

In 2017, Ecuador made a significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government signed into law new protections for victims of trafficking and drafted legislation to protect girls who are victims of human trafficking. The government also created the Directorate for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling within the Ministry of the Interior to lead all law enforcement and research operations related to human trafficking. In addition, the government adopted a new policy to support vulnerable populations, including through new welfare programs, and the Ministry of Tourism exchanged best practices with regional tourism ministries to prevent child sex tourism and human trafficking. However, children in Ecuador engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. In addition, Ecuador lacks effective coordinating mechanisms to combat child labor and programs providing adequate coverage of the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Ecuador engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1; 2; 3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Ecuador.

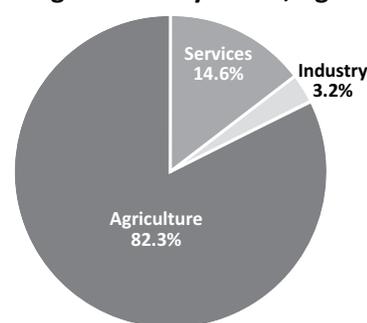
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	4.9 (168,530)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	97.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	5.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		104.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (4)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's Analysis of Statistics from Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo, y Subempleo, 2016. (5)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



In 2017, the government conducted two national surveys capturing child labor data. (6)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of bananas,† palm oil,† and flowers,† including the use of chemical products and machetes (2; 7; 8; 9; 6; 10) Fishing† (8; 9; 6)
Industry	Gold mining† and small-scale mining† (6) Production of bricks† (3; 11) Construction,† including loading construction materials, mixing materials to make concrete, and brickwork (3; 9; 11; 12; 6)
Services	Domestic work† (8; 6; 13) Street work, including begging, shoe shining, selling newspapers, and vending (7; 8; 9; 14; 15; 6; 10)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (14; 16; 17; 6) Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking and robbery (3; 17; 6; 18)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [†]	Forced recruitment of children by Colombian non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (12; 19; 20; 6)
	Use in the production of pornography (7)
	Forced labor in banana and palm plantations, floriculture, fishing; and in domestic work, street vending, and begging, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (21; 6; 22; 18)

[†] 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.

Civil society and government contacts reported incidences of Peruvian children being recruited into forced labor under false promises of employment in illegal mines. (17; 6; 23) Migrant and refugee girls from Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Venezuela are particularly vulnerable to labor trafficking in domestic servitude and forced begging. (6; 23) Indigenous children from the highlands between the ages 6 and 10 are trafficked for forced begging in Guayaquil, Quito, and Rumiñahui. (24; 10)

Migrant and refugee children from other Latin American countries, LGBTI children, girls from poor families, and indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian girls are often used in commercial sexual exploitation, including in the provinces of Guayas and Manabí. Commercial sexual exploitation in Ecuador also occurs near illegal mining sites. (2; 3; 6; 18; 24; 25) Venezuelan girls are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in Ecuador. (18) Sex trafficking networks also recruit children in schools, and, increasingly, through social media platforms, encouraging children to recruit their friends and classmates. (6) On Ecuador’s northern border, children are forcibly recruited to engage in drug trafficking and robbery. (26)

Despite education being free in Ecuador, children face barriers to accessing education, including having to pay for uniforms and books, lack of space and teachers, and lack of transportation for children who must attend schools far from their homes. (27; 6) Many indigenous children abandon school early, both in rural and urban areas. (9; 16) Specifically, almost half of all indigenous children in rural areas, and 37 to 40 percent of those in urban areas, do not attend secondary school, which can make them more vulnerable to child labor. (28) The lack of schools in some areas specifically affects indigenous and refugee children, who must travel long distances to attend school. (6)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Ecuador has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government’s laws and regulations are in line with relevant international standards (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Article 46 of the Constitution; Article 82 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (29; 30)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 87 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (30)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 8 of Resolution No. 016 of 2008; Article 5 of Ministerial Accord MDT-2015-0131 (31; 32)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 82, 91, 105, and 213 of the Integral Penal Code (33)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 47 and 91 of the Integral Penal Code; Article 117 of the Organic Law on Human Mobility (33; 34)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 91 and 100-104 of the Integral Penal Code (33)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 47, 219, and 220 of the Integral Penal Code (33)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution (29; 30)
Non-state	Yes	18	Article 127 of the Penal Code; Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution (29; 30; 33)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Article 38 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law (35)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 4 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law; Chapter 5, Article 28 of the Constitution (29; 35)

* No conscription (29)

In 2017, the government signed into law new protections for victims of trafficking. (34; 22) This law establishes a system to register and monitor victims of human trafficking and inform policy, action plans, and strategies to prevent trafficking. (34) The law also offers protections to families of trafficking victims and does not require testimony or a complaint to be filed to receive such services. (34) The Office of the President also issued regulations implementing this law. (36) The Ecuadorian legislature drafted legislation to prevent and eradicate violence against women and to protect girls who are victims of trafficking. (6) In collaboration with civil society, the private sector, and other government ministries, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) began drafting the Organic Integral Labor Code, which includes provisions on child labor and its worst forms and provides protections for adolescent workers. (18; 6)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MOL that may hinder adequate child labor enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Industrial Relations (MOL)	Monitor child labor, conduct labor inspections at worksites, and enforce child labor laws in the formal sector. Administer sanctions against companies found using child labor and collect fines. (2; 7) Using the Unified System of Registration of Child Labor (SURT), collect information on child laborers and refer children to appropriate government services. (6)
Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), Office of Special Protection to Vulnerable Population	Provide remediation services to child laborers and their families. Assist victims of child labor found in the informal sector. (2; 37) Through its Office of Special Protection, maintain a national anti-child-labor program involving coordination with civil society organizations and local governments. (6) Run seven protection centers staffed by social workers, doctors, psychologists, and educators. (37)
Attorney General's Office	Enforce criminal laws against child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. (12; 38)
Ministry of Interior	Oversee and evaluate all police actions, including the National Police Unit for Crimes against Children and Adolescents (DINAPEN). (23) DINAPEN investigates all crimes against children, including abuse, sexual exploitation, sex tourism, smuggling, kidnapping, exploitative child labor, and forced labor. (15; 39) DINAPEN's anti-trafficking unit also investigates child trafficking cases. (2)
Office of the Prosecutor	Try cases related to the worst forms of child labor. (7)
Ministry of Education	Help victims of child labor reintegrate into school through the Special Protection program. (40)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Ecuador took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MOL that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$61,752 (3)	\$1,458,000 (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	206 (3)	150 (6)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	4,626 (3)	Unknown
Number Conducted at Worksites	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	368 (3)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	Unknown* (3)	Unknown* (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	Unknown* (3)	Unknown* (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

*The government does not publish this information.

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Ecuador's workforce, which includes more than 8 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Ecuador should employ about 534 labor inspectors. (2; 3; 41; 42) Furthermore, inspectors often lack the necessary resources, such as transportation, to fulfill their mandate. (2; 3; 38)

According to the ILO, one of the major obstacles in combating child labor in Ecuador is the absence of an adequate mechanism for receiving, routing, and addressing child labor charges and complaints. (3) While the government has created new mechanisms for identifying and referring child labor victims, it does not apply them consistently and uniformly. (3; 6) The absence of appropriate sanctions against employers also hinders efficient labor law enforcement. (6) Inspectors do not have sufficient knowledge of child labor laws. (6) Although Ecuadorian laws and regulations governing child labor are comprehensive, those regarding hazardous work are not enforced equally in rural areas and family-run businesses. (3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Ecuador took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the National Police Unit for Crimes against Children and Adolescents (DINAPEN) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including its referral mechanism.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (3)	Yes (43)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (3)	N/A (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (18)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Number of Investigations	Unknown	80 (6)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown* (3)	8 (6)
Number of Convictions	Unknown* (3)	1 (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

*The government does not publish this information.

In 2017, the government created the Directorate for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling within the Ministry of Interior to lead all law enforcement and research operations related to human trafficking. (6; 43) DINAPEN and Chile's Investigative Police conducted a binational operation against a criminal group that trafficked boys and girls for labor exploitation from the Imbabura province in Ecuador to Chile. (18) This investigation resulted in four arrests and the rescue of five Ecuadorian children. (18) In other operations, police also arrested 3 people for commercial sexual exploitation of children and rescued 11 girls who were engaged in commercial sexual exploitation, some as a result of human trafficking. (18) The government also provided victims' protection assistance to seven Ecuadorian children who were victims of labor trafficking and nine children who were victims of sex trafficking. (18)

