

In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Council of Ministers approved the 2021–2025 National Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma, which aims to strength education access for Roma children, and the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force expanded its membership to include representatives from additional agencies. The Tuzla Cantonal Court also sentenced six offenders to a total of 74 years of imprisonment, a historical first for the judicial system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, children in Bosnia and Herzegovina are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging. Social programs dedicated to assisting children involved in forced begging do not have adequate resources, and representatives from the Ministries of Labor are not included in the National Anti-Trafficking Strike Force, which limits coordination efforts. Furthermore, most child labor is in the informal sector, and laws on the minimum age for work do not meet international standards because they do not apply to children who are self-employed or those working outside of formal employment relationships.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). 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	8.9 (44,017)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	83.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	10.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3 (MICS 3), 2006. (2)

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
Services	Street work, including vending and washing car windows (3-5)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced begging and forced domestic work (5,6)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,6)
	Use in illicit activities, including for pickpocketing (5-7)
	Use in the production of pornography (5,6)

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

Street begging is the most common form of child labor in BiH, and organized groups sometimes traffic children to regional and EU countries, where they are forced to beg. (3,7-10) In BiH, Roma children are the most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor due to barriers to accessing education, including the high costs of school supplies and uniforms. (11,12) Roma students also face discrimination from teachers, peers, and school administrators, which has resulted in a disproportionate number of Roma children being enrolled in schools for children with intellectual disabilities. In addition, some Roma children lack birth registration documents, which are

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required to attend school in BiH. (13) UNHCR reports indicate that some children in BiH were still designated as being at risk of statelessness in 2022. (5,13,14) Children who are classified as stateless are at higher risk for labor exploitation. (14,15) Additionally, migrants—particularly unaccompanied children—from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and other countries who travel through BiH are potential targets for human traffickers. (16,17)

Schools in the Republika Srpska (RS) entity deny the right of some Bosniak children to receive instruction in the Bosnian language; as a result, these children sometimes travel long distances to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) entity to receive education in their language. (3,14,18) In addition, discrimination persists under the "Two Schools Under One Roof" practice between Bosniaks and Croats in FBiH. Under this system, Bosniak and Croat children are in segregated classes following separate curricula in the same school building. (19) This creates obstacles for students who wish to attend schools other than those that match their ethnic identity and enables ethnic discrimination in schools, which can lead to absenteeism. (3,14,18) Children with disabilities also face barriers to accessing education, which may make them vulnerable to child labor. (18) Sources indicated that the government has not allocated enough financial resources for adequate implementation of inclusive education initiatives, particularly for students with disabilities. (15,18,20)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

BiH 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	✓

BiH is a democratic republic with a bicameral parliament. Governmental responsibilities lie with the state; the two entities of BiH, which are the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS); and the self-governing Brčko District (BD). (21) The Government of BiH has established laws and regulations related to child labor at the state, entity, and district levels (Table 4). However, gaps exist in BiH's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a lack of minimum age protections for children who are self-employed or working outside a formal employment relationship.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Article 20 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 57 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (23)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 42, 57, and 171 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 185 and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Article II of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (26,27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Articles 185 and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina (24)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 186 and 187 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina (24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 195 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina (27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 9 of the Law on the Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (31)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 9 of the Law on the Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (31)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		Article 173(e) of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina (27)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (32)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (32)

\* Country has no conscription (31)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (32)

The labor laws of FBiH, RS, and BD do not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age to work because the labor laws do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships. In addition, FBiH, RS, and BD do not include street begging in their lists of hazardous occupations prohibited for children. (22-27) Although the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina BiH criminalizes human trafficking for forced labor, it fails to specifically outlaw forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from trafficking in persons. (28) Laws related to illicit activities in BiH are also not sufficient because using, procuring, and offering children for the production and trafficking of drugs are not criminally prohibited. Moreover, the laws of BiH and FBiH do not meet international standards for the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and legislation in BiH, FBiH, RS, and BD do not meet international standards for the recruitment of minors by non-state armed groups, as their criminal codes fail to explicitly prohibit this offense. (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 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 & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Social Policy	Enforces labor laws, including those on child labor. (5) The Cantonal-Level Labor Inspectorates (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Ministry of Labor and Veterans' Labor Inspectorate (Republika Srpska), and the Administrative Support Department (Brčko District) enforce labor laws at the canton, entity, and district levels respectively. (22,27,29)
State Investigative and Protection Agency (SIPA) and Border Police (SBP)	SIPA investigates human trafficking crimes and enforces anti-trafficking laws across the entire country. SBP identifies victims of human trafficking at the border. (5,6,30)
State, Entity, and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Cantonal-Level Prosecutors' Offices	Prosecute human trafficking, forced labor, enticement to prostitution, and forced begging cases at their respective levels, based on applicable laws. (5,6)

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### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in BiH took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of appropriate referral mechanisms.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	133 (10)	191 (33)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (23)	Yes (22,27,29)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	105,460 (10)	302,905 (32)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (10)	0 (33)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A	N/A
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A	N/A
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (23-25)	Yes (22,27,29)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10)	Yes (33)

Officials indicated that there were sufficient resources provided to the Labor Inspectorates and that the number of labor inspectors appeared to be adequate. In 2022, labor inspectors received training on labor law enforcement and the identification of hazardous work and human trafficking. (5) The Labor Inspectorate is authorized to assess administrative penalties up to approximately \$555 (1,000 *konvertibilna marka*), and labor inspectors in both entities and BD may visit formal sector worksites without prior supervisory approval. (5,22-27) Complaint mechanisms also exist in both entities and BD, including a mechanism for receiving online complaints, but research found that BiH does not have an official system for referring children identified during labor inspections to social services providers unless they are victims of human trafficking. (29)

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in BiH 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 training for responsible enforcement authorities.

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (10)	Yes (33)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	9 (32)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	7 (32)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	20 (32)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Yes (32)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown

Forced begging cases are pursued by cantonal- and entity-level police and cantonal-, entity-, and state-level prosecutors. Children who are detained for begging are generally referred to social services providers, which are often run by NGOs with funding from the Ministry of Security or the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. (5,9,32) However, law enforcement officials sometimes penalize child victims of forced begging by issuing fines against the children. (17,33,34) Research also indicates that law enforcement officials and social workers would benefit from additional training on identifying children used for forced labor and begging, as these cases are often misclassified as child negligence or simply "Roma custom" (referring to higher rates of participation in the informal market). (4,17)

In November 2022, the Tuzla Cantonal Court sentenced 6 offenders to a total of 74 years of imprisonment, a historical first for the judicial system in BiH as the highest sentence for trafficking in persons in BiH to date and also the first conviction for organized human trafficking for child labor exploitation. (5) However, some courts continue to impose sentences under the legal minimum or dismiss charges against perpetrators altogether. (5,37,38) In addition, enforcement officials are often unwilling to pursue investigations and prosecutions against parents involved in the trafficking of their children, particularly for forced labor, and shelters subsequently return children to the parents who were involved in the trafficking process. (5,17)

Additionally, in December 2022, the Court of BiH concluded a 4-year case involving international trafficking in human beings, including minors, for the purposes of labor exploitation and involvement in criminal offenses and ultimately sentenced 5 individuals to a total of 33 years of prison. Two defendants were each sentenced to 12 years of prison and were also ordered to pay back illicit gains in the amount of \$423,975 (389,887 euros). (32) One defendant was sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of \$5,560 (10,000 *konvertibilna marka*), and the other 2 defendants were each sentenced to 2 years in prison (with a fine in 1 case of \$2,780 (5,000 *konvertibilna marka*)). (5,6,32)

### 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 the lack of inclusion of all relevant agencies.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Department of the State Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons (State Coordinator) within the Ministry of Security (MOS)	Coordinates human trafficking survivor protection efforts among relevant ministries at the entity-level and among prosecutors at the state-, entity-, and local-levels, as well as with NGOs. (11,31,35) Oversees the human trafficking database, which includes data from NGOs, SIPA, SBP, and police agencies and prosecutors' offices at all levels. (31,35,36) Publishes data from this database in its annual report on human trafficking. Oversees shelter management and monitors NGO compliance with the agreed-upon provisions on survivors' assistance. (31,36) During the reporting period, the National Coordinator's Office allocated approximately \$71,406 (130,000 <i>konvertibilna marka</i> ) to fund 7 NGOs, providing support and housing to survivors of human trafficking. (5)

Although the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force is meant to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts across agencies, representatives from FBiH and RS Ministries of Labor are not included. (2,7,39)

### 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 implementation of existing policies.

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

Policy	Description & Activities
Strategy to Suppress Trafficking in Human Beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020–2023)	Includes activities to prevent forced labor, including child labor. (3) During the reporting period, the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force established by the Strategy continued to meet regularly and was expanded to include representation from the Service for Foreigners' Affairs per the guidance of MOS. (5)
Guidelines for Work of Regional Monitoring Teams	Enhance the cooperation of monitoring team members and the National Referral Mechanism. (30,40) Include a section on mixed migration flows, in which unaccompanied migrant children and victims of human trafficking are addressed. (30) During the reporting period, the regional monitoring teams continued to meet regularly and implemented their respective annual action plans. (5)
Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Sarajevo Canton	Prevents begging, exploitation of children, and abuse of children in Canton Sarajevo. (39,40) Sets rules on state cooperation for victim protection and mandates the provision of physical, psychological, health, and social protection for children. (40) Research was unable to determine whether the Protocol was active during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (10)

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In April 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the 2021–2025 National Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma, which calls for higher rates of civil registration of Roma, more opportunities for fair employment, and better educational outcomes for Roma children, all of which factor into lower child labor participation rates. (5,41,42)

## 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 a lack of adequate funding.

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

Program	Description & Activities
Daily Centers†	Centers for Social Welfare-supported and NGO-operated drop-in centers in seven locations across the country, designed to assist vulnerable street children. (11,31,39) Provide direct assistance to children, including educational activities, counseling, food, and hygiene. (3) Sarajevo's Center for Social Welfare Mobile Team also engages in daily outreach to children on the streets and to families in vulnerable communities throughout the capital region. (3) During the reporting period, the centers continued to operate normally and provided children involved in begging and other forms of street work with material and educational support. (5) However, Sarajevo's Mobile Team staff continues to lack sufficient resources for their work, especially reliable transportation. (31,43) Daily Centers also lack consistent financial and technical support, which may limit the ability of these centers to identify and assist children working on the streets. (30,35,46) In addition, support for street children outside Sarajevo varies significantly. (3) Although the government provides some social services for low-income families through the Centers for Social Welfare, many families do not receive enough assistance to reduce their reliance on child labor, especially begging. (31,43,45)
Assistance for Trafficking Victims†	Government program that allocates small grants to local NGOs for the provision of shelter and social services to survivors of human trafficking, including counseling, educational assistance and job training for domestic survivors, and visa and legal services for foreign survivors of human trafficking. (3,20) In 2022, the government allocated approximately \$71,406 (130,000 <i>konvertibilna marka</i> ) to support designated NGOs. (5)
Prevention and Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina	Joint project by the EU and the Council of Europe with \$790,720 in funding over 3 years to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to better identify victims of human trafficking and heighten public awareness of human trafficking. (46,47) Activities include training for labor inspectors, police officers, healthcare providers, and education professionals. (20) During the reporting period, the Office of the State Coordinator submitted its final report on its anti-trafficking efforts in 2021 to the Council of Ministers. (5)

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 BiH.

## 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 BiH (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships.	2015 – 2022
	Criminalize forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from human trafficking in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District.	2018 – 2022
Legal Framework	Ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including the use, procurement, and offering of a child for the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that the laws criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including street begging.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina's legislation criminally prohibits using children for prostitution, production of pornography, and pornographic performances.	2019 – 2022



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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Collect and publish information on labor and criminal law enforcement efforts, including labor inspectorate funding.	2015 – 2022
	Create an official mechanism for referring children identified during labor inspections to social services providers.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that children are not penalized for being victims of the worst forms of child labor.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that law enforcement, judiciary officials, and social services providers are trained on indicators of child trafficking—including trafficking of migrant children—and are able to properly identify victims, classify violations, use referral mechanisms, and prosecute offenders.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors receive training on all sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including hazardous work in agriculture.	2021 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure that all relevant ministries are represented in the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force.	2017 – 2022
Government Policies	Ensure that the government publishes information on activities conducted under policies that address child labor, including the Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Canton Sarajevo.	2021 – 2022
Social Programs	Ensure that inclusive education initiatives receive adequate funding to support activities aimed toward improving academic outcomes for vulnerable children.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that all children have access to education by eliminating school-related fees, accommodating children with disabilities, and preventing discrimination against minority students.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that all children have access to birth registration or identity documentation required to enroll in school.	2011 – 2022
	Allow Bosniak children in RS to access education in the Bosnian language and end the "Two Schools Under One Roof" practice to eliminate discrimination in schools based on ethnicity in FBiH.	2018 – 2022
	Provide programs such as Daily Centers and Centers for Social Welfare with adequate financial and technical resources to assist vulnerable families and survivors of child labor.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure sufficient resources to provide social services and education to potential and actual victims of domestic or international human trafficking, including unaccompanied minors.	2014 – 2022
	Establish programs to support street children living outside of Sarajevo.	2019 – 2022

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