. 1 of 2015
Free Public Education	✓	Section 47 of the Education Ordinance

\*Country has no conscription



## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient resource allocation for the labor inspectorate hindered enforcement efforts.

### Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

**Department of Labor (DOL), in the Ministry of Labor and Foreign Employment (MOLFE):** Enforces labor laws related to the employment of children and young persons, including overseeing the labor inspectorate and the Women and Children’s Affairs Division. Receives public complaints of child labor lodged in national and district-level offices. Receives complaints from other state organizations, including from the National Child Protection Authority. Conducts special investigations of child labor and hazardous labor and takes legal action as necessary. During the reporting period, the DOL received 87 complaints on child and hazardous child labor and documented 10 child labor and 3 hazardous child labor incidents involving 15 victims. Vulnerable children were identified and directed for relevant care, including to the Department of Probations and Child Care Services. Additionally, 17 new Assistant Commissioners of Labor received a 10-day training related to child labor laws, and 42 labor inspectors received a 3-day training workshop on labor laws, inspections, and court procedures. In March and May 2023, 357 labor officers received training on child labor laws. The trainings were in both the Tamil and Sinhala languages. The Deputy Commissioner of Women and Children’s Affairs Division delivered a presentation to 45 district-level child protection officers and counselors on eliminating child and hazardous labor by 2025.

**Sri Lankan Police:** Supervise the National Child Protection Authority’s Special Police Investigation Unit, which has approximately 40 police officers who investigate complaints and enforce criminal laws involving children, including complaints of child labor. The National Child Protection Authority also works with the National Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce to address human trafficking issues, including commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. The Sri Lankan Police have approximately 300 child protection officers based in the districts who are tasked with preventing child exploitation and protecting survivors. The Criminal Investigations Department investigates cases, prepares indictments, and forwards cases to the relevant High Court, while the Attorney General’s Office is responsible for prosecutions in the High Court. In addition, the Children and Women’s Bureau enforces laws related to the worst forms of child labor. In 2023, the police department organized a cybercrime investigations training for 30 participants that focused on child exploitation. The police department also conducted a training for 90 participants on forensic interview skills, with a focus on child victims.

### 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	Unknown

In 2023, **557** labor inspectors conducted **76,916** worksite inspections, finding **12** child labor violations. It is **unknown** whether the government initiated prosecutions or convicted perpetrators for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, although it conducted **10** investigations.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>Sri Lanka has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p><b>National Steering Committee on Child Labor Elimination:</b> Coordinates efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor and oversees the National Policy on the Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka. Chaired by the Secretary of MOLFE and includes representatives from 18 key government agencies, employers and workers’ organizations, the ILO, UNICEF, and NGOs. In 2023, convened one time and discussed the drop in school attendance, children’s vulnerability to child labor, and increasing implementation of the Child Labor-Free Zone model to 10 more districts in 2024.</p>
<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>Sri Lanka has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.</p> <p><i>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</i></p>	<p><b>National Policy on the Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka:</b> Aims to mainstream child labor issues into national development policies, improve enforcement, and support collaboration with key stakeholders. Under the policy framework, the Department of Labor will track school dropout rates, establish a reporting mechanism, and identify vulnerable children and potential child labor cases in the Sabargamuva District in 2024.</p> <p><b>National Child Protection Policy:</b> Established by the National Child Protection Authority as a measure to address issues faced by children, including the sexual exploitation of children in the tourism sector. In 2023, the government started drafting a Child Rights Act.</p> <p><b>ILO Decent Work Country Program:</b> Detailed the priorities and outcomes required to make progress toward the goal of decent work for all. Identified key areas of work for the eradication of child labor, including operationalizing the Child Labor-Free Zone model in additional districts, expanding the inspection system to cover child labor in the informal sector, raising the minimum age for employment to age 16, revising regulations on hazardous child labor, improving the complaint and referral mechanisms, and regularly collecting data on child labor. Although the program expired in 2022, it continued to be implemented during the reporting period. For example, the program held a 1-day event in 10 districts to raise awareness of child labor laws in 2023.</p>
<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>Sri Lanka funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address child labor in all sectors, including mining and agriculture.</p> <p><i>* Program was launched during the reporting period.</i>  <i>† Program is funded by the Government of Sri Lanka.</i>  <i>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p><b>Child Labor-Free Zone Model:</b>† Local government initiatives that seek to eliminate child labor through the identification of children engaged in child labor, a rehabilitation program, assistance to families of children at risk of engaging in child labor, and an awareness-raising campaign. Operated by district secretariats with assistance from the DOL and with technical and financial support from the ILO. During the reporting period, existing programming was continued in 10 districts with a plan to extend the program to 10 more districts in 2024.</p> <p><b>Humanitarian Action for Children:</b>* \$34 million UNICEF-led campaign to support children’s school attendance, nutrition, and safety in response to the economic crisis. The World Food Program restarted the school meal program through 2023 and in October 2023 announced the expansion of school meal programs to cover 1.6 million students in primary schools across the country.</p> <p><b>Aswesuma:</b>*† Government social welfare program that aims to alleviate poverty in Sri Lanka by providing financial assistance to families based on their economic status. During the reporting period, the program provided benefits to 1.7 million families.</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)