

Ukraine

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED LAW THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Ukraine made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Despite the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the Ukrainian government continued to make efforts to address child labor and exploitation. The State Labor Service signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the State Service for Children to consolidate and coordinate measures to improve the prevention and detection of labor law violations, specifically those involving children. The government also established the Center for Child Rights Protection, which provides assistance to children who are witnesses to or survivors of crimes, and the National Police and Prosecutor General's Office provided training for investigators on best practices in the field of juvenile justice. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Ukraine is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because it failed to remedy Order No. 303 of 2022, which prohibits labor inspectors from conducting routine or targeted inspections while martial law is in force. Although the State Labor Service partially resumed unplanned inspections, by law it is only able to conduct unannounced inspections on suspicion of the following categories of violation: (1) informal employment; (2) legality of employment contracts suspension and termination; and (3) observance of wartime labor regulations surrounding schedules, paid leave, and other contractual issues. These limitations preventing routine inspections may leave potential violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses undetected in workplaces. Further, Ukrainian laws do not meet international standards for the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation because they do not criminalize the users of commercial sex involving children. In addition, the government does not have a coordinating mechanism or policies to address all forms of child labor, including in hazardous work in mining, agriculture, and street work. The government does not have the opportunity to carry out law enforcement, coordinate efforts, or implement its policies and social programs to address child labor in the Russia-occupied territories.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	9.7% (385,204)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	97.2%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	12.0%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14	
Sector/Industry	Percent of Population
Agriculture	97.0%
Industry	0.5%
Services	2.5%

Children in Ukraine are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, production of pornography, and forced begging. In addition, children are recruited by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict. Children, especially in Russia-occupied areas, also perform dangerous tasks in mining.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Farming and raising livestock.
Industry	Construction, manufacturing, and mining, [†] including extracting and transporting coal and amber.
Services	Street work, including street trade, washing cars, and begging.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in the production of pornography. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict. Forced begging. Trafficking in illicit drugs.