During the reporting period, criminal investigators received training by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on the use of Facebook for commercial sexual exploitation of children. (18) The National Police also hosted a training for 20 DINAPEN officers on trafficking and smuggling of persons, including children. (18; 23) However, DINAPEN officers lack sufficient human and material resources to adequately investigate the use of children in the trafficking of drugs. (2) Ecuador has only two shelters for victims of trafficking, and they serve only girls who have been victims of sex trafficking. There are no shelters for boys or girls who have been victims of trafficking unrelated to sex. (18) Although the 2016 introduction of the Unified System of Registration of Child Labor (SURT) has improved the referral mechanisms for victims removed from the worst forms of child labor, the process is ad hoc. (6) The lack of shelters in many provinces means law enforcement officers need to keep victims of the worst forms of child labor at police barracks until a space becomes available in a shelter in another province. (6)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including coordination among agencies.

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
Inter-institutional Committee for the Eradication of Child Labor	Coordinate government efforts to combat child labor. (2) Includes participation from the MOL. (23) Last convened on December 5, 2017. (6)
Inter-Agency Committee against Trafficking in Persons	Coordinate government efforts to combat human trafficking, including child trafficking. Established as part of the National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, Sexual and Labor Exploitation, and Other Forms of Exploitation. (38) Chaired by the Ministry of the Interior, involves several ministries and government agencies. (12) In 2017, held a binational fair at the Rumichaca International Bridge, the principal border crossing between Colombia and Ecuador, to raise awareness of human trafficking and the services available to trafficking victims. (18) Also held events to commemorate World Anti-Trafficking Day. (18)
Technical Secretariat for the Lifetime Plan*	Convene government ministries to discuss issues, including child labor. (2)
National Council for Intergenerational Equity (CNII)	Coordinate interagency efforts to protect vulnerable populations, including children. (2)
Local Autonomous Governments	Participate in coordinating mechanisms to combat child labor and implement the guidelines provided by CNII. (2) Mayors, who are held accountable to ensure that children do not work, can be fined if children are found working. (44)
Inter-Agency Table for the Eradication of Child Labor (<i>Mesa Interinstitucional de Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil</i>)	Coordinate regional efforts to address child labor. (45) Participants include MIES; regional councils of Childhood and Adolescence; Ministries of Education, Labor, and Interior; Ministry of Social Development (MCDS); DINAPEN; and the Attorney General's Office. (45)

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

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Weak coordination between ministries providing social services has caused difficulties in ensuring that children rescued from working in the informal sector receive adequate social assistance. (3) In 2017, the government used SURTI to collect data on child labor and better identify, assist, and monitor children in child labor; however, the government does not publish this information. (6) The ILO and MOL report that SURTI has assisted in efforts to improve coordination to address child labor. (6) However, research was unable to determine the extent of SURTI's success in improving coordination.

In 2017, Ecuador and Peru signed the Tumbes Declaration to jointly address trafficking in persons and better serve trafficking victims, including children. (18; 23) The Ministry of Tourism exchanged best practices with regional tourism ministries to prevent child sex tourism and human trafficking and trained hotel owners and employees of 120 hotels on identifying, responding to, and reporting suspected cases of child sex tourism and human trafficking. (18) The Ministry of Tourism also coordinated activities to prevent child sex tourism and trafficking in persons with ECU911 (Ecuador's national emergency phone line), the ministries of foreign affairs and labor, and local governments. (18)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Plan to Eradicate Child Labor (2015–2017)	Establish strategy to eradicate child labor in Ecuador by 2017. (2) The Plan, approved in 2016, is being implemented. (46)
Lifetime Plan (<i>Plan Toda Una Vida</i>) (2017–2021)†	Aims to support vulnerable populations from birth to advanced age through a series of social welfare programs. Aims to reduce child labor of children between ages 5 and 14 to 2.7 percent by 2021. (6; 47) Launched on November 28, 2017. (6) Led by the Technical Secretariat for the Lifetime Plan. (48)
National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, Sexual and Labor Exploitation, and Other Forms of Exploitation	Establish processes to prevent, investigate, and impose legal sanctions against human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse. Enacted by decree in 2006 to protect and restore the rights of victims. (17; 49; 50) In 2017, the government failed to approve the revised version of this plan and instead continued to operate under an older version. (22)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of efforts to address the worst forms of child labor.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor ‡

Program	Description
Project to Eradicate Child Labor (PETI) (2014–2017)	MOL project under the National Plan for Good Living to prevent hazardous child labor in agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and mining. (46; 9) In 2017, the MOL held an interagency event in recognition of the International Day Against Child Labor. (43) As of 2017, this program has educated almost 10,000 people about child labor in the provinces of Los Rios and Bolivar. (43)
Business Network for a Child Labor Free Ecuador	UN initiative, works to gain commitment from participating industries to promote the prevention and elimination of child labor in their supply chains, trains businesses on child labor prevention, and creates employment opportunities for the parents of children engaged in child labor. (51; 52) In 2017, the MOL held an event to promote the network in Cuenca among 20 local businesses. So far, 38 companies are members of the network, which raised child labor awareness by training 14,000 participants. (53)
National Program to Combat Child Begging†	Raises awareness about child begging; aims to facilitate social services for children begging in the streets. (54; 55) In 2017, raised awareness through the Give Dignity campaign. (43)
USDOL-funded initiatives	Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues (GAP), a \$15.9 million project implemented by the Global March to End Child Labor. (56) Building Effective Policies Against Child Labor in Ecuador and Panama (2012–2016), a \$4.3 million project implemented by the ILO in collaboration with Casa Esperanza, Comunidades y Desarrollo en Ecuador (COMUNIDEC), and Fundación Esquel. (57; 58) EducaFuturo Project (2012–2017), an \$8.1 million project implemented by Partners of the Americas, in collaboration with Expoflores, COMUNIDEC, and Fundación de las Americas. Additional information is available on the USDOL website.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor ‡ (cont)

Program	Description
Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents	Ministry of Tourism program that seeks to prevent commercial sexual exploitation by creating regulations and awareness campaigns in the tourism sector. (59) In 2017, trained staff from 120 hotels exchanged best practices in preventing child sex tourism and trafficking, and coordinated child sex tourism and trafficking prevention activities with ECU911, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Labor, and local governments. (6)
Eloy Alfaro Workers' Symphonic Orchestra (<i>Orquesta Sinfónica de los Trabajadores Eloy Alfaro</i>)†	Orchestra that performs to raise awareness of child labor. (3) Established by MOL in 2016, comprises more than 200 former child laborers from Quito and Cuenca who take daily music lessons funded by MOL. (3) In 2017, played at the International Day Against Child Labor. (43)
Grants for Human Development	Conditional cash transfer program run by MIES that supplements household income for vulnerable families. (60; 56) In December 2017, the government increased the benefit for heads of household to \$150 per month, depending on the number of children in the family. (43)
Mission Tenderness (<i>Misión Ternura</i>)†*	Seeks to promote the development of children under age 5 by combating malnutrition, increasing the number of children participating in early childhood education programs, and increasing participation of children from poor and vulnerable families in public childhood development programs. (6)
Less Poverty, More Development (<i>Menos Pobreza, Más Desarrollo</i>)†*	Aims to reduce extreme poverty from 8 percent to 3.5 percent by 2021, in part, through a conditional cash transfer for families living below the poverty line. (61; 6) In December 2017, the government increased the benefit from \$50 to \$150 for heads of household, depending on the number of children in the family. (6; 61)
Youth Impulse (<i>Impulso Joven</i>)†*	Seeks to increase job training and higher education opportunities for at-risk youth, support youth entrepreneurship through preferential loans, and connect employers with at-risk youth. (6)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Ecuador.

‡ The government has other social programs which may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (3; 7; 62; 63; 64)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Ecuador (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Publish the number of labor inspections conducted, child labor violations found, penalties imposed and collected for child labor violations, as well as the number of criminal violations found.	2014 – 2017
	Ensure that laws and regulations governing child labor, and especially hazardous labor, are enforced consistently throughout the country, including in rural areas and family-run businesses.	2016 – 2017
	Increase the number of labor inspectors in accordance with the ILO technical advice.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that inspectors receive sufficient resources, such as transportation, to adequately carry out their duties.	2014 – 2017
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient knowledge of existing laws, penalties, and processes to conduct inspections and refer victims to social services.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that police investigators receive sufficient resources to investigate cases of the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2017
Coordination	Strengthen coordinating mechanisms between ministries providing social services to victims of child labor, especially in the informal sector, and the mechanism for receiving, routing, and addressing child labor complaints.	2015 – 2017
Policies	Update the National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Labor Exploitation, and Other Forms of Exploitation.	2017
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education, particularly secondary education, accessible for all children, including indigenous and refugee children and children from rural areas, by removing school-related fees, increasing classroom space, and providing adequate transportation.	2014 – 2017

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