

In 2021, Serbia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed a number of guidelines to facilitate improved coordination between social services providers and labor authorities. The Labor Inspectorate also received an increased budget, which allowed inspectors to conduct more inspections than in previous years. However, children in Serbia are still subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. Serbia's laws do not treat forced child beggars as victims of child labor, and the country's social welfare centers are overburdened, which limits efforts to provide services to victims of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Serbia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. (4,5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Serbia. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	18.8 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	97.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	20.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		97.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (7)

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	Farming, activities unknown (4)
	Forestry, activities unknown (8)
	Fishing, activities unknown (8)
Industry	Manufacturing, activities unknown (9,10)
	Construction, activities unknown (10,11)
Services	Street work, including washing cars, collecting scrap material, vending, and begging (1,4,9,12)
	Wholesale and retail trade (8,9,11,12)
	Working in food service, information and communication, and transportation and storage (4,9,10)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,5,9,11,13)
	Forced begging (4,5,14,15)
	Use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,11)
	Domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (16,17)
	Use in illicit activities, including in petty crime (5,9,13,18)

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

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Children from Serbia, particularly those from Roma communities, are victims of domestic human trafficking and the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation. (9,13,18,19) Girls, Roma children, and children from low-income families in rural communities are most vulnerable to child labor, including human trafficking. (1,20)

Undocumented migrants are at a significantly higher risk of human trafficking for the purposes of labor or sexual exploitation. (19) Asylum seekers and grantees are allowed to access free primary and secondary education in Serbia. (1,21) In addition, Serbia has social programs to assist migrant children with access to education. (21-23)




Some Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptian children in Serbia experience challenges in obtaining birth registration, which may make school enrollment difficult and increase their vulnerability to child labor. (9,14,24-29) The government has a program to increase the attendance of Roma children in preschool, and the law allows children to enroll in school without identity documents. However, uneven application of this policy, economic hardship, ethnic discrimination, language barriers, disabilities, and placement in non-mainstream schools sometimes discourage Roma children, especially girls, from attending school. (14,17,24,26,27,30,31) Roma children are also more likely to begin school at a later age and drop out of school more frequently than their non-Roma peers. (9,25)

Constitutional and legal protections prohibit discrimination in the education system against individuals with disabilities. (14,32,33) However, some individuals with disabilities, especially Roma children, face difficulties in accessing education due to a lack of clear, specified legal regulations and some lingering social prejudices. (24,28,29,34)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Serbia 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).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Article 24 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution (32,35)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 25 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution (32,35)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 25, 84, 87, and 88 of the Labor Law; Regulation on Hazardous Labor of Children (35,36)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 390 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution (32,37)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 388 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution (32,37)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 112 and 183–185 of the Criminal Code (37)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 388 of the Criminal Code (37)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 39 of the Law on the Army (38)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 4 of the Law on Military, Labor, and Material Obligation (39)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 4 of the Law on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (40)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 71 of the Constitution; Articles 94 and 98 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (32,41)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 71 of the Constitution; Article 91 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (32,41)

* Country has no conscription (39)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (32,40)

During the reporting period, government ministries reviewed a hazardous child labor list created with the assistance of the ILO for potential passage in 2022. (14) Serbia's law does not treat child beggars as victims, but rather as perpetrators and offenders. (4,42) In addition, Serbian law does not criminally prohibit use of a child in illicit activities except when it results from human trafficking. (37) Serbia's law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as the use of children in prostitution is not explicitly prohibited. Additionally, the Serbian Criminal Code's provisions concerning pimping, procuring and mediation in prostitution only refer to "minors," defined as "a person over fourteen years of age but who has not attained eighteen years of age." (37)

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, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs (MOLEVSA)	Through the Labor Inspectorate, inspects businesses, including unregistered businesses. Per mandate established by the Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor, receives and investigates child labor complaints and informs Centers for Social Work of child labor violations. (14) Has internal sub-units that focus on the protection of children with disabilities and children working on the street. (4) Through the Center for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection (CPTV), identifies victims of child trafficking and those at risk, conducts needs assessments, contributes to human trafficking research projects, and refers victims to social services. (17) CPTV is divided into two parts: the Agency for Coordination of Protection of Trafficking Victims and the Urgent Reception Center. (13,16,24) In addition, CPTV works with state institutions, international organizations, and NGOs on human trafficking prevention and protection efforts and activities. (24)
Ministry of the Interior (MOI)	Oversees the General Police Directorate and enforces laws prohibiting commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through the Criminal Police Department. (18) Informs the Centers for Social Work of any child labor violations found. (4,16)
Republic Public Prosecutor's Office	Leads investigations on human trafficking cases and exchanges information through a network of 27 local prosecutors and NGOs. Provides financial support to CPTV. (14)
Parliamentary Committee on Children	Reviews draft legislation and monitors the implementation of laws pertinent to children's rights. (14)
Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights, Office of the Protector of Citizens	Monitors and conducts research on the situation regarding children's rights in Serbia. Produces reports on child begging, promotes inclusive education and legal prohibition of corporal punishment, and manages draft laws on children's rights for parliamentary approval. (4,14)

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Social Welfare Centers (SWCs) provide social services, track the number of street children, and receive reports of labor violations from the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs (MOLEVSA) and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). According to MOLEVSA, the SWCs are significantly overburdened. (14,43)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Serbia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of MOLEVSA that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient labor inspector training.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$3,910,898 (17)	\$4,242,720 (14)
Number of Labor Inspectors	217 (17)	206 (14)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (35)	Yes (35)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (43)	No (14)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (17)	N/A (14)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (17)	Yes (14)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	62,475 (17)	63,670 (14)
Number Conducted at Worksite	62,427 (43)	63,670 (14)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	20 (17)	18 (14)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	10 (17)	16 (14)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (17)	Yes (14)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (43)	Yes (14)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (35)	Yes (35)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (17)	Yes (14)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (17)	Yes (14)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (17)	Yes (14)

Labor inspectors are responsible for inspecting registered and unregistered businesses, including businesses in the agricultural sector. (14) The Labor Inspectorate uses a work plan for inspections that is drafted at the beginning of each year and targets high-risk sectors in which child labor is known to occur, such as agriculture and construction. (14,44) In addition, the Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor requires labor inspectors to use a checklist to identify child labor during inspections and mandates that police and labor inspectors inform SWCs in cases of child labor. The Inspectorate also maintains a hotline number to allow observers to report illegal work activities and other labor irregularities that could impact health and safety at worksites. (14,45) Inspectorate leadership indicated that they had plans to hire new inspectors in an effort to replace a number of retiring staff, though low salaries and a lack of interested pre-retirement age applicants have hindered these plans. (14)

In June 2021, new government guidance entitled "Instruction on Conduct of Social Protection Institutions and Organizations in Providing Social Protection Services to Protect Children from Child Labor" was passed. In addition, in September, the government approved the Instruction on Conduct of the Labor Inspection in the Protection of Children from Child Labor. (14)

The Labor Inspectorate has designated experts on child labor at each of its branches to provide training to other inspectors. (17) However, new labor inspectors do not receive formal training but are trained instead on-the-job by working alongside seasoned inspectors. According to the ILO, this informal training may be inadequate without also including formal training. (4)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Serbia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient financial resource allocation.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (17)	No (14)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (17)	N/A (14)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (17)	No (14)
Number of Investigations	27 (43)	21 (46)
Number of Violations Found	22 (43)	7 (46)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	33 (43)	7 (46)
Number of Convictions	22 (43)	1 (46)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (43)	Yes (46)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (17)	Yes (14)

Training on identifying human trafficking is provided as a part of the general police curriculum given to law enforcement officials who process immigration cases. (47) Continuous training on identifying human trafficking is also provided to one public prosecutor in each of the 25 Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices. However, sources indicated that some agencies responsible for investigation of human trafficking cases lack funding. (4)

Criminal law enforcement authorities continue to adhere to the 2017 Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor, which authorizes police and labor inspectors to inform the SWCs regarding any cases of child labor discovered during inspections. The SWCs, the primary providers of social services to human trafficking victims, also assist authorities with child trafficking cases. (17)

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 a lack of efficacy in allocation of human and financial resources.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Council for Children's Rights	Coordinates government efforts to address child labor by monitoring and evaluating government activities, and includes representatives from international organizations and government ministries, such as MOLEVSA. (17) During the reporting period, the Council was active and held a number of meetings. (14)
National Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Anti-Trafficking Council)	Sets government policies on human trafficking; chaired by MOI. Drafts updated annual standard operating procedures for CPTV. (4) The National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons acts as the Secretary of the Council and manages the work of the implementation team. (17) In April 2021, the President of the Anti-Trafficking Council (the Minister of the Interior) formed a working group to draft a new annual National Action Plan under the 2017–2027 Strategy for Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings. In addition, the President of the Council adopted a Decision on forming a working group to improve proactive detection of human trafficking cases, encourage effective prosecution strategies, and create an environment that supports the legal protection of victims of human trafficking. (14)
Refugee Protection Working Group	Serves as the main mechanism for coordinating non-food related services to refugees, including children, and shares information on protection of refugees. Co-chaired by UNHCR and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, with the participation of NGOs, local governments, and international organizations. (14) During the reporting period, the Working Group met on a monthly basis. (14)

The position of National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons continues to experience constraints on time and financial resources. (24,43)

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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 Roma policies.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Roadmap for Eliminating Abuse of Child Labor in Serbia (2018–2022)	Creates a roadmap for eliminating the worst forms of child labor. Focuses on the prevention and elimination of child abuse, support for children working on the streets and vulnerable families, the creation of a system within SWCs to monitor and record risks of child labor, and continuous development for professional workers. (48) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
Action Plan for Protection of Children from Violence (2018–2022)	Prevents violence against children and extends support to children who have been victims of violence. (49,50) Part of the Roadmap for Eliminating Abuse of Child Labor in Serbia. Includes enhanced interventions for the protection of children from violence, including the usage of organizational mechanisms to ensure compliance with national law in ensuring children's safety. (49) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
Strategy for Preventing and Suppressing Human Trafficking and Action Plan (2017–2022)	Creates a legislative framework, budget, benchmarks, and strategic areas in need of improvement to address human trafficking. (11,51) In September 2021, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development collaborated with the Council of Europe to revise the list of indicators utilized to identify children who are potential victims of human trafficking. (14)
Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Institutions and Organizations Working with Children Involved in Life and Work on the Streets of Belgrade	Aims to enhance institutional cooperation among MOI, the Criminal Police Directorate, the Communal Police, city SWCs, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Education, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Health, and civil society organizations. (52) Defines street children, worst forms of child labor, child work, and child trafficking. (17,52) Stipulates lead institutions, rules, and procedures for interacting with street children. The first round of training on the Protocol was funded by Save the Children. (17) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2016–2025)	Seeks to include representatives from Roma communities in policy implementation and aims to improve access to education for the Roma population in Serbia, including access to preschool. (53) During the reporting period, representatives of the National Assembly of Serbia, the National Council of the Roma National Minority, civil society organizations, and international bodies attended a technical meeting that covered topics such as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Roma community and how to address poverty, gender inequality, and discrimination. (54)

During the reporting period, the government worked with the UN to draft a new Development Partnership Framework. (14) In addition, the government worked with the ILO to establish a new Instruction on Conduct of Social Protection Institutions and Organizations in Providing Social Protection Services to Protect Children from Child Labor. These guidelines will be utilized by entities that work in the realm of social protection and will include indicators of potential child labor issues. (14) Child labor elimination and prevention strategies should be further integrated into the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2016–2025). (12)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Access to Education Programs†	World Bank, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development project that aims to improve access to early childhood education for socially disadvantaged children. (55) Research was unable to determine whether this program was active during the reporting period.
Assistance to Roma Children in Education	World Bank, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development project that aims to improve access to early childhood education for socially disadvantaged children. (55) In June 2021, the Government of Serbia collaborated with the European Commission to host a six-session technical meeting on the social inclusion of the Roma community. The sessions focused on Roma education and employment, in addition to housing, healthcare, and social welfare policies. (54)
Belgrade Children's Shelter†	Social welfare institution funded by the City of Belgrade; opened in 2019. (4) Caters to vulnerable children ages 7 to 18. Provides accommodation services and daytime shelter services to meet the needs of young people and street children, who are subsequently referred to competent social work centers and judicial authorities. (4) The shelter was operational during the reporting period. (56)

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

Program	Description
Strengthening the Identification and Protection of Victims of Trafficking†	IOM, CPTV, and MOI project that contributes to the implementation of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy by improving mechanisms for the prevention and identification of victims of human trafficking. (25) MOI, MOLEVSA, and the Public Prosecution Office signed a Memorandum on Cooperation in the Field of Suppression of Human Trafficking and the Rights Protection of Human Trafficking Victims. The Memorandum defines mutual rights in the identification of human trafficking, assistance and protection of victims, and statistical reporting. (9,13,57) During the reporting period, CPTV continued to provide victims of human trafficking with guidance and counseling during legal proceedings. In addition, MOI formed three working groups to draft the 2021–2022 Action Plan for the Strategy for Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings 2017–2027, to monitor and implement the Action Plan, and to encourage proactive human trafficking investigations. (15)
Measurement, Awareness-Raising, and Policy Engagement (MAPI6) Project on Child Labor and Forced Labor	USDOL-funded global project implemented by ILO to conduct research and develop new survey methodologies, improve awareness, strengthen policies and government capacity, and promote partnerships to address child labor and forced labor. (17,58) In Serbia, the project aims to build the capacity of the government and other stakeholders to address child labor in part by providing support for the country's first National Child Labor Survey. (58) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.

† Program is funded by the Government of Serbia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (9,13,59)

The Government of Serbia has implemented other programs on child labor and inclusive education, including the Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care program, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology; and the World Bank. In addition, the national Child Allowance Program increased the monthly payment amount of cash benefits available for families with at-risk children ages 7 or older. (14,60,61)

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 Serbia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law does not treat child beggars as criminals.	2017 – 2021
	Finalize and adopt the hazardous child labor list.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2021
	Ensure that the use of children for prostitution is criminally prohibited.	2021
Enforcement	Ensure that staff members at Social Welfare Centers have sufficient resources, such as personnel and funding, to address the specific needs of child trafficking victims.	2015 – 2021
	Train new labor inspectors on child labor and provide training on new laws related to child labor to all labor inspectors.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that criminal investigators and agencies addressing human trafficking have the necessary funding and training to conduct thorough investigations.	2010 – 2021
	Publish data pertaining to labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of child labor penalties imposed that were collected and whether routine inspections were targeted.	2021
Coordination	Ensure that the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons has a level of financial support that facilitates efforts to eliminate child labor.	2015 – 2021
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion.	2017 – 2021
	Publish information on key policies undertaken to combat child labor.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the 2018–2022 Roadmap for Eliminating Abuse of Child Labor in Serbia.	2021
Social Programs	Address barriers to education, including access to birth registration documentation; increase access to education for children with disabilities; and increase access and retention rates for minority populations, particularly migrant and Roma children.	2013 – 2021
	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor, including those in farming and construction.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that the Access to Education Programs initiative is active.	2021

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MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

- [illegible]