

In 2022, Bolivia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government increased its number of labor inspectors from 72 to 123 and launched a new national action plan to address human trafficking. The municipal government of Santa Cruz also trained 300 university students to volunteer in the Market Spaces program, which is designed to offer services and support to children who work in the markets with their families. However, children in Bolivia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, including in the harvesting of Brazil nuts, and mining. Although Bolivian law requires that apprentices attend school, it does not set a minimum age for participation in apprenticeships. In addition, prohibitions against child trafficking are insufficient because they require that the use of threats, force, or coercion be proven for a trafficking crime to have occurred. The government also did not publicly release information in 2022 on its criminal law enforcement efforts.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bolivia.

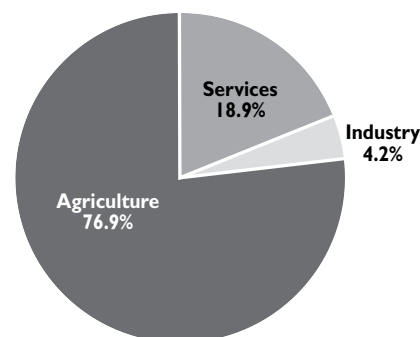
**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	7 to 14	15.4 (286,890)
Attending School (%)	7 to 14	97.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	14.5
Primary Completion Rate (%)		92.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Encuesta de Hogares (EH), 2020. (2)

**Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 7-14**



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	Harvesting Brazil nuts/chestnuts† and sugarcane† (3)
	Plucking chickens (4,5)
	Planting and harvesting corn (6)
Industry	Mining† of gold, silver, tin, and zinc (3,7)
	Construction, including heavy lifting and shoveling (3)
	Production of bricks† (3,8)
Services	Street vending, shoe shining, and assisting transportation operators (3,9,10)
	Cleaning cemeteries (grave sites) (11,12)
	Domestic work (3)

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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‡	Forced labor in domestic work, mining, ranching, and in the production and harvesting of Brazil nuts and sugarcane (13,14)
	Forced begging (3,14)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,15)
	Use in illicit activities, including robbery and producing or transporting drugs (13,14)

† 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.







Rural and poor Bolivians, most of whom are indigenous, and LGBTQI+ youth are particularly at risk for sex and labor trafficking. (14,16) Girls, averaging 14 years old, are used in commercial sexual exploitation in El Alto. (17) Girls ages 13 to 17 are increasingly lured by sex traffickers via social media with fake offers of modeling or employment. (16) Bolivian children are taken from rural areas to major cities and mining centers for commercial sexual exploitation. (16) Civil society groups also report that child sex tourism has become an increasing problem. (14,16) Bolivia has no shelters for boys who have been sexually exploited, and many cases involving the exploitation of boys go unreported due to social stigma. (3) In addition, the cultural practice known as *padrinazgo*, which involves rural families sending their children to urban areas to live with individuals for better access to education, social services, and food, often leads to forced labor, including in domestic work and third-party businesses. (13) The government has not published any comprehensive data on child labor since 2016. (3)

Attendance rates for secondary education remain low in rural areas. (10) Civil society has reported a steady rise in the number of Venezuelan migrants electing to stay in Bolivia, most of whom lack legal status. The children of these families often struggle to obtain the proper paperwork to enroll in the public school system. (3,17) Migrant children attending school do not receive credit and are prevented from receiving diplomas. (18) There is also a lack of teachers, schools, and textbooks in rural areas, especially in indigenous communities. (3)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bolivia 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 Bolivia’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including insufficient prohibitions against child trafficking as they require that the use of threats, force, or coercion be proven for a crime to have taken place.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Articles 8 and 58 of the General Labor Law; Article 129 of the Child and Adolescent Code; Sentence 0025/2017 of the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal; Article 3 of Law No. 1139 (19-22)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 58 and 59 of the General Labor Law; Articles 5 and 136 of the Child and Adolescent Code (19,20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 136 of the Child and Adolescent Code (20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 15, 46, and 61 of the Constitution; Article 291 of the Penal Code; Article 34 of the Comprehensive Law against Human Trafficking and Smuggling (23-25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Article 15 of the Constitution; Articles 6, 34, and 35 of the Comprehensive Law against Human Trafficking and Smuggling (23,25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 34 and 35 of the Comprehensive Law against Human Trafficking and Smuggling; Articles 281 bis, 321, 321 bis, 322, and 323 bis of the Penal Code (25,26)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 47, 48, and 56 of the Law on Coca and Controlled Substances (27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	16*	Article 2 of the General Directive of Pre-Military Recruitment; Articles 2 and 7 of the Law of National Military Service (28,29)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	No		Articles 108 and 249 of the Constitution; Article 1 of Supreme Decree No. 1875; Article 1 of Supreme Decree No. 21479 (23,30,31)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	17‡	Article 81 of the Constitution; Articles 1, 8, 9, and 11–14 of the Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez Education Law (23,32)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 17 and 81 of the Constitution; Article 1 of the Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez Education Law; Article 115 of the Child and Adolescent Code (20,23,32)

\*The minimum age for combat is 18 per Article 36 of the Law of National Military Service. (28)

‡ Age calculated based on available information. (23,32)

As 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. (20,22) Furthermore, although Bolivian law specifies that education is compulsory through secondary school, it does not specify a start or end age. (23,32) In addition, prohibitions against child trafficking are insufficient because they require that the use of threats, force, or coercion be proven in order for a crime to have taken place. (23,25) Bolivian law requires employers to grant apprentices the time necessary to attend school. However, it does not set a minimum age of at least 14 for participation in apprenticeships. (19) Articles 108 and 249 of the Constitution require Bolivian males to perform compulsory military service in accordance with national law. (23) Article 1 of Supreme Decree No. 1875, passed in 2014, lowered the minimum age at which compulsory military service may begin, from age 18, as previously established, to age 17, which does not comply with international standards. (30,31)

### 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 child labor laws.

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

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforces child labor laws. (4) Refers cases to the Labor Courts for adjudication of penalties and unpaid wages. (4) Engages municipal Offices of the Child Advocate to ensure the protection of children's rights and carries out inspections through its special unit for the Progressive Eradication of Child Labor. (33,34) Assists in the implementation of the Child and Adolescent Code. (20,33) MOL can investigate cases of hazardous child labor through routine investigations or from citizens who report a potential problem. If a child is discovered working in hazardous or illegal conditions during an investigation, the case is referred to the municipal Child Advocate Office. (3) In 2022, MOL presented a proposal to the national government to help guide future actions to address child labor titled, "Public Policy Bolivia: A Country Free of Forced, Dangerous, and Child Labor." (18,34)
Municipal Offices of the Child Advocate	Authorize children from the age of 14 to engage in work and register them in the government's Child and Adolescent Information System (SINNA). (17,22,33) Protect the rights and welfare of children by referring criminal child labor cases to prosecutors and by referring children to social services. (20,33) SINNA is administered by the Ministry of Justice and Transparency. (20,22)
Prosecutor's Office	Enforces criminal laws against forced labor, commercial sexual exploitation including child sex trafficking, and the use of children in illicit activities at the departmental level, in coordination with the Attorney General. (3,18,35) Provides legal support and lawyers for children who are survivors of the worst forms of child labor. (3) The Attorney General's Office oversees investigations and prosecutions at the national level and regional prosecutors who, in conjunction with the Bolivian National Police, pursue cases of human trafficking and maintain a database of these cases. (35)

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Bolivia 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	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	72 (36)	123 (34)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (17)	Yes (19)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (17)	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (17)	423 (34)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (17)	0 (34)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (17)	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (36)	Unknown
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (36)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (36)	Yes (3)

The MOL's Employment and Social Welfare office reported employing 123 labor inspectors. (34) Research indicates that Bolivia does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (18,37,38) According to NGOs, the training that labor inspectors received in 2022 was much shorter than the 4-month training course previously offered. (3) However, the MOL trained 8,850 people to help prevent child and forced labor in 2022 but did not specify who received the training. (34) Research could not determine whether unannounced inspections are permitted. (19) While the municipal Offices of the Child Advocate are charged with registering work permits for children ages 14 and older, reports indicate that up to 15 percent of municipalities in Bolivia lack a local office. Many more are reported to lack sufficient resources and the capacity to perform their mandate and raise awareness of children's rights and their parents' obligations under the Child and Adolescent Code. (4,13,33) In a 2021 interview, the Ombudsman's Office acknowledged that the registration of adolescent workers by these offices was insufficient and that the low numbers of registrations reported do not reflect the reality of child labor in Bolivia. (39)

If a child labor violation is found, an inspector's report serves as the official complaint and details in the report are the evidence that inspectors transfer to labor judges, who then adjudicate the cases. The judge is the final arbiter and determines penalties for violations. (3) The special unit for the Progressive Eradication of Child Labor conducted 423 inspections using 8 mobile office units, primarily in rural and remote areas, and did not find any child labor violations. (34) Although a high proportion of children work in the informal economy, this sector is not subject to labor inspections. (34,40) The MOL, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Ministry of Justice do not have a consolidated database or systematized records of the number of violations found related to child labor. (17) In previous reporting periods, the MOL reported that its budget was insufficient to perform the number of labor inspections that should be conducted. (4,17)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

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

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Number of Investigations	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown (17)	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (17)	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (17)	Yes (3)

In 2022, Bolivian officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Government, and Justice met with experts from the EU-funded EUROFRONT program to discuss border management strategies and a regional plan to address trafficking in persons on the Peruvian-Bolivian border area of Desaguadero and the Argentinian-Bolivian border area of Aguas Blancas. The Bolivian Police Academy, with IOM support, trained 70 officials, including police officers, prosecutors, and judges on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in persons crimes. (16,18) The 6-month training program included 240 hours of academic instruction followed by 560 hours of investigative practice and on-the-job training. In addition, 65 prosecutors received training on human trafficking from UNODC. (16) Although the government did not provide the number or type of officials who received training, a civil society group reported that a course titled "Diploma in the Investigation of Trafficking in Persons aimed at Public Police Servants," organized by the Police University, the Bolivian senate, and IOM launched in July of 2022 to strengthen the government's response to human trafficking. The Trafficking in Persons Council also met 17 times in 2022 and led an effort to draft new amendments to the human trafficking law. (16)

The Government of Bolivia did not take active measures to investigate, prosecute, convict, or sentence perpetrators of worst forms of child labor crimes. (17) The high rate of rotation among police, prosecutors, and judges—a standard practice to help prevent corruption—leads to insufficient knowledge, a lack of experience on human trafficking, and a judicial backlog for these types of cases. (14,41) Reporting indicates that the budget, personnel, and resources of the judicial system are insufficient to address human trafficking. Although the amount dedicated to human trafficking is not reported, less than 0.5 percent of the entire federal budget is devoted to the judicial system, implying inadequate resources. (16) Furthermore, in 2022 the judiciary returned unused funds to the executive branch, suggesting that its budget is not implemented in the most productive manner. Civil society groups reported that trafficking in persons crimes in developed areas received more judicial attention compared to rural areas where there are few resources for the legal system. (16,18) In addition, research found that children rescued from the worst forms of child labor are often not referred to social services providers because some cities lack shelters and other social services for children. (13,42,43) Shelters maintained by departmental governments are underfunded, and child survivors are often cast out of shelters on the basis of

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fixed timelines—after spending the maximum number of days allowed—rather than an assessment of need. (42) The government did not report the number of children referred to receive social services in 2022. While children can report workforce abuse to the Child Advocate’s Office, they rarely do. (13)

## 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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Commission for the Progressive Eradication of Child Labor	Coordinates national efforts on child labor issues. Led by MOL, and includes the Ministries of Justice, Education, and Planning, and several NGOs. (33) Research was unable to determine whether the coordinating body carried out activities during the reporting period.

## 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 coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

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

Policy	Description & Activities
Plurinational Policy Against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (2021–2025)†	On April 29, 2022, the government released a new national action plan for 2021-2025, with support from IOM, UNODC, and civil society. It contains several objectives including to educate the population about human trafficking and smuggling, reintegrate survivors, train law enforcement officials, provide prompt and effective justice, promote mechanisms of international coordination, produce and manage knowledge, and build an institutional environment able to address human trafficking and smuggling. (16) The government did not provide information about the resources devoted to implement this plan. (16)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

The government has lacked a national action plan to address child labor since the National Plan for the Progressive Eradication of Child Labor expired in 2010. (44)

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

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

Program	Description & Activities
Juancito Pinto Subsidy Program†	Government program that provides a conditional cash transfer to all primary and some secondary school students to increase school attendance and reduce the dropout rate. (45) According to the latest publicly available information from the Education Ministry, the program provided financial support to more than 2.3 million participating students to encourage school retention. Each participating child received approximately \$29 annually upon proving regular attendance in school. (3) The Government of Bolivia continued to support this program throughout the reporting period. (3)
Market Spaces	Each year, the Santa Cruz municipal government trains over 300 university volunteers and reaches over 500 young children between the ages of 3 and 12 in the 8 Santa Cruz markets. (3) Children who previously worked with their parents in the market now receive mentorship and food, and abuse is monitored and reported. Most of the workers in the Market Space project are psychology, education, or social work university students in their final year at university and volunteer their time to prevent child labor. (46) The concept was initially supported by the Government of Santa Cruz and UNICEF and costs about \$5,000 per year to maintain but is now self-sustaining through a small tax collected from each market vendor or parent. (46) The Government of Bolivia continued to support this program throughout the reporting period. (3)

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

Program	Description & Activities
Bolivian Foreign Trade Institute's Triple Seal Initiative	Initiative of the Department of Santa Cruz's MOL, in collaboration with the Bolivian Institute of Standardization and Quality, UNICEF, and ILO, to develop a voluntary certification program that recognizes companies that comply with Bolivian law and ILO conventions on child labor and forced labor issues. (47) In January 2022, the largest sugar producer in the country, responsible for 40 percent of the market, was issued the triple seal certification. (14) Reports from the current period suggest that this partnership has been successful at reducing child labor in the sugarcane industry. (3)

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 Bolivia.

The government has funded a school breakfast program since 1994. Currently, approximately 74 percent of students nationwide receive this service. (3) Although the Government of Bolivia has implemented programs in the agricultural and education sectors, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children in commercial sexual exploitation.

## 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 Bolivia (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 14 to 17 to align with the compulsory education age.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that the law sufficiently prohibits child trafficking by removing the requirement of the use of threats, force, or coercion to be established for the crime to have occurred.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the law prohibits children under the age of 14 from participating in apprenticeships.	2010 – 2022
	Ensure that the law establishes age 18 as the minimum age for compulsory recruitment by the state military and criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2015 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish information on child labor law enforcement, including labor inspectorate funding, training, penalties imposed and collected, and whether routine and unannounced inspections were conducted.	2009 – 2022
	Publish information about whether unannounced inspections are permitted.	2022
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 123 to 432 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 6.5 million.	2013 – 2022
	Provide sufficient funding to increase the Ministry of Labor's capacity to ensure the adequate enforcement of child labor laws.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that there are systematized records or a consolidated database on the number of violations found related to child labor.	2019 – 2022
	Establish and maintain an Office of the Child Advocate in every municipality, allocating sufficient resources from municipal-level budgets to ensure that legal protections are extended to all children who are permitted to work, and that parents are assisted in registering their children for work.	2014 – 2022
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement, including training for criminal investigators and disaggregated numbers on investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions achieved, and sentences imposed for child labor crimes.	2011 – 2022
	Address issues of high rotation among police, prosecutors, and judges, as well as the existing judicial case backlog, to ensure adequate prosecution of child labor crimes.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that rural areas receive sufficient resources to address trafficking in persons crimes.	2022
	Coordination	Ensure that the National Commission for the Progressive Eradication of Child Labor is active and able to carry out its intended mandate.
Government Policies	Establish and implement a new national policy or national action plan to address child labor, including its worst forms.	2010 – 2022
	Provide data on the funding or resources supporting the Plurinational Policy Against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.	2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Conduct a comprehensive child labor survey so there is sufficient data to inform government actions to eliminate child labor.	2022
	Ensure that all children, regardless of migration status, can access education and receive credit and diplomas for attending, and expand national programs in rural and indigenous areas to increase secondary school attendance.	2010 – 2022
	Ensure that there are sufficient social programs, including shelters for male survivors of human trafficking, throughout the country for child labor survivors and that survivors are not cast prematurely out of shelters.	2018 – 2022
	Implement programs to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2022

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