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work from age 16 to 17 to align with the compulsory education age.
	Prohibit all children under age 16 from working in hazardous occupations during vocational training.
	Ensure that laws provide criminal penalties for use of children in prostitution.
Enforcement	Resume routine and targeted labor inspections.
	Publish criminal law enforcement information, including whether sentences were imposed for worst forms of child labor crimes.
	Publish labor law enforcement information, including the number of child labor penalties that were imposed and collected.
	Authorize the State Labor Service to enforce the collection of delinquent penalties to ensure that all penalties imposed are collected.
	Hold perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor, including child soldiering, accountable. Ensure that former child soldiers are not penalized for crimes they were forced to commit.
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism with sufficient scope to address all forms of child labor, including hazardous work in mining, agriculture, street work, and other forms of informal work in which child labor is known to occur.
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all forms of child labor, including hazardous work in mining, agriculture, street work, and other forms of informal work in which child labor is known to occur.
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor, including the activities carried out by children working in mining, agriculture, and street work, to inform policies and programs.
	Institute a rehabilitation and reintegration program for children engaged in armed conflict.
	Continue efforts and expand existing programs to ensure that all children in Ukraine, including those with disabilities, children from Roma communities, and homeless and orphaned children, especially those living in state-run institutions, are protected from human trafficking and labor exploitation.
	Continue efforts to ensure that all children in Ukraine, including those with special needs and those living in conflict zones, have access to education, whether virtual or in person, that meets their educational needs.
	Develop programs to ensure that all Roma children are registered at birth and are able to access education.
	Ensure that there are sufficient resources and trained personnel to assist child victims of commercial sexual exploitation in all state-run facilities that serve children in need.
	Institute programs to address all forms of child labor, including hazardous work in mining, agriculture, street work, and other forms of informal work.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children in Ukraine face increased social, economic, and political challenges, which can make them more vulnerable to exploitation because of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The increased vulnerability is most pronounced in areas of active conflict. Internally displaced children (particularly unaccompanied children) and children in conflict-affected territories are especially vulnerable to exploitation in the worst forms of child labor. In addition, children with disabilities, Roma children, and homeless and orphaned children, especially those living in or aging out of state-run institutions, are at risk of human trafficking, including trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation. Russian authorities and proxy groups backed by Russia continued to recruit children for use as soldiers and informants, train them in weapons use, and organize them into reserve militia battalions at militant-run camps and at school programs located in territory controlled by Russia.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Education continued to be disrupted for more than 6.7 million Ukrainian children, particularly for those in active conflict areas, due to the extensive damage and destruction of schools as a result of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The Ukrainian government continued to provide distance and in-person learning covering over 95 percent of children, with half of the children in Ukraine attending in-person classes and the other half attending either a combination of in-person and online classes or only online classes. A lack of electricity and internet due to attacks on electricity and telecommunications infrastructure has further disrupted access to education. Some children with special needs, children from poor families, and displaced children cannot access online classes because they lack computer equipment or internet access. Additionally, some Roma children lack birth registration, impeding their ability to register for school. Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar children who do not speak Russian may have difficulty accessing education in Russia-controlled areas. Ukrainian children residing temporarily in several host countries in Europe have low enrollment rates in local education systems due to language barriers, difficulty accessing schools, and expectations of returning to Ukraine. While these children are likely attending school via the Ukrainian online learning platform, there is no available data to confirm their attendance.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Ukraine has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Ukraine's laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for hazardous work because children between the ages of 14 and 16 are not forbidden from engaging in hazardous work as part of a vocational training program, nor on the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children because no law criminalizes the users (clients) of commercial sex involving children.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	16	✓	Article 150 of the Criminal Code; Article 188 of the Labor Code; Article 21 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✗	Article 150 of the Criminal Code; Article 190 of the Labor Code; Article 21 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood; Ministry of Health Order No. 46
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Article 150-1 of the Criminal Code; Order of the Ministry of Health No. 46 on the approval of the list of heavy work and work with dangerous and harmful working conditions, in which the employment of minors is prohibited; Article 190 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Article 149 of the Criminal Code; Articles 21 and 35 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood; Article 43 of the Constitution of Ukraine; Article 1 of the Law on Employment
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Article 149 of the Criminal Code; Article 32 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✗	Articles 149 and 301–303 of the Criminal Code; Articles 10 and 21 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood; Articles 1, 6, and 7 of the Law on the Protection of Public Morality
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 304 and 307 of the Criminal Code; Articles 10 and 21 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	17	✓	Articles 15 and 20 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Article 15 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service; Decree No. 447 on Measures to Enhance the Defense Capacity of the State

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Article 149 of the Criminal Code; Article 30 of the Law on the Protection of Childhood
Compulsory Education Age	17‡	✓	Articles 3, 12, and 20 of the Law on General Secondary Education; Article 53 of the Constitution
Free Public Education		✓	Article 53 of the Constitution of Ukraine; Article 2 of the Law on General Secondary Education

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In August 2024, the Law On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Simplifying Access to Free Legal Aid came into force. This law guarantees equal access for all children to free legal aid necessary to ensure the protection of their rights. It also expands the right to free secondary legal services to all human trafficking victims, including representation of victims' interests in courts, other state bodies, and local government.

As the minimum age for work of age 16 is lower than the compulsory education age of 17, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. Furthermore, Ministry of Health Order No. 46 does not prohibit children between the ages of 14 and 16 from engaging in hazardous work as part of a vocational training program, which is not in compliance with international standards. Although the law specifies that children in these training programs may be onsite for no more than 4 hours and must remain in strict compliance with applicable safety norms and rules and regulations on labor protection, this is not in compliance with international standards. Ukraine does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children because no law criminalizes the users (clients) of commercial sex involving children.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Ukraine took actions to address child labor. However, a lack of authority to conduct routine and targeted labor inspections during martial law in Ukraine hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
<p>State Labor Service: Operates under the executive branch and enforces labor laws, including laws on child labor, by conducting inspections. Regional offices of the State Labor Service share information about child labor cases with regional offices of the National Police of Ukraine, regional employment centers, the Department of Child Affairs, trade union leaders, regional social services organizations, and centers dedicated to social protection. In 2024, the State Labor Service continued limited unannounced inspections under conditions of martial law and also held 1,512 labor law-related consultations and 1,568 workshops and round tables on topics that included the prevention of informal child labor and child exploitation.</p>
<p>Office of the Prosecutor General: Investigates and prosecutes cases related to the worst forms of child labor. Oversees a department and regional offices for the Protection of Interests of Children that focus on the worst forms of child labor. The regional offices conduct pre-trial investigations and investigations of criminal offenses, file appeals of court decisions related to children's issues, provide legal representation to children, and support the execution of court decisions related to child protection. Operates specialized centers for child survivors and witnesses in Mykolayiv and Vinnytsya oblasts. Works with the National Police of Ukraine, including the Migration Police Department, which is tasked with preventing human trafficking offenses, including child sexual exploitation.</p>

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts	
Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	No
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes
Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Yes
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown

In 2024, **804** labor inspectors conducted **2,623** worksite inspections, finding **5** child labor violations involving **6** minors. The government initiated **1,708** investigations of the worst forms of child labor, of which **1,670** cases pertained to the importation, sale, production, or distribution of child pornography. It is **unknown** how many convictions there were, although **1,448** of these cases were referred to the courts for prosecution.

In early 2022, Ukraine issued Order No. 303, which prohibits labor inspectors from conducting routine or targeted inspections while martial law is in force. In addition, while the State Labor Service resumed unannounced labor inspections in 2023 and reports having conducted proactive labor inspections in 2024, it was only able to conduct inspections if they met three specific criteria: (1) informal employment; (2) legality of employment contracts suspension and termination; and (3) observance of wartime labor regulations surrounding schedules, paid leave, and other contractual issues. These limitations on inspections may leave potential violations of child labor laws and other labor abuses undetected in workplaces.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Ukraine established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, this mechanism does not address all worst forms of child labor in the country, including hazardous work in mining and agriculture, street work, and other forms of informal work.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
<i>Interagency Working Group on the Detection, Suppression, and Investigation of Crimes Related to Human Trafficking:</i> Led by the Ministry of Social Policy, which serves as the National Coordinator for Counter-Trafficking Policy and includes representatives from government entities, regional governments, NGOs, and international organizations. In 2024, the council met in January and July to discuss challenges with pre-trial investigations of human trafficking crimes, including the trafficking of children during wartime.

Ukraine established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover all forms of child labor, including hazardous work in mining, agriculture, street work, informal work, and other sectors in which child labor is known to occur.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
<i>Resolution on the Social Protection of Children and Urgent Measures to Protect the Rights of the Child:</i> Established in 2023, directs the government to develop additional programs and social services to protect children against abuse, including the worst forms of child labor. Includes a provision on measures that address the participation of children in armed conflict. Under this Resolution, the State Service for Children began full operation in 2024, including signing a Memorandum of Cooperation with the State Labor Service to coordinate efforts to ensure compliance with labor laws, specifically laws on child labor, with a particular focus on hazardous work.
<i>National Action Plan for Countering Human Trafficking (2023–2025):</i> Adopted in June 2023, guides the work of the National Coordinator on Countering Human Trafficking and enhances mechanisms for preventing human trafficking, building institutional capacities and collaboration of the National Referral Mechanism stakeholders, strengthening the identification of individuals involved in trafficking-related crimes, and ensuring comprehensive protection and assistance to all human trafficking victims, including children.

Ukraine funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate because they do not address the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified, including in hazardous work in mining, agriculture, street work, and other forms of informal work.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Center for Child Rights Protection: * ‡ Established during the reporting period under the Coordinating Council for the Protection and Security of Children, this interagency Center supports children who are survivors of or witnesses to crimes by providing them with medical examination and treatment, as well as therapeutic and other assistance.
Centers and Shelters for Socio-Psychological Rehabilitation of Children: ‡ Serve children in need, including child survivors of human trafficking, through a network of centers and shelters that operate across Ukraine. Children are provided with individual social, psychological, medical, and other types of assistance. Government officials report that there is a lack of resources and specialized personnel to assist child survivors of sexual exploitation through these centers. These centers remained active during the reporting period.
Programs Administered by the National Social Service: ‡ The National Social Service, a central executive agency which reports to the Ministry of Social Policy, implements state policy in the field of social protection and protection of children’s rights, and performs state control of social support and observance of children’s rights. In coordination with local authorities, operates active centers for social services for family, youth, and children around Ukraine, and provides social services for vulnerable children and families, including survivors of human trafficking. These programs remained active during the reporting period.

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Ukraine.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports