

In 2022, Djibouti made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government signed a presidential decree mandating the establishment of the National Committee to Fight Against Trafficking and Similar Practices and, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, established and opened the Center for Unaccompanied Children and Vulnerable Migrants, which provides mental health and medical support, legal assistance, shelter, food, and clothes to vulnerable young migrants. The Ministry of Women and Families also conducted a study on children living in the street in Djibouti City, which included information about the prevalence and conditions of forced child labor. However, children in Djibouti 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 street work. Minimum age provisions apply only to children with a formal employment contract, which does not comply with international standards. In addition, the government did not make adequate efforts to enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor due to a lack of financial and human resource allocations and reporting mechanisms. Finally, the government did not publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Djibouti. 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	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		64.8

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

Source for all other data: Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2023. (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
Agriculture	Caring for livestock, including goats (3)
Industry	Construction, activities unknown (4)
Services	Domestic work, [†] activities unknown (4-6)
	Street work, including vending, shining shoes, washing cars, and begging (4,6-8)
	Working in restaurants, small shops, and family businesses (4-6)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (9)
	Forced domestic work and begging (6,9-12)
	Use in illicit activities, including the selling of marijuana (3)

[†] 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.

Continued conflict between Russia and Ukraine—which, together, account for the majority of Djibouti's wheat imports—and continued drought in the region have led to rural workers losing livelihoods and rising commodity prices throughout the country. Reports claim that this has subjected roughly 49,000 women and children to

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higher risks of labor exploitation, including child labor, and has greatly increased the risk of children dropping out of school. (13) Djibouti is vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate, and children will become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation as the country experiences more climate change-related weather events and trends such as droughts, floods, and sea level rise. (14)




Reports suggest that children, including undocumented migrant girls, are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation in Djibouti City, along the Ethiopia-Djibouti trucking corridor, and in Obock, the primary point of arrival and departure for Yemen. (9,12) Djibouti is a common transit country for mixed-migration flows from Ethiopia, Yemen, the East Africa region, and the Arabian Peninsula, and children from these regions are vulnerable to exploitation. (4,8,12) During the reporting period, the Ministry for Women and Families conducted a study on over 1,000 children forced to beg in Djibouti City, revealing that an overwhelming majority of the children—over 90 percent—were from Ethiopia and Somalia. (6)

During the reporting period, the government completed and inaugurated a new kindergarten school in the Markazi refugee camp. Girls, children living in rural Djibouti, children with disabilities, children in nomadic families, and child refugees continue to have low rates of school enrollment, making these children more vulnerable to child labor. (15-18) Although primary and middle schools are tuition free, other school-related expenses may prevent children from attending school. (19) Requirements for documentation and birth registration can be barriers to accessing education because in practice, migrant children and refugees without UNHCR documentation cannot attend public schools, and children in rural areas and street children without birth documents can attend school but cannot take exams. (6) For children born in rural areas and street children, there is often a financial barrier in obtaining birth documentation later in childhood, preventing them from accessing all benefits of public schooling and thus increasing their vulnerability to child labor. (5,6,20) Registered refugee children are integrated into local schools while undocumented migrant children and refugees awaiting status determination have access to schools in refugee camps. (4,6)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Djibouti 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 Djibouti's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of prohibitions related to the use of a child for prostitution.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 5 of the Labor Code (21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 108 and 110 of the Labor Code (21)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 110 of the Labor Code (21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2 and 290 of the Labor Code; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (21,22)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 5–7 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (22,23)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 394, 396, 462, and 463 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 5–8 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants (23,24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 355, 356, and 461 of the Penal Code (24)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 1 of the National Army Amendment Decree (25)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 149–151 and 461 of the Penal Code (24)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 4 and 14 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (26)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 16 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (26)

* Country has no conscription (27)

The Labor Code's minimum age provision applies only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement, which does not conform to international standards requiring the protection of all children under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (21,24) In addition, while Djibouti's Labor Code contains a hazardous work list, it only applies to domestic work, work in hotels, and work in bars, omitting hazardous activities like street work, in which children are known to be engaged in the country. Article 111 in the Labor Code grants authority to the Minister of Labor to publish a hazardous work list enumerating additional hazardous sectors, which has not yet been done. (21,24) Furthermore, laws do not specifically criminalize the use of a child for prostitution. (23,24)

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 (MOL)	Enforces all labor laws, including child labor laws and regulations. (10) Through its General Inspectorate of Labor and Social Laws, regulates youth employment. (5)
Criminal Enforcement Agencies	Enforces criminal laws and investigates crimes related to child labor through the Djibouti National Police, including the Brigade for Minors. (10) Through the National Commission on Human Rights receives complaints and investigates cases of human rights violations, including child labor. (28) Assists survivors in obtaining legal aid to prosecute violators. (28)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes child labor cases referred by MOL. (10)

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Labor Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to address child labor (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$112,994 (4)	Unknown (29)
Number of Labor Inspectors	5 (4)	5 (4,29)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (21)	Yes (6,21)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (4)	Yes (6,29)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	6 (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	14 (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (4)	Unknown (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (4)	Yes (6,29)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (21)	Yes (21)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (4)	No (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (4)	No (4)

Previous years' reports show that the labor inspectorate conducts an exceptionally low number of worksite inspections, which may impede the enforcement of child labor laws. The enforcement of child labor laws is also challenging due to a lack of child labor-specific training for inspectors and minimal resources for transportation, limiting the inspectorate's ability to conduct inspections outside of Djibouti City. (4) While the law includes a mechanism to impose monetary civil penalties, in practice, the labor inspectorate currently issues warning letters outlining how to remedy the situation in order to avoid a penalty. There is no formal mechanism to refer children found during labor inspections to appropriate social services. (4,6)

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to address child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (4)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (4)	Unknown (6)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (4)	Unknown (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (4)

Research indicates that NGOs in Djibouti communicate human trafficking indicators to the police, who refer these cases to the prosecutor's office. (3,30) During the reporting period, the government did not provide information on criminal law enforcement for inclusion in this report.

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 clarity of institutional coordination mandates among government ministries to address all forms of child labor.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Council for Children	Assesses progress on issues pertaining to children and proposes policy and strategic guidelines. (8,31) Headed by the Prime Minister and includes public stakeholders, civil society partners, associations, and non-governmental organizations involved in the field of childhood. (31) Research was unable to determine whether the National Council for Children was active during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the government mandated the establishment of a National Committee to Fight Against Human Trafficking and Similar Practices, intended to prioritize the issue of trafficking in persons and to mandate a comprehensive, inter-ministerial approach to preventing and eliminating trafficking in persons. (6,29,32) However, while various bodies coordinate efforts to address child protection and trafficking in persons, research was unable to determine if there were other active coordinating bodies dedicated to preventing and eliminating other forms of child labor. (4,5,33)

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 the lack of a policy to address child labor in its worst forms.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015–2022)	Aims to strengthen the legislative framework to address and prevent human trafficking, protect and assist human trafficking survivors, and establish a national referral mechanism between law enforcement officials and social services providers. (34) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons during the reporting period.
Child Protection Policies	Includes the National Child Policy (2022–2032), which sets out fundamental rights for children—including the right to education and the right to health—and mobilizes national resources toward these ends. (35) The National Strategic Plan for Childhood in Djibouti (2022–2026) provides political and strategic guidelines for implementing the country's child protection policy. (29,36) Both policies are coordinated by the Ministry of Women and the Family. (35) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement these policies during the reporting period.
National Strategy for Migration	Promotes aid and livelihoods for migrants in Djibouti and raises awareness for the rights and humanitarian needs of migrants. Facilitates coordination between humanitarian partners and the government through the National Coordination Office for Migration. (37) Launched in 2021 with the assistance of the IOM. (37) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Strategy for Migration during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (18,36,38)

