

In 2021, Tunisia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In July 2021, the Tunisian parliament passed the Domestic Workers Bill, prohibiting the employment of children in domestic work. In April 2021, the Second Chance program, which reintegrates school dropouts ages 12 to 18 back into the educational system or provides them with vocational training, opened a new location. Additionally, in November 2021, a new emergency shelter for children in Tunis was created, along with five other shelters across the country dedicated to the needs of children. However, children in Tunisia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work and begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in scavenging through garbage and in street work. Government officials have noted that the budget for staffing and logistics, such as fuel and transportation, is inadequate to carry out inspections, especially in remote areas of the country. In addition, the government was unable to provide complete data on its enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report, due to records management challenges and delays in the digitization of court records.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Tunisia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work and begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in scavenging for garbage and in street work. (I-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Tunisia.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	3.0 (50,364)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.2
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	2.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		106.5

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 4 (MICS 4), 2011–2012. (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 (1,3,8-12)
	Fishing, activities unknown (3)
	Animal husbandry, activities unknown (3)
	Forestry, activities unknown (3)
Industry	Construction, activities unknown (3,4,11,12)
	Manufacturing and industrial work (3,12)
Services	Domestic work† (1,3,4,9,12,13)
	Street work, including scavenging garbage† (1,3,10,12-15)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,8,14,16-21)
	Use in illicit activities, including stealing, smuggling, and drug trafficking (4,8,11-16,19,20)
	Forced labor in domestic work and begging (3-5,8,10,12,14,22,23)

† 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.

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Claims of exploitation of children—including sexual exploitation—have substantially increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. (12) In 2021, reporting indicates there was an uptick in the number of children being forced by criminal organizations to beg. (12)

Refugees and migrants who lack legal documentation, including child migrants, from sub-Saharan African countries and those fleeing unrest in neighboring countries are vulnerable to labor exploitation because refugees and migrants do not have the status to legally work in Tunisia. (24)




A 2017 National Child Labor Survey indicated that 7.9 percent of all children are engaged in child labor, 63.2 percent of whom are involved in hazardous work. The northwest region—consisting of the Governorates of Béja, Jendouba, Kef, and Siliana—registered the highest incidence of child labor at 27.7 percent. (3) Figures from the survey indicate that, of children ages 5 to 17 who work, 48.8 percent are engaged in agriculture and fishing, 20.2 percent in commerce, 10.9 percent in manufacturing, 6.4 percent in domestic work, and 4.7 percent in construction. (3,4) Young girls from Tunisia’s northwest and other interior regions are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. (5,14,21,23)

Students face barriers to education, especially in rural areas, due to inadequate transportation and household poverty. (1,4,8,10,12,25) Middle and high school completion rates in poor and rural communities remain significantly lower than in wealthy and urban areas. (26)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

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

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

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 53 of the Labor Code (27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 58 of the Labor Code (27)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Ministry of Social Affairs Order of April 1, 2020 (28)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 105, 171, 224, and 250 of the Penal Code; Articles 2.1, 2.5, 2.6, and 8.0 of the Law on the Prevention and the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons (29,30)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 2, 3, 5, 8, and 23 of the Law on the Prevention and the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons (30)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 226 ter, 232, and 234 of the Penal Code; Article 25 of the Child Protection Code; Article 2.7 of the Law on the Prevention and the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons (29-31)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 5 and 11 of Law No. 92.52 on Narcotics (32)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 2 of the National Service Law (33)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 2 of the National Service Law (33)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 2(5) of the Law on the Prevention and the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons; Articles 3 and 18 of the Child Protection Code (30,31)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Section I of the Law on Education (34)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 38 and 46 of the Constitution; Law on Education (34,35)

In July 2021, the Tunisian parliament passed the Domestic Workers Bill, prohibiting the employment of children in domestic work. (12) The law allows inspectors to enter residences where children are believed to be working as domestic servants. (12)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

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

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA)	Conducts labor inspections and assesses fines and penalties for infractions. (8,27) Employs social workers and medical inspectors to assist in addressing issues of child labor. (4) Collaborates with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) to identify and provide support to children vulnerable to child labor. (8,10,17) Monitors the implementation of labor legislation, investigates violations, and initiates prosecutions through the General Directorate of Labor Inspection. Investigates cases of children working under the age of 18 and provides medical testing for children. (20) Implements social and orientation programs for minors relating to child labor through the General Administration for Social Development. (20)
Ministry of Women, Family and the Elderly (MWFE)	Gathers evidence and conducts investigations on child welfare cases; conducts needs assessments and implements intervention plans. Provides services to child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. (1) Trains child protection delegates to address child labor in the field through coordination with local governments and civil society. (1) Acts as judicial police in cases of imminent danger to children through its Delegates for the Protection of Children. (10,31)
Ministry of the Interior (MOI)	Investigates reports of the worst forms of child labor as a criminal violation, including complaints that fall outside of the labor inspectorate's mandate and those pertaining to the informal sector. Through its Child Protection Service in the National Police, addresses the commercial sexual exploitation of children and coordinates with MSA and MWFE regarding violations. (1,8,10) Through its Judicial Police, coordinates with MSA to refer cases of at-risk youth. (8,36,37)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Coordinates anti-human trafficking efforts and the criminal enforcement of child labor laws. (17)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Tunisia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). (12) However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, such as financial penalties too low to serve as an adequate deterrent. (1,13)

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**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$4,410,204 (38)	\$6,139,671 (38)
Number of Labor Inspectors	329 (1)	328 (38)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	N/A (38)	N/A (38)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown (1)	No (38)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (1)	Yes (38)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	100 (38)	143 (38)
Number Conducted at Worksite	100 (38)	143 (38)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	76 (38)	63 (38)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	33 (38)	4 (38)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (1)	Unknown (12)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (39)	Yes (12)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (39)	Yes (12)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (1)	Yes (38)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (1)	Yes (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (12)

Government officials have noted that the budget for staffing and logistics, such as fuel and transportation, is inadequate to carry out inspections, especially in remote areas of the country. (1) Although there are labor inspectors who monitor the informal sector in Ariana, Jendouba, Medenine, Sfax, Sousse, Tunis, and Tozeur, ministry officials note that the labor inspectorate lacks resources to adequately monitor the informal economy throughout the country. Informal work employs approximately 54 percent of the country's total workforce. (4,8,10,11,40)

Civil fines for violating child labor laws are weak, ranging from approximately \$7 to \$21 per infraction (20 to 60 TND) and are doubled for repeat offenders, though the total amount levied cannot exceed \$1,667 (5,000 TND). Civil fines remain insufficient to deter potential violators. (1)

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Tunisia 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 deficient structures for prosecution planning.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (1)	Unknown (12)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (1)	Unknown (12)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (39)	Unknown (12)
Number of Investigations	94 (39)	147 (38)
Number of Violations Found	82 (39)	Unknown (12)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	17 (39)	3 (38)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (1)	Unknown (12)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (1)	Unknown (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (12)

Judges are frequently reluctant to convict on human trafficking charges due in part to a low level of awareness on the part of police and judicial authorities of the proper application of the anti-human trafficking law and how to handle human trafficking cases. (1,13) Although the Ministry of Interior reports that children under the age

of 18 are not routinely detained for involvement in illicit activities, there have been isolated incidents of law enforcement punishing children for their involvement in the worst forms of child labor. (1, 13)

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) does not maintain comprehensive data as most records are not digitized. (1) The government was unable to provide comprehensive information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. (12)

#### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
The Leadership Committee to Combat Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to address child labor as part of the Child Labor National Action Plan (PAN-TN). Led by MSA, includes membership of 11 other ministries and 3 unions, with support from the ILO. (12) In September 2021, held a meeting entitled Joint Commitment to Unaccompanied Migrant Children, which was attended by the representatives from the National Authority to Combat Trafficking in Persons, the MOJ, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the MOI, and the MSA, in addition to participants from international and national organizations dedicated to child protection. (12) The Committee also held roundtable sessions to raise awareness among children about child labor. These awareness-raising sessions benefited 560 children and encompassed various thematic areas, such as career planning, economic empowerment, and vocational training, as well as principles of the Tunisian labor code. (12) In addition, it continued to expand upon a previous pilot project, which coordinated efforts to eradicate child labor in the governorates of Sfax and Jendouba, by executing a guide of procedures for collaboration on child labor situations. (12) In 2021, the government launched a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which helps identify and refer victims to care services to ensure their protection; this program is maintained by the National Authority to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Council of Europe, as well as Switzerland, Norway, and civil society organizations helped develop the NRM. (12)
National Authority to Combat Trafficking in Persons ( <i>Instance Nationale de Lutte Contre la Traite des Personnes</i> )	Led by MOJ, coordinates anti-human trafficking efforts and raises awareness of human trafficking issues. Membership Includes 12 ministries, 2 members of civil society, a media representative, and a member of the National Commission of Human Rights. (17,37,41-43) In 2021, drafted a National Training Strategy that included stakeholders from across the Tunisian government, along with civil society actors involved in addressing human trafficking. (12) In October 2021, in partnership with the Council of Europe, published a guide for professionals to aid in supporting and reintegrating survivors of human trafficking. It also organized a virtual seminar to disseminate this guide and assist those working in the field of human trafficking to reintegrate survivors through social welfare programs in a process that is clear and streamlined. (12)

#### 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.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
Child Labor National Action Plan (PAN-TN)	Raises awareness, builds the capacity of stakeholders, encourages action from NGOs and the public, improves policies, and promotes the implementation of existing laws and policies. (44,45) Active in 2021. (12)
National Strategy for the Combat of Trafficking in Persons (2018–2023)	Aims to establish a global evidence-based approach to address trafficking in persons by coordinating national and international actors. (5,14) Active in 2021. (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). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

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**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
USDOL-Funded Project (PROTECTE)	A \$4 million project implemented by ILO that aims to strengthen Tunisia's ability to implement the PAN-TN, a multi-stakeholder effort involving government, business, and civil society at the central and rural levels. Additional information is available on the USDOL website.
Support Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking (2014–2022)	USDOS-funded project implemented by IOM to carry out anti-human trafficking activities in collaboration with MOJ, MOI, MSA, and MWFE. Includes three objectives: building the capacity of relevant institutions and agencies to identify and assist victims of human trafficking based on their individual needs; strengthening cross-sector cooperation and the sharing of information through the implementation of a national referral mechanism; and conducting an awareness-raising campaign to keep children in school and discourage illegal migration that could lead to human trafficking. (1)
Centers to Provide Aid to Victims of Child Labor†	Serve up to 6,000 children engaged in child labor or vulnerable to child labor through the maintenance of 79 youth centers. (46)
Shelters and Services for Victims of Human Trafficking‡	Serve survivors of human trafficking, predominantly children, through the operation of shelters by the Government of Tunisia. Provide lodging, food, clothing, psychological services, legal aid through a network of pro bono lawyers, and free medical care in collaboration with MOH. Place adults and unaccompanied children in dedicated centers to receive schooling. (16,47) In November 2021, a new emergency shelter for children in Tunis was created, along with five other shelters across the country dedicated to the needs of children. (12)
Programs to Reduce School Dropout Rates†	MOE-funded School Dropout Prevention Program that maintains about 2,300 social protection units in schools and mobile units in rural areas to monitor students and prevent them from dropping out. (46) Includes a project operated by the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment to incorporate students who have dropped out into vocational training programs. (20)
Second Chance Program	Pilot program funded by MOE, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Government of the United Kingdom, and several government ministries, to reintegrate school dropouts ages 12 to 18 back into the educational system or provide them with vocational training. (1,46) In April 2021, Second Chance opened a new location. This is part of the first phase of the social program designed to meet the needs of over 1,000 dropout students in Tunisia. (12)

† Program is funded by the Government of Tunisia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (37)

Although Tunisia has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, including in agriculture, fishing, commerce, manufacturing, domestic work, and construction. In addition, while the National Authority works to ensure the safety of child victims of labor exploitation and trafficking in persons, options for victims' long-term support and possible relocation remain extremely limited. (13,21)

## 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 Tunisia (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Provide adequate staff and other resources, including fuel and transportation, to enable the labor inspectorate to conduct a greater number of inspections, particularly in remote areas and in the informal economy.	2015 – 2021
	Collect and publish information related to the enforcement of child labor laws, including the training of labor inspectors, the number and types of labor inspections conducted, the penalties imposed, and penalties collected.	2013 – 2021
	Collect and publish information on criminal law enforcement of child labor laws, including on law enforcement training and the number of criminal child labor investigations that were initiated, violations identified, prosecutions initiated, convictions secured, and penalties imposed for the worst forms of child labor.	2019 – 2021
	Increase penalties for those who employ children in violation of child labor law protections to deter potential violations and reduce recidivism.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that law enforcement and the judiciary are fully informed as to the existence and application of anti-human trafficking penalties and impose when appropriate.	2020 – 2021



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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Publish the microdata of the 2017 National Child Labor Survey so that the information can inform programming and policies.	2017 – 2021
	Address barriers to education, especially for children in rural areas, such as unreliable transportation, and physical violence in schools.	2015 – 2021
	Expand existing programs to fully address the scope of the child labor problem, including in agriculture, fishing, commerce, manufacturing, domestic work, and construction.	2015 – 2021
	Establish long-term support and relocation options for survivors of child labor and trafficking in persons.	2020 – 2021

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