In 2022, Ecuador made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Interior created the National Directorate for the Investigation of Crimes Against Women, Family, Children, Adolescents, Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling, which oversees law enforcement units responsible for investigating labor and sex trafficking cases that involve children. Further, the Ministry of Tourism approved a new Code of Conduct for tourism industry workers that includes actions meant to prevent the sexual exploitation of minors in tourist establishments. In addition, the government's new social





program, Inclusive Cities, brought protection services and temporary housing to 9,000 participants in 17 cities. However, children in Ecuador are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. The Ministry of Labor has reported that the resources allocated to the labor inspectorate—including the number of inspectors, transportation, and equipment—is insufficient to conduct inspections in the informal sector. The Government of Ecuador has also not undertaken a nationwide child labor survey since 2012; the lack of current information on the prevalence of child labor hampers efforts to address the problem.

## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table I provides key indicators on children's work and education in Ecuador.

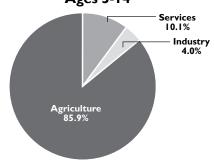
Table I. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	7.0 (260,567)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.5
Primary Completion Rate (%)		97.5

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 Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo (ENEMDU), 2021. (2)

Figure 1. 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	Production of bananas, rice, coffee, cocoa, palm oil, sugarcane, vegetables, citrus, and flowers (primarily for domestic consumption), including with use of chemical products† and machetes† (3-10)
	Fishing† (8,10,11)
	Hazardous work in the carving† and threading† of abacá fiber (11,12)
Industry	Gold mining† and small-scale mining† (7,10,11)
	Production of bricks† (7,10,11)
	Construction† and brickwork (3,4,10,11)
Services	Work in auto shops, including hazardous work involved in used heavy machinery (10)
	Garbage scavenging (10)
	Food services, including working as waiters and kitchen staff. (10)
	Domestic work† (8,10,11)
	Street work, including begging and vending (8,10,11,13)

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#### MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (10,11,14,15)
Forms of Child	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking and robbery, sometimes as result of human trafficking (8,10,11,16)
Labor‡	Recruitment of children by Colombian non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,17)
	Use in the production of pornography (10,11,14)
	Forced labor in small scale banana, hemp, and palm plantations, cacao, coffee, floriculture, mining; and in domestic work, street vending, and begging (8-11,15)

<sup>†</sup> Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

Civil society and government sources reported incidences of Peruvian adolescents being recruited under false promises of employment into forced labor in illegal mines in Ecuador, where child prostitution can also occur. (11,18-20) Migrant and refugee children from Colombia and Venezuela are vulnerable to street work, including forced begging. They are also vulnerable to exploitative labor practices in some parts of the fishing sector in the coastal region and in artisanal mining in southern Ecuador and in the northern province of Imbabura. (3,4,10,11,18,21) Some Indigenous children between the ages of 6 and 10 from the highlands are victims of human trafficking for forced begging in Guayaquil and Quito, initially under false promises of employment. (6,11,22) Some migrant and refugee children from other Latin American countries, as well as Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian girls, are used in child prostitution. (3,4,8,11,15,23) Sex trafficking networks also recruit children from schools and, increasingly, through social media platforms. (14,21) Traffickers force children into criminality, recruiting them to engage in drug trafficking and robbery. (8,11)

Despite education being free in Ecuador, children face barriers to accessing education including lack of space and teachers, economic difficulty in buying uniforms and school supplies, inadequate school infrastructure, teen pregnancy, and lack of transportation for children who must attend schools far from their homes. (3,4,10,18) In addition, some NGOs have reported students being assigned to schools that are far from their homes. (10) Reports indicate that approximately 57,000 children abandoned their studies during the reporting period due to involvement in informal employment or begging networks that prevented them from attending school. (24) Reporting also indicates that as many as 65 percent of school-age Venezuelan refugee and migrant children are not enrolled in Ecuador's educational system due to non-institutional barriers like a lack of resources and local discrimination. (11) Undocumented students face difficulties graduating from secondary school as national authorities are unable to grant diplomas without identity documents. (10) Lastly, the government has not conducted a comprehensive nationwide child labor survey since 2012, which hampers efforts to eradicate child labor. (11-16)

### II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

	Convention	Ratification
ESTATE V	ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
<b>MILLION</b>	ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	UN CRC	<b>✓</b>
	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	<b>✓</b>

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

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

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

	Meets		
Standard	International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Article 46 of the Constitution; Article 82 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (25,26)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 87 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (26)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 5, 6, and 8 of Resolution No. 016 of 2008; Article 5 of Ministerial Accord MDT-2015-0131 (27,28)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 82, 91, 105, and 213 of the Integral Penal Code (29)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 47, 91, and 92 of the Integral Penal Code; Article 117 of the Organic Law on Human Mobility (29,30)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 91 and 100-104 of the Integral Penal Code (29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 47, 219, and 220 of the Integral Penal Code (29)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution (25,26)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		· /
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 127 of the Integral Penal Code; Article 57 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 161 of the Constitution (25,26,29)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Articles 38, 42, and 43 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law (31)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 4 of the Organic Intercultural Education Law; Chapter 5, Article 28 of the Constitution (25,31)

<sup>\*</sup>Country has no conscription (25)

## 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 enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human resource allocation.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforces child labor laws in the formal sector through the Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups, which has partially resumed the responsibilities of the now-defunct "Project to Eradicate Child Labor" (PETI). (10) Monitors and identifies cases of child labor, assesses penalties, promotes public awareness campaigns to prevent child labor, provides technical assistance to local governments on child labor, and identifies victims of child labor for the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) to provide special services. (4,11) Separate from MOL, MIES conducts routine inspections in the informal sector for child labor and provides remediation services to child laborers and their families. (3,4,18) Using the Unified System of Registration of Child Labor, MOL collects information on child laborers and refers children to appropriate government services. (4,11)
Attorney General's Office (AGO)	Enforces criminal laws against child labor and hazardous child labor, including the prosecution of cases. (10,11,18) The AGO's Specialized Victim Witness Protection Program provides immediate support and shelter to survivors and witnesses willing to press charges and testify against their abusers, and coordinates referrals for further assistance with other government agencies. (18)
Ministry of Interior (MOI)	Enforces child labor laws. In 2022, through the National Police, MOI established the National Directorate for the Investigation of Crimes Against Women, Family, Children, Adolescents, Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling* with four specialized units: (I) the National Investigation Unit for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (UNIPEN); (2) the National Investigation Unit for Gender Violence, Women or Members of the Family Nucleus; (3) the National Investigation Unit for Sexual Integrity; (4) and the National Investigation Unit for Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling. All of these units are tasked with investigating crimes against children, including child labor. (10) UNIPEN is the primary anti-trafficking law enforcement unit responsible for investigating labor and sex trafficking cases involving children and is also responsible for investigating all crimes against children. (10)

<sup>\*</sup> Agency responsible for child labor enforcement was created during the reporting period.

# **Ecuador**

#### **MODERATE ADVANCEMENT**

### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Ecuador took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,187,168 (11)	\$4,000,000 (10)
Number of Labor Inspectors	117 (11)	149 (10)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	12,335 (11)	7,782 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	5 (11)	6 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	19 (11)	4 (10)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	19 (11)	4 (10)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (11)	Yes (10)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Ecuador's labor force, which includes approximately 8.3 million workers. (10,11,33,34) MOL also reported that the labor inspectorate lacked the necessary resources, such as transportation and equipment, to fulfill its mandate. (3,10) Furthermore, inspectors do not have sufficient knowledge of child labor laws and lack training on identifying victims of human trafficking. (19,21) While Ecuador's labor inspectors do carry out inspections in the informal sector, they focus primarily on formal sector employment. (11) Although Ecuadorian laws and regulations governing child labor are comprehensive, those regarding hazardous work are not enforced equally in rural areas and family-run businesses. (11) The government does not publish information from the Unified System of Registration of Child Labor, which collects data on the number of child laborers and allows labor enforcement to refer children to the appropriate government services, and research indicates the government continues to struggle with ensuring that some children rescued from working in the informal sector receive adequate social services. (19,35)

#### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Ecuador took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of specialized shelters for boys who are survivors of sex or labor trafficking.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (II)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	479 (11)	414 (10)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	39 (10)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	2 (10)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (11)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (11)	Yes (10)

A reciprocal referral mechanism exists between law enforcement and social services for victims of human trafficking; however, civil society reports that the mechanism is, at times, ad hoc. (11) Shelters serve only girls

who are survivors of sex trafficking. There are no shelters for boys who are survivors of sex trafficking, or for survivors of labor trafficking. (14) Although the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) will generally assign child victims to shelters depending on space availability, officials cite a lack of shelters in many provinces as a primary constraint in victim assistance. (3,18,21,36,37) Shelters have reported not receiving promised government funds in a timely manner and largely relied on NGOs and international funding to maintain their services. (15) Penalties were imposed for convictions related to child labor; however, the Judicial Council did not provide specific information on the penalties themselves. (10)

#### 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).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups	MOL, through the Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups, is the primary coordinating mechanism for the elimination of child labor. The Directorate partially assumed the roles and responsibilities of the now-defunct PETI program. (10) Aims to promote employment for parents and prevent child labor through labor inspections. (10) The Directorate was active during the reporting period, offering support for child labor eradication efforts, assessing penalties, and providing technical assistance to local governments on child labor eradication. (24)

#### 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 an active and permanent policy to address child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor (2021–2025)†	Promotes employment for parents and prevention of child labor through inspections. (10) Developed in March through the National Council for Intergenerational Equity's National Agenda for Intergenerational Equity, which was created as a technical planning instrument for the formulation of public policies at the national and local levels. Despite the end of the PETI program in 2021, MOL reported it continued to support child labor eradication efforts through the Directorate for the Attention to Priority Groups. (10) Reports indicate that, although this policy has been officially adopted, it has not yet been implemented. (10)
National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2019–2030)	Aims to prevent, investigate, and impose legal sanctions against human trafficking with a focus on human rights, mobility, and gender, as the majority of victims in Ecuador are women. The Action Plan includes U.Sfunded support through the IOM and is the government's first multisectoral plan on human trafficking that establishes goals for every public sector institution to address human trafficking. (38-40) The government continued to implement the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons during the reporting period. (15)
National Development Plan (Plan de Creación de Oportunidades) (2021–2025)	Creates employment opportunities for Ecuadorians and aims to establish a plan for future policy areas. These include economic, social, integral security, ecological transition, and institutional policy areas. (41) In the social axis listed in the plan, the Ecuadorian government lays out its objective to protect families, guarantee their rights and services, eradicate poverty, and promote social inclusion. (10) In order to meet this objective, Ecuador has set a goal of decreasing the percentage of children between the ages of 5 and 14 that engage in child labor. This plan aims to reach the goal of decreasing child labor from 6.1 percent to 4.4 percent by 2025. (9,10,41)

<sup>†</sup> Policy was approved during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Tourism approved a new Code of Conduct for tourism industry workers. The Code outlines actions meant to prevent the sexual exploitation of minors in tourist establishments. (15)

#### 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 inadequate efforts to address the worst forms of child labor in all relevant sectors.

## **Ecuador**

### MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Inclusive Cities*†	MIES program that helps guarantee the rights of children, adolescents, people with disabilities, and the elderly population through social protection programs. Provides temporary housing for children and adolescents. (42) During the reporting period, the Inclusive Cities program reached 9,000 participants across 17 cities with populations vulnerable to child labor. (10)
National Program to Combat Street Begging and Child Labor†	MIES program that raises awareness about child begging and aims to facilitate social services for children begging in the streets. (11) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Program to Combat Street Begging and Child Labor 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

Although civil society stakeholders commended the government's social programs, they reiterated that these programs only make limited interventions in sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, specifically the informal and agricultural sectors. (18) Research found that a social registry that contains information on low-income families has not been updated since 2015, which hampers its ability to sufficiently fund social assistance programs. Civil society notes that an update to the social registry should prioritize the most vulnerable populations at risk of child labor. (4,11)

### 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 Ecuador (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Strengthen social services referral mechanisms for survivors of child labor, especially for those found in the informal sector.	2015 – 2022
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 149 to 556 to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 8.3 million people.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate is properly funded so that inspectors receive sufficient resources, including transportation and equipment, to carry out their duties adequately.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that inspections sufficiently cover sectors in which child labor has been reported, including the informal sector.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that laws and regulations governing child labor, especially hazardous labor, are enforced consistently throughout the country, including in rural areas and family-run businesses.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient knowledge of existing laws and receive adequate training in victim identification to conduct inspections and refer victims to social services.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal investigators receive sufficient resources, such as additional investigators, to investigate cases of suspected child labor crimes and refer victims to social services consistently.	2016 – 2022
	Provide specialized shelters for boys and girls that have been victimized by labor trafficking. Ensure that funds are distributed to shelters in a timely manner.	2018 – 2022
	Publish child labor data collected through the Unified System of Registering Child Labor.	2018 – 2022
Government Policies	Fully implement the National Council for Intergenerational Equity policy plan, "Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor."	2022
Social Programs	Conduct a comprehensive child labor survey to ensure sufficient and current data to inform government actions to eliminate child labor.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure students without identity documents are able to graduate.	2022
	Develop and administer social programs to address the vulnerability of migrant and refugee children to exploitative labor practices in the fishing sector and in artisanal mining.	2018 – 2022
	Eliminate barriers to and make education accessible for all children, including Indigenous and refugee children and children from rural areas, by increasing classroom space and teachers, addressing teen pregnancy issues, providing adequate transportation, and easing the economic burden of buying school supplies.	2014 – 2022

<sup>\*</sup> Program was launched during the reporting period.

<sup>†</sup> Program is funded by the Government of Ecuador.

<sup>‡</sup>The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (18,43)

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Ensure that all social programs that address child labor, including the National Campaign to Combat Street Begging and Child Labor, remain active and publish information on activities undertaken on an annual basis.	2019 – 2022
	Ensure that social programs make interventions in sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, specifically in the informal and agricultural sectors.	2018 – 2022
	Update the social registry—which contains information on low-income families and informs the provision of social assistance—to include families most vulnerable to child labor.	2020 – 2022

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