

India

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, India made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Railway Protection Force, which has removed over 50,000 children from trafficking situations in the past 5 years, launched a revised Standard Operating Procedure outlining a more robust framework and structure for intercepting child trafficking on Indian railways. In Tamil Nadu, the government rescued over 330 bonded laborers, including 65 children, through special inspections in 44,000 establishments. Furthermore, the government conducted a month-long program to rescue and rehabilitate child laborers, including conducting field checks, disseminating awareness programs, and enrolling children in school programs. However, despite these efforts, the government's existing hazardous work prohibitions do not include all occupations in which children work in unsafe and unhealthy environments. The implementation of programs and systems and enforcement of policies related to child labor are inconsistent across states and union territories. Prosecution rates for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, remain low, and the improper handling of child labor cases by the police remains a concern. Through the enhanced enforcement of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, the government continued to revoke the licenses of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, including those which work to address 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	1.0% (2,119,846)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	90.7%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	0.4%

Children in India are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in garment production, stone quarrying, and brickmaking.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Producing hybrid cottonseed, cultivating cotton, harvesting and processing sugarcane, transplanting rice seedlings, and performing peripheral work on farms, such as removing weeds.
Industry	Manufacturing garments, weaving silk fabric and carpets,† producing raw silk thread (sericulture), spinning cotton thread and yarn, and embellishing textiles with silver and gold (<i>zari</i>).† Quarrying and breaking stone and sandstone,† producing bricks,† recovering metals from electronic waste (e-waste),† and mining and collecting mica.† Polishing gems† and manufacturing glass bangles,† locks,† and brassware.† Rolling cigarettes (<i>bidis</i>)† and manufacturing incense sticks (<i>agarbatti</i>), fireworks,† and matches.† Manufacturing footwear, producing leather goods and accessories,† and stitching soccer balls.
Services	Domestic work.† Working in restaurants, hotels, food service, and tourism services. Street work, including scavenging, sorting garbage, selling trinkets, and organized begging. Working in automobile workshops and repairing vehicles.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor making bricks, quarrying stones, in rice mills, and in agriculture, including producing hybrid cottonseed. Forced labor in garments, embroidering silver and gold into textiles (<i>zari</i>), domestic work, and begging. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

† 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 India's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Include in the list of hazardous work prohibited for all children all sectors in which children work in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, such as textile and garment production, carpet making, and domestic work.
	Amend child trafficking laws so they do not require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be established for the crime of child trafficking.
	Publish the legal instrument that establishes the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into India's armed forces.
	Encourage all states and union territories to enact rules to implement the Occupational, Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code to protect children from hazardous forms of work.
Enforcement	Employ at least 32,829 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 492 million people, and provide labor inspectors with adequate training on child labor in all states and union territories.
	Annually publish national data related to labor law enforcement, including data on the number of labor inspectors, labor inspectorate funding, and the number of worksite and unannounced inspections conducted.
	Provide adequate training and sufficient resources to criminal investigators, prosecutors and judges to combat the worst forms of child labor, including by: providing adequate training to criminal investigators on laws related to child labor, including the Bonded Labor (Abolition) Act, in all states and union territories; providing states and union territories with dedicated funding staff, and infrastructure to establish anti-human trafficking units; establishing Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centers to ensure a smooth trial process for child survivors of sexual crimes; and ensuring that judges and prosecutors are adequately trained to handle child sex crimes.
	Annually publish national data related to criminal law enforcement, including the number of investigations, convictions, and prosecutions related to worst forms of child labor crimes.
	Ensure that criminal law agencies appropriately detect, investigate, prosecute and penalize crimes related to the worst forms of child labor including by: sufficiently enforcing the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act by fast-tracking bonded labor cases and consistently prosecuting perpetrators of labor exploitation; ensuring that all cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act adhere to their mandated 1-year timeline for prosecution in Fast Track Special Courts; adjudicating the backlogs of Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses cases; and prosecuting and holding accountable perpetrators of the <i>Jogini</i> system to protect girls from lower castes from being subjected to sexual exploitation by temple patrons in return for in-kind payments or cash allowances.
	Hold accountable public officials who facilitate, participate in, or hinder efforts to address the worst forms of child labor, including officials who accept bribes, hold children in bonded labor in agriculture and in brick kilns, and who delay registering human trafficking cases or mistreat human trafficking survivors.
Coordination	Annually publish activities undertaken by the Task Force to Implement the Child Labor Act and the Central Advisory Board on Child and Adolescent Labor to address and prevent child labor.
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the National Plan of Action for Children and State Action Plans on Child Labor and publish results from activities undertaken to implement these plans annually.
	Encourage states and territories that do not currently have action plans for the elimination of child labor to establish such plans.