During the reporting period, the Government of Djibouti approved and implemented the Master Plan for Education and Training (2021–2035) and its implementation plan, the Action Plan for Education and Training (2021–2025). These plans aim to expand inclusive and equitable education to all children in Djibouti, increase access to vocational training, achieve universal basic education, and to develop the preschool education system. (18,29,36) The plans bring together various ministries to ensure cohesive implementation, planning, and monitoring of their programs. (17) The Ministry of Social Affairs and Solidarity, in partnership with an international NGO, performed an evaluation of the National Social Protection Strategy (2018–2022) to develop terms of reference for the creation of a new strategy. The original strategy sought to broaden social protections for vulnerable Djiboutians, including children and youth from families experiencing poverty, by collecting data on the needs of these children and calling for increased investments in child welfare. (38,39) Despite these efforts, research found no evidence of a comprehensive policy to address all forms of child labor. (4,29)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy 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 & Activities
Ministry of Women and Families Programs†	Includes programs developed to provide children and families from vulnerable groups with resources to reduce their economic and social vulnerabilities, such as: the Social Assistance Program, which provides children and their families with education and in-kind support; the Support Project for Girls and Women in Precarious Situations, a multi-sectoral program which provides girls with education and training; the Country Strategic Option Program (2019–2024), a rural poverty-reduction program; and Djibouti's Support Program for Children with Academic Difficulties, a program providing academic support for children from low-income families. (40,41) An NGO implements a memoranda of understanding with the Ministry of Women and Families and the National Commission of Human Rights to provide psycho-social support and monitoring for children housed at an overnight shelter. (42) During the reporting period, the Ministry developed a guide on foster families with NGO partners, focused on minimizing child abuse, exploitation, and abandonment. (17)
IOM Center for Unaccompanied Children and Vulnerable Migrants*	Established during the reporting year as a result of a partnership between the IOM, the Ministry for Women and Family, and the Ministry of the Interior. Provides mental health services, medical support, legal assistance, and basic needs to young and child migrants, who are often vulnerable to exploitation. (6,32,43) Established in conjunction with the National Referencing Mechanism for Trafficking Victims, which allows civil society organizations and NGOs to refer people impacted by human trafficking directly to law enforcement agencies. During the reporting year, the Center provided shelter and services to 21 Ethiopian migrant children in Djibouti. (6,32)
World Bank-Funded Programs	The Integrated Cash Transfer and Human Capital Project, which ended in 2022, sought to expand the social safety net system and provide basic services in targeted poor communities, primarily through conditional cash transfers. (5,44,45) The Expanding Opportunities for Learning Project (2019–2024), a \$30 million project, supports Djibouti's efforts to expand access to quality education for 35,000 at-risk or underserved children, including girls, refugees, and disabled students. The Government of Djibouti and the International Development Association (IDA) co-finance the program, which aims to expand access to and improve retention in primary and lower secondary education for disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups. (46,47) The project also plans to build the capacity of teachers and administrators in underserved areas. (46,48,49) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement these programs during the reporting period.

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 was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Djibouti.

‡ The government had other programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (17,39,50)

Research found no evidence of programs to assist children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation. (6)

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 Djibouti (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that all children are afforded minimum age for work protections under the law, including children working outside formal employment relationships.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include sectors in which child labor is known to occur and that expose children to abuse, injury, unhealthy environments, and particularly difficult conditions including street work.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of children in prostitution.	2012 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish complete labor law enforcement information, including funding of the labor inspectorate, the number of labor inspections conducted in total and at worksite, the number of child labor violations found, and the number of penalties imposed and collected.	2021 – 2022
	Establish a mechanism for the Ministry of Labor to receive child labor complaints.	2010 – 2022
	Establish a reciprocal referral mechanism between the labor inspectorate and social services to protect and rehabilitate children involved in child labor.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure the government conducts an adequate number of labor inspections.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has the necessary equipment, including adequate transportation, to conduct labor inspections in all regions.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that civil penalties for child labor violations are imposed and collected.	2021 – 2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Publish complete criminal law enforcement data, including training for criminal investigators, number of investigations, number of violations, number of prosecutions, number of convictions, and number of penalties imposed.	2021 – 2022
	Institutionalize child labor-focused trainings for all labor inspectors, including by training new labor inspectors at the beginning of their employment, as well as providing refresher courses throughout their employment.	2022
Coordination	Ensure that the National Council for Children is active and able to carry out its intended mandate of assessing progress on issues pertaining to children and proposing child-related policy and strategic guidelines.	2009 – 2022
	Establish a coordinating body dedicated to preventing and eliminating all forms of child labor.	2009 – 2022
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor, including the National Strategic Plan for Childhood and the National Strategy for Migration, and that data on these activities are published on an annual basis.	2017 – 2022
	Adopt a comprehensive national policy to address all forms of child labor, including its worst forms.	2016 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2022
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children in rural areas, including girls, by removing school-related expenses.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that all children, including refugees, asylum seekers, and children in rural areas have access to education by removing barriers to obtaining national birth certificates or UNHCR refugee documentation to attend school.	2019 – 2022
	Implement programs to specifically address children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement all social programs related to child labor, including the Expanding Opportunities for Learning Project, and that data on these activities are published on an annual basis.	2022

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