

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED LAW THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2022, Armenia made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government enacted a new Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, which strengthened Armenia’s child protection framework by criminalizing child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The government also adopted a universal inspection checklist on labor rights violations which is applicable to all industries. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Armenia is receiving an assessment of minimal advancement because it continued to implement a regression in law that delays advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor. Labor inspectors lack full authority to conduct unannounced inspections, despite receiving additional authority in 2022 to carry out limited unannounced inspections when detecting unregistered employment cases. The lack of unannounced inspections may leave potential violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses undetected in workplaces. Children in Armenia 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 agriculture. In addition, the government does not routinely collect or maintain official data on the prevalence of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table I provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Armenia.

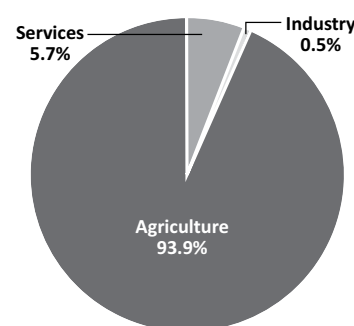
Table I. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	7.0 (24,602)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	8.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021 published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from National Child Labor Survey (SIMPOC), 2015. (2)

Figure I. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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 (3,4)
	Raising livestock, including cattle breeding, cattle herding, and sheepherding (5,6)
	Forestry and fishing (3)
Industry	Construction, activities unknown (3,4,6,7)
Services	Vehicle maintenance (3,6)
	Selling food (6,8)
	Street work, including vending; gathering scrap metal; selling flowers, napkins, and icons; and begging (3,5,9)
	Working in shops, cafés, and supermarkets (5,6,10)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (Cont.)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,5,11,12) Forced begging and forced labor in stores (4,5,8,9)

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

The Government of Armenia does not routinely collect or maintain official data on child labor. (9,13,14) Reports indicate that significant numbers of children, primarily boys ages 14 to 18, leave school to work in the informal sectors in agriculture and construction. (9,15,16) In 2022, according to the police, the number of children engaged in begging increased; however, the police did not find evidence of organized crime behind the begging. (9) Children of families who travel for seasonal labor and work on farms in remote rural areas are less likely to be enrolled in school and are vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in agriculture. (17) Authorities note that less-educated, socially vulnerable girls are at higher risk of being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, while children living in economic hardship or children deinstitutionalized from orphanages are more likely to be coerced into forced begging, farm work, and forced labor in the service sector. (9,12)







Although Article 38 of the Constitution of Armenia and Article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Education guarantee free universal education, children from ethnic minority and low-income families continue to have reduced access to education. (18-21) Reports indicate that in some rural areas, girls' education is not prioritized due to traditional cultural norms. (15,20) The government has made progress in improving access to education in remote communities and implemented a program to pay tuition fees for students from national minorities. The detection of school dropouts has also been a priority for the government; however, there is no enforcement of the mandatory school attendance requirement, nor are there programs to identify, assess, and address the reasons for truancy or dropping out. (5,22)

The Law on Education requires all schools to be inclusive for children with disabilities by 2025; however, children with disabilities still face difficulty accessing mainstream education where school buildings remain inaccessible. (19,21) In addition, lack of accessible learning materials, special education teachers and other specialists makes it particularly difficult for students with hearing, visual, and mental disabilities to access mainstream education. (21) Challenges remain with institutionalized children, such as those living in government boarding schools, orphanages, and special education institutions, who are vulnerable to exploitation in child labor and are at a higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. (4,7,23)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Armenia 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	✓

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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	16	Articles 15, 17, 18, and 102 of the Labor Code; Article 57 of the Constitution; Article 41.6 of the Administrative Violations Code (18,24,25)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 17.1 and 257 of the Labor Code, Article 41.6 of the Administrative Violations Code (24,25)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Decree on Approval of the List of Occupations and Work That Are Likely to be Heavy and Hazardous for Persons Under the Age of 18 Years, Pregnant Women, and Women Taking Care of a Child Under the Age of 1 Year; Articles 140, 144(3), 148, 149, 153, 155, 209, 249, and 257 of the Labor Code (24,26)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 57 of the Constitution; Article 3 and 3.2 of the Labor Code; Articles 188 and 189 of the Criminal Code (18,24,27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 188, 189, and 242 of the Criminal Code (27)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 188–190, 239, and 298–300 of the Criminal Code (27)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 71, 238, 393, and 394 of the Criminal Code (27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	16‡	Article 29 of the Law on the Rights of the Child; Law on Military Service and Status of the Military Servant; Government Decree No. 525-N of April 26, 2012 (28-30)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 19 of the Law on Military Service and the Status of the Military Servant (28)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 29 of the Law on the Rights of the Child; Articles 137, 147, 238, and 320 of the Criminal Code (27,30)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	18	Article 18 of the Law on Education (19)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 38 of the Constitution; Article 6 of the Law on Education (18,19)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (29)

During the reporting period, the government enacted a new Criminal Code and a new Criminal Procedure Code, which strengthened Armenia’s child protection framework by criminalizing child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (27,31) In addition, the government approved changes to the Labor Code that define “forced or compulsory labor,” which allows the government to fully enforce its prohibition on forced labor as prescribed in the Constitution, Criminal Code, and Labor Code. (18,24,27,32) Adopted in May 2022, amendments to the Law on Identification and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking include requirements for the government to issue a National Action Plan to counter human trafficking and to set specific minimum standards for the services provided to survivors of trafficking, to include child survivors. The amendments expand the definition of trafficking to include “exploitation of persons in helpless situations” from the previous version that referred to “exploitation of a person who, because of a mental disorder, is unable to realize or control his/her behavior.” (33,34) In October 2022, the government issued a decree on Approved Indicators for Identifying Trafficking Victims by the Identification Commission, to include specific indicators to identify potential child victims of trafficking. (35)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) finalized a draft law on Child Rights and Child Protection System to include several regulations related to the worst forms of child labor. (9,36) In addition, in 2022, MoLSA finalized a draft package of amendments to the Labor Code to include clarification and consolidated provisions related to child labor. (9) The amended Labor Code was adopted in 2023 and it includes provisions that align the minimum age for work law with the international standards. (24)

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Because the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (18,19,24,25) In addition, the Labor Code allows children ages 14 and 15 to work restricted hours with the permission of a parent or guardian but does not identify specific activities that constitute light work. (24)

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 authority 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 & Activities
Health and Labor Inspection Body (HLIB)	Ensures compliance with legal requirements in the fields of healthcare and labor law. (5) Publishes an annual report on activities undertaken the previous year and plans for the upcoming year. (8,37) Operates a labor rights violations complaint hotline and online platform to which individuals can submit complaints. (9) Carries out on-site inspections based on a pre-determined list of companies compiled based on risk assessment methodology, an annual work plan, as well as in response to complaints, including child labor complaints, and administrative proceedings. Also authorized to issue penalties for any administrative violations they uncover and to refer cases to criminal law enforcement when appropriate. (38) During 2022, HLIB held seminars for students of the State Pedagogical University and the College of Finance and Economics of the State Economic University on reducing children’s involvement in the worst forms of labor, ensuring safe working conditions in the workplace, and preventing child labor exploitation. (9) HLIB continued the internship program started in 2021 with the Agricultural University, hosting student interns majoring in occupational safety and health issues, and training them on labor issues including child labor. In 2022, the ILO organized a multi-day training for labor inspectors on legal provisions related to working conditions, employee protection, and child labor. (9) In addition, over 50 labor inspectors participated in two 2-day trainings organized by the Department of State-funded World Vision program on the application of forced labor indicators including for children. (9)
Criminal Enforcement Agencies	General Department of Criminal Police enforces laws against the worst forms of child labor and transfers information received on alleged crimes and trafficking in persons cases to the Investigative Committee. Anti-trafficking, domestic violence, and other units of the police prevent and respond to crimes, as well as support the Investigative Committee’s investigator in conducting criminal proceedings and perform the investigator’s assignments as needed. (9,31,39) Conducts administrative proceedings, enforces protective measures, and other activities prescribed by law. Conducts internal investigations and submits to the Investigative Committee case information about alleged crimes. (9) Every regional police unit throughout the country has a designated officer whose portfolio includes human trafficking. (40) Operates a hotline to receive complaints related to human trafficking and migration issues. (4,40,41) In 2022, the police increased their efforts in identifying children begging in the streets and, for the first time, they were able to fine parents for engaging a child in begging by applying Article 177 of the Administrative Violations Code. (9) During the reporting period, the Police continued with human trafficking-related trainings for its staff and organized 8 trainings attended by 100 participants. (42) Investigative Committee, through its Department for Investigation of Trafficking in Persons, Crimes Against the Sexual Inviolability of Minors and Illegal Drug Trafficking Crimes, initiates criminal proceedings and conducts investigations of all cases of human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (9,31,43)
Prosecutor General’s Office (PGO)	Through the Department for Combating Crimes against Humans within the PGO, oversees the legality of Police operations and Investigative Committee investigations and prosecutes criminal cases involving child trafficking. Prosecutors receive regular training on human trafficking and other worst forms of child labor. (39,44)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, the lack of full authority to conduct unannounced inspections in Armenia may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2.8 million (5)	\$3.5 million (9)
Number of Labor Inspectors	50 (5)	57 (9)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (25)	Yes (25)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (9)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksites	544 (5)	389 (9)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	1 (5)	7 (9)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	1 (5)	7 (9)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	1 (5)	7 (9)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (9)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (9)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	No (24)	No (45)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	N/A (5)	N/A (9)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (9)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (9)

In March 2022, the government adopted a universal inspection checklist on labor rights violations which is applicable to all industries to verify their compliance with labor legislation requirements. (9) This checklist allowed the Health and Labor Inspection Body (HLIB) to carry out scheduled on-site labor inspections in 2022, compared to 2021 when most of HLIB's labor engagement was initiated through administrative proceedings, in part due to lack of an approved checklist. (5,9,39) Of the 398 on-site inspections conducted in 2022, 234 were on labor rights and 155 were on workers' health and safety, and primarily targeted mining, manufacturing, and construction businesses. In 2022, HLIB identified seven violations of child labor laws in construction, small and medium trade, and gas services, and children were between 17 and 18 years old. (9) All of the companies were fined and penalties were collected in total amount of \$1,500 (601,185 AMD). (9)

In 2022, HLIB had funding to employ 92 labor inspectors, of which 57 positions were filled. (9) In November 2022, the government adopted changes to the Law on Organizing and Conducting Inspections to allow HLIB to carry out unannounced inspections only when detecting unregistered employment cases. (9,45,46) Even for routine inspections, HLIB must inform employers of an upcoming inspection three business days in advance. (40) HLIB has broader authority when responding to a complaint, in which case HLIB may issue notification to the employer via e-mail and immediately conduct a site visit; however, if the business director or acting director is not present and does not receive the notification, inspectors are not allowed to start. (5,38) HLIB lacks legal mechanisms to fully enforce compliance with labor legislation, including conducting unannounced inspections and conducting inspections after working hours. (9)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Armenia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient specialized training for investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (9)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	1 (47)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	1 (47)
Number of Convictions	1 (5)	1 (43)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (5)	Yes (43)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (9)

During the reporting period, one person was convicted and sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment and was conditionally released with a 2-year probation period for involving three minor victims in forced begging in 2016. (43,47) One criminal case from 2021 of involving a child in forced begging was concluded and sent to court with an indictment. (47) In addition, the police conducted a preliminary investigation on one child labor trafficking case. (9,43,47) Authorities reported an increase in the use of social media to coerce and blackmail vulnerable individuals into sex trafficking. (12)

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In 2022, 52 judges (19.2 percent of judges) and all 376 prosecutors from the Ministry of Justice attended trainings on the new Criminal Code and the new Criminal Procedure Code. (42) With support from the U.S. Department of State-funded World Vision program, multiple government agencies participated in several human trafficking-related training activities, and the State Migration Service developed guidelines for identification of potential victims of human trafficking among migrants and other at-risk populations, to include the specifics of working with potential child trafficking victims. (42,43) In addition, during the reporting period, three prosecutors, three investigators from the Investigative Committee, one investigator from the National Security Service, and three police officers participated in an online training course on Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation organized by the International Law Enforcement Academy of Budapest and supported by the U.S. Department of State. (39,42)

Reports indicate that law enforcement officials may not receive sufficient specialized training on interviewing survivors of child trafficking, which in some cases can prevent local investigators from collecting sufficient evidence to build a prosecutable case. (4,39,48) Although the Criminal Procedural Code includes provisions to protect witnesses and minimize victim re-traumatization, the government does not always employ these measures in all human trafficking cases, including those involving minors. (31,41) In addition, the change in the law enforcement structure resulting in the decrease of police involvement in initial investigations and establishing the Investigative Committee as the leading investigative agency raised further concerns among civil society about proactive identification of trafficking victims and effective investigations under the new criminal procedures. (31,43)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism 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 efforts to address all forms of child labor.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Interagency Working Group Against Trafficking in Persons	Operates under the Ministerial Council to Combat Human Trafficking and ensures operational coordination. Multidisciplinary group of government representatives and national and international NGOs, chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA). (7) MoLSA also chairs the Trafficking Victims Identification Commission comprising representatives from MoLSA, Prosecutor's Office, Police, and two NGOs, tasked with identifying individuals as victims of trafficking and referring them for required assistance and support. (7) During the reporting period, the working group discussed findings on the implementation status of the 2020–2022 National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons and developed the 2023–2025 version of this anti-trafficking plan, which was approved by the government in early 2023. (9,43,49)

Armenia lacks coordinating mechanisms to address other forms of child labor, including street work, the services sector, and agriculture. (16)

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 a lack of policies to cover all forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2020–2022)	Supported the development of policy and the implementation of activities to address human trafficking. Committed the government to train specialists in multiple spheres, including law enforcement, the courts, educators, and medical providers. (50,51) Included a chapter on prevention of child trafficking and child exploitation. (7,52) From July 30 to December 2, 2022, the government conducted human trafficking awareness-raising campaigns, including outreach meetings and trainings, across the country. (42,43) In addition, classes on human trafficking topics continued as part of the middle and high school civics curricula. (42)

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During the reporting period, MoLSA, with UNICEF's support, developed a draft Strategy on Labor and Social Protection for 2023–2026 that covers vulnerable populations, to include children. This strategy will inform future cross-sectoral and thematic sub-strategies related to labor and social protection. (9,53) Research found no evidence of any policies to address child labor in all its forms in Armenia, including in agriculture, services, and other forms of informal work.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Family Benefits Program†	Seeks to mitigate poverty for families with children by giving families a monthly payment based on their financial situation, the number of children in the family, and the geographical location of their home. (54) During the reporting period, research was unable to determine the impact of this ongoing program.
UNICEF Country Program for 2021–2025	Improves child protection systems, including through expanding programs for children in extreme poverty, improving social integration of children with disabilities, and developing a victim witness protection system. (5,55) In 2022, continued to support the government's child protection systems through technical assistance, operationalization of policies, and strengthening systems at central and local levels to ensure more integrated delivery of services for children and families in various social sectors. (56)
Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking†	Operates in partnership with NGOs to provide medical, psychological, social, and legal services to survivors of human trafficking, and access to education for children. Continued services were provided to survivors during the reporting year. (5,8,22,51) In 2022, the government also increased funding to the shelter to \$100,000 (40.2 million AMD), twice the amount allocated in 2020. (57)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is funded by the Government of Armenia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (54)

Although the Government of Armenia has implemented programs to address child labor, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs to assist children engaged in child labor in street work or in agriculture. In addition, personnel and resources are insufficient to meet the needs of many social services programs, and participation is low due to a lack of awareness-raising outreach by the government. (22)

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 Armenia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work from 16 to 18 to align with the compulsory education age.	2022
	Ensure that Armenian law specifies the types of light work acceptable for children ages 14 to 15.	2014 – 2022
Enforcement	Strengthen the inspection system by permitting unannounced inspections.	2017 – 2022
	Empower labor inspectors to conduct inspections and apply administrative penalties to all cases of child labor, including cases conducted after working hours and when the business director or acting director is not present.	2021 – 2022
	Protect children by providing law enforcement officials with specialized training on interviewing survivors of child trafficking.	2018 – 2022
	Implement existing witness protection mechanisms to protect survivors of child trafficking who cooperate with law enforcement.	2011 – 2022
	Ensure law enforcement officials understand their mandated duties and the Investigative Committee is adequately trained on trafficking victim identification and investigations.	2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Establish coordinating mechanisms to address all worst forms of child labor in all sectors, including in street work, services, and agriculture.	2009 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address child labor in all its forms in Armenia, including in agriculture, services, and other forms of informal work.	2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor, including in agriculture and construction, to inform policies and programs.	2019 – 2022
	Ensure that all children, including girls, children in remote areas, those from low-income families and families that travel for seasonal labor, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have equal access to education.	2010 – 2022
	Strengthen measures in the educational system to identify truant children and enforce mandatory school attendance requirements to ensure children are not engaged in child labor.	2020 – 2022
	Ensure the availability of out-of-care services for deinstitutionalized children in parallel with increased efforts to prevent institutionalization of children and ensure that children currently residing in government institutions are not engaged in child labor.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that mainstream education is accessible to children with special education needs and children with disabilities by improving the accessibility of the physical infrastructure and increasing the availability of special education teachers and other specialists for students with mental disabilities.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Family Benefits Program and make information about implementation measures publicly available.	2021 – 2022
	Implement programs to address child labor in street work and in agriculture.	2009 – 2022
	Allocate sufficient personnel and resources to publicize and provide social services throughout the country, offer sufficient training to services providers, and assign reasonable caseloads.	2020 – 2022

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