

In 2020, Uzbekistan made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government took active measures to prevent the use of child labor in the cotton harvest, including by eliminating the harvest quotas that were historically a root cause of child and forced labor in Uzbekistan. The government also cooperated with civil society activists to detect labor exploitation in the annual cotton harvest, created an action plan to implement international recommendations on eliminating the worst forms of child labor, and expanded efforts to raise awareness during the cotton cultivation season about child and forced labor prohibitions. In addition, lawmakers adopted a new law on trafficking in persons that strengthened protection for human trafficking victims, including child trafficking victims. However, children in Uzbekistan are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. Although the government made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas, laws prohibiting the commercial sexual exploitation of children do not meet international standards. Uzbekistan also has not carried out a national child labor survey to determine the prevalence of child labor in sectors other than cotton production.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Uzbekistan are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. (1-3) Uzbekistan has not carried out a national child labor survey to determine the prevalence of child labor in sectors other than cotton production. (3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Uzbekistan.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	4.3 (244,095)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	84.1
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	5.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		105.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (4)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3 (MICS 3), 2006. (5)

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	Harvesting silk cocoons; preparing land for crop planting (6,7)
Services	Street work, including vending, car washing, and begging (7-10)
	Collecting scrap metal (6,8)
	Public works, including refurbishing school grounds and facilities (3,6,11,12)
	Vending in markets (7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,3,8)
	Forced labor in harvesting silk cocoons (1,6,13)
	Forced labor in construction, non-cotton agriculture, and cleaning parks, streets, and buildings (1,6)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Traffickers exploit Uzbek children in sex trafficking transnationally in the Middle East, Eurasia, and Asia. (1) Children are also vulnerable to internal trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (1,12)

Uzbekistan

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

ILO monitors reported that prohibitions on child labor were generally upheld during the 2020 cotton harvest. Farmers increased due diligence measures for preventing child labor, including by informing cotton pickers about laws and regulations prohibiting child labor in the harvest and verifying pickers' ages prior to transporting them to fields. (14) However, ILO and civil society harvest monitors also noted an uptick in the number of children, primarily ages 15 to 17, participating in the 2020 cotton harvest compared to harvests in 2018 and 2019. In interviews with ILO and civil society monitors, some pickers reported bringing teenage children to work in the fields to increase household income. (14,15) In such cases, monitors provided pickers with additional information on child labor prohibitions and the hazards cotton picking poses to the health and well-being of children. (14) Monitors also assessed that school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic and pandemic-related economic stresses within families may have increased children's vulnerability to child labor in the 2020 cotton harvest. (14,15)

Children in Uzbekistan sometimes participate in public works projects, including refurbishing school grounds and facilities. (3,6) Limited evidence suggests that in isolated cases, school officials may compel students to assist in harvesting silk cocoons, sometimes characterizing the work as traditional communal labor (*khashar*). (6,13) Although there is free public education in Uzbekistan, schools may charge informal fees, which can make education inaccessible to children from low-income families. (3,10, 27)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	18	Articles 15, 77 and 242 of the Labour Code; Article 49 of the Administrative Code (16,18,19)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 241 and 245 of the Labour Code; Article 49-1 of the Administrative Code (18,19)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		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 (20,21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 37 of the Constitution; Article 7 of the Labour Code; Article 51 of the Administrative Code; Articles 135 and 148(2) of the Criminal Code (18,19,22,23)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on Combatting Human Trafficking; Article 135 of the Criminal Code (23,24)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 128(1), 130–131, and 135 of the Criminal Code (23)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 10 of the Law on Guarantees of the Rights of the Child; Articles 127 of the Criminal Code; Article 188-1 of the Administrative Code (17,19,23)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 24 of the Law on Universal Military Service (25)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Articles 4 and 46 of the Law on Universal Military Service (25)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 216(1) and 242 of the Criminal Code; Article 3 of the Law on Civil Organizations (23,26)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	18‡	Articles 4 and 9 of the Law on Education (27)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 4 of the Law on Education; Article 41 of the Constitution (22,27)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (27)

During the reporting period, the government adopted a new law on trafficking in persons aiming to enhance access to government services and strengthen protections for victims of human trafficking, including child victims. (12,24) The government also drafted and began Parliamentary review of a comprehensive Labor Code reform package. (28) In addition, in early 2021, parliament adopted a package of amendments to the Criminal Code that included criminal penalties for the use of children ages 16 to 17 in commercial sex. This package of amendments also established criminal penalties in the first instance for forced labor violations involving minors. (29)

Articles 131 and 135 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan criminalize pimping, procuring, involving, or inducing children into prostitution, and criminalize the actions of those who profit from prostitution involving children. (23) In addition, Criminal Code Article 128(1) criminalizes the use of children ages 16 to 18 in prostitution. However, no law criminalizes the users (clients) of prostitution involving children under age 16. (23) Moreover, although Uzbekistan's laws prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of children for both the production and trafficking of drugs, the legal framework prohibiting these crimes lacks clarity as penalties are only addressed in the Administrative Code, not the Criminal Code. (19,23)

The law does not determine the activities or conditions in which children who have not yet completed their compulsory schooling may engage in light work, although the Labor Code establishes caps on the maximum number of work hours permitted for children ages 15 to 17. (18,27)

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 enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Uzbekistan

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MOELR)	Conducts labor inspections, including inspections for compliance with child labor laws. (10) Leads the National Sub-Commission on Combating Forced Labor. (30,31)
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA)	Investigates crimes related to child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, which may then be prosecuted by the Prosecutor General's Office. (10) Leads the National Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons. (30,31) Maintains a database on 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. (12)
Prosecutor General's Office	Prosecutes criminal violations involving the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (10) Also provides oversight of some MOIA efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor. (12)
Youth Union	Monitors school attendance to ensure that students do not miss class during the cotton harvest. (9) Participates in monitoring efforts organized by the Federation of Trade Unions (FTUU) to monitor violations of labor laws during the annual cotton harvest. (32,33)
Women's Committee of Uzbekistan	Participates in monitoring efforts organized by FTUU to monitor violations of labor laws during the annual cotton harvest. (32,33)
Human Trafficking Hotlines	Receive reports of incidents of human trafficking and refer reports to the relevant agencies. The MOIA-led National Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons administers one hotline, and an NGO maintains a second foreign donor-funded hotline. (1)
Feedback Mechanisms	Receive complaints on the violation of workers' rights and labor laws. MOELR can receive 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. (15,34-37) Labor inspectors are required to investigate all complaints submitted to MOELR within 7 days. In 2020, as in 2019, ILO observers were given real-time access to this feedback mechanism during the cotton harvest season to monitor the efficacy of the government's response. (14,34,35,38) FTUU also operates its own independent feedback mechanism, accessible online or over the phone, and a legal clinic that assists workers in remediating issues. The ILO reported that in 2020, the FTUU legal clinic also referred cases to MOELR for investigation of labor law violations. (14,38,39)

In 2020, the feedback mechanism hotline operated by the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) received 180 complaints related to the cotton harvest. (40) Of these 180 complaints, 30 concerned recruitment for the cotton harvest, 102 concerned late payment of wages for cotton picking, 34 concerned poor working conditions in the harvest, 5 concerned issues with labor contracts for pickers, and 9 concerned financial collections at workplaces to pay for cotton pickers. All 180 complaints were referred to the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MOELR) for investigation; of these, 118 labor law violations were identified and remedied through corrective action. (40)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan took actions to combat child labor. (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of MOELR 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	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$300,000 (11)	\$142,000 (12)
Number of Labor Inspectors	400 (3)	344 (12)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (12,41)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (3)	Yes (10,12)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (3)	Yes (10,42)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (10,12)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	5,392 (11)	5,154 (12)
Number Conducted at Worksite	5,392 (11)	5,154 (12)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	21 (11)	2 (12)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	21 (11)	2 (12)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	21 (11)	2 (12)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (10)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (41)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (32)	Yes (10)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3,43)	Yes (10,35)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (10)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Uzbekistan's workforce, which includes more than 17.8 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 20,000 workers in transitioning economies, Uzbekistan would employ about 890 inspectors. (44,45) In 2020, labor inspectors, farmers, and cotton cluster operators attended a series of training seminars on fair recruitment laws and practices. (37,42) A total of 80 labor inspectors also received routine recertification training, which every inspector is required to complete at least once every 3 years. Although funding for the Labor Inspectorate decreased in 2020 compared to 2019, the government noted that 2019 funding levels had included one-time appropriations for purchasing new equipment, which were not included in the 2020 budget. (12) The government also noted that, in addition to labor inspectors employed by MOELR, the FTUU employs 33 labor monitors, who can refer potential violations to the Labor Inspectorate for investigation and imposition of penalties as appropriate. (12)

During the reporting period, the government enhanced penalties for violations of labor laws. Maximum fines for forced labor violations in the first offense increased significantly, from \$60–70 in 2019 to nearly \$2,000 in 2020. (35) MOELR identified two child labor cases, one in Bukhara and the other in Samarkand. Both cases were referred through social media and involved children working on refurbishing school facilities and grounds. (12) Labor inspectors assessed and collected penalties totaling \$2,200 (22,300,000 UZS) for these two violations. (12) MOELR also identified 105 total forced labor cases in 2020, 46 of which were related to mobilization of workers for the annual cotton harvest and 59 of which were related to unfair recruitment into other work. (14,40) During the cotton harvest, 42 offenders, including district *hokims* (local leaders), heads of institutions, directors, and farmers were penalized under Administrative Code Article 51 for forced labor violations. (14) Five *hokims* from districts in Namangan, Tashkent, and Khoresm regions were formally reprimanded by the Cabinet of Ministers for forced labor offenses in their districts and officially warned that they would be dismissed without further notice for any subsequent forced labor offenses. (14,42) MOELR referred six forced labor cases to the courts for criminal action, although the current status of these cases is unknown. (12,46)

Labor inspectors are empowered to conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in public-sector enterprises and, with permission from the Business Ombudsman, are authorized to conduct limited inspections at private-sector businesses. However, reports indicate that in practice, inspectors may be reticent to enter private businesses or homes and typically only do so in response to complaints. (3, 10–12, 35, 47, 48) In addition, a temporary moratorium on planned inspections at state enterprises was put in place for part of the reporting period due to the pandemic. However, inspectors still carried out monitoring visits to state enterprises during the cotton harvest season to enforce prohibitions on forced and child labor. (35) The legislature established working groups comprising senators, Legislative Chamber deputies, journalists, and bloggers that conducted labor monitoring visits at farms, cotton clusters (vertically-integrated cotton production enterprises), neighborhood associations (*mahallas*), private enterprises, and public organizations. MOELR also established six working groups comprising labor inspectors that conducted rapid-response investigations of forced labor complaints during the harvest. (40) All of these working groups visited, in total, 95 cotton clusters, 3,221 farms, 1,572 neighborhood associations, and 796 private and public enterprises and organizations. (40) The Labor Inspectorate further reported that it reviewed 26,788 complaints in 2020 across all sectors, conducted 5,154 total inspections for compliance with laws governing working conditions, and identified 6,314 violations requiring remediation. (12)

Uzbekistan

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

The government increased cooperation with independent civil society monitors to detect and respond to suspected labor violations in the cotton harvest. Civil society monitors participated in regular information exchanges with MOELR and received special badges from the government that granted them unimpeded access to visit cotton fields and other entities involved in the harvest, despite pandemic-related internal travel restrictions. (14,35) Independent observers reported that labor inspectors consistently investigated potential labor violations referred to them by civil society activists, and investigated reports of potential violations were publicized in the press and on social media. (10,15,49) Labor inspectors responded to 790 forced labor complaints between January and October 2020, of which 461 were received through MOELR's feedback hotline, 113 through social networks (including Telegram messenger), 201 in writing, and 15 through MOELR's website. (10,12,35,37,40) Civil society activists reportedly submitted 26 complaints, 6 of which resulted in imposition of fines for official complicity in forced labor. (10)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including investigation planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (3)	Yes (12)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (3)	Yes (10)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	2 (2,11)	12 (12)
Number of Violations Found	4 (12)	13 (12)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	3 (12)	8 (12)
Number of Convictions	3 (12)	6 (12)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (2)	Yes (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (10)

In 2020, law enforcement investigated 12 criminal cases involving 13 suspects under suspicion of procuring children for commercial sexual exploitation. Because of these investigations, 13 children were recognized as victims of crimes related to human trafficking and referred to rehabilitation centers for services. (12) Eight cases involving 10 suspects were referred for prosecution under Criminal Code Article 135, trafficking in persons. One case culminated in an acquittal for two defendants and the other seven cases resulted in conviction of eight perpetrators. (12) Of these, four perpetrators were sentenced to prison terms, three were sentenced to restriction of liberty, and one received a suspended sentence. (12) In one of these cases, investigators and prosecutors cooperated with lawyers from Istiqbolli Avlod, a local anti-trafficking NGO, to gather evidence and present it in court. The perpetrator was sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment. (50) Sources reported that this case was the first human trafficking conviction in which Istiqbolli Avlod's lawyers were able to participate directly in court proceedings. (50)

Limited reports suggest that MOIA investigations into potential cases involving the worst forms of child labor may not be thorough enough to detect violations or gather sufficient evidence to move forward with prosecution. (35,50) The Prosecutor General's Office began a review of human trafficking cases that were closed due to lack of evidence to determine whether any should be reinitiated. However, information on how many of these cases involved child victims was not available. (10,50) In addition, the new law on combating human trafficking adopted during the reporting period established procedures to improve the referral mechanism by which authorities refer child victims of trafficking to social services. (10,24)

Although criminal liability for repeat forced labor offenses was introduced in early 2020 under Criminal Code Article 148(2), monitoring reports on the 2020 cotton harvest noted enforcement challenges that may have

hampered the government's ability to initiate criminal prosecutions for forced labor offenses. (14,23) Officials can only be held criminally liable under Art. 148(2) for complicity in forced labor if they commit repeated offenses within the same 12-month period. In addition, criminal enforcement agencies faced difficulties collecting sufficient evidence to prosecute complicit officials. (14) The ILO reported on two instances in which issues related to witness testimony and admissibility of documentary evidence limited government efforts to pursue prosecution of forced labor cases. (14)

During the reporting period, 184 MOIA staff members received training on Uzbekistan's new law on trafficking in persons. (12) Judges from the Supreme Court and from the Higher School of Judges received training from UNODC on interpreting and applying Criminal Code Article 135, which defines and establishes penalties for human trafficking crimes, including those involving children. (51) Investigators, judges, and prosecutors also received training from the ILO on child labor and forced labor. In addition, the NGO Istiqbolli Avlod continued to work with criminal enforcement agencies to provide human trafficking training to investigators. (10)

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 with civil society organizations.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor (National Commission)	Coordinates state and local entities' efforts to combat sex trafficking and forced labor; analyzes and monitors efficacy of government programs to address sex trafficking and forced labor; organizes international cooperation on combating sex trafficking and forced labor; and provides legal and policy recommendations for improvement of government efforts in these areas. (30,31) Chaired by the National Rapporteur on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. (30) Comprises the two sub-commissions on combating sex trafficking and forced labor, respectively. The Minister of Internal Affairs heads the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Minister of Labor heads the Sub-Commission on Combating Forced Labor. (3,30,31) In 2020, National Commission member agencies provided monthly reports on progress to implement work plans approved in 2019. (52)
National Rapporteur on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor (National Rapporteur)	Chairs the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. Reports annually to the President on sex trafficking and forced labor issues, government efforts to punish perpetrators, and services for victims of sex trafficking and forced labor crimes. (30,31) Conducts public awareness-raising activities related to sex trafficking and forced labor. (31) In 2020, the National Rapporteur regularly convened the National Commission to report on the implementation of prohibitions on child labor and forced labor. (10,42) The National Rapporteur's office also prepared and published a report for the President on efforts undertaken in 2020 to combat forced labor and sex trafficking. (52)
Local Commissions for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labor (Local Commissions)	Ensure timely and rigorous implementation of all laws and regulations, including those issued by the National Commission, related to sex trafficking and forced labor. (12,53) Local Commissions are chaired by the regional <i>hokim</i> (governor) and provide monthly reports to the National Commission. (38,53) In 2020, Local Commissions met twice monthly and provided an end-of-year report to the National Commission on alleged forced labor cases that had occurred in their regions. (42,46) Members of Local Commissions also received training from ILO on effectively carrying out mandates related to combating forced labor and sex trafficking. (40)

During the reporting period, the National Sub-Commission on Combating Forced Labor drafted an Action Plan based on international recommendations to eliminate the worst forms of child labor; the National Rapporteur formally approved this Action Plan in November 2020. (54) The National Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons prepared addenda to Uzbekistan's draft National Referral Mechanism (NRM) regarding trauma-informed and child-friendly approaches to addressing human trafficking crimes. However, these addenda cannot be adopted or implemented until the full draft NRM package is adopted. (35) International organizations reported that the Sub-Commission's lack of a designated secretariat hampered communication with external stakeholders, which delayed action on activities to counter human trafficking. (35)

Although there were no reports of reprisals against individuals for monitoring labor conditions during the 2020 autumn harvest season, a group of activists reported that they were arrested by police while monitoring

Uzbekistan

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

labor conditions in one region's cotton fields during the spring weeding season; one activist reported that he was beaten after being detained. The activists were subsequently placed under police supervision for 14 days of self-quarantine, allegedly for potential COVID-19 exposure from a police officer. (55) In 2020, the government continued to engage in dialogue with civil society stakeholders on child and forced labor issues. (14,56) In March, the Ministry of Justice registered a local independent human rights NGO, the first to receive official status since 2003. (57) However, there were also continued reports that many human rights NGOs, including those working on forced and child labor issues, were repeatedly denied official registration, sometimes for failing to meet requirements that had not been publicly specified. (15,58,59)

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 of privatization policies in the cotton sector.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Memorandum of Understanding Between the ILO and the Republic of Uzbekistan (2014–2020)	Established terms of agreement between ILO and the government on cooperation to implement the Decent Work Country Program in Uzbekistan. (60) In 2020, the Government of Uzbekistan and ILO continued to work together under this agreement. (33)
Plan of Immediate Measures in the Area of Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor ("Roadmap") (2019–2020)	Established a plan for updating legislation on sex trafficking and forced labor, building government capacity to combat sex trafficking and forced labor, enhancing transparency of conditions in the annual cotton harvest, raising awareness on sex trafficking and forced labor issues, and reforming the agriculture and textile industries. (61) In 2020, the National Commission passed legal reforms related to human trafficking that were envisioned under this roadmap, and continued to monitor the cotton harvest for labor violations. (35)
Action Plan on Implementing International Recommendations to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor†	Establishes a work plan to address international recommendations to advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Uzbekistan. Aims to improve labor and criminal law enforcement, coordination, policies, and social programs related to the worst forms of child labor. (62)
Policies for Seasonal Cotton Harvest Workers	Establishes the minimum wages for cotton pickers and sets other guidelines with the goal of attracting voluntary labor to the annual harvest. In 2020, MOELR increased the minimum wage for cotton pickers compared to 2019 rates, and required local recruiters to work under civil law contracts. (33,36,63)
Strategy for the Development of Agriculture in the Republic of Uzbekistan (2020–2030)	Calls for a reduction of the state's involvement in agriculture and enhances farmers' autonomy over what crops to grow. Under the Strategy's priority action to end state intervention in agriculture, the President abolished state quotas for cotton and wheat production in 2020. (64,65)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2020, President Mirziyoyev formally abolished the practice of imposing state quotas for cotton production. (65-67) Under this quota system in previous harvests, local and regional officials were held responsible for mobilizing adequate labor to harvest a centrally determined amount of cotton, which observers reported was a root cause of forced labor and increased the risk of child labor. (68,69)

However, independent monitors reported that in some parts of the country, local governments established and carried out regional cotton harvest plans that reproduced quotas on a local level. (14,67) Reports also continued during the 2020 harvest that some cotton "clusters" (vertically-integrated private business partnerships along the cotton value chain from farm to finished products) may reproduce quota pressures through contractual practices. (14,67,70) The government grants clusters exclusive territorial concessions to operate in individual districts, making the cluster the only potential buyer for cotton farmers in that district. (70-72) Although new regulations adopted in 2020 allow farmers to form independent cooperatives, they may only do so in districts without an existing, operational cluster. (36) Allegations persisted in 2020 that some clusters engage in coercive business practices against farmers, including failing to pay for delivered crops or purchasing cotton at a lower price than initially promised. However, such issues appear to be localized to specific districts and clusters. (73,74) Some clusters maintain close ties to local administrators, and there were reports that in the

2020 growing season, some farmers were asked to sign contracts in the presence of local *hokimiyats* (local government administrations), which then kept the contracts on behalf of the cluster. (14) In some cases, contracts included production targets for farmers that were recommended by the *hokimiyat* and included land confiscation penalties if farmers failed to deliver the contracted amount of cotton. These practices mimicked the pressures on farmers and officials that historically created high risks for labor exploitation under the national quota system. (14,70) Government of Uzbekistan officials acknowledged that the abolishment of production quotas has been implemented unevenly at the local level, including in the context of cluster contracts. (35)

Some clusters are investing in mechanical harvesting equipment and methods, which reduce the need for manual labor during the harvest. Clusters have also taken a varied approach to recruiting seasonal laborers, with some clusters investing in implementation of fair recruitment practices. (14,15,43,72) ILO and civil society monitors found that in some districts, the adoption of these practices resulted in a significant decrease in labor exploitation. Monitors confirmed that, for the first time since monitoring began, a few of the country's cotton-producing districts had zero cases of forced labor in the 2020 harvest. (14,15)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, 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
Efforts to Prevent Child and Forced Labor in the Cotton Harvest†	Includes initiatives to raise awareness about the prohibition of child and forced labor in the cotton harvest. (43,75) Starting in May 2020, the government distributed thousands of informational materials to employers and neighborhood organizations (<i>mahalla</i> committees) about prohibitions on child labor and forced labor. During the cotton harvest season, the government also broadcast public service announcements on television about child and forced labor prohibitions and pickers' rights to decent work in the harvest. (12,40,42) ILO monitors reported an increase in cotton pickers' awareness of their labor rights and relevant labor laws in 2020 compared to prior years. (14)
National Rehabilitation Center†	MOELR-operated shelter that provides human trafficking victims with emergency medical and social services and assists in social rehabilitation. (3,8,75) This center provided assistance to 92 victims in 2020, including 12 children (9 boys and 3 girls). (12,40)
Population Employment Facilitation Centers†	Local centers run by MOELR to connect the unemployed with job opportunities, including paid public work and seasonal agricultural work. Matches job seekers with labor needs in the cotton harvest to reduce the risk of forced labor. (3,34,76) The government increased employment opportunities in public works projects in 2020 as part of its pandemic response efforts. (35,77) MOELR also created a dedicated website to recruit job seekers interested in working in the annual cotton harvest. (33)
Support for the Implementation of the Decent Work Country Program in Uzbekistan (2014–2020)	\$6 million USDOL-funded project awarded to ILO to enhance the capacity of the government and workers' and employers' representatives to prevent and reduce child and forced labor and promote decent work in Uzbekistan. (78) During the reporting period, the project developed and conducted fair recruitment trainings for labor inspectors, government officials, farmers, brigade leaders, cotton cluster representatives, and other cotton-sector stakeholders. (33) Additional information is available on the USDOL website .

† Program is funded by the Government of Uzbekistan.

In 2020, the government amended birth registration procedures to ensure all children are registered, including those born to undocumented parents. Citizenship eligibility was also extended to nearly 50,000 residents of Uzbekistan who had been rendered stateless by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. (46) The Ministry of Finance also worked with UNICEF to draft a new regulatory framework for social protection benefits, which is currently under review by other government bodies. (12) In addition, the government significantly increased funding for social services for human trafficking victims, including child victims. These expenditures included funding for anti-trafficking NGOs, shelters for trafficking victims, and legal assistance for trafficking victims. (52)

Although there are programs to address child labor in the cotton sector, research did not find evidence of programs designed to address child labor in other sectors, such as public works and street work.

Uzbekistan

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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 Uzbekistan (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Criminally prohibit and penalize the use of a child for prostitution.	2015 – 2020
	Update the Criminal Code so that it penalizes the use, procuring, and offering of children for both the production and trafficking of drugs.	2020
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions specify the activities and conditions in which children who have not yet completed their compulsory schooling may work.	2020
Enforcement	Continue to increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2015 – 2020
	Ensure that labor inspectors conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in all sectors, including at private enterprises, even if no complaint has been filed.	2018 – 2020
	Thoroughly investigate all potential criminal cases involving the worst forms of child labor and, when sufficient evidence exists, refer violations for criminal prosecution.	2020
	Remove the requirement that prosecution may only result if multiple forced labor violations occur within a 12 month period by allowing a single offense to be prosecuted or by expanding the 12-month period to encompass a longer period of time.	2020
Coordination	Designate standard mechanisms for communication between external stakeholders and national coordinating bodies to facilitate coordination of efforts to combat forced labor and sex trafficking.	2020
	Ensure that local NGOs monitoring child labor, forced labor, and other labor rights issues are able to register, and sanction officials who harass, intimidate, or abuse labor rights activists.	2017 – 2020
Government Policies	Ensure that local officials do not establish or enforce contractually mandated cotton production targets.	2020
	Monitor implementation of the new cluster system to ensure farmers are not coerced to enter into contracts with certain clusters or produce cotton under terms that create high risk for exploitative labor.	2019 – 2020
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that schools do not charge informal fees to students or their families.	2019 – 2020
	Expand programs to address the worst forms of child labor in sectors other than cotton harvesting.	2009 – 2020

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Uzbekistan

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