



UZBEKISTAN

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – Efforts Made but Continued Practice that Delayed Advancement

In 2023, Uzbekistan made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved a new constitution that incorporates prohibitions against child labor and forced labor, and updated a list of hazardous work activities prohibited for children. It also signed a new memorandum of understanding with the International Labor Organization and the International Finance Corporation launching a Better Work pilot program to expand the authority and capacity of the labor inspectorate, as well as collective bargaining rights. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Uzbekistan is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because it continued a practice that delays advancement to eliminate child labor. Labor inspectors are required to first seek approval from the Business Ombudsman before they may conduct unannounced private sector inspections; given that the Business Ombudsman's primary responsibility is the promotion and protection of private sector business interests in Uzbekistan, this requirement poses a conflict of interest that creates an administrative barrier to unannounced inspections and may result in advance notice being given to business owners and likely leaves potential violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses undetected. In addition, there continue to be impediments to the operation of non-governmental organizations in addressing broader labor concerns. Human rights and civil society organizations, including those working on forced and child labor issues, have been denied official registration for bureaucratic reasons, sometimes for failing to meet registration requirements that had not been publicly specified. Some civil society organizations also reported interference by government security services when researching and monitoring labor conditions in the cotton sector.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	8.6% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	92.8%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	10.5%

Children in Uzbekistan are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture and public works.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Raising silkworms, preparing land for crop planting, tending livestock.



Industry

Construction.



Services

Street work, including vending, portering, car washing, tire repair, and begging, collecting scrap metal, and public works, including refurbishing school grounds and facilities.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in construction, non-cotton agriculture, and cleaning parks, streets, and buildings. Use in illicit activities, including theft and the production or trafficking of drugs.

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

Legal Framework

Update the labor law's light work provisions to specify the activities and conditions in which children who have not yet completed their compulsory schooling may work.

Enforcement

Provide more detailed information on labor inspections, including the number of unannounced inspections, how many inspections are conducted onsite versus through desk inspections of documents submitted by businesses, and whether inspectors are targeting high-risk sectors.

Conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in all sectors, including at private enterprises, even if no complaint has been filed.

Sign draft decree that will address gaps with the funding and staffing of the labor inspectorate, as well as remove the requirement for the Business Ombudsman to approve inspections of private sector enterprises.

Coordination

Remove obstacles to the registration of NGOs and other civil society organizations monitoring child labor, forced labor, and other labor rights issues, including making all registration requirements public.

Social Programs

Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.

Ensure educational access for all children, including refugee children from Afghanistan who do not speak Uzbek or Russian.

Remove or defray informal school fees for students and their families.

Implement targeted programs to address the worst forms of child labor in public works, street works, and agriculture sectors other than cotton harvesting.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children living in rural areas and from low-income families are at higher risk of child labor and trafficking in persons. Those living in institutions are more likely to become victims of sex trafficking.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

While all children are entitled to free education under Uzbekistan's laws regardless of ethnicity or immigration status, refugee children, particularly those from Afghanistan, have limited access to school as they do not speak either Uzbek or Russian. Additionally, some schools may charge informal fees, including bribes for admission or better grades, which impede educational access for low-income families.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 18 Years		Articles 118 and 411–422 of the Labor Code; Article 49 of the Administrative Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Article 412 of the Labor Code; Article 49-1 of the Administrative Code; Article 44 of the Constitution
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Decree on Adoption of the List of Occupations with Unfavorable Working Conditions to Which It Is Forbidden to Employ Persons Under Eighteen Years of Age; Decree on Approval of Provision on Requirements on Prohibition of Use of Minors' Labor
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 44 of the Constitution; Article 7 of the Labor Code; Article 51 of the Administrative Code; Articles 135 and 148 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3 and 35 of the Law on Combating Human Trafficking
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 3 and 35 of the Law on Combating Human Trafficking; Article 135 of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 128, 128(1), 130, 131, and 135 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3 and 35 of the Law on Combating Human Trafficking
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 10 of the Law on Guarantees of the Rights of the Child; Articles 56 and 127 of the Criminal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 24 of the Law on Universal Military Service
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Articles 4 and 46 of the Law on Universal Military Service
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Articles 216(1) and 242 of the Criminal Code; Article 3 of the Law on Civil Organizations
Compulsory Education Age, 18 Years ‡		Articles 4 and 9 of the Law on Education
Free Public Education		Articles 4, 5, and 9 of the Law on Education; Article 50 of the Constitution

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In 2023, Uzbekistan passed into law a new constitution that includes an article that explicitly prohibits child labor. The Cabinet of Ministers also enacted decrees clarifying the circumstances under which children may work in athletic and creative professions, as well as an updated list of professions which are prohibited for those under 18 years of age. The Criminal Code was also amended to strengthen penalties for sexual crimes against children. In addition, the new Labor Code came into effect and has several provisions designed to protect children from child labor.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan took actions to address child labor. However, cumbersome administrative requirements for labor inspections and criminal investigations hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR): Monitors labor issues and conducts labor inspections through the State Labor Inspectorate (SLI), including inspections for compliance with child labor laws. SLI can investigate offenses of forced and child labor and refer possible criminal cases to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA). Leads the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Decent Work. In addition to labor inspectors employed by MEPR, local governments employ 200 “assistant inspectors” who can participate in labor inspections but are not allowed to impose administrative fines. Receives complaints, including on an anonymous basis, through a telephone hotline with a short, easy-to-remember number; a web portal; and a Telegram messenger bot. In 2023, SLI received and investigated over 19,000 complaints of labor violations.

MOIA: Investigates crimes related to child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children, which may then be prosecuted by the Prosecutor General’s Office. Leads the National Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons. Maintains a database of human trafficking crimes, including child trafficking crimes, which aggregates relevant information received from other government bodies, citizens' organizations, non-profit organizations, and civil society groups.

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, **344** labor inspectors conducted inspections at **14,513** organizations, finding **0** child labor violations. It is **unknown** how many investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor the government conducted or how many perpetrators were convicted, although it initiated **8** prosecutions.

Although labor inspectors are empowered to conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in public sector enterprises, permission is required from the Business Ombudsman to conduct inspections at private-sector businesses, which poses an administrative barrier that may prevent inspectors from identifying and addressing labor law violations in a timely manner. The Business Ombudsman reports directly to the President, and its primary function is to promote and protect business interests in Uzbekistan. As a result, inspectors may avoid requesting permission for such inspections due to the political climate, and business owners may receive advance notice of any inspections that are approved. Reports indicate that in practice, inspectors may be reticent to enter private businesses or homes on an unannounced basis and typically only do so in response to complaints. In 2022, a draft decree was presented to the President that is intended to improve labor inspectorate funding and staffing, as well as to remove the requirement to obtain permission from the Business Ombudsman to conduct unannounced inspections; the decree, however, remains unsigned.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Uzbekistan established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, the government repeatedly denied the applications of human rights NGOs to officially register to operate in the country.</p>	<p>National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Decent Work: Coordinates state and local entities' efforts to address sex trafficking; analyzes and monitors the efficacy of government programs to address sex trafficking and forced labor; organizes international cooperation on efforts to address sex trafficking and forced labor; and provides legal and policy recommendations for improvement of government efforts in these areas. Chaired by the National Rapporteur on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Decent Work. Comprises two sub-commissions to address trafficking and decent work, respectively. MOIA heads the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Minister of Employment and Poverty Reduction heads the Sub-Commission on Decent Work. In 2023, the Commission met three times and adopted two roadmaps to implement international recommendations on eliminating child labor and trafficking in persons.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Uzbekistan established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.</p>	<p>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the ILO and the Republic of Uzbekistan (2021–2025): Establishes terms of agreement between ILO and the government on cooperation to implement the Decent Work Country Program in Uzbekistan. It is unknown what efforts were taken in 2023 to implement this MOU.</p> <p>Action Plans on Implementing International Recommendations to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Establish work plans to address international recommendations to advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Uzbekistan. Aim to improve labor and criminal law enforcement, coordination, policies, and social programs related to the worst forms of child labor. In 2023, the government approved an action plan specifically to implement the recommendations in this report, but neither provided a copy of the action plan nor specified what actions it intended to implement under this plan.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Uzbekistan 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 and in all states where child labor has been identified, including in public works, street work, and agriculture sectors other than cotton harvesting.</p> <p><small>* Program was launched during the reporting period. † Program is funded by the Government of Uzbekistan.</small></p>	<p>Better Work Pilot Program:* The government signed a memorandum in May 2023 to launch this program, which is intended to engage ILO and the International Finance Corporation to support the improvement of labor standards and conditions in the cotton and textile industries, including the expansion of unannounced labor inspections and the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.</p> <p>National Rehabilitation Center:† MEPR-operated shelter that provides human trafficking survivors with emergency medical and social services and assists in social rehabilitation. Children are placed in specialized institutions, separate from adult survivors. This center continued to provide services to survivors of the worst forms of child labor in 2023.</p>

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



WORKER RIGHTS SPOTLIGHT

The government continues to deter the formation of any trade unions that are independent of the state-affiliated Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan. Laws protecting workers from retaliation for union activity are rarely enforced. These factors have created an environment that limits unions' independence and ability to effectively advocate for workers' rights, including reporting child labor.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports