

In 2022, Uzbekistan made significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In October 2022, the Uzbek president signed a new labor code that places additional restrictions on work that can be performed by children. The government also issued a decree to reduce informal work and worked with the International Labor Organization to conduct a comprehensive survey of working conditions in the construction sector. In addition, it continued to run public awareness campaigns against child labor which targeted high risk sectors. The National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor also adopted action plans to implement U.S. government recommendations on child labor and trafficking in persons. However, children in Uzbekistan 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 and public works. While the government has made strong progress in addressing labor issues in the cotton harvest, there continue to be impediments to the operation of non-governmental organizations in addressing broader labor concerns. Human rights and civil society organizations, including those working on forced and child labor issues, are frequently denied official registration for bureaucratic reasons, sometimes for failing to meet registration requirements that had not been publicly specified.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Uzbekistan. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	8.6 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	92.8
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	10.5
Primary Completion Rate (%)		101.5

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 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2020–2021. (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	Raising silkworms, preparing land for crop planting (3-6)
Industry	Construction (3,7)
Services	Street work, including vending, portering, car washing, and begging (4,8-11)
	Collecting scrap metal (5,9)
	Public works, including refurbishing school grounds and facilities (5,7,8,12-14)
	Vending in markets (4)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,7)
	Forced labor in construction, non-cotton agriculture, and cleaning parks, streets, and buildings (5,15)
	Illicit activities, including theft and the production or trafficking of drugs (8)

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

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Although Uzbekistan has not carried out a national child labor survey to determine the prevalence of child labor in sectors other than cotton production, research indicates that children engage in child labor in agriculture. (8,12) Reports also indicate a high level of informal employment in Uzbekistan, which is difficult to monitor for violations of child labor laws. (3) Traffickers exploit Uzbek children in sex trafficking transnationally in the Middle East, Eurasia, and Asia. (7,15) Children are also vulnerable to internal human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (3,14,16)

Civil society observers note that rural poverty is a major contributing factor to child labor in Uzbekistan, and that poverty has slightly increased in recent years. Additionally, some schools in rural areas lack adequate facilities, including running water. (3,8,17) In 2021, Uzbekistan received a modest influx of refugees from Afghanistan. While all children in Uzbekistan are entitled to free compulsory education regardless of ethnicity or immigration status, most Afghan children do not attend school because they do not speak either Russian or Uzbek. (3) In addition, although there is free public education in Uzbekistan, schools may charge informal fees, which can make education inaccessible to children from low-income families. (8,11,12,18)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including clarifying light work permissible for children who have not yet completed schooling.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	18	Articles 15, 77, and 242 of the Labor Code; Article 49 of the Administrative Code (19-21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 241 and 245 of the Labor Code; Article 49-1 of the Administrative Code (20,21)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Decree on Adoption of the List of Occupations with Unfavorable Working Conditions to Which It Is Forbidden to Employ Persons Under Eighteen Years of Age; Decree on Approval of Provision on Requirements on Prohibition of Use of Minors' Labor (22,23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 37 of the Constitution; Article 7 of the Labor Code; Article 51 of the Administrative Code; Articles 135 and 148 of the Criminal Code (20,21,24,25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on Combating Human Trafficking; Article 135 of the Criminal Code (25,26)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 128, 128(1), 130, 131, and 135 of the Criminal Code (25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 10 of the Law on Guarantees of the Rights of the Child; Articles 56 and 127 of the Criminal Code (25,27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 24 of the Law on Universal Military Service (28)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Articles 4 and 46 of the Law on Universal Military Service (28)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 216(1) and 242 of the Criminal Code; Article 3 of the Law on Civil Organizations (25,29)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	18‡	Articles 4 and 9 of the Law on Education (18)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 4 and 5 of the Law on Education; Article 41 of the Constitution (18,24)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (18)

In October 2022, the President signed a new Labor Code into law, which entered into effect on April 30, 2023. Article 412 of the amended labor code places further restrictions on work that may be performed by children under age 18, prohibiting them from performing underground work as well as work in nightclubs and in the production, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, narcotic and psychotropic substances, and toxic substances. (3,20) The updated labor code also codifies prohibitions against forced labor and aims to improve employment prospects for vulnerable populations, including survivors of human trafficking. (30)

The law does not determine the activities or conditions in which children who have not yet completed their compulsory schooling may engage in light work, although the Labor Code establishes caps on the maximum number of work hours permitted for children ages 15 to 17. (18,19)

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 Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR)	Formerly the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, this ministry was renamed following a government reorganization in December 2022. (3) The MEPR retains oversight of labor issues, and conducts labor inspections through the State Labor Inspectorate (SLI), including inspections for compliance with child labor laws. (11) Leads the National Sub-Commission on Combating Forced Labor. (31,32) In addition to labor inspectors employed by the MEPR, local governments employ an additional 200 “assistant inspectors” who can participate in labor inspections but are not allowed to impose administrative fines. (14) Receives complaints, including on an anonymous basis, through a telephone hotline with a short, easy-to-remember number; a web portal; and a Telegram messenger bot. (3,33-37) In 2022, labor inspectors received 19,512 complaints of labor violations through all channels. (3)
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA)	Investigates crimes related to child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, which may then be prosecuted by the Prosecutor General’s Office. (3,11) Leads the National Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons. (31,32) Maintains a database of human trafficking crimes, including child trafficking crimes, which aggregates relevant information received from other government bodies, citizens’ organizations, non-profit organizations, and civil society groups. (14)
Prosecutor General's Office	Prosecutes criminal violations involving the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (11) Also provides oversight of some MOIA efforts to address the worst forms of child labor. (14)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the reluctance of inspectors to conduct unannounced inspections other than on the basis of a complaint.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$150,000 (8)	\$150,000 (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	344 (8)	344 (3)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (14,38)	Yes (3,38)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	6 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	4 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	4 (8)	0 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (38)	Yes (38)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (3)

In December 2022, the President announced a government reorganization, effective January 1, 2023, in which the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations was renamed the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction and absorbed other responsibilities related to social welfare, which were previously under other ministries. The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) conducted 6,912 inspections regarding working conditions in 2022 and 416,685 workplace inspections in total, but it is unclear how many of these were conducted onsite or targeted to high-risk sectors. (3,8) The government also worked with the ILO to undertake a comprehensive survey of working conditions in the construction sector, including the prevalence of forced and child labor. Although other sources indicate that children work in construction, the findings of this survey, published in November 2022, did not identify a systemic issue of child labor in the sector. (3,39) In May and June 2022, the government also facilitated a training course on interpersonal communication skills for 56 SLI inspectors with the goal of improving their interviewing skills and ability to detect labor violations. (3)

Research indicates that high turnover among labor inspectors is an ongoing problem in Uzbekistan. (3) The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) employs an additional 33 inspectors who may conduct unannounced inspections, but they are not authorized to impose penalties. Labor inspectors are empowered to conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in public-sector enterprises. (3) However, permission is required from the Business Ombudsman to conduct inspections at private-sector businesses, which poses an additional administrative burden and may prevent inspectors from addressing labor law violations in a timely manner. Reports indicate that in practice, inspectors may be reticent to enter private businesses or homes on an unannounced basis and typically only do so in response to complaints. (8,11,14,30,35,40,41) During the reporting period, a draft decree was presented to the President that is intended to address several of these gaps, including labor inspectorate funding and staffing, as well as to remove the requirement to obtain permission from the Business Ombudsman. However, this decree has not been signed. (3)

There have been no reports of a resurgence in child labor in the cotton harvest following the lifting of the Cotton Pledge and the removal of cotton from Uzbekistan from the U.S. Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced with Child Labor or Forced Labor in 2022. (3,42,43) The government distributed written materials to cotton pickers, employers, and *mahallas* about the prohibition on child labor. (3) Civil society activists report that

nearly all farmers they spoke to were aware of prohibitions on child labor in the cotton harvest. (42) In addition, the Agency for Youth Affairs monitors school attendance to ensure that students do not miss class during the cotton harvest and participates in monitoring efforts organized by the FTUU to monitor violations of labor laws during the annual cotton harvest. (8,10,44,45)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including in investigation planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	9 (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	9 (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Convictions	9 (8)	Unknown (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (3)

Law enforcement information which clearly distinguishes data on criminal child labor cases from other criminal cases that involved children was not available for inclusion in this report. (3) However, in 2022, law enforcement investigated and filed five criminal cases related to the sexual exploitation of nine children. Two of these cases resulted in convictions during the reporting period, while the other three remained pending, and the children involved were referred to rehabilitation centers. (3) Authorities also investigated 368 criminal cases and obtained convictions in 339 cases of involving minors in antisocial behavior, which may include activities such as theft, robbery, hooliganism, or assault. (3) The government also reported investigating three individuals for trafficking of two children and initiating prosecutions against four individuals for previously identified cases of child trafficking, although it is unclear whether these children were trafficked for adoption purposes or labor. (30)

In September 2022, the government facilitated a 2-day training on forced labor for SLI inspectors and civil society members. The MEPR and the ILO also conducted an online training on forced labor which included representatives of farms and cotton and textile clusters. (3) During the reporting period, the MOIA academy graduated 124 cadets specializing in investigations who received 3 years of training, including on child and forced labor. In addition, the government cooperated with NGOs and international organizations including the IOM and the OSCE to conduct 17 trainings for new investigators throughout the year. (3)

Criminal liability for repeat forced labor offenses was introduced in early 2020 under Criminal Code Article 148(2). However, criminal enforcement agencies may face difficulties prosecuting criminal labor violations due to a lack of clarity over whether the perpetrator is a first-time offender, which would garner administrative penalties, or a repeat offender who may be prosecuted under criminal charges. (46)

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 repeatedly denying the applications of human rights NGOs to officially register with the government.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor (National Commission)	Coordinates state and local entities' efforts to address sex trafficking and forced labor; analyzes and monitors efficacy of government programs to address sex trafficking and forced labor; organizes international cooperation on efforts to address sex trafficking and forced labor; and provides legal and policy recommendations for improvement of government efforts in these areas. (3,30-32) Chaired by the National Rapporteur on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. (3,31) Comprises two sub-commissions to address sex trafficking and forced labor, respectively. MOIA heads the Sub-Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Minister of Labor heads the Sub-Commission on Combating Forced Labor. (8,12,31,32) In 2022, the Commission met three times and adopted action plans to implement recommendations from U.S. government reporting on child labor and trafficking in persons. The Commission was also responsible for approving a joint work plan with the ILO for 2022–2023, aimed at transitioning large sections of Uzbekistan's economy from informal to formal employment as a means of creating a better environment to monitor for child and forced labor violations. (3,30)

International organizations have reported that the Sub-Commission's lack of a designated secretariat hampered communication with external stakeholders, including NGOs and anti-trafficking activists, which delayed activities to counter human trafficking. (35) In addition, many human rights NGOs, including those working on forced and child labor issues, were repeatedly denied official registration, sometimes for failing to meet requirements that had not been publicly specified. These denials appear to be politically motivated and have the effect of curtailing civil society efforts to address human rights issues. (3,17,33,47,48)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the ILO and the Republic of Uzbekistan (2021–2025)	Establishes terms of agreement between the ILO and the government on cooperation to implement the Decent Work Country Program in Uzbekistan. (8,49) As part of this MOU, the ILO and the government approved a work plan during the reporting period to help transition large swaths of the country's workforce away from informal employment. (3)
Action Plans on Implementing International Recommendations to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Establish work plans to address international recommendations to advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Uzbekistan. Aim to improve labor and criminal law enforcement, coordination, policies, and social programs related to the worst forms of child labor. (50) In 2022, the government created an action plan specifically to implement the recommendations in this report, but did not provide a copy of the action plan nor specify what actions it intended to implement. (30)

In addition to the joint work plan the government signed with the ILO, the President issued a decree to decrease informal employment as a means to reduce child labor and forced labor. (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 the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Efforts to Prevent Child and Forced Labor in the Cotton Harvest†	Includes initiatives to raise awareness about the prohibition of child and forced labor in the cotton harvest. In 2022, the government distributed 800 banners and 200,000 flyers on prohibitions against the use of child labor in the cotton harvest, and provided 10,000 posters on forced and child labor prohibitions to <i>mahallas</i> and employers. (30)
National Rehabilitation Center†	MEPR-operated shelter that provides human trafficking survivors with emergency medical and social services and assists in social rehabilitation. (9,12) Children are placed in specialized institutions, separate from adult survivors. (30) This center continued to provide services to survivors of the worst forms of child labor in 2022. (3)

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 Uzbekistan.

Although there are programs to address child labor in the cotton sector, research did not find evidence of programs designed to address child labor in other sectors, such as public works, street work, and agriculture other than cotton.

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 Uzbekistan (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the labor law's light work provisions specify the activities and conditions in which children who have not yet completed their compulsory schooling may work.	2020 – 2022
Enforcement	Provide more detailed information on labor inspections, including the number of unannounced inspections, how many inspections are conducted onsite versus through desk inspections of documents submitted by businesses, and whether inspectors are targeting high-risk sectors.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors conduct self-initiated unannounced inspections in all sectors, including at private enterprises, even if no complaint has been filed.	2018 – 2022
	Sign draft documentation which will address gaps with the funding and staffing of the labor inspectorate, as well as remove the requirement for the Business Ombudsman to approve inspections of private sector enterprises.	2022
	Thoroughly investigate all potential criminal cases involving the worst forms of child labor and, when sufficient evidence exists, refer violations for prosecution.	2020 – 2022
	Remove barriers to investigating and prosecuting officials who may be complicit in child labor violations, including simplifying regulations which may penalize violations differently depending on whether the violator is a repeat offender.	2021 – 2022
Coordination	Designate standard mechanisms for communication between external stakeholders and national coordinating bodies to facilitate coordination of efforts to address forced labor and human trafficking.	2020 – 2022
	Remove obstacles to the registration of NGOs monitoring child labor, forced labor, and other labor rights issues, including making all registration requirements public.	2017 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure educational access for children who do not speak Uzbek or Russian.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that schools do not charge informal fees to students or their families.	2019 – 2022
	Implement targeted programs to address the worst forms of child labor in public works, street works, and agriculture sectors other than cotton harvesting.	2009 – 2022

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