

In 2021, Djibouti made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor began discussions with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Families about the creation of a formal mechanism to refer children found in child labor to appropriate social services. In addition, the labor inspectorate targeted inspections in the restaurant and construction sectors, in which child labor is believed to be more prevalent. However, children in Djibouti are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in street work. Minimum age provisions apply only to children with a formal employment contract, which does not comply with international standards. In addition, the government did not make adequate efforts to enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor due to lack of financial and human resource allocations and reporting mechanisms. Finally, the government did not publish data on labor law or criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Djibouti are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in street work. (1,2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Djibouti.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	12.3 (23,693)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	10.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		64.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3 (MICS 3), 2006. (4)

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	Caring for livestock, including goats (5)
Industry	Construction (2)
Services	Domestic work† (2,6)
	Street work, including vending, shining shoes, washing cars, and begging (2,7,8)
	Working in restaurants, small shops, and family businesses (2,6)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1)
	Forced domestic work and begging (1,9,10)
	Use in illicit activities, including the selling of marijuana (5)

† 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.

Reports suggest that children, including undocumented migrant girls, are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation in Djibouti City and along the Ethiopia-Djibouti trucking corridor. (1,11) Djibouti is also host to the largest number of foreign military installations in the world, including thousands of military personnel and

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security contractors. This foreign military presence heightens the risks of commercial sexual exploitation of girls. (12) Djibouti is a common transit country for mixed-migration flows from Ethiopia, Yemen, the East Africa region, and the Arabian Peninsula, and children from these regions are vulnerable to exploitation. (2,8)

Djibouti's primary school enrollment rate increased from 75 percent to 92 percent between 2009 and 2019. (13) However, enrollment rates are lower for girls and for all children living in rural or impoverished areas, making these children more vulnerable to child labor. (14) Although primary and middle schools are tuition free, other school-related expenses may prevent children from attending school. (15,16) Documentation and birth registration is sometimes a barrier to accessing education. Children must have a birth certificate or UNHCR refugee documentation to attend school, and thus undocumented migrant children and asylum seekers waiting for status determination are often unable to access education. (2) Despite the passage in 2017 of a National Refugee Law, which guarantees education as a fundamental right to refugees and asylum seekers lawfully residing in Djibouti, over 40 percent of refugees ages 6 to 16 were not enrolled in school. (17-19) Children in rural areas, where access to documentation is limited, also face obstacles to obtaining birth certificates. (6)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Djibouti 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 Djibouti'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	No	16	Article 5 of the Labor Code (20)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 108 and 110 of the Labor Code (20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 110 of the Labor Code (20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2 and 290 of the Labor Code; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (20,21)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 5–7 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (21,22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 394, 396, 462, and 463 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 5–8 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants (22,23)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 355, 356, and 461 of the Penal Code (23)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article I of the National Army Amendment Decree (24)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 149–151 and 461 of the Penal Code (23)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 4 and 14 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (25)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 16 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (25)

* Country has no conscription (26)

The Labor Code's minimum age provision applies only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement, which does not conform to international standards requiring the protection of all children under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (20,23,27) Djibouti's hazardous work provision is also incomplete. Although the Labor Code prohibits the employment of children between the ages of 16 and 18 in domestic work, hotels, and bars, Article 111 calls for the creation of a more complete hazardous work list, which has not been adopted. (20,23,27) Furthermore, laws do not specifically criminalize the use of a child for prostitution. (22,23)

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.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforces all labor laws, including child labor laws and regulations. (9) Through its General Inspectorate of Labor and Social Laws, regulates youth employment. (6)
Djibouti National Police, including the Brigade for Minors	Enforce criminal laws and investigate crimes related to child labor. (9)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes child labor cases referred by MOL. (9)
National Commission on Human Rights	Receives complaints and investigates cases of human rights violations, including child labor. (28) Assists victims in obtaining legal aid to prosecute violators. (28)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	\$112,994 (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	2 (8)	5 (2)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (20)	Yes (20)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (8)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (8)	Yes (2)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	30 (8)	6 (2)
Number Conducted at Worksite	5 (8)	6 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	2 (8)	14 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (8)	0 (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (8)	0 (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (8)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (20)	Yes (20)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (8)	No (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (8)	No (2)

Starting in 2021, the labor inspectorate dedicated one of its five inspectors to child labor inspections. (2) During the reporting period, inspections targeted the construction and restaurant industries, in which children often work. (2)

The labor inspectorate has only one vehicle, which limits inspectors' ability to conduct inspections outside of the city of Djibouti. (2) In 2021, the labor inspectorate conducted only 6 inspections. The exceptionally low number of worksite inspections conducted in Djibouti may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws. (2) The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Djibouti's workforce, which includes approximately 250,000 workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Djibouti would need to employ roughly 6 inspectors. (29,30) While the law includes a mechanism to impose monetary civil penalties, in practice, the labor inspectorate currently issues warning letters outlining how to remedy the situation in order to avoid a penalty. (2) While there is no formal mechanism to refer children found during labor inspections to appropriate social services, the MOL has initiated discussions to create one with the Ministry of Women and Families and the Ministry of Education. (2)

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to address child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (8)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (2)

The government did not provide information on its criminal law enforcement efforts regarding training for investigators, the number of investigations, the number of violations found, the number of prosecutions initiated, the number of convictions, or the number of penalties imposed for inclusion in this report. (2) NGOs communicate human trafficking indicators to the police, who refer these cases to the prosecutor's office. (5,27,31) The NGO Caritas International implements separate memoranda of understanding with the Ministry of Women and Families and the National Commission of Human Rights. (8,31)

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 efforts to address all forms of child labor outside the scope of human trafficking.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Anti-Trafficking Working Group	Coordinates efforts to address human trafficking through the development of a collaboration and outreach strategy focusing on the operationalization of the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015–2022). The interagency working group is led by the Ministry of Justice and includes representatives from the MOL and the Ministry of the Interior. (32,33) During the reporting year, the Anti-Trafficking Working Group did not hold regular meetings. (2)
National Council for Children	Coordinates, implements, and monitors child protection policies and programs. Guides and defines government policy on child protection, including efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (34) Led by the Prime Minister and includes eight other agencies, representatives from NGOs, the private sector, and elected officials. (35) Advocates for (1) newborn refugees and migrants to receive birth certificates; (2) education under governmental programs for refugees and asylum seekers; and (3) family reunification for unaccompanied migrant minors. (5) Research was unable to determine the activities of this body during the reporting year. (2)
Ministry of Women and Families	Creates child protection policies and coordinates their implementation. The ministry also develops and implements programs to address all forms of violence against children. (6,8) Through its National Policy for Children in Djibouti, focuses on the survival, development, protection, and participation of children. (6,31) The working group includes representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the National Police/Gendarmerie, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the National Women's Union, the infant orphanage Daryel, and the National Agency for the Disabled, all of which coordinate efforts on the care of children at risk and child survivors of violence. (8) Research was unable to determine the activities of the Ministry of Women and Families during the reporting year. (2)

While various bodies coordinate efforts to address child protection and trafficking in persons, there is no active coordinating body dedicated to preventing and eliminating other forms of child labor.

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 lack of policy to address child labor in its worst forms.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015–2022)	Aims to strengthen the legislative framework to address and prevent human trafficking, protect and assist human trafficking survivors, and establish a national referral mechanism between law enforcement officials and social services providers. (36) During the reporting period, the government appointed a single focal point for the implementation of this plan, and it convened an interministerial meeting to discuss trafficking in persons. (37)
Government of Djibouti Policies	Includes the National Policy for Children in Djibouti (2018–2022), which sets out fundamental rights for children, including access to basic social services and mobilizes national resources toward these ends. (38) The National Strategic Action Plan for Children in Djibouti, which was renewed in 2017, provides political and strategic guidelines for implementing the country's child protection policy. (39) The National Social Protection Strategy (2018–2022) seeks to broaden social protections for vulnerable children and youth. (38) During the reporting year, as part of the National Policy for Children, the government continued to work to expand school enrollment. (2)
National Strategy for Migration†	Promotes aid and livelihoods for migrants in Djibouti. Raises awareness for the rights and humanitarian needs of migrants. Facilitates coordination between humanitarian partners and the government through the National Coordination Office for Migration. Launched during the reporting year with the assistance of the IOM. (40)
UNDAF (2018–2022)	Focuses primarily on programs that build capacity for survivor recognition and protection and assists the government in the development of its "Vision 2035" plan, which is aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The government has launched or expanded several new policies and programs under this framework, including a revised Social Protection Strategy. (38,41) This policy continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (37)

While the government of Djibouti had policies to address trafficking and other forms of child welfare, research found no evidence of a policy to address child labor, including its worst forms. (2)

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VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to 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
Ministry of Women and Families Programs†	Includes the Social Assistance Program (2016–present), which provides children and their families in vulnerable communities with education and in-kind support. (38) Similarly, the Support Project for Girls and Women in Precarious Situations (2017–present) is a multisectoral program aimed at reducing girls' economic and social vulnerability through education and training. (38) The Country Strategic Option Program (2019–2024) is a rural poverty-reduction program established under Djibouti's revised Social Protection Strategy. (38,42) Djibouti's Support Program for Children with Academic Difficulties, established in 2017, aims to provide academic support for children from low-income families. (38) The Ministry of Women and the Families continued to implement these programs during the reporting year. (2)
Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework	Government commitment, under the UNHCR, to provide refugees with access to education, healthcare, employment, and income generation. (8) The government and its partners continued to implement and expand this program during the reporting period. (37)
UNICEF Country Program, (2018–2022)	Aims to ensure children's rights and welfare by reducing child mortality, improving access to basic education, and reducing children's vulnerabilities by providing access to social protection services. Operates coordination with the Government of Djibouti, the WFP, the Global Partnership for Education, the WHO, and other partners. (43) Includes efforts to ensure access to education for refugee children, improve birth registration, and address child trafficking. (43) During the reporting year, UNICEF supported COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts, provided treatment for 3,250 children under the age of 5 suffering from malnutrition, furnished school supplies to children, including refugees, and provided services to 500 street children. (44)
World Bank-Funded Programs	The Integrated Cash Transfer and Human Capital Project (2019–2022) seeks to expand the social safety net system and provide basic services in targeted poor communities, primarily through conditional cash transfers. (6,45–47) The Expanding Opportunities for Learning Project (2019–2024), a \$28 million project, supports Djibouti's efforts to expand access to quality education for 35,000 at-risk or underserved children, including girls, refugees, and disabled students. The Government of Djibouti and the International Development Association (IDA) agreed to co-finance the program, which aims to expand access to and improve retention in primary and lower secondary education for disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups. (48,49) The project also plans to build the capacity of teachers and administrators in underserved areas. (18,48,50) Both programs continued during the reporting period. (47,51)
WFP Djibouti Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024)	Supports the government's priorities for achieving food and nutrition security through stronger partnerships to strengthen national capacity in school feeding, nutrition, social protection, emergency preparedness, agricultural production support for rural and urban women and men equitably, vocational training for peace and prosperity, and supply chain management. (8,52) During the reporting period, provided in-kind and cash benefits to 108,399 people to mitigate vulnerability and undernourishment, and provided specialized food assistance to 5,645 children under the age of 5 to address malnutrition and stunting. (52)

† Program is funded by the Government of Djibouti.

‡ The government had other programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (26,53)

During the reporting year, the Government of Djibouti, in line with the 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, continued working to implement its commitment to integrate child refugees into its national education system. (2,18,19,54,55) Furthermore, the government created a favorable environment for NGOs to operate programs for children, such as faith-based programs furthering the inclusion of children with disabilities in primary and secondary school. (37) Nevertheless, research found no evidence of programs to assist children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation. (2)

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 Djibouti (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that all children are afforded minimum age for work protections under the law, including children working outside formal employment relationships.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of children in prostitution.	2012 – 2021
	Ensure that the list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children is comprehensive.	2009 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that all regions are targeted for labor inspections and that the labor inspectorate has the necessary equipment for regional inspection coverage.	2017 – 2021
	Establish a mechanism for the Ministry of Labor to receive child labor complaints.	2010 – 2021
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2021
	Ensure the government conducts an adequate number of labor inspections.	2021
	Establish a reciprocal referral mechanism between the labor inspectorate and social services to protect and rehabilitate children involved in child labor.	2021
	Ensure that civil penalties for child labor violations are imposed and collected.	2021
	Publish complete criminal law enforcement data, including the number of investigations conducted, violations found, penalties imposed and collected, prosecutions initiated, and convictions obtained.	2021
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement officials receive sufficient initial training and refresher courses on the worst forms of child labor.	2021
Coordination	Ensure all coordinating bodies are active and able to carry out their intended mandates.	2009 – 2021
	Establish a coordinating body dedicated to preventing and eliminating all forms of child labor.	2009 – 2021
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor during the reporting period and that data on these activities are published.	2017 – 2021
	Adopt a national policy to address all forms of child labor, including its worst forms.	2016 – 2021
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children in rural areas, including girls, by removing school-related expenses.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that all children, including refugees, asylum seekers, and children in rural areas, have access to education by removing requirements for national birth certificates or UNHCR refugee documentation to attend school.	2019 – 2021
	Implement programs to specifically address children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2021

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