Area	Suggested Action
Social Programs	Reduce barriers and promote access to education for all children, including those from lower castes, members of tribal communities, and religious minorities, by providing sufficient training for teachers, providing separate and sanitary washrooms for girls, and increasing the number of available schools, especially in urban slums in which inadequate infrastructure options limit access to education.
	Collect and make available to the public data on exploitative child labor in every state through a central data repository, including findings from district-level bonded labor surveys and raw data from the national census.
	Ensure that state governments issue release certificates and provide financial assistance for bonded labor victims, including full compensation for those freed from bonded labor, through the Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Laborers.
	Provide adequate funding for educational programs, including programs that target child laborers, and provide re-entry programs and aftercare services, in all states and territories.
	Ensure that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act is not used to prevent child labor-focused NGOs from obtaining international funding or preserving their licenses to operate in the country.
	Provide all states and union territories with funding for human trafficking shelters in a timely and consistent manner.
	Develop and implement social programs to address child labor, bonded child labor, and child trafficking among vulnerable populations in India, including religious minorities, lower-caste children, and children from Bangladesh and Nepal.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children living in extreme poverty are especially vulnerable to child labor in India. In areas with limited economic prospects, parents may allow their children to go to cities or farms to earn money, in some cases effectively selling their children to traffickers. Children are vulnerable to labor exploitation in sectors in which adults from marginalized castes also face labor exploitation, such as shrimp processing in Andhra Pradesh, where children reportedly accompany their families in situations of debt bondage. Poverty and high rates of illiteracy in the lower caste community leave those children, especially girls, more vulnerable to child labor. Girls from some of the lower castes may be particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. Through a banned but ongoing system called *Jogini*, girls as young as age 12, usually from lower castes, are married to a local deity and are used by temple patrons as sex slaves, often in return for in-kind payments such as food and shelter. Some receive allowances from the perpetrator. Girls and boys from tribal areas are at higher risk of being trafficked into labor exploitation in domestic work and agriculture, respectively.

Maoist groups reportedly forcibly recruit children in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand to handle weapons, operate as human shields, and serve as cooks, porters, and informants in armed conflicts. Previous reports indicate that some non-state armed groups recruit girls for sexual exploitation, including practices indicative of sexual slavery.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

In India, school budgetary constraints, inadequate transportation for children in rural areas, a lack of separate and sanitary washrooms for female students, and inadequate infrastructure in existing schools present barriers to education access. Limited direct recruitment for teaching jobs and a cumbersome teacher recruitment process have led to high pupil-teacher ratios, severe teacher vacancies, and a non-availability of teachers with subject matter expertise, adversely impacting the quality of education. Lower-caste children, members of tribal communities, and religious minorities face discrimination and harassment by education officials. Lower-caste children in some schools are segregated from other students, relegated to seats in the backs of classrooms, denied midday meals, and assigned tasks like cleaning toilets during the school day. Flooding and extreme heat have hindered children's access to school facilities, especially in resource-poor and marginalized communities. Children whose parents move frequently for seasonal work are more likely to have an incomplete primary education due to frequent discontinuation of their schooling.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

