

In 2018, Ethiopia made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The National Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Task Force worked with the ILO to map service providers working on migration issues in order to improve coordination and collaboration. The government also nearly quadrupled the labor inspectorate's budget from its 2017 allocation, and in collaboration with the World Bank and UNICEF, it distributed 117 million textbooks and constructed 260 primary school classrooms. However, children in Ethiopia continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. The law in Ethiopia does not include free basic education or a compulsory age for education, leaving children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Social programs to combat child labor have also not sufficiently targeted sectors with high incidences of child labor.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Ethiopia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1-4) According to the results of a 2015 national child labor survey published in 2018, almost 16 million children from the ages of 5 to 17 engaged in child labor. The majority of these children were found in Oromia, Amhara, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' regions. (5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Ethiopia.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	7 to 14	41.5 (10,202,669)
Attending School (%)	7 to 14	73.1
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	30.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		54.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Socio Economic Survey, 2015–2016. (7)

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	Planting and harvesting apples, bananas, coffee, cotton, and <i>khat</i> (2,5,8,9)
	Herding livestock, including cattle (10)
	Fishing (2,5)
Industry	Mining† gold and quarrying† (5,8,11)
	Construction,† including carrying heavy loads and digging (2,5,8,10)
	Repairing motor vehicles and motorcycles (5)
	Producing handicrafts, including pottery and traditional handwoven textiles (2,5,8,12)
Services	Domestic work (4,5,9)
	Unpaid household services, including carrying heavy loads of water and firewood (5,8)
	Street work, including shoe shining, assisting taxi drivers, vending, portering, and begging (5,8,10,13)

# Ethiopia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

**Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (Cont.)**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor <sup>†</sup>	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,4,10,14,15)
	Forced labor in domestic work, herding, street vending, and traditional weaving of handwoven textiles, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,14,16)
	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (4)

<sup>†</sup> Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

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







Children are trafficked from rural areas to Addis Ababa and to other regions of the country for forced labor in the weaving industry and in domestic work. (8,14,16) Children also reportedly harvest and sell *khat*, a stimulant to which they may become addicted due to bodily contact with the plants’ excretions during harvest. (4) Families continue to play a role in financing and coercing their children to go abroad or to urban areas to look for work. (14-17) Children who begin as voluntary migrants may be forced into prostitution or become victims of forced labor. (14,15)

Many children face barriers to education, including the distance rural children must travel to reach school; a lack of sanitation, which especially affects adolescent girls; sexual harassment; the requirement to pay for uniforms and supplies; and a lack of teachers. These factors increase children’s risk of entering the workforce at a young age. (4,9,18,19) The Somali and Afar regions had the lowest rates of school attendance, with only 38.6 percent of school-age children enrolled in the Somali region and 50.2 percent enrolled in the Afar region. (5) In 2018, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) nearly doubled, from 1.6 million to 2.95 million, many of them children who may encounter difficulty accessing education in host communities or IDP camps. (4,20,21)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Ethiopia 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 Ethiopia’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work and the age for compulsory education.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Articles 89.2 and 185.1 of the Labour Proclamation (22)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	18 <sup>‡</sup>	Article 36.1(d) of the Constitution; Articles 89.1, 89.3, and 185.1 of the Labour Proclamation (22,23)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 89.4 and 185.1 of the Labour Proclamation; Directive on Prohibited Occupations for Young Workers (22,24)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 18.3 of the Constitution; Article 596 of the Criminal Code; Articles 2.4 and 3–4 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (23,25,26)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 18.2 of the Constitution; Articles 597, 635, and 637 of the Criminal Code; Article 3.2 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (23,25,26)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 634–636 of the Criminal Code; Articles 2.4 and 3–4 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (25,26)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 525 of the Criminal Code (25)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18‡	Article 270 of the Criminal Code (25)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (26)
Compulsory Education Age	No		
Free Public Education	No		

\* No conscription (25)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (22)

Not all Ethiopian laws related to child labor are in compliance with international standards. The Labour Proclamation applies only to children in a contractual employment relationship, which does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (22,27) The types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover traditional weaving, an area of work in which there is evidence of using dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools, or work that involves the manual handling or transporting of heavy loads other than in the transportation industry. (22,24) Lastly, Article 89.5 of the Labour Proclamation allows children ages 14 to 16 to engage in certain forms of hazardous work following the completion of a government-approved and inspected vocational training course. (22,28) This contradicts ILO C. 138, which prohibits hazardous work for all children under age 16. However, the Government of Ethiopia notes that, in practice, children may begin apprenticeships only after the completion of 10 years of schooling, or at age 17. (28)

### 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 authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA)	Conducts labor inspections of formal worksites at the regional level through its regional Bureaus of Labor and Social Affairs. (4) Through its National Referral Mechanism, coordinates victim referral to social services providers. (17)
Ethiopian Federal Police Commission	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (4) Through its Special Child Protection Units in Addis Ababa and other major cities, combats child trafficking and assists vulnerable children. (4,14,29)

# Ethiopia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)**

Organization/Agency	Role
Office of the Attorney General	Prosecutes criminal violations of child labor laws, including through its Special Investigative Unit for Women and Children. (4)
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs	Develops and implements programs to protect vulnerable children and monitor alleged violations of child protection laws, including the worst forms of child labor. (1,30) Maintains foster families and rehabilitation centers for children rescued from the worst forms of child labor. (4)

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in Ethiopia took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of MOLSA that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the authority to assess penalties.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$54,390 (31)	\$205,743 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	516 (31)	541 (4)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (31)	No (22)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	N/A (4)	No (4)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (31)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	46,000 (31)	38,000 (4)
Number Conducted at Worksite	28,275 (31)	38,000 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	70 (32)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (31)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (31)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (31)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (31)	Yes (4)

In 2018, the labor inspections focused on the construction and agricultural sectors, in which child labor is known to occur. However, the government did not publish the number of child labor violations identified as a result of these inspections. (4) Penalties for violating child labor laws range from \$11 to \$44 and are too low to deter violations. (22)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Ethiopia's workforce, which includes 52.8 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Ethiopia should employ roughly 1,321 inspectors. (33,34) In addition, although the labor inspectorate's funding nearly quadrupled from 2017, MOLSA and other stakeholders report that a lack of resources and poor coordination among agencies hampered their ability to enforce child labor laws throughout the country. (4)

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, criminal law enforcement agencies in Ethiopia took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including collecting and publishing enforcement statistics.

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	N/A (4)	N/A
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (31)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (31)	Yes (17)
Number of Investigations	1,400 (31)	Unknown (4)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (31)	Unknown (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (31)	Yes (4)

Although the Federal Police Commission and the Office of the Attorney General track all investigations, they lack a mechanism to disaggregate data by age and type of crime. (4) The government also continues to focus on transnational human trafficking for the purpose of forced labor, to the detriment of internal human trafficking, including child trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, which is a known problem in Ethiopia. (14)

Ethiopian immigration and border patrol authorities refer trafficking victims to NGO-run shelters, in which they are given first aid and assistance to return home. Although the centers do not disaggregate data for children, NGOs reported that many of those receiving services were younger than age 18, some of whom may have been returning from the Gulf States. (17)

#### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms 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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Coordinates activities on the worst forms of child labor. Members include MOLSA, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, and the Ministry of Education. (4, 15)
MOLSA National Forum to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Combats the worst forms of child labor at the national level. Biannual meetings convene participants from the Ethiopian Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. (4)
National Steering Committee Against Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children	Develops action plans and coordinates activities to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (15,30)
National Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling Council	Addresses international exploitation, including the worst forms of child labor. Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, with representatives from five government ministries and regional presidents who meet twice a year. (17,26,35,36)
National Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Task Force	Operational arm of the National Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling Council. (17) Meets quarterly and coordinates activities against trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. Led by the Office of the Attorney General and includes representatives from 31 government stakeholders and international organizations such as the IOM, the ILO, and the UNODC. (17,26,36) In 2018, the Secretariat worked with the ILO to map stakeholders working in the area of migration in order to improve coordination and collaboration. (37)
National and Regional Task Forces on Orphans and Vulnerable Children	Promote children's rights; chaired by members of the federal government and state ministers. (30) Coordinated and implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in all nine regional capitals and two city administrations. (38)

Research was unable to determine whether most of the coordinating bodies were active during the reporting period. Limited committee budgets, overlapping mandates, and poor coordination may affect their ability to operate and coordinate efforts to address child labor at a national or regional level. (15,17)

# Ethiopia

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

### 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 policies.

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

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2016–2020)	Includes guidelines on child labor identification, withdrawal, reintegration, and educational policies. Overseen by the National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (4)
National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2015–2020)	Examines legal and institutional frameworks and responses related to the human trafficking situation in Ethiopia. Aims to provide guiding principles based on international best practices for anti-human trafficking action and the institutional structures and inputs needed to combat human trafficking. (39)
National Children’s Policy	Aims to promote children’s rights and combat child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and child labor. Promotes access to quality primary and secondary education, and education in rural areas or for out-of-school youth. (40) In 2018, the Ministry of Woman and Children’s Affairs developed an implementation plan and shared it with lower level structures for feedback. (38)
Education Policies	Aims to improve access to quality education. Includes Education Sector Development Programme V (2015–2020); Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030),† which aims to implement compulsory education; Education and Training Policy, which prioritizes government support for education through grade 10; Pastoralist Area Education Strategy, which provides for alternative education in pastoralist communities; and National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy, which aims to improve access to vocational education for girls and out-of-school children. (19,41–44)
UNDAF (2016–2020)	Promotes improved access to education and livelihood services for vulnerable children. Seeks to protect children from abuse, violence, and exploitation, and to rehabilitate them. (45)
National Human Rights Action Plan II (2016–2020)	Aims to promote human rights in line with Ethiopia’s second Growth and Transformation Plan. Includes creating detailed manuals on crime investigation, improving the ability of civil society organizations to secure local funding, and combating both domestic and international trafficking in persons. (46,47)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (21,30,48–52)

