

# UGANDA

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – *Efforts Made but Regression in Practice that Delayed Advancement*

In 2023, Uganda made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions secured 18 convictions for child trafficking. Moreover, the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Coordination Office for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons developed a new strategy to strengthen the effectiveness and coordination of public awareness campaigns on human trafficking. In addition, the Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labor in Supply Chains project was renewed for a second phase to reach more districts and partners, while also strengthening the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development’s Child Labor Unit. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Uganda is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because the government failed to provide any funding toward the operational activities of the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development, preventing the ministry from conducting labor inspections. In addition, a United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported that the Government of Uganda provided active support to the March 23 Movement, a non-state armed group which forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Uganda’s laws addressing the minimum age for hazardous work also do not meet the international standard because the Employment of Children Regulations permits a commissioner to allow children ages 12 and older, who are enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship program, to engage in hazardous work. Moreover, Uganda’s law only guarantees free education through the primary level, even though international standards require free basic education through lower secondary school. Lastly, the lack of a centralized supervisory authority, along with inadequate funding, training, and resources, hampered the capacity of law enforcement agencies to conduct child labor inspections and investigations.

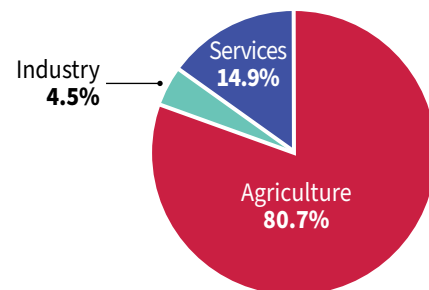


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	62.9% (7,978,224)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	81.4% (2,471,122)
Attending School	5 to 14	82.8%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	63.6%

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



Children in Uganda 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 gold mining.

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



#### Agriculture

Cultivating and harvesting coffee, tea,† tobacco,† rice,† sugarcane,† and vanilla, and acting as scarecrows in rice fields. Working with livestock, including herding cattle.† Fishing,† including catching† and selling fish, and paddling† and loading boats.† Collecting insects.



#### Industry

Construction,† including making† and laying† bricks. Quarrying stone† and sand,† mining† gold, and making charcoal. Manufacturing, including working in carpentry workshops.†



#### Services

Street work, including vending,† begging,† car washing,† working as porters,† scavenging,† collecting plastic bottles,

and collecting and selling scrap metal. Working in hair salons, hotels,† restaurants,† bars,† and video halls.† Domestic work.†



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including burglary, cattle theft, and car and house break-ins, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in agriculture, fishing, and animal herding. Forced labor in factories, mining, and quarrying. Forced begging and forced labor in bars and restaurants, street vending, and 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 Uganda’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### **Legal Framework**

Accede to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.

Ensure that only minors ages 16 and older who have received adequate, specific instruction or vocational training are permitted to perform hazardous work, and that their health, safety, and morals are fully protected.

Increase the compulsory education age from 13 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.

Establish by law free basic public education.

### **Enforcement**

Fully fund the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development to carry out its mandated duties without relying on the financial support from civil society organizations and NGOs.

Ensure labor officers receive adequate training and increase their capability to follow through on child labor cases.

Put safeguards in place to ensure that the military does not support or coordinate with non-state armed groups that recruit children.

Establish a mechanism to assess civil penalties.

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by increasing the number of labor inspections and integrate data on risk-prone sectors and previous incidents to initiate routine and targeted inspections.

Ensure that the inspectorate is using its existing authorities to inspect private farms and homes and to conduct sufficient routine and unannounced inspections, including in the informal sector.

Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors from 180 to 464 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 18.6 million workers.

Improve coordination between national- and district-level child labor enforcement bodies to ensure that relevant data are shared and that child labor inspections are prioritized across the country.

Ensure that child labor cases reach the Industrial Court and that penalties are assessed by addressing monitoring issues and improving the court’s reach outside urban centers.

Continue to increase efforts to ensure that public officials who facilitate or participate in human trafficking or the worst forms of child labor are held accountable, including officials who have ties with labor recruitment companies.

Strengthen mechanisms for following up on child labor claims, including children in domestic work, and prevent these children from being detained and abused by police.

Increase the capacity of criminal law enforcement agencies to respond to the worst forms of child labor by dedicating more personnel to worst forms of child labor cases and improving training for criminal law enforcement staff.

### **Government Policies**

Ensure that district labor action plans reflect national policies implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development.

### **Social Programs**

Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by defraying informal costs borne by families, including supplies, uniforms, and materials; addressing physical and sexual violence; and ensuring sufficient teachers, infrastructure, and transportation in rural areas. Moreover, ensure children have equal access to school regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Enhance efforts to ensure that refugee children have equal access to educational opportunities by accommodating their language needs, correcting their classification status as refugees, and addressing issues related to delays and costs in processing their equivalency examinations. Additionally, ensure that refugee children are attending school by addressing gender-based violence and exploitation, harassment, and refugee discrimination, and ensuring that there are well-equipped schools accessible to refugee settlements.

Enhance the availability of shelters for victims of child labor, including child trafficking victims.

Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, particularly in mining and commercial sexual exploitation, in all areas of the country.

A UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) report states that the Government of Uganda provided logistical support and transportation to the March 23 Movement (M23), a non-state armed group which forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in the conflict in the eastern DRC. However, the Government of Uganda authorities publicly denied any support to M23.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Civil society organizations and government entities report that children from rural areas, especially the Karamoja region, one of the most remote regions in Uganda, are vulnerable to human trafficking and forced into begging, street vending, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation. NGOs and media reports have indicated that children from Karamoja are also sold in open-air markets or through intermediaries and forced into cattle herding. The Ugandan People’s Defense Force noted that cattle rustlers in the Karamoja region recruit children, especially boys, for violent cattle raids. An unspecified number of these children have been killed during military operations against the cattle rustlers, and according to the Parliament’s Committee on Gender, Labor, and Social Development, cattle raids also increase children’s vulnerability to human trafficking. Moreover, reports indicate that refugee children throughout the country were at an increased risk of engaging in child labor or being subjected to the worst forms of child labor. An assessment revealed that when the monthly stipend amount for refugees was decreased in 2023, there was an increase in child labor cases from 56 in May and June to 129 cases in July and August as children were dropping out of school in order to supplement their households’ basic needs.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Research found isolated reports of LGBTQIA+ children being expelled or suspended from school. Reports also indicate that some LGBTQIA+ children were forced to flee their households due to the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which likely hampered their access to education. In addition, while Ugandan law provides for free primary education, the cost of school supplies, meals, and other materials often impeded some children from attending school. Research found that these fees are paid directly to the schools, and if students are not able to pay the amount in full, they might be prevented from attending or completing their term. Other barriers to education include lack of teachers, poor school infrastructure, and lack of transportation, particularly in remote rural areas where children may have to walk very long distances to the nearest school. In addition, although free primary education laws apply equally to refugee children, reports indicate that some are wrongfully classified as “international students,” resulting in a significant increase of their education fees. Girls, especially those in refugee camps, face particular risk of being out of school and are vulnerable to exploitation due to gender-based violence, harassment, and the pressure to undertake domestic duties. Additionally, for a number of refugee settlements, such as Nakivale, schools are often located far from where refugees live and are inadequately equipped to meet the needs of the large student population.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Uganda has not ratified the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. In addition, Uganda’s laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for hazardous work because children ages 12 and older enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship programs may get permission from a commissioner to engage in hazardous work.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>16 Years</b>		Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Section 32 of the Employment Act; Regulations 5 and 8 of the Employment (Employment of Children) Regulations
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Regulation 6 and the First Schedule of the Employment (Employment of Children) Regulations; Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Sections 2 and 5 of the Employment Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Section 8 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Section 8 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Section 131 of the Penal Code; Section 14 of the Anti-Pornography Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 5(d) of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Article 88 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 52(2)(c) of the Defense Forces Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Section 5(b) of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Compulsory Education Age, <b>13 Years</b> ‡		Sections 2 and 10(3)(a) of the Education Act
Free Public Education		Sections 2, 4, 9, 10(3)(a), and 57(g) of the Education Act

\* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

Uganda’s existing legal framework governing child labor does not meet international standards. While Uganda has a list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children under the age of 18, Section 8 of the Employment of Children Regulations permits a commissioner to allow children ages 12 and older enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship program to engage in hazardous work, in violation of international standards. In addition, children in Uganda are required to attend school only up to age 13, making children ages 13 to 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school while also not being legally permitted to work. Finally, although Uganda has adopted policies to extend universal education through the secondary level, by law free education is limited to the primary level.



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Uganda took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of a budget for the labor inspectorate to conduct labor inspections and the inability to assess penalties hindered enforcement efforts.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD):** Formulates, implements, and enforces labor inspection policies and laws related to working conditions through its Department of Labor, Industrial Relations and Productivity. Includes the Industrial Court, which judges labor dispute cases that are referred by labor officers. Operates the Uganda Child Helpline known as *Sauti*. Although the MGLSD carried out an unknown number of labor inspections during the reporting period, these were solely funded by civil society organizations since the government did not provide any funding for the ministry’s operational activities, including for labor inspections.

**Ministry of Internal Affairs:** Responsible for the enforcement of criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor. The Uganda Police Force’s Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) investigates forced labor cases, the Special Investigations Division and the Anti-Human Trafficking Desk investigate cases related to human trafficking and the use of children in illicit activities, and the Sexual Offenses Desk investigates cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The police also work with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) to investigate and prosecute cases related to child labor, including its worst forms.

## 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	Yes

In 2023, **180** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections. In addition, the government conducted **510** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated **289** prosecutions, and convicted **18** perpetrators.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>Uganda has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p><b>National Steering Committee on the Elimination of Child Labor:</b> Coordinates child labor issues and implements the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor, including by setting policy priorities, securing resources for child labor programs, and coordinating with key stakeholders. Led by MGLSD, includes members from several ministries, including the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Local Government, and the Uganda Police Force. In 2023, the committee met quarterly and participated in consultative meetings to develop concepts for new civil society programs to address child labor. In addition, it supported the development of the Child Labor Inspection Checklist to be used during labor inspections.</p>
<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>Uganda established policies related to child labor. However, the implementation of national policies was not consistent throughout all of the country's districts.</p> <p><small>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</small></p>	<p><b>National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor (2020/2021–2024/2025):</b> Aims to focus government efforts on the prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and reduction of the risk of child labor, with the goal of eliminating all forms of child labor by 2025. In 2023, awareness-raising activities and education sessions related to child labor and its worst forms were carried out with local leaders in the Karamoja and Bunyoro regions. In addition, a process to review and update the plan was initiated.</p> <p><b>National Child Policy:</b> Focuses on four basic children's rights: survival, development, protection, and participation. Prioritizes the elimination of child labor, launched with an implementation strategy through 2025, and outlines the responsibilities of all stakeholders in implementing child-related policies. In 2023, the policy was reviewed by stakeholders working on the protection of children's rights.</p> <p><b>National Action Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons in Uganda (2019–2024):</b> Focuses on developing sustainable systems and structures to prevent human trafficking; improving capacity for the identification, protection of and support for victims; improving investigations and prosecutions; and establishing cooperative relationships with international stakeholders. Includes the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking, which seek to improve coordination among stakeholders responsible for providing services to victims and those responsible for prosecuting criminals. In 2023, five government agencies, including the ODPP, the Uganda Police Force, and the Coordination Office for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) designed to guide the detection, investigation, and prosecution of human trafficking cases. The SOPs aim to strengthen the overall effectiveness of Uganda's law enforcement strategy by providing guidance to prosecutors, police officers, immigration officers, labor inspectors, civil society organizations, and community leaders.</p>

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

<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>Uganda funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors where child labor has been identified, including in mining and commercial sexual exploitation.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of Uganda.</i></p> <p><i>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p><b>Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labor in Supply Chains (ACCEL Africa):</b>                  Implemented by the ILO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in Uganda, in partnership with the Government of Uganda and the Federation of Ugandan Employers. Uganda’s participation in the \$29 million multi-country project targeted child labor in the coffee and tea supply chains in the Mbale, Kabarole, Buikwe, Hoima, and Bushenyi districts. In 2023, the project was extended into its second phase, continuing to build on the foundations laid during the first phase and aiming to expand coverage by reaching more districts and partners, while also strengthening the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development’s child labor unit.</p> <p><b>Uganda Child Helpline:</b><sup>†</sup> Funded primarily by UNICEF with in-kind contributions from the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development, comprises District Action Centers and a physical call center located in Wakiso that screens all calls for reported cases of child abuse. Caseworkers at District Action Centers follow up directly on cases of child abuse, including child labor and exploitation, assigned to them by the National Call Center and liaise with local authorities to address reported incidents. In 2023, the helpline responded to 77 cases of child trafficking between March and November and referred cases to the CFPU and civil society organizations for rehabilitation services.</p>
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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)