India has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, India's legal framework regarding the prohibition of child trafficking does not meet international standards because the law requires the use of force, fraud, or coercion to establish child trafficking offenses.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	14	✓	Section 3(1) of the Child and Adolescent Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Section 3A of the Child and Adolescent Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Schedule to the Child and Adolescent Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act; Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Sections 2(g), 4, and 16–19 of the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act; Sections 138(4), 141, 143, and 144 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita; Section 79 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		X	Sections 139 and 141 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita; Sections 2, 5, 5A, and 5B of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act; Article 23 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Sections 93, 94, 96, 97, 139, and 142 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita; Sections 4–6 of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act; Sections 13 and 14 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act; Section 67B of the Information Technology Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Sections 76, 78, and 83(2) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act; Sections 15–18, 20–23, and 32B(c) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act; Section 93 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	16	X	
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		N/A	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Sections 1(2) and 83 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act
Compulsory Education Age	14	✓	Section 3 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act
Free Public Education		✓	Section 3 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act

India's new criminal code, the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita*, went into effect in 2024. India's hazardous work regulations for children between ages 14 and 18—established by the country's Occupational, Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSH) Code—do not include all sectors in which children are known to work, including spinning mills, garment production, and carpet making, all of which expose children to dangerous machinery, difficult working conditions, and long hours. The OSH Code only applies to institutions with 10 or more employees. Since the majority of businesses in India qualify as micro, small, or medium enterprises, the

10-employee cut-off leaves many Indian workers unprotected. India's child trafficking laws do not meet international standards as they require the use of force, fraud, or coercion to establish child trafficking offenses. Although sources report that the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into India's Armed Forces is age 16 and that individuals must be age 18 to be deployed, these legal provisions are not publicly available and could not be verified.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in India took actions to address child labor. However, alleged corruption in state police forces and a lack of training of enforcement personnel hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement	
State Government Labor Ministries: Each state has its own labor ministry that employs labor inspectors responsible for the enforcement of labor laws. State ministries conduct labor inspections, including inspections for child labor, and assess penalties for violations. Ministries refer children to child welfare committees for protection and rehabilitation services when child workers are identified and removed from work. During the reporting period, various states and union territories reported actions undertaken to address and prevent child labor. For example, the labor inspectorate in Andhra Pradesh removed 65 children from bonded labor through routine and special inspections, the National Capital Territory of Delhi's labor department supported the rescue and rehabilitation of 180 children working in factories, and the labor department of Karnataka reported removing 365 children from child labor as part of a "crackdown" on child labor in the state.	
Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies: Enforce laws pertaining to the worst forms of child labor. When criminal child labor violations are identified, state and local police submit information to District Magistrates to determine whether a case should be prosecuted in District Court. Police refer children found in the worst forms of child labor to child welfare committees for protection and rehabilitation services. Anti-Human Trafficking Units, which are reportedly not fully operational or established in all states, function under district police headquarters and provide intelligence gathering on human trafficking cases. Cases that fall under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children, are referred to Fast Track Special Courts, which are mandated to prosecute offenders within 1 year. A backlog of cases and insufficient training of personnel, however, prevent the courts from complying with this timeline. During the reporting period, criminal law enforcement agencies were active in investigating worst forms of child labor cases, though specific data related to these cases are not available. Reportedly, some police do not follow protocol in child trafficking investigations, and state authorities have ordered police to register these cases as kidnapping or missing persons cases to reduce the number of human trafficking cases in official statistics.	

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	Yes
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. In addition, although investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, the total number of investigations during the reporting period is **unknown**.

During the reporting period, the Government of India published its Crime in India Report with crime statistics from 2022. The report shows that in 2022, 583 perpetrators were arrested under the Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act and 203 persons were convicted under this Act.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

India established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, the government did not provide information on efforts undertaken by the coordinating mechanisms to address and prevent child labor during the reporting period.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Child Labor Coordinating Bodies: Led by the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), the Task Force charged with implementing the Child Labor Act comprises 12 officials from the federal and state governments. The Central Advisory Board on Child and Adolescent Labor monitors the implementation of existing legislation and programs related to child labor. Both coordinating bodies met during the reporting period; the outcomes of the meetings, however, are unknown.

India established policies related to child labor. However, states have not uniformly established action plans to eliminate child labor, and reporting on actions undertaken to implement policies is limited.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Policy on Child Labor: Overseen by MOLE and the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Aims to address child labor and includes activities for the provision of assistance to children. Under the policy, the Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labor (PENCIL) Portal was developed and implemented, which functions as a child tracking filing system to enhance enforcement of child labor laws, including the Child Labor Act, and provides a complaint mechanism for citizens to report child labor violations. It is unknown whether actions were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period. In June 2024, MOLE urged all state governments to strictly monitor and enforce the provisions of the Child Labor Act and to use the PENCIL Portal effectively.

National Plan of Action for Children: Overseen by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Identifies priority actions for achieving the objectives set out in the National Policy for Children, including age-appropriate classes for children released from child labor and child trafficking. Also seeks to develop community-based prevention, identification and release procedures, victim services, and reintegration mechanisms, as well as strengthen institutions to address the worst forms of child labor. Research could not determine actions taken under this policy. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) supports monitoring, evaluation, and formulation of policies under the Plan. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Women and Child Development and NCPCR were active in implementing this Plan of Action. NCPCR continued to receive and respond to complaints of child rights violations in districts with high tribal populations, held state-level consultation meetings regarding strategies for preventing children from dropping out of schools and reintegrating out-of-school children, and published a Special Report on Child Protection in the state of West Bengal.

State Action Plans on Child Labor: State and union territory-specific plans to address and eliminate child labor. Research indicates that not all states and union territories have adopted state-level action plans. During the reporting period, states including Jharkhand and Karnataka took actions to implement their plans; however, research was unable to identify actions undertaken by all states to implement these policies.

India funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, shelters providing assistance to victims of the worst forms of child labor lack financial and human resources.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Scheme: Ministry of Education program which aims to make education accessible and inclusive for all children in India by supporting states and union territories in implementing the National Education Policy, improving early childhood education, and bridging social gaps in education. In 2021, SSA absorbed the National Child Labor Project, which aimed to remove children from situations of child labor and provide them with reintegration services through its Special Training Centers. Under the SSA Scheme during the reporting period, the government increased the number of free textbooks provided to students by over 5 million. However, many states, including Delhi, Punjab, and West Bengal, did not receive the funds under the SSA Scheme from the central government.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Laborers:[‡] MOLE program that provides released bonded laborers with financial assistance of \$300 (Rs. 30,000) and social protection services, and funds district-level surveys on bonded labor prevalence. During the reporting period, the National Human Rights Commission of India met once to discuss challenges in addressing bonded labor, identifying gaps in rescue, relief, and rehabilitation efforts. Some state governments continue to lack standard operating procedures to implement this scheme and failed to issue release certificates, and some failed to provide adequate financial assistance to bonded labor victims without significant support from NGOs.

Anti-Human Trafficking Activities:[‡] Government-operated anti-trafficking shelters, run in collaboration with NGOs and state governments. Shelters include government-run juvenile justice homes and government-run women's and children's homes. In 2023, the Ministry of Women and Child Development-funded *Ujjawala* and *Swadhar Greh* schemes merged to form the *Shakti Sadan* scheme, which provides services to and repatriates human trafficking survivors, including the children of survivors. The government reported that as of December 2024, 404 *Shakti Sadan* homes were active and had served nearly 30,000 women. However, research was unable to determine how many beneficiaries were children.

[‡] Program is funded by the Government of India.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports