

# Bosnia and Herzegovina

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Brčko District Assembly adopted Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which significantly improved protection against human trafficking, including prohibiting slavery, servitude, and debt bondage, as well as prohibiting the recruitment, harboring, transportation, transfer, and receipt of a child. The Council of Ministers also adopted a Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking (2024–2027), which aims to prevent child trafficking and forced begging. The State Coordinator’s Office within the Ministry of Security budgeted approximately \$107,000 to support four non-governmental organizations to operate assistance programs and shelters for victims of human trafficking. However, despite these efforts, the country’s largest shelter, which was operated by the International Forum of Solidarity Emmaus, closed in January 2024 in part because the government failed to adopt a budget in 2020 and 2021, leading to the shelter’s accrued debts. Most child labor is in the informal sector, and laws on the minimum age for work do not meet international standards because they do not apply to children who are self-employed or who are otherwise working outside of formal employment relationships. Finally, the government does not have an official mechanism to refer children found in child labor to social services providers.

## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

| Statistics on Children’s Work and Education |          |                        |
|---|----------|------------------------|
| Children                                    | Age      | Percent and Population |
| Working                                     | 5 to 14  | 8.9% (44,017)          |
| Hazardous Work by Children                  | 15 to 17 | Unavailable            |
| Attending School                            | 5 to 14  | 83.7%                  |
| Combining Work and School                   | 7 to 14  | 10.6%                  |

Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging. Children also engage in child labor in street work.

| Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity |   |
|--|---|
| Services   | Street work, including vending and washing car windows.   |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†            | Forced begging and forced domestic work. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Illicit activity, including pickpocketing. |

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

## SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

| Area            | Suggested Action  |
|-----------------|---|
| Legal Framework | Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships.                                    |
|                 | Criminalize forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from human trafficking in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.  |
|                 | Criminally prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, including the use, procurement, and offering of a child for the production and trafficking of drugs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. |
|                 | Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.  |
|                 | Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, after consultation with employers’ and workers’ organizations.                                   |

| Area                       | Suggested Action  |
|----------------------------|---|
|                            | Criminally prohibit using children for prostitution, production of pornography, and pornographic performances in Bosnia and Herzegovina.  |
| <b>Enforcement</b>         | Publish information on labor law enforcement efforts, including labor inspectorate funding.   |
|                            | Publish information about criminal law enforcement related to child labor crimes, including on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and penalties imposed.  |
|                            | Create an official mechanism for referring children identified during labor inspections to social services providers.   |
|                            | Establish a coordinated strategy to improve institutional knowledge among law enforcement and judiciary officials on child trafficking indicators to properly identify victims, classify violations, use referral mechanisms, prosecute offenders, and provide services to survivors.   |
|                            | Ensure that labor inspectors receive training on and conduct inspections in all sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including informal work and hazardous work in agriculture, and allocate more resources to regional monitoring/coordination teams across the country, and develop additional incentives to encourage members' regular participation. |
| <b>Government Policies</b> | Implement the Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Canton Sarajevo, and publish results from activities implemented on an annual basis.  |
| <b>Social Programs</b>     | Implement adequately funded programs to support the needs of vulnerable children and families that have difficulty paying for the cost of school supplies. Ensure that all children have access to birth registration or identity documentation required to enroll in school. In addition, ensure that children in shelters are provided with education access.     |
|                            | Allow Bosniak children in Republika Srpska to access education in the Bosnian language and end the "Two Schools Under One Roof" practice to eliminate discrimination in schools based on ethnicity in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.   |
|                            | Provide programs such as Daily Centers and Centers for Social Welfare with adequate and timely financial resources and technical support on time to assist vulnerable families and survivors of child labor.  |
|                            | Provide training to social workers and shelter staff in shelters, particularly as it relates to working with child trafficking survivors.   |
|                            | Provide sufficient funding for social services to assist survivors of domestic or international human trafficking.  |
|                            | Establish programs to support street children living outside of Sarajevo.   |

## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roma children are the most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor due to barriers to accessing education. Some Roma students face linguistic and cultural discrimination from teachers, peers, and school administrators. Widespread discrimination leads to the disproportionately high rate of enrollment of Roma children in schools for children with intellectual disabilities despite the absence of any medical justification. In addition, some Roma children lack birth registration documents, which are required to attend school in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Roma parents and guardians frequently force their children to beg when they are outside of school. In some reported instances, Roma children are forced into early marriages and, later, work in agriculture or domestic service. Additionally, unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and other countries who travel through Bosnia and Herzegovina are potential targets for human traffickers.

## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Schools in the Republika Srpska entity deny the right of some Bosniak children to receive instruction in the Bosnian language; as a result, these children sometimes travel long distances to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) entity to receive education in their own language. In addition, discrimination persists under the "Two Schools Under One Roof" practice between Bosniaks and Croats in FBiH. Under this system, Bosniak and Croat children are in segregated classes following separate curricula in the same school building. This practice creates obstacles for students who wish to attend schools other than those that match their

ethnic identity and fosters ethnic discrimination in schools, which can lead to absenteeism. Children with disabilities also face barriers to accessing education, which may make them vulnerable to child labor.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, BiH's laws do not meet the international standard on child trafficking because BiH's Criminal Code fails to specifically outlaw forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from trafficking in persons.

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor   |     |                               |  |
|---|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| Standard  | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation  |
| Minimum Age for Work  | 15  | X                             | Articles 20 and 171 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina   |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work  | 18  | ✓                             | Article 57 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children |     | ✓                             | Articles 42, 57, and 171 of the Labor Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor                        |     | ✓                             | Articles 185, 186, and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Article II of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking  |     | X                             | Articles 185, 186, and 186a of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Article 198 of the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska     |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children                     |     | X                             | Articles 186 and 187 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities                           |     | X                             | Article 195 of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina   |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment                          | 18  | ✓                             | Article 9 of the Law on the Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military         |     | N/A                           |  |
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups                 |     | X                             | Article 173(1)(e) of the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina   |
| Compulsory Education Age  | 15† | ✓                             | Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina   |
| Free Public Education   |     | ✓                             | Article 16 of the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina   |

† Age calculated based on available information

The labor laws of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), the Republika Srpska (RS), and Brčko District (BD) do not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age to work because the labor laws do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside of formal employment relationships. Country has not determined by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. Although the Criminal Code of BiH criminalizes human trafficking for forced labor, it fails to specifically outlaw forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery separately from trafficking in persons in the FBiH and BD. Laws related to illicit activities in BiH are also not sufficient because using, procuring, and offering children for the production and trafficking of drugs are not criminally prohibited. Moreover, the laws of BiH and FBiH do not meet

international standards because the BiH Criminal Code fails to prohibit using children for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances.

In 2024, the BD Assembly adopted Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Brčko District of BiH, which improved protection against trafficking, as well as separating child trafficking into a separate article with some greater penalties compared to the penalties in the human trafficking provision.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina took actions to address child labor. However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws, including the absence of a victim referral system.

| Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement  |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Ministries of Labor and Social Policy:</b> Enforce labor laws, including those on child labor. The Cantonal-Level Labor Inspectorates (FBiH), the Ministry of Labor and Veterans’ Labor Inspectorate (RS), and the Administrative Support Department (BD) enforce labor laws at the canton, entity, and district levels, respectively. |  |
| <b>State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) and Border Police (SBP):</b> SIPA investigates human trafficking crimes and enforces anti-trafficking laws across the entire country. SBP identifies victims of human trafficking at the border.  |  |

| Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts                                      |         |
|---|---------|
| Has a Labor Inspectorate  | Yes     |
| Able to Assess Civil Penalties  | Yes     |
| Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections                                | Yes     |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted                                       | Yes     |
| Has a Complaint Mechanism   | Yes     |
| Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations                            | N/A     |
| Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes | Yes     |
| Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes                 | Unknown |

In 2024, **179** labor inspectors conducted **196,039** worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. The government also conducted investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor; however, it is **unknown** whether prosecutions were initiated or perpetrators were convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Bosnia and Herzegovina established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

| Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Department of the State Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons (State Coordinator) within the Ministry of Security:</b> In conjunction with the Anti-Trafficking Strike Force, coordinates human trafficking survivor protection and rehabilitation efforts involving both relevant ministries and NGOs. Oversees the human trafficking database, which includes data from NGOs, SIPA, SBP, and police agencies and prosecutors’ offices at all levels. During the reporting period, the State Coordinator’s Office provided approximately \$107,400 in financial support to four NGOs to operate assistance programs and shelters for victims of trafficking. |  |

Bosnia and Herzegovina has established policies related to child labor. However, there is insufficient funding for the regional monitoring teams.

| Key Policies Related to Child Labor   |
|---|
| <b>Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking (2024-2027):</b> * Adopted on October 23, 2024, the strategy aims to prevent human trafficking and forced labor, including hazardous child labor as a result of trafficking in persons. With regard to child labor, the strategy indicates all levels of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina should propose action plans to enhance coordination mechanisms to combat human trafficking, improve prevention of child trafficking, and ensure protection for child victims of human trafficking. Additionally, to improve conditions for Roma children, the strategy supports legislation to hold parents criminally liable for forced child marriages and forced begging. Following the adoption of the Strategy, different levels of government began working on their respective action plans. On December 12, Republika Srpska adopted its action plan. |
| <b>Guidelines for Work of Regional Monitoring Teams:</b> Enhance the cooperation between monitoring team members and the National Referral Mechanism. During the reporting period, the regional monitoring teams were active but continued to face budgetary challenges that limited their ability to follow the guidelines and ensure the continuity of their work.  |
| <b>Protocol on Cooperation and Treatment in Cases of Unlawful Behavior to the Detriment of Children in Sarajevo Canton:</b> Aims to prevent begging, exploitation of children, and abuse of children in Canton Sarajevo. Sets rules on state cooperation for victim protection, and mandates the provision of physical, psychological, health, and social protection for children. However, no reports indicated that the Protocol was actively applied in 2024.  |

\* Policy was approved during the reporting period.  
‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.

Bosnia and Herzegovina funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these programs do not have adequate funding.

| Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor   |
|--|
| <b>Daily Centers:</b> ‡ Centers for Social Welfare-supported and NGO-operated drop-in centers in seven locations across the country. Designed to assist vulnerable street children, the centers provide direct assistance to children, including educational activities, counseling, food, and hygiene. Sarajevo’s Center for Social Welfare Mobile Team also engages in daily outreach to children on the streets and to families in vulnerable communities throughout the capital region.  |
| <b>Assistance for Trafficking Victims:</b> ‡ The Office of State Coordinator for Anti-Trafficking allocates small grants to four local NGOs (Bolja Buducnost Modrica, Zena sa Une Bihac, Zena BiH Mostar, and Lara Bijeljina) for the provision of shelter and social services to survivors of human trafficking, including counseling, educational assistance, and job training for Bosnian survivors, and visa and legal services for foreign survivors. During the reporting period, anti-trafficking NGOs continued to provide direct assistance to victims of trafficking. However, despite an increase in the budget from \$70,400 (130,000 KM) to \$107,400 (198,000 KM), only \$11,300 (21,000 KM) was distributed by year’s end. The government has pledged to distribute the remaining funds by the end of January 2025. |

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the reporting period, the government continued to allocate funds to the Roma community under the 2021–2025 Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma. The funding totaled approximately \$747,000 and was allocated toward housing, employment, healthcare, and educational support.

For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)