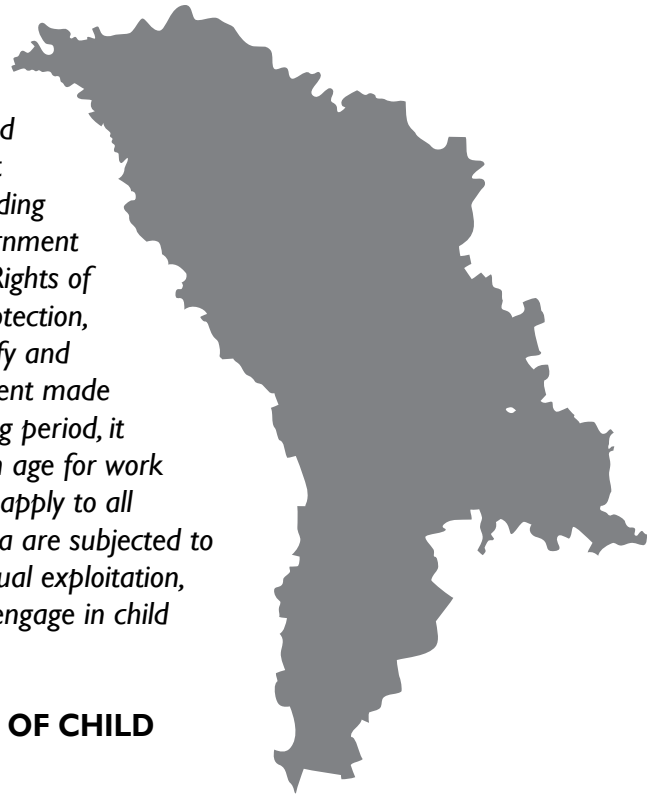


In 2022, Moldova made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Moldova enacted a law in December 2022 which authorizes labor inspectors to perform onsite, unannounced inspections if inspectors have information or suspicion that certain types of labor violations may be taking place, including child labor and trafficking in persons. In addition, the government reactivated the National Council on the Protection of the Rights of Children, established a new National Program for Child Protection, and signed a joint order between three ministries to identify and assist children at risk of child labor. Although the government made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas during the reporting period, it does not meet the international standard for the minimum age for work because the Labor Code's minimum age provisions do not apply to all children working in the informal sector. Children in Moldova are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture.



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

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

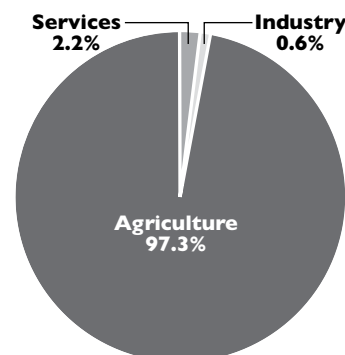
**Table I. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	24.3 (102,105)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	92.1
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	29.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		107.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Labour Force Survey-Child Labour Survey (LFS-SIMPOC), 2009. (2)

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



Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Agriculture,† including growing and harvesting crops, picking fruits, and raising farm animals (3-10)
	Forestry, including transporting heavy loads (9)
	Fishing, including feeding fish (9)
Industry	Construction,† including carrying heavy loads (3,6,8,9)
	Manufacturing (3,5)
	Working in the garment sector (5,7)
	Baking,† including confectionary and food preservation (5,7)
	Sanitation and waste management (6)

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Street work, including portering, begging, and washing cars (3,5,6,10-13)
	Domestic work (7,13)
	Working in hospitality, retail, restaurants, amusement parks, and transportation (3,5-7,13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3-5,7,8,10,13-15)
	Forced begging (5,7,8,10,13,15)
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs (5,6)

† 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.




Trafficking of children, particularly those from rural or poor families, continues to be a concern in Moldova, including in the separatist region of Transnistria which is outside of the de facto control of the Moldovan government. (3,4,16,17) Traffickers exploit both boys and girls ages 5 to 14 for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation as well as in forced labor. (4,14) Children abandoned by parents who have migrated abroad, living on the street, or those who are refugees remain particularly vulnerable, and observers express concern that corrupt management in state residential institutions like orphanages exploit children in domestic services or on farms. (3,4,16,18) Online commercial sexual exploitation of children has increased in recent years, partially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. (3,4,8,18) Lack of information limits an assessment of the types of work that children perform and the sectors in which they work, including in the separatist region of Transnistria, which is not under the de facto control of Moldovan authorities. Civil society sources report that the child labor situation in Transnistria does not differ significantly from the rest of Moldova. (3) However, survivors of child labor and human trafficking in Transnistria do not have access to Moldovan legal protections or social services. (4)

Children in Moldova are guaranteed free transportation to school, and no fees are required for schooling through grade 10. However, students in grades 10 through 12 are often charged fees to rent textbooks. (3) Children from Roma communities also continue to be less likely to enroll in school and at higher risk of dropping out due in part to discrimination by school officials and distrust of public institutions by Roma families, and are more vulnerable to child labor and human trafficking. (3,5,14) Schools in rural areas often lack a sufficient number of teachers, and public schools lack adequate resources to address the needs of children with disabilities. (3,5,6)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Moldova 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 Moldova’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including minimum age protections that do not extend to children working in the informal sector.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 46 of the Labor Code (19)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 255 of the Labor Code; Article 3 of the Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (19,20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Government Decision No. 541; Articles 2 and 3 of the Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor; Articles 103, 105, 255, and 256 of the Labor Code (19-21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 44 of the Constitution; Article 168(b) of the Criminal Code; Article 7 of the Labor Code; Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (19,20,22,23)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 2 and 25–30 of the Law on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings; Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor; Article 206 of the Criminal Code (20,23,25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 175, 206, and 208 of the Criminal Code; Article 6 of the Law on the Rights of the Child; Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor; Law No. 207 (20,23,26,27)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 208 and 217 of the Criminal Code; Collective Convention on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (20,23)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 12 of Law No. 162-XVI on the Status of Military Servicemembers (28)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 28 of Law No. 1245-XV on the Preparation of Citizens for Homeland Defense (29)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 26 of the Law on the Rights of the Child; Article 206(d) of the Criminal Code (23,26)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	18	Articles 13 and 152 of the Education Code of 2014 (30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 35 of the Constitution; Article 9 of the Education Code of 2014 (22,30)

On December 22, 2022, Moldova's Parliament passed a law which came into effect in March 2023 and newly empowers the State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) to conduct unannounced visits at worksites if they have information or indications of certain violations, including trafficking in persons or labor exploitation. (3,18) However, as this law does not grant the authority to conduct unannounced inspections if there are any other direct or indirect means of obtaining the necessary information, potential violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses may remain undetected. The government also amended Law 316/2022 to certify that during the investigation of cases of sexual abuse or exploitation of children, minors should be interviewed in special settings in accordance with international standards. (18) However, the Labor Code's minimum age provisions do not meet international standards because they do not apply to all children working in the informal sector. Although Article 46(3) of the Labor Code permits children as young as age 15 to work, the law also does not specify the conditions in which light work may be undertaken. (19) In addition, the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (19,30)

### 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, restrictions on unannounced inspections conducted at the national level in Moldova may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws during the reporting period.

# Moldova

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Health, Labor, and Social Protection's (MHLSP) State Labor Inspectorate (SLI)	Enforces child labor laws through inspections of labor relations of enterprises, institutions, and organizations. (5,6,9,31) Publishes an annual report on the previous year's activities. (5,32) Also operates a dedicated children's hotline which refers child survivors of trafficking for specialized legal, psychological, and social services under the National Referral System (NRS). (3,5,18)
Ministry of Internal Affairs	Oversees law enforcement agencies such as the National Center for Combating Trafficking in Persons (CCTIP), which leads criminal investigations against perpetrators of human trafficking crimes, including the trafficking of children for labor or commercial sexual exploitation. (3,14) The CCTIP also cooperates with the Border Police Inspectorate, National Anti-Corruption Center, and Customs Service, and provides partial funding for the operation of a 24/7 trafficking in persons hotline. (3,4) Also contains the Center for Combating Cybercrime, which investigates cybercrime, including online commercial sexual exploitation of children, and is the unit with primary responsibility for investigating these crimes at the National Inspectorate for Investigations of the General Police Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (5,33)
Specialized Prosecution Office for Organized Crime and Special Cases and Anti-Trafficking Bureau within the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO)	Monitors and analyzes human trafficking cases in the Anti-Trafficking Bureau within the PGO. (6,8,11) Includes a unit that investigates and prosecutes cases, including online and digital child sexual exploitation cases. (3)

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, the lack of authorization to conduct unannounced inspections at the national level in Moldova may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws (Table 6).

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$705,364 (5)	\$1,050,000 (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	104 (5)	66 (3)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (34)	Yes (34)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	2,279 (5)	1,600 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	31 (5)	18 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	6 (5)	6 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	3 (5)	5 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	No (35)	No (35)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (5)	Unknown (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (3)

In 2022, the SLI supported several training sessions on safe working conditions for all employees, including those under 18 years old, as well as on the prevention and disruption of informal work, forced labor, and human trafficking. These trainings included both new employee trainings and refresher courses for experienced inspectors, as well as training focused specifically on child labor. (3) Between January and November 2022, SLI labor inspectors conducted approximately 1,600 onsite inspections, of which 16 were targeted at identifying child labor violations. During the reporting period, the SLI responded to four direct complaints and six referrals from the police of suspected child labor. (3) The SLI identified 18 labor law violations involving minors, and courts imposed fines against 6 employers. The SLI also reported that eight children were removed from child labor as a result of labor inspections. (3)

In October 2022, Government Decision number 725 was signed into law which decreased the SLI staff limit to 84 directly hired labor inspectors. The MHLSP states that this change is intended to improve the SLI by increasing salaries to attract and retain highly qualified inspectors. (3) During the reporting period, only 66 of these

84 positions were filled, which approximates ILO recommendations for the size of Moldova's workforce. (3,36) However, the SLI has reported that its funding is insufficient to procure modern equipment, and that this hinders labor law enforcement. (3,5,6,9) Revisions to Law No. 131 on State Control of Entrepreneurial Activity were passed in December 2022 which granted the State Labor Inspectorate authority to directly issue penalties for some labor law violations which had previously required judicial approval. If an inspector finds that certain non-criminal violation of labor law has occurred, excluding informal employment or underdeclared labor, they must issue recommendations to the offender on how to resolve the violation. (3) If the violation is not resolved after the prescribed period (no less than 30 days, but no more than 90 days), then the SLI may refer the case to a competent court. This approach often results in employers making the recommended remediation to avoid a fine, then resuming the offending practice after the case has been cleared. (3)

Although Law No. 131 empowers inspectors to perform unannounced onsite inspections if labor exploitation is alleged or suspected, laws and practices introduced as part of government restructuring in 2017 and 2018 continued to limit the power of the State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) to enforce child labor laws. Laws No. 179 and No. 131 mandated that all labor inspections begin with a desk review and permit site visits only if the subject of an inspection provides insufficient documentation or if a risk assessment procedure finds reasonable indicators of a possible violation. (3,5,6,9,14,35,37) Site visits, including those conducted in response to complaints, could not take place until after the target of an inspection had 5 days to respond to a request for documents, which served as de facto advance notice of an inspection. (6,8,9,35,37) Inspectors were only permitted to forgo the documentary inspection and proceed directly to an onsite inspection with managerial approval if a risk assessment indicates an immediate threat to the environment, life, health, or property. (35,37) Furthermore, onsite labor inspections could focus only on the potential violations that have been identified in advance through either the complaint process or a desk review, even if other violations, such as child labor, were observed. (8,38,39) In 2022, these strict measures continued to limit the number and scope of onsite inspections, including unannounced inspections, that labor inspectors were empowered to conduct, and labor inspectors are still not authorized to perform routine, on site, unannounced inspections as a standard practice. (3)

When reporting inspection data, the SLI divides inspections into two categories—those that appear on the annual inspection plan and those that arise during the year when triggered by complaints or incidents. The latter are considered to be unannounced whether they are preceded by a desk audit or not. (3,5) It is therefore not possible to determine whether any truly unannounced inspections took place in 2022, and if so, how many. (3) Both government and NGO sources reported that the child labor violations identified by the government during the reporting period did not reflect the magnitude of the child labor problem in Moldova due to an insufficient number of labor inspectors, budget limitations, cultural acceptance of child labor on family farms, and legal limitations on the government's ability to conduct inspections. The number of child survivors of abuse, trauma, and exploitation supported by NGOs is substantially greater than the number of government investigations of such cases. (3,5,8) The Transnistrian region is not under the de facto control of Moldovan authorities, who are prevented from carrying out inspections and law enforcement there. (3,5,8)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Moldova 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 a lack of funding for new criminal investigators.

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

<b>Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	55 (40)	22 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	15 (40)	26 (3)
Number of Convictions	22 (40)	3 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (40)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (3)

# Moldova

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2022, 15 new law enforcement officers attended 3 initial training sessions on trafficking in persons and child labor laws. Authorities also opened 22 new cases, initiated the prosecution of 26 individuals for crimes involving the worst forms of child labor, and the CCTIP identified a case of suspected forced labor involving six boys. (3) The PGO sentenced three individuals convicted of trafficking children to prison terms of between 6 and 10 years. In addition, five survivors of trafficking successfully filed civil cases against the defendants, each of whom was awarded 20,000 MDL (\$1,043.80). (3) Criminal investigators within the CCTIP have well-furnished offices as a result of U.S. Government support over the last 12 years. However, the CCTIP does not have sufficient vehicles or fuel allocations for its daily investigation activities, nor does it have updated computer equipment. (3) High staff turnover in the past year has also hindered the CCTIP's effectiveness. (3,4) Many authorities still lack adequate training to identify potential child trafficking victims. (8)

Within the judiciary, specialized judges are trained specifically to handle cases involving human trafficking and other related crimes, such as child pornography, but special interview services for child survivors of human trafficking are also not uniformly applied which can result in re-traumatization of survivors. (4,10) In 2022, the government amended the law exempting child victims and at-risk victims from required attendance in court proceedings and began implementing video recording of interviews to prevent re-traumatization. The government also amended the law to ensure child victims of sexual abuse or exploitation, including trafficking, were interviewed in specially equipped rooms in accordance with international standards. (41) While NGOs had previously reported that judges sometimes reclassified cases from human trafficking crimes to crimes with lesser penalties, such as pimping, there were no such instances reported in 2022 and the practice was not reported to be widespread. When such reclassification occurs, victims of human trafficking are no longer protected by the provision of the criminal code that exempts trafficking victims from criminal liability for offenses committed because of their exploitation. (4,8)

## 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 effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of coordination among bodies responsible for identifying children in child labor and providing services for their rehabilitation.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Center for Combating Trafficking in Persons (CCTIP)	Coordinates efforts to prevent and eliminate child trafficking and child sexual exploitation. Members include SLI, Security and Intelligence Service, Agency for Public Services, and other government departments. (3) In June 2022, met to present and approve a policy on preventing and eliminating trafficking in persons and to implement the recommendations of international monitoring mechanisms. (3)

In 2022, the government reactivated the National Council on the Protection of the Rights of Children (NCCRP), and the MHLSP implemented an intersectoral cooperation mechanism for the identification, assessment, referral, assistance, and monitoring of child victims and potential victims of violence neglect, exploitation, and trafficking. However, civil society organizations have reported limited services for resocialization and reintegration for child survivors of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and there is room for increased cooperation between social protection, health, and law enforcement in this regard. (3,4)

## V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9).

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

Policy	Description & Activities
National Program for Child Protection (2022-2026)†	Sets the objectives and priority actions for the next five years which aim to strengthen children's social protection system. Includes an Action Plan containing 72 actions to address child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, including through online means. (3,42)

† Policy was established during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (9,43)

On November 17, 2022, Moldova's Parliament approved the National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030," which includes provisions to improve working conditions and reduce informal employment. (3)

## 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 insufficient services for resocialization and reintegration of child survivors of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

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

Program	Description & Activities
Decent Work Country Program (2021–2024)	ILO program that aims to gather statistics on the prevalence of child labor, build the capacity of the labor inspectorate, and eliminate labor exploitation in the construction and agriculture sectors. (44)
Center for Protection and Assistance for Victims of Human Trafficking†	Government-funded shelter for survivors of human trafficking from Moldova that offers accommodations, rehabilitation, and reintegration services, and which contains a special wing for child survivors. The shelter remained active through the reporting period. (3)
Social Aid Program and Social Support for Families with Children‡	Provides cash assistance to families. The Social Aid Program, implemented by the district departments of social assistance and family protection, has provided aid for low-income families since 2008. (5,6,45)

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 Moldova.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (9,11,15)

To strengthen the child protection system, the MHLSP signed a memorandum of cooperation with UNICEF to provide support for 25,000 families with children from September 2022 to September 2023. (3,46) Additionally, on November 25, 2022 the MHLSP, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education and Research signed a joint order approving new reporting on child welfare issues. (3) Observers report there are insufficient services for resocialization and reintegration of child survivors of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. (5,6,8,10)

## 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 Moldova (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the Labor Code covers children working in the informal sector.	2020 – 2022
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions are sufficiently specific to prevent children from involvement in child labor.	2020 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for work from 16 to 18 to align with the compulsory education age.	2018 – 2022
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspectors are empowered to identify and assess penalties for child labor violations detected during inspections, even if the inspection was not conducted in response to a child labor complaint.	2019 – 2022
	Increase funding for the State Labor Inspectorate and the National Center for Combating Trafficking in Persons to ensure that they provide inspectors and investigators with the resources necessary to inspect for child labor.	2012 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors receive training specific to child labor.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that judicial authorities and investigators, including police officers and National Center for Combating Trafficking in Persons investigators, receive training on laws and investigative techniques related to the worst forms of child labor, especially related to online child pornography and children left without parental care.	2016 – 2022
Coordination	Pursue prosecution of child labor crimes under appropriate statutes and maintain protection under the law for victims who commit crimes as a result of their exploitation.	2020 – 2022
	Improve cooperation among social protection, health, and law enforcement entities with regard to providing appropriate services and reintegration assistance to child survivors of labor exploitation and trafficking in persons.	2019 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs, including for the separatist region of Transnistria.	2013 – 2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Provide adequate resources for schools in rural and poorer communities, as well as those serving children with disabilities.	2020 – 2022
	Implement oversight of state residential children's institutions to prevent exploitation of children by management.	2021 – 2022
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education by removing informal fees for school supplies, including textbooks.	2018 – 2022
	Institute targeted support programs that eliminate discrimination and violence against Roma children and promote equal access to education.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure sufficient social, psychological, and financial support for child survivors of trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and abuse, and children working in agriculture.	2015 – 2022

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