

Djibouti

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Djibouti made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. A workshop was organized to assess the progress of and plan for the next phase of the National Child Policy, an important instrument that sets out fundamental rights for children. In addition, a new school opened in Bissidirou in the Obock region to improve access to education. However, Djibouti's minimum age for work protections do not meet international standards as they apply only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement. In addition, Djibouti's laws do not meet international standards for the prohibition of commercialized sexual exploitation as there are no laws that specifically criminalize the use of a child for prostitution. Finally, it is unknown whether the government made labor law or criminal law enforcement actions to address or prevent the worst forms of child labor.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

| Statistics on Children’s Work and Education | | |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Children | Age | Percent and Population |
| Working | 5 to 14 | 12.3% (23,693) |
| Attending School | 5 to 14 | 67.4% |
| Combining Work and School | 7 to 14 | 10.2% |

Children in Djibouti 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 street work.

| Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity | |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Industry | Construction. |
| Services | Domestic work.† Street work as vendors, shoe shiners, beggars, and car washers. Working in restaurants, small shops, and businesses. |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced domestic work and begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. |

† 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.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

| Area | Suggested Actions |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal Framework | Ensure that all children are afforded minimum age for work protections under the law, including children working outside formal employment relationships. |
| | Criminally prohibit the use of children in prostitution. |
| Enforcement | Strengthen the labor inspectorate by undertaking routine, targeted, and unannounced inspections in all sectors, including sectors susceptible of child labor. |
| | Publish complete labor law enforcement information, including funding of the labor inspectorate, the number of labor inspections conducted in total and at worksites, whether routine inspections are targeted, if unannounced inspections are conducted, the number of child labor violations found, and the number of child labor violations for which penalties were imposed and collected. |
| | Ensure that the possibility of filing a child labor complaint with the labor inspectorate at the Ministry of Labor is sufficiently publicized. |

| Area | Suggested Actions |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>Implement a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor inspections.</p> <p>Ensure that the labor inspectorate has the necessary equipment, including adequate transportation, to conduct labor inspections in all regions, and institutionalize child labor-focused trainings for all labor inspectors, including by training new labor inspectors at the beginning of their employment, as well as providing refresher courses throughout their employment.</p> <p>Impose monetary penalties for child labor violations that are consistent with the law and commensurate with the seriousness of the violation.</p> <p>Publish complete criminal law enforcement data, including on the training of criminal investigators and the number of investigations, violations, prosecutions, convictions, and penalties imposed.</p> |
| Coordination | <p>Ensure that the National Council for Children is active and able to carry out its intended mandate of assessing progress on issues pertaining to children and proposing child-related policy and strategic guidelines.</p> <p>Establish a coordinating body dedicated to preventing and eliminating all forms of child labor.</p> |
| Government Policies | <p>Implement key policies related to child labor, including the National Strategy for Migration and the Action Plan for Education and Training, and publish data on these activities on an annual basis.</p> <p>Adopt a comprehensive national policy to address all forms of child labor, including its worst forms.</p> |
| Social Programs | <p>Conduct a comprehensive study of children's activities to determine whether they are engaged in or at risk for involvement in child labor.</p> <p>Provide sufficient funding to institute programs that address the economic consequences that leave children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.</p> <p>Develop and expand existing social programs to ensure that all children, including refugees, asylum seekers, and children in rural areas, have access to education, are permitted to take year-end exams, and are not restricted in their educational advancement by a lack of birth certificate or United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees documentation.</p> <p>Implement programs to specifically assist children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key social programs to address child labor and make information about implementation measures publicly available.</p> <p>Provide sufficient funding for the International Organization for Migration Center for Unaccompanied Children and Vulnerable Migrants.</p> |

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Droughts in particular affect children, especially girls, since they are in charge of collecting water and under drought conditions need to travel longer distances in order to do so, becoming at risk of exploitation. In addition, children transiting through the country, primarily from Ethiopia and Somalia to the Middle East, are particularly at risk of commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Requirements for documentation and birth registration can be barriers to accessing education because in practice, children from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen cannot attend public schools without UN High Commissioner for Refugees documentation. Children in rural areas and street children without birth registration documents can attend school but are not permitted to take exams. In addition, weather events have consequences leading to higher school dropouts, and limited access to safe water in schools due to droughts has been an issue. Finally, gaps exist in educational opportunities between urban and rural areas as a lack of school facilities in rural areas limits access to education.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Djibouti has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Djibouti's laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for work because the Labor Code's minimum age provision applies only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement.

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Standard | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation |
| Minimum Age for Work | 16 | X | Articles 5 and 108 of the Labor Code |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work | 18 | ✓ | Articles 108 and 110 of the Labor Code |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | | ✓ | Article 110 of the Labor Code |
| Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor | | ✓ | Article 24 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking | | ✓ | Articles 1 and 5–7 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants; Article 24 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children | | X | Articles 394, 396, 462, and 463 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 5–8 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities | | ✓ | Articles 355, 356, and 461 of the Penal Code |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment | 18 | ✓ | Article 1 of the National Army Amendment Decree |
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military | | N/A | |
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups | | ✓ | Articles 149–51 and 461 of the Penal Code |
| Compulsory Education Age | 16 | ✓ | Articles 4 and 14 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System |
| Free Public Education | | ✓ | Articles 4, 16, 22, and 27 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System |

The Labor Code's minimum age provision applies only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement, which does not conform to international standards requiring the protection of all children under the minimum age for work. In addition, laws do not specifically criminalize the use of a child for prostitution.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

It is unknown whether enforcement agencies in Djibouti took documented actions to address child labor in 2024.

| Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement | |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ministry of Labor: | Enforces all labor laws, including child labor laws and regulations. Through its General Inspectorate of Labor and Social Laws, regulates youth employment. Research could not find evidence that the Ministry of Labor took actions to address or prevent child labor during the reporting period. |
| Criminal Enforcement Agencies: | Through the Djibouti National Police, enforce criminal laws and investigate crimes related to child labor, including child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition, the Ministry of Justice has two prosecutors specifically trained to handle cases involving trafficking of vulnerable children. |

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

It is **unknown** how many labor inspectors conducted worksite inspections, or whether child labor violations were found in 2024. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Djibouti established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it is unknown whether this mechanism took actions to coordinate efforts to address child labor during the reporting period.

| Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| National Council for Children: | Assesses progress on issues pertaining to children and proposes policy and strategic guidelines. Headed by the Prime Minister, includes public stakeholders, civil society partners, associations, and NGOs involved in the field of childhood. |

Djibouti established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover all the worst forms of child labor, including the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation.

| Key Policies Related to Child Labor | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Child Protection Policies: | Include the National Child Policy (2022–2032), which sets out fundamental rights for children, including the right to education and the right to health, and mobilizes national resources toward these ends. The National Strategic Plan for Childhood in Djibouti provides political and strategic guidelines for implementing the National Child Policy. Both policies are coordinated by the Ministry of Women and Family. During the reporting period, a multisectoral workshop was organized to assess the progress of and plan for the next phase of the National Child Policy. |
| National Strategy for Migration: | Promotes aid and livelihoods for children from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen in Djibouti and raises awareness about the rights and humanitarian needs of these children. Implemented by the Ministry of Interior, it facilitates coordination between humanitarian partners and the government through the National Coordination Office for Migration. In 2024, the National Coordination Office for Migration was active and remained an important partner in coordinating migration efforts, notably by collaborating with the International Organization for Migration. |

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Action Plan for Education and Training (2021–2025): In coordination with the Master Plan for Education and Training (2021–2035), aims to expand inclusive and equitable education to all children in Djibouti, increase access to vocational training, achieve universal basic education, and develop the preschool education system. The plans bring together various ministries to ensure cohesive implementation, planning, and monitoring of their programs. In 2024, research reported the renovation and opening of a few schools, including a boarding school in a rural area, to improve access to education.

† The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.

Djibouti funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor. However, insufficient funding hindered these social programs' actions.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Ministry of Women and Family Programs:‡ Include programs that provide children and families from vulnerable groups with resources to reduce their economic and social vulnerabilities, such as: the Social Assistance Program, which provides children and their families with education and in-kind support; the Support Project for Girls and Women in Precarious Situations, a multi-sectoral program which provides girls with education and training; the Country Strategic Option Program (2019–2024), a rural poverty reduction program; and Djibouti's Support Program for Children with Academic Difficulties, a program that provides academic support to children from low-income families. Research was unable to determine what activities, if any, were undertaken during the reporting period as part of these programs.

International Organization for Migration Center: Provides mental health services, medical support, legal assistance, and basic necessities to children from other countries, who are often vulnerable to exploitation. Established in conjunction with the National Referencing Mechanism for Trafficking Victims, which allows civil society organizations and NGOs to refer people impacted by human trafficking directly to law enforcement agencies. However, recent reports show that if repatriation is not an option for the children after 4 weeks, they become street children who are able to access the shelter during the day for two meals, occasional lessons (such as lessons on personal hygiene, the effects of drugs, and how to sew, etc.), hygiene facilities, and activities before being forced to leave for the night due to lack of resources, becoming vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Research also indicates that the program is at risk of running out of funding and might be forced to end.

Expanding Opportunities for Learning (2019–2024): A \$30 million project co-financed by the Government of Djibouti, Global Partnership for Education, and Education Above All. Supported Djibouti's efforts to expand access to quality education for 35,000 at-risk and underserved children, including girls, children from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen, and disabled students. The project also built the capacity of teachers and administrators in underserved areas. While research found that this program continued during the reporting period, no activities were reported.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Djibouti.

† The government had other programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports