

Nepal

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Nepal made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government expanded its hazardous work list to include brickmaking and stone breaking, sectors in which there is evidence that work involves carrying heavy loads and exposure to hazardous substances. In fiscal year 2023–2024, the Nepal Child Rights Council rescued 71 children from India and re-integrated them with their families. The government further provided \$3,707 to implement the Child Labor Free Local Government Declaration Manual and declared municipalities as Child Labor Free Zones. However, Nepal's laws do not meet international standards for the prohibition of child trafficking because they do not clearly criminalize recruitment, harboring, receipt, or transportation in the absence of force, fraud, or coercion. In addition, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security lacks sufficient budgetary resources and labor inspectors to adequately enforce laws related to child labor. Finally, the laws ensuring access to free education up to the secondary level are insufficient because they are limited to citizens.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

| Statistics on Children’s Work and Education | | | Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14 | |
|---|----------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Children | Age | Percent and Population | Sector/Industry | Percent of Population |
| Working | 5 to 14 | 20.4% (1,093,497) | Agriculture | 54.8% |
| Hazardous Work by Children | 15 to 17 | Unavailable | Industry | 10.2% |
| Attending School | 5 to 14 | 93.0% | Services | 35.0% |
| Combining Work and School | 7 to 14 | 22.0% | | |

Children in Nepal are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in producing bricks and embellished textiles; quarrying, collecting, and breaking stones; and weaving carpets.

| Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity | |
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| Agriculture | Farming, including tending livestock. |
| Industry | Construction.† Producing bricks,† including loading and unloading of mules and donkeys. Embellished textiles (zari)† and embroidery. Quarrying, collecting, and breaking stones.† Weaving carpets.† |
| Services | Domestic and transportation work.† Working as shopkeepers, shop sales assistants, and tailors. Working in hotels,† restaurants,† and tea shops; in entertainment,† including as dancers;† and in mechanical repair shops for cars and motorbikes.† Portering and collecting recyclable waste. |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in embellishing textiles (zari), weaving carpets, and domestic work. Forced labor in agriculture, producing bricks, quarrying, and breaking stones. Use in illicit activities, including the cultivation and trafficking of drugs. Forced begging. |

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

| Area | Suggested Action |
|-----------------|--|
| Legal Framework | Raise the minimum age for entry into hazardous work to 18 years old. |
| | Criminally prohibit the human trafficking of children without requiring proof of the use of force, fraud, or coercion. |
| | Criminally prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, including the production of drugs. |
| | Establish criminal penalties for the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups. |

| Area | Suggested Action |
|----------------------------|---|
| Enforcement | Collect data and implement measures to improve the effectiveness of labor inspections, including by creating and utilizing a centralized database to track and monitor cases of child labor, and by collecting data and assessing the effectiveness of local level employment officers who act as child labor inspectors. |
| | Increase training of criminal law enforcement officials on victim-centered approaches for investigating and responding to cases of child trafficking while ensuring that human trafficking cases are consistently registered and prosecuted, instead of resolved through mediation. |
| | Ensure labor inspectors conduct unannounced inspections in all sectors in which child labor is found, including the informal sector and small factories that employ fewer than 10 workers. |
| | Increase the Ministry of Labor's budget, increase the number of labor inspectors from 22 to 211 to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 8.4 million people, ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient resources to conduct routine, complaint-based inspections, and ensure that labor inspectors receive regular training on laws related to child labor, including its worst forms. |
| | Institutionalize regular training for labor inspectors on laws related to child labor, including its worst forms. |
| | Publish data on criminal law enforcement actions, including training for criminal investigators and the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions achieved, and penalties imposed for child labor crimes. |
| | Create and utilize a centralized database to track and monitor cases of child labor, disaggregated by type of activity and sex, including labor court data related to child labor. |
| | Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and, where appropriate, convict and sentence perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor. |
| Coordination | Ensure that an adequate and organized coordination mechanism between different government agencies working to address child labor is established, with access to a centralized database system on child labor statistics and trends based on sectors and regions. |
| Government Policies | Develop a policy framework for implementation of services and delegate responsibilities for responding to child labor under a federalist system. |
| | Prioritize capacity building of government, law enforcement, and social safety officers to include training on child labor, conducting labor inspections, and coordination mechanisms to address child labor. Ensure that capacity building of law enforcement and child protective services in the country is prioritized with adequate funding. |
| Social Programs | Implement programs to address child labor in the adult entertainment, agriculture, domestic work, brick production, transportation, and construction sectors, in which the majority of child labor in the country is found. |
| | Eliminate barriers to education by increasing the availability of sanitation facilities at schools, addressing long distances to schools, enrolling and providing services to meet the needs of children with disabilities, increasing the availability of documentation for refugee children, and offsetting fees associated with schooling. |
| | Provide timely support and interventions for survivors calling the National Child Labor Helpline. |
| | Develop programs to address child trafficking and labor that target vulnerable populations, including stateless children, children living on the streets, those from groups such as the Dalit and Madhesi communities, indigenous groups, Indian and Nepali families, and from provinces such as Karnali and Sudurpashchim. |
| | Increase the budget for social programs for children, including rehabilitation services for survivors of child labor. |
| | Ensure that the new programs such as the School Midday Meal National Framework, the Recovery and Accelerated Learning Plan in local governments, and the Teachers Professional Development Framework are adequately implemented under the School Education Sector Plan. |

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Unhoused children are highly vulnerable to human trafficking, especially sex trafficking. Moreover, children in Nepal's unregistered shelters are exploited in forced begging. These children are also trafficked into exploitative or fraudulent orphanages where they are used to solicit money from foreign donors. The majority of children working in seasonal brick kilns in Nepal are from India and Nepal. Stateless children and those from marginalized groups such as the Dalit and Madhesi communities, indigenous groups, and from provinces with low human development index scores such as Karnali and Sudurpashchim are also highly vulnerable to human trafficking and child labor. Extreme weather events, such as flooding and landslides, have increased Nepali children's vulnerability to child labor in sectors such as brick kilns, domestic service, and carpet manufacturing.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Children, particularly girls, face barriers to accessing education due to a shortage of sanitation facilities, geographic distances, costs associated with schooling, household chores, and an absence of parental support. In Nepal, a lack of separate toilet facilities for girls deters them from attending school, especially when they are menstruating. Children with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing education, including unsuitable school infrastructure. Refugee children in Nepal face obstacles in enrolling in school because of lack of access to official documentation required by the Nepali government. The government, however, allows NGOs to provide primary- and secondary-level schooling to refugee children without documentation. Catastrophic flooding has hindered children's access to school facilities and safe learning spaces.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Nepal has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Nepal's laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for hazardous work, the prohibition of child trafficking, and the prohibition of the use of children in illicit activities.

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor | | | |
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| Standard | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation |
| Minimum Age for Work | 14 | ✓ | Section 3 of the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work | 17 | ✗ | Section 3 of the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | | ✓ | Schedule 1 of the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act |
| Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor | | ✓ | Section 4 of the Bonded Labor (Prohibition) Act; Section 4 of the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act; Sections 2–4 and 15 of the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act; Section 4 and 164 of the Labor Act |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking | | ✗ | Sections 3, 4, and 15 of the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children | | ✓ | Article 66(3)(d) and 72(3)(c) of the Act Relating to Children 2018; Sections 2, 3, 4, and 15 of the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act; Sections 16(2) and 16(3) of the Children's Act |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities | | ✗ | Sections 11 and 16 of the Children's Act; Section 4 of the Narcotics Act; and Section 28 of the National Penal Code. |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment | 18 | ✓ | Section 7 of the Military Service Regulation 2069 |

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor | | | |
|---|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| Standard | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation |
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military | | N/A* | |
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups | | X | Article 39 of the Constitution |
| Compulsory Education Age | 14 | ✓ | Article 31 of the Constitution; Section 6 of the Free and Compulsory Education Act |
| Free Public Education | | X | Section 16D of the Education Act; Section 20 of the Free and Compulsory Education Act; Article 31 of the Constitution |

* Country has no conscription

During the reporting period, Nepal expanded its hazardous work list to include brickmaking and stone breaking, sectors in which there is evidence that work involves carrying heavy loads and workers are exposed to hazardous substances. Nepal's National Master Plan on Child Labor (2018–2028) has also identified children working in brick kilns as a group particularly vulnerable to hazardous child labor. The minimum age for hazardous work is not consistent with international standards because it does not prohibit children aged 17 from engaging in hazardous work. In addition, the law related to child trafficking is insufficient because it does not clearly criminalize the recruitment, harboring, receipt, or transportation of children in the absence of force, fraud, or coercion. Furthermore, although the Constitution prohibits the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups, there is no specific legislation penalizing this practice. Finally, the laws ensuring free education up to the secondary level are insufficient because they are limited to citizens.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Nepal took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human and financial resources at the federal and state levels hindered enforcement efforts.

| Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement | |
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| Department of Labor and Occupational Safety, Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security (MoLESS): Enforces labor laws, including those involving child labor. Conducts studies, provides training on child labor prevention, and monitors Nepal's child labor prevention program. Active during the reporting period. | |
| Nepal Police: Investigate crimes involving women and children, including crimes related to human trafficking, through the Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau. The Nepal Police have a functioning Anti-Trafficking in Persons Bureau and 232 Women and Children units across 77 districts of Nepal under the Women and Children Service Directorate. Assist in children's rescue, rehabilitation, and coordination for the arrest of perpetrators in cases of the worst forms of child labor. In cases of hazardous child labor, coordinate with and hand over cases to MoLESS. During the reporting period, the Nepal police registered 17 cases of child trafficking and 2,197 cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation. | |

| 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 |

| Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts | |
|---|---------|
| 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 |

In 2024, **22** labor inspectors conducted **3,888** worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. While the police registered **17** cases of child trafficking and **2,197** cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, it is **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

Nepal has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it is unclear whether the coordinating mechanism carried out any activities during the reporting period.

| Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor |
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| Child Labor Prevention and Occupational Safety Section, MoLESS, and Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MWCSC): Coordinates policymaking and monitors implementation of child labor inspection guidelines. Consists of an Under Secretary, one section officer, and one factory inspector. Confers with the Monitoring Action Committees, MWCSC, the National Child Rights Council, MoLESS, and District Labor Offices. |

Nepal established policies related to child labor. However, Nepal lacks a policy framework to direct and coordinate services and activities related to child labor.

| Key Policies Related to Child Labor |
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| National Master Plan to End Child Labor (July 2018–July 2028): Prioritizes ending all forms of child labor by 2025 and includes a strategy to establish a fund at the local and provincial levels to help survivors of child labor. The plan designates the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, and Poverty Alleviation as the lead ministry to establish targeted programs for children involved in forced child labor, particularly in the agricultural sector. The Ministry carries out awareness programs through cooperatives at local and provincial levels and monitors child labor by analyzing the results of child labor surveys. In 2024, the government developed the Child Labor Free Local Government Declaration Operation Manual-2077 in collaboration with the ILO and UNICEF. The government further provided \$3,707 (500,000 NPR) to implement the manual and declare municipalities as Child Labor Free Zones. |
| School Education Sector Plan (2023–2032):* Policy framework to expand access to education for all children, improves the quality of education, and facilitates improved management and governance of schools. The plan includes strategies to combat child labor and trafficking through education solutions. During the reporting period, under the education plan, the government approved the School Midday Meal National Framework, rolled out the Recovery and Accelerated Learning plan in local governments, and updated the Teachers Professional Development Framework. The accelerated learning plan has been implemented in 150 out of 276 municipal governments, and the teacher professional support system has been established in 50 out of 753 local governments. |

* 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.

Nepal funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem because of gaps in funding and implementation.

| Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor |
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| Child Rights, Rescue and Rehabilitation Program:† Nepal Child Rights Council coordinates and facilitates monitoring, evaluation, and reviewing of local child rights at the provincial and local levels. Local children's funds have been established in approximately 243 local governments across the country. In fiscal year 2023–2024, the Nepal Child Rights Council rescued 71 children from India |

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

and re-integrated them with their families. For fiscal year 2024–2025, the government allocated over \$1.4 million (Rs. 192.5 million) for activities under the Child Labor Elimination and Rehabilitation Fund. These programs include awareness of child labor with the local government, capacity building grants, and conditional grants for declaring a municipality child labor free.

Helpline and Hotline Programs:[‡] Child Helpline–1098 is an MWCSC- and Child Workers in Nepal-funded helpline. Responds to calls about missing children, child abuse, child labor, child trafficking, and child sexual abuse in 18 locations in Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India. NGO and government officials stated that the response time to investigate allegations of child labor reported through the helpline is slow. National Center for Children at Risk–Hotline No. 104 is a hotline operated from Kathmandu, which is jointly run by the Central Child Welfare Board and Nepal Police. These hotlines cover cases for 74 out of the total 77 districts in Nepal. Responding to complaints received through the hotline, the Nepal Child Rights Council rescued 235 children and provided services for 10,251 children in fiscal year 2023–2024.

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

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

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports