

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT REGRESSION IN LAW THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2019, the Kyrgyz Republic made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed a policy package that established a National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking, and drafted a new National Action Plan for 2020–2024 on the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, the Kyrgyz Republic is receiving an assessment of minimal advancement because it implemented a regression in law that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor. As of January 1, 2019, the government instituted a moratorium on unannounced labor inspections. Inspections can only be conducted in response to a formal complaint, and must be approved and announced by the Ministry of Economy before a site visit can occur. Children in the Kyrgyz Republic engage in 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. Protections to children granted in the Labor Code, such as the minimum age of employment, are not extended to children engaged in non-contractual employment, and research indicates that the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety employed an insufficient number of labor inspectors. In addition, the scope of social programs to combat child labor was insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in the Kyrgyz Republic engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-4) Children also engage in child labor in agriculture. (5-9) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	34.0 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	38.4
Primary Completion Rate (%)		104.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (10)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (11)

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	Cultivating cotton, tobacco,† rice, potatoes, sugar beets, and wheat (3,5-9,12-18)
	Raising and herding cattle (3,8,17)
Industry	Coal mining† (3,9,12,13,19,20)
	Brick making (3,12,13,17)
	Construction, including lifting and portering construction materials, and cutting metal sheets for roofs (3,13,17,20,21)
Services	Working in bazaars and markets, including loading and unloading goods, portering, collecting plastic bottles and garbage, and selling items, including food and newspapers (2,5,7,9,15,16,19,22,23)
	Washing cars (7,17)
	Working in restaurants and cafes, including serving food and washing dishes (5,12,17,24)
	Street work, including begging and shoe shining (1,12,14,15)
	Domestic work, including child care (1,2,6,9,14)

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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†	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4,17)
	Use in illicit activities, including trafficking drugs, as a result of human trafficking (4)

† 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.

Child labor, including hazardous child labor, is most prevalent in the *oblasts* (provinces) of Naryn and Osh. (20) Children from the Kyrgyz Republic who travel to Kazakhstan to work, either with their parents or unaccompanied, cannot attend school due to a lack of documentation. These children engage in child labor in Kazakhstan in construction, farming, herding, or selling products in the markets; some fall victim to forced child labor. (25) Within the Kyrgyz Republic, children of labor migrants have been identified in child labor in markets. (26)

The inability to enroll in school makes children from a variety of circumstances vulnerable to child labor. (3,22,27) According to UNICEF, an estimated 650,000–750,000 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic work abroad, and an additional 1 million are internal migrants. (27) Some children, who are left behind when their parents migrate to work in other countries or other areas of the Kyrgyz Republic, cannot access their birth certificates or guardianship documents, which are required for school enrollment. (5,12,27) Children with disabilities, children living and working on the street, and children living in rural areas also have difficulty accessing education. (3,17) According to Kyrgyz law and the Ministry of Education and Science, residence registration is not required for children to attend school; however, research reports that some schools require residence registration, known as *propiska*, for school enrollment. (2,3,6,28)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The Kyrgyz Republic 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 has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in the Kyrgyz Republic’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 18 of the Labor Code (29)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 294 of the Labor Code; Article 15 of the Code on Children (29,30)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 294 of the Labor Code; Decree 314; Annex I of Decree 548 (29,31,32)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 10 of the Labor Code; Article 15.2 of the Code on Children; Article 1 of the Law on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking; Article 173 of the Criminal Code (29,30,33,34)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 1 of the Law on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking; Article 171 of the Criminal Code (33,34)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 166–168 of the Criminal Code; Articles 5 and 15 of the Code on Children (30,33)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 180–181 and 267–268 of the Criminal Code; Articles 5 and 15 of the Code on Children (30,33)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 24.1 of the Law on Military Service (35)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Articles 17.1 and 22.1 of the Law on Military Service; Article 392 of the Criminal Code (33,35)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 392 and 395 of the Criminal Code (33)
Compulsory Education Age	No	15‡	Article 16 of the Law on Education (28)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 16 of the Law on Education (28)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (28)

In 2019, the Criminal Code was amended to remove the requirement that force, fraud, or coercion be established for the crime of child trafficking. This change has also been included in the Code of Criminal Procedures, which guides implementation of criminal justice laws. (33,36)

According to Article 6 of the Labor Code, protections to children granted in the labor code, such as the minimum age for employment, are not extended to children engaged in non-contractual employment. (29)

Article 166 of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic criminalizes involving a minor into prostitution through violence, threats, or coercion; Article 167 of the Criminal Code criminalizes pimping, including of children under age 16; and Article 171 of the Criminal Code criminalizes child trafficking, including for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, no law clearly criminalizes the users (clients) of prostitution involving children. (33)

Children in the Kyrgyz Republic are required to attend school only until grade nine, which is typically when they reach age 14 or 15. (5,6,28) This standard makes children ages 14 and 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to be in school, but they also are not yet legally permitted to work.

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, the absence of unannounced inspections conducted at the national level in the Kyrgyz Republic may impede the enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety	Monitors work sites and refers child laborers to social services. Coordinates with the Inspectorate for Minors' Affairs in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor General's Office, and regional State District Administration authorities to enforce child labor laws. (17,19)
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA)	Enforces criminal laws related to child labor, including its worst forms. Conducts independent inspections and joint raids with the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety to identify violations, which can be referred to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecutorial action. (17)
Prosecutor General's Office	Enforces and applies labor-related laws, including labor inspections and investigations of child labor violations, in coordination with the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety. (19)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)

Organization/Agency	Role
Oblast Administration	Enforces child labor laws at the <i>oblast</i> (province) level. (19)
Ministry of Labor and Social Development	Serves as the key government agency for children’s issues. Protects children and families in difficult living situations, including child laborers. (19) Coordinates with <i>oblast</i> -level authorities to investigate violations of child labor laws. (19)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, lack of authorization to conduct unannounced inspections in the Kyrgyz Republic may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (37)	Unknown (17)
Number of Labor Inspectors	30 (37)	30 (17)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (22)	Yes (17)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	Yes (17)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (19)	Yes (17)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	799† (37)	504‡ (17)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown	229‡ (17)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (37)	96‡ (17)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (37)	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (37)	Yes (17)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown	No (17)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (38,39)	No (17)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (37)	No (17)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (22)	Yes (17)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (40)	Yes (17)

† Data are from January 1, 2018 to September 30, 2018.

‡ Data are from January 1, 2019 to September 30, 2019.

As of January 1, 2019, a 2-year moratorium on unannounced labor inspections came into effect. (41-43) Under this moratorium, inspections are only triggered in response to a formal complaint lodged to the State Inspectorate. Also, before a site visit can be conducted, the Ministry of Economy must approve the inspection and provide notice to the public that an inspection is planned. (17) The Prime Minister described the moratorium as a measure “to improve the business environment.” (44) Between January and September 2019, the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety conducted 504 inspections according to this procedure. (17) The Inspectorate reported no child labor violations found as a result of these inspections. (17) Labor inspectors also participated in 64 MOIA-led investigative raids, through which the Inspectorate identified 229 children working in hazardous child labor, primarily in agriculture. Six of these children were under age 14 and 223 were aged 14-18. (17,45)

In 2019, the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety employed 30 labor inspectors. (17) The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of the Kyrgyz Republic’s workforce, which includes more than 2.8 million workers. (46) According to the ILO’s technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 20,000 workers in transitioning economies, the Kyrgyz Republic would employ about 142 labor inspectors. (22,47,48) The State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety acknowledged that the number of labor inspectors was inadequate to ensure appropriate enforcement of child labor laws. (22) Reports also suggest that limited staffing may hamper the Inspectorate’s ability to monitor places with a high incidence of child labor, such as markets and bazaars. (45) The government considers the level of funding for labor inspection activities

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to be classified information. However, inspectorate representatives noted that funding may be insufficient to adequately enforce child labor laws. (17) The ILO also expressed concern that the inspectorate lacked sufficient funding to carry out inspections. (19) During the reporting period, labor inspectors received training on new labor code provisions, and one inspector received training on trafficking in persons. (17)

While the Code on Children formally provides for a child labor complaint mechanism, reports indicate that a lack of institutional capacity among labor inspectors and social workers may hinder adequate implementation of this mechanism. (17,30)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in the Kyrgyz Republic took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (19)	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	Yes (36)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (49)	Unknown
Number of Investigations	70† (49)	64‡ (17)
Number of Violations Found	36† (49)	29‡ (45)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	7 (49)	3 (17,36)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (19)	0 (17)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (19)	Yes (17)

† Data are from January 1 to September 30, 2018.

‡ Data are from January 1, 2019 to September 30, 2019.

In 2019, and in partnership with UNODC, 12 instructors from the Supreme Court’s Higher School of Justice received training on trafficking in persons. (50) The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) conducted seven trainings on human trafficking for its staff, including one training for State Customs Service officials. In partnership with UNODC, MOIA also developed a compendium of standard operating procedures on investigating and detecting crimes related to trafficking in persons. (36)

Between January and September 2019, MOIA conducted 64 investigative raids to detect child labor, which were carried out in cooperation with labor inspectors from the State Ecological and Technical Inspectorate. (17) These raids detected 494 working minors, 29 of whom were identified working in the worst forms of child labor. (45) Authorities identified one forced labor case involving two child victims. Although this forced labor case was referred for prosecution, prosecutorial action was suspended following pre-trial proceedings due to the absence of the victims’ statements. (17) An official from MOIA separately reported six cases involving children that the government officially investigated as trafficking in persons crimes in 2019. However, it is unclear if any of these investigations overlap with raids that MOIA conducted to detect child labor. (51) In addition, criminal investigators referred two cases for prosecution involving the use of a child in the production of pornography. (36) Research was unable to determine the status or outcome, if any, of ongoing child labor cases for which prosecution was initiated in 2018 and may have continued during the reporting period.

Reports suggest that Kyrgyz police officers exploit trafficking victims, including some younger than age 18. Concerns persist about police misconduct, including allegations that police threaten and extort sex trafficking victims, including minors, and reports indicate that police accept bribes from alleged traffickers to drop cases. (4)

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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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Children's Affairs Commission	Assesses the needs of children in difficult situations, including child laborers; creates individual development plans; and monitors service delivery. Members include social workers from regional Departments of Child Protection of the Ministry of Labor and Social Development and law enforcement authorities. (19) In 2019, the Commission continued to operate according to the Regulations on the Procedure for the Identification of Children and Families in Difficult Situations. (26,40,52)
Coordination Council for Social Protection and Children's Rights	Develops policies to eliminate child labor. (53) Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, members include representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Development and three other ministries. (54,55) Met quarterly in 2019. (17)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force	Parliamentary group that coordinates and oversees work to combat trafficking in persons. In 2019, met to discuss and approve an Action Plan for 2019–2020 to guide its work, and convened offsite meetings in Batken, Osh, and Naryn <i>oblasts</i> to meet with victims of forced labor. (36)
Regional Trafficking in Persons Coordination Councils	Coordinate local implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons in all seven regional or <i>oblast</i> -level governments and the city of Osh. In 2019, all councils participated in institutional development workshops in partnership with UNODC. (57)

Reports indicate that the Children's Affairs Commission lacks adequate procedures to conduct needs assessments for traumatized children, such as those who have been subjected to commercial sexual exploitation or other worst forms of child labor, hindering its ability to effectively accomplish its mandate. (26,52)

In 2019, the government designated the State Migration Service as the lead agency for coordinating efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons. (36,58)

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 mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant policies.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Regulations on the Procedure for the Identification of Children and Families in Difficult Situations	Establishes the process for identifying children in difficult living situations, including those engaged in the worst forms of child labor. Receives complaints, conducts outreach activities, devises individual action plans, removes children from the worst forms of child labor, and provides financial and educational services. (40) The Children's Affairs Commission continued to implement this policy in 2019. (26,40,52)
National Referral Mechanism†	Establishes formal policies on (1) identification of victims of human trafficking; (2) referrals for and provision of social services to victims; and (3) protection of victims' personal data. (51,61) In 2019, this policy was integrated into UNODC workshops to develop Regional Trafficking in Persons Coordination Councils. (51,57)
National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2017–2020)	Improves the legal framework on human trafficking; improves dissemination of information on human trafficking risks for migrants and vulnerable populations; raises awareness about protections for victims and criminal penalties for perpetrators; and improves coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and international partners. (62,63) In 2019, the State Migration Service convened the interagency monitoring group responsible for implementing the National Action Plan every 6 months and discussed establishing a mechanism for local- and national-level government entities to coordinate efforts to combat trafficking in persons. (36)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2019, the government drafted a new National Action Plan (NAP) for 2020–2024 on the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor. This draft NAP is currently awaiting approval by relevant government ministries and departments. (17)

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The government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the National Education Strategy and Roadmap. (64)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, 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 programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Cash Transfer Program†	Government-funded cash transfer program for families living in difficult situations, including families with children engaged in child labor. (53) In 2019, cash assistance from the Ministry of Labor and Social Development continued to be available to such families. However, based on available information, the amount of assistance appears to be low, and some families face barriers to accessing these benefits. (69,70)
Ministry of Education and Science National School Attendance Database†	Government-funded program implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science to pilot a national electronic database to track children who do not attend school. Following development and use throughout the country, database information is intended to be shared with the Ministry of Labor and Social Development to assist children engaged in child labor. (6) The database is meant to provide information to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on cases of criminal violations of child labor laws. In addition, school social workers could use the database to work with families, ensuring that children attend school. (6) In July 2019, the Ministry of Education announced a tender for the development of a mobile app for tracking student enrollment and attendance, which has been rolled out in pilot communities. (45,71)
Support of Family and Protection of Children (2018–2028)†	Government-funded program that includes limited activities to address child labor, including revising Decree 314, the hazardous work list for children. Responsible for organizing competitive bids for projects, including one that will result in four new social services centers by 2020 for families and children in difficult living situations. (72) Provides local administrations with income-generating ideas for families in difficult living situations. (72) Research did not find information about the implementation of this program in 2019.

† Program is funded by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (73,74)

Although the Kyrgyz Republic has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, particularly in commercial sexual exploitation as a result of human trafficking and in agriculture, including cultivating cotton.

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 the Kyrgyz Republic (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law's minimum age provisions and hazardous work prohibitions apply to all children, including those working without an employment contract.	2014 – 2019
	Criminally prohibit and penalize the use of a child for prostitution.	2019
	Ensure that the age up to which education is compulsory is the same as the minimum age for work.	2014 – 2019
Enforcement	Lift the moratorium on unannounced labor inspections and ensure that the labor inspectorate conducts routine, targeted, and unannounced labor inspections.	2018 – 2019
	Publish complete information about the State Inspectorate's efforts to enforce prohibitions on child labor, including information on the Inspectorate's funding; the number of labor inspections conducted at worksites; and the number of penalties collected.	2011 – 2019
	Strengthen the labor inspection system by providing child labor training for new labor inspectors and criminal investigators.	2014 – 2019
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice and ensure that inspectors have adequate resources to conduct inspections.	2012 – 2019

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Ensure that the State Inspectorate on Ecological and Technical Safety and relevant social services providers have the capacity to adequately implement the child labor complaint mechanism.	2019
	Publish complete information about criminal enforcement of prohibitions on the worst forms of child labor, including the penalties imposed.	2019
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies investigate and prosecute violations related to the worst forms of child labor, including cases of possible police complicity in abusing victims.	2015 – 2019
Coordination	Ensure that the procedures for needs assessment of the Children's Affairs Commission are appropriate for traumatized children, including children who were engaged in the worst forms of child labor.	2019
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into relevant policies, such as the National Education Strategy and Roadmap.	2015 – 2019
Social Programs	Ensure that all children have access to free education, including children with disabilities, those living and working on the street, those lacking residence registration, and those without birth certificates and guardianship documents.	2009 – 2019
	Implement all social programs, including the Support of Family and Protection of Children program.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that social programs, such as the Cash Transfer Program, provide sufficient benefits to reduce vulnerability to child labor and are accessible to families.	2019
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, particularly in commercial sexual exploitation as a result of human trafficking and in agriculture, including cultivating cotton.	2014 – 2019

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