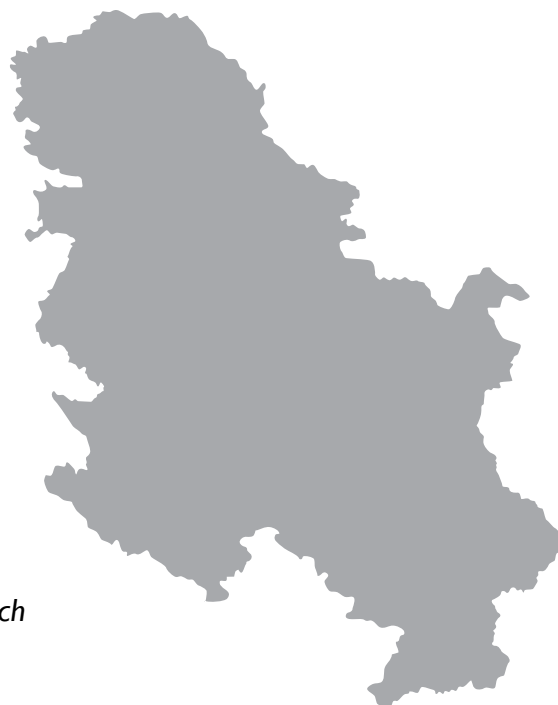


In 2022, Serbia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims conducted trainings for educators, healthcare workers, and other social protection authorities on identifying potential victims of human trafficking. The government also approved the 2022 Plan to Protect Street Children in Situations of Violence, Neglect, and Exploitation, which defines hazardous street labor for children and sets guidelines for coordination between the Centers for Social Work, the Labor Inspectorate, the Basic and Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices, and educational and health institutions. However, children in Serbia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. Serbia's laws do not treat forced child beggars as victims of child labor, and the country's social welfare centers are overburdened with cases, which limits efforts to provide services to survivors of child labor.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Serbia. 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	18.8 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	97.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	20.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		98.1

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 the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (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	Farming, activities unknown (3)
	Forestry, activities unknown (4)
	Fishing, activities unknown (4)
Industry	Manufacturing, activities unknown (5,6)
	Construction, activities unknown (7,8)
Services	Street work, including washing cars, collecting scrap material, vending, and begging (3,7,8)
	Wholesale and retail trade, activities unknown (4,5,7)
	Working in food service, information and communication, and transportation and storage (6,7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,7,8)
	Forced begging (7-11)
	Use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (7,11)
	Domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (12,13)
	Use in illicit activities, including in petty crime (7,8,11)

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

# Serbia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT




Children from Serbia, particularly girls, those from Roma communities, and children living in rural areas, are victims of domestic human trafficking and the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation. (5,14-16) Undocumented migrants are at a significantly higher risk of human trafficking for the purposes of labor or sexual exploitation. (16)

Constitutional and legal protections prohibit discrimination in the education system against individuals with disabilities. (9,17,18) However, some individuals with disabilities, especially Roma children, face difficulties in accessing education due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure and social prejudices. (19-22) Some Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptian children in Serbia also experience challenges in obtaining birth registration, which may make school enrollment difficult and increase their vulnerability to child labor. (5,9,19-21) In addition, placement in non-mainstream schools sometimes discourage Roma children, especially girls, from attending school. (9,13,19,24-27) Roma children are also more likely to begin school at a later age and drop out of school more frequently than their non-Roma peers. (5,23)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Serbia 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 Serbia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including insufficient measures to prohibit the use of children in illicit activities.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Articles 24, 25, and 274 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution (17,28)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 25 and 274 of the Labor Law; Article 66 of the Constitution (17,28)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 25, 84, 87, and 88 of the Labor Law; Regulation on Hazardous Labor of Children (28,29)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 112, 388, and 390 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution (17,30)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 112 and 388 of the Criminal Code; Article 26 of the Constitution (17,30)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 112 and 183–185 of the Criminal Code (30)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Articles 246, 247, and 388 of the Criminal Code (30)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 4 of the Law on Military, Labor, and Material Obligation; Article 39 of the Law on the Army (31,32)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 4 of the Law on Military, Labor, and Material Obligation (32)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 24 of the Law on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; Article 388 of the Criminal Code (30,33)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 71 of the Constitution; Articles 94 and 98 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (17,34)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 71 of the Constitution; Article 91 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (17,34)

\* No conscription (32)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (17,33)

Serbia's law does not treat child beggars as victims, but rather as offenders, and does not criminally prohibit the use of a child in illicit activities except when it results from human trafficking. (31,35) Serbia also lacks sufficient prohibitions for the commercial sexual exploitation of children, as the use of children in prostitution is not explicitly prohibited. (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, 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, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs (MOLEVSA)	Through the Labor Inspectorate, inspects businesses, including unregistered businesses. Per mandate established by the Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor, receives and investigates child labor complaints and informs Centers for Social Work of child labor violations. (9) Has internal sub-units that focus on the protection of children with disabilities and children working on the street. (3) Through the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV), identifies victims of child trafficking and those at risk, conducts needs assessments, contributes to human trafficking research projects, and refers victims to social services. (13) The CPTV is divided into two parts: the Agency for Coordination of Protection of Trafficking Victims and the Urgent Reception Center. (14,12,19) In addition, the CPTV works with state institutions, international organizations, and NGOs on human trafficking prevention and protection efforts and activities. (19)
Ministry of the Interior (MOI)	Oversees the General Police Directorate and enforces laws prohibiting commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through the Criminal Police Department. (36) Informs the Centers for Social Work of any child labor violations found. (7,11)
Republic Public Prosecutor's Office	Leads investigations on human trafficking cases and exchanges information through a network of local prosecutors and NGOs. (7)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Serbia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs (MOLEVSA) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient labor inspector training.

# Serbia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$4,242,720 (9)	\$3,900,000 (7)
Number of Labor Inspectors	206 (9)	207 (7)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (28)	Yes (28)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (9)	No (7)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	63,670 (9)	65,043 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	18 (9)	13 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	16 (9)	13 (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (9)	Yes (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (28)	Yes (28)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (7)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (9)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (7)

The Labor Inspectorate has designated experts on child labor at each of its branches to provide training to other inspectors. (13) Labor inspectors are responsible for inspecting registered and unregistered businesses, including businesses in the agricultural sector. (7) The Labor Inspectorate uses a work plan for inspections that is drafted at the beginning of each year and targets high-risk sectors in which child labor is known to occur, such as agriculture and construction. (7,37) In addition, the Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor requires labor inspectors to use a checklist to identify child labor during inspections and mandates that police and labor inspectors inform Social Welfare Centers in cases of child labor. The Inspectorate also maintains a hotline number to allow observers to report illegal work activities and other labor irregularities that could impact health and safety at worksites. (7,38)

During the reporting period, labor inspectors participated in trainings on recognizing labor exploitation and human trafficking, and also received additional information on how to coordinate with other relevant institutions in efforts to protect victims of human trafficking. (7,39) However, new labor inspectors receive on-the-job training only by working alongside seasoned inspectors. According to the ILO, the lack of formal training, including training on child labor, may hamper their ability to perform adequate inspections. (7) In 2022, the government allocated approximately \$300,000 less to the Labor Inspectorate's budget than in 2021. Additionally, the Labor Inspectorate continued to face workload difficulties due to a lack of personnel. (7)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Serbia 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 insufficient financial resource allocation.

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (9)	Yes (7)
Number of Investigations	21 (40)	26 (41)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	7 (40)	12 (7)
Number of Convictions	1 (40)	23 (41)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (40)	Yes (41)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (7)

Criminal law enforcement authorities continue to adhere to the 2017 Special Protocol of Labor Inspection for Protecting Children Against Child Labor, which authorizes police and labor inspectors to inform the SWCs regarding any cases of child labor discovered during inspections. The SWCs, the primary providers of social services to human trafficking victims, also assist authorities with child trafficking cases. (7,13) The Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV) indicated that 25 children who were victims of trafficking were identified by authorities during the reporting period, including 4 children involved in forced begging and 2 children who were compelled to commit criminal acts. The CPTV also indicated that authorities showed improvements in the identification of minor victims of trafficking, and that in 2022 approximately 40 percent of all human trafficking cases in Serbia involved children. (7)

Training on identifying human trafficking is provided as a part of the general police curriculum given to law enforcement officials who process immigration cases. (42) Continuous training on identifying human trafficking is also provided to one public prosecutor in each of the 25 Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices. However, sources indicated that some agencies responsible for investigation of human trafficking cases lack funding. (3) While government sources indicate that misdemeanor charges against children are rare, charges were brought against 15 children for begging in 2022. (7)

#### 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 a mechanism to coordinate efforts to address all worst forms of child labor.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Anti-Trafficking Council)	Sets government policies on human trafficking and drafts annual standard operating procedures for CPTV. Chaired by MOI, with the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons acting as the Secretary of the Council. (11) The Council remained active during the reporting period, though the National Coordinator position remained vacant, which affected this coordinating body's ability to collaborate with relevant institutions. In addition, reports indicate that the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons continued to lack adequate financial and human resources to carry out their duties. (7,19)

While the government continues to support the Refugee Protection Working Group and the Council for Children's Rights, there is no unified mechanism to coordinate efforts to address all worst forms of child labor. However, in May 2022, the government signed the Plan to Protect Street Children in Situations of Violence, Neglect, and Exploitation, which delineates the roles of government agencies and non-governmental entities to protect vulnerable children, including the Centers for Social Work, the Public Prosecutors' Offices, and the Labor Inspectorate, as well as civil society, health, and educational institutions. (7) Additionally, the government collaborated with the European Union and the Council of Europe on a joint project entitled "Prevention and Fight Against Human Trafficking in Serbia" to strengthen the collaboration between the Labor Inspectorate, law enforcement authorities, and social services institutions, including the National Coordination Office for the Fight Against Human Trafficking, the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims, and the Public Prosecutor's Office. (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 mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant Roma policies.

# Serbia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Policy	Description & Activities
Roadmap for Eliminating Abuse of Child Labor in Serbia (2018–2022)	Established a roadmap for eliminating the worst forms of child labor. Focused on support for children working on the streets and vulnerable families, as well as the creation of a system within Social Welfare Centers (SWCs) to monitor and record risks of child labor. (43) During the reporting period, the ILO conducted an assessment of the 2018–2022 roadmap to inform the development of the government's subsequent 2023–2026 policy. (7)
Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Institutions and Organizations Working with Children Involved in Life and Work on the Streets of Belgrade	Aims to enhance institutional cooperation among MOI, the Criminal Police Directorate, the Communal Police, city SWCs, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Education, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Health, and civil society organizations. (44) Defines street children, worst forms of child labor, child work, and child trafficking. (13,44) Stipulates lead institutions, rules, and procedures for interacting with street children. The policy was active during the reporting period. (7)

Although the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2016–2025) seeks to improve access to education for the Roma population in Serbia, including by providing access to preschool, child labor elimination and prevention strategies are not specifically included in the policy. (45,46)

## 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).

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

Program	Description & Activities
Access to Education Programs†	World Bank, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development project that aims to improve access to early childhood education for socially disadvantaged children, including children with disabilities and children from ethnic minority groups. (47) The program was active during the reporting period. (7)
Belgrade Children's Shelter‡	Social welfare institution funded by the City of Belgrade; opened in 2019. (3) Caters to vulnerable children between the ages of 7 and 18. Provides accommodation services and daytime shelter services to meet the needs of young people and street children, who are subsequently referred to SWCs and judicial authorities. (3) The shelter was operational during the reporting period. (7)
Strengthening the Identification and Protection of Victims of Trafficking†	IOM, CPTV, and MOI project that contributes to the implementation of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy by improving mechanisms for the prevention and identification of victims of human trafficking. (23) MOI, MOLEVSA, and the Public Prosecution Office maintain a Memorandum on Cooperation in the Field of Suppression of Human Trafficking and the Rights Protection of Human Trafficking Victims. The Memorandum defines mutual rights in the identification of human trafficking, assistance and protection of victims, and statistical reporting. (5,14,48) During the reporting period, the CPTV provided trainings on identification and referral of victims of human trafficking for social welfare workers, healthcare workers, and educators. (7,11)

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 Serbia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (5,14,49)

SWCs provide social services, track the number of street children, and receive reports of labor violations from MOLEVSA and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) to assist in tracking which sectors have the highest number of working children. According to MOLEVSA, the SWCs are significantly overburdened due to insufficient staffing and high caseloads. (7,11)

## 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 Serbia (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs, and eliminate the requirement that illicit activities must directly stem from human trafficking.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the use of children for prostitution is criminally prohibited and that the Criminal Code's provisions on pimping, procuring, and mediation in prostitution include all children under age 18.	2021 – 2022
Enforcement	Provide comprehensive training to labor inspectors so they are able to carry out their inspection mandates.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal investigators and agencies addressing human trafficking have the necessary funding to conduct thorough investigations.	2010 – 2022
	Publish data pertaining to labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of child labor penalties imposed that were collected.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate is adequately funded to facilitate both regular operations as well as the hiring of new labor inspectors.	2022
Coordination	Ensure that the Office of the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons is adequately funded and staffed.	2022
	Establish a mechanism to coordinate efforts to address all worst forms of child labor.	2022
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion.	2017 – 2022
Social Programs	Ensure that staff members at Social Welfare Centers have sufficient resources, such as personnel and funding, to address the specific needs of child trafficking victims.	2015 – 2022
	Address policy and social barriers to education via targeted programming for disadvantaged populations, including improving access to birth registration documentation; increasing access to education for children with disabilities; and increasing educational access and retention rates for minority populations, particularly migrant children, Roma children, and girls.	2013 – 2022
	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor, including those in farming, construction, forestry, fishing, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade.	2020 – 2022

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