The government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the Education Sector Development Program, the National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy, or the National Youth Policy. (43,44) In addition, research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement these policies during the reporting period.

### VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, 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 adequacy to address the problem in all sectors.

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

Program	Description
Engaged, Educated, Empowered, Ethiopian Youth Project (2014–2018)	\$10 million USDOL-funded project implemented by World Vision, Inc. (53) By the end of the project in 2018, placed 12,670 youth ages 14 to 17 in educational or employment activities, trained 3,119 teachers on inclusive education, and trained 1,374 government officials on enforcing child labor laws. (54) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.
World Bank-funded Projects	Includes ET Productive Safety Nets Project 4 (PSNP 4) (2014–2020),† a \$600 million project that aims to improve access to social safety nets, including cash and in-kind transfers to orphans and vulnerable children; Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Project II (GEQIP-2) (2014–2019), a \$130 million project that aims to improve learning conditions in Ethiopia through curriculum development, textbook assessment, teacher training, and school construction; and Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity (GEQIP-E) (2017–2022), a \$300 million program that works with the Ministry of Education to improve education quality and access. (55–58) In 2018, the government took steps to modernize PSNP 4 by developing a registry and monitoring system for beneficiaries, and continued to provide on-time cash transfers to 2.5 million households. (59) As part of GEQIP-2, distributed 117 million textbooks and teaching aids. GEQIP-E worked with the Ministry of Education to create budget lines for school grants and textbooks. (60,61)



**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)**

Program	Description
UNICEF-funded Programs	Programs to improve social safety nets and improve access to education. Includes Child-to-Child and Accelerated School Readiness programs, which extend educational opportunities to internally displaced children, and Integrated Basic Social Services with Social Cash Transfer (2015–2018),† UNICEF, Irish Aid, and MOLSA-funded project in support of PSNP 4 that aims to improve educational outcomes in the Oromia and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' regions by providing cash transfers. (20,62) In 2018, constructed 260 primary school classrooms, provided training to 309 refugee teachers, educated almost 18,000 children, and provided transfers to almost 1.3 million beneficiaries. (20)

† Program is funded by the Government of Ethiopia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (63,64)

Although the government participates in and implements several programs to combat child labor, these programs do not sufficiently target sectors with high incidences of child labor, such as agriculture and domestic work. (4) There is also a lack of appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration centers throughout the country for victims of child trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation. (3,15)

## 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 Ethiopia (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that all children are protected by child labor laws, including children working in non-contractual employment.	2009 – 2018
	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, including hazardous tasks in traditional weaving.	2016 – 2018
	Establish, by law, free basic education and an age up to which education is compulsory that is consistent with the minimum age of employment.	2012 – 2018
Enforcement	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by permitting labor inspectors to assess penalties.	2013 – 2018
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient training and resources to conduct inspections in all sectors, and are able to coordinate adequately with other agencies.	2009 – 2018
	Ensure that penalties are severe enough to deter violations and that both domestic and transnational child trafficking cases are investigated.	2013 – 2018
	Gather, disaggregate, and publish information on the number of child labor violations found and penalties applied and collected, as well as the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, and convictions obtained.	2009 – 2018
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2015 – 2018
Coordination	Ensure that established coordinating mechanisms to combat child labor have adequate funding to fulfill their mandates and are able to effectively coordinate between committees.	2015 – 2018
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the Education Sector Development Program, the National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy, and the National Youth Policy.	2013 – 2018
	Ensure existing policies are implemented as intended.	2018
Social Programs	Increase access to education for all children by decreasing the distance to schools in rural areas, hiring additional teachers, constructing sanitation facilities, eliminating school-related costs, and addressing the sexual abuse and harassment of girls.	2010 – 2018
	Develop or expand social protection programs to prevent or withdraw children from all relevant sectors of child labor, including agriculture and domestic work, and ensure that social services, such as rehabilitation and reintegration centers, are available throughout the country.	2009 – 2018

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