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Uganda

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Uganda made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and in partnership with civil society organizations, achieved a 5 percent reduction in child labor cases in the Karamoja region throughout the districts of Moroto, Nakapiripirit, and Busia. Additionally, the “Work: No Child’s Business” 5-year project reported a 7.3 percent increase in the number of children ages 5 to 17 attending school in the region. The government, in partnership with the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, and other stakeholders, launched the National Coalition to End Child Poverty, which aims to network, raise awareness, advocate, and take action to ensure the survival, development, protection, and participation of children as established in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Uganda is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because the government failed to provide any funding to conduct labor inspections. In addition, United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo reports indicated that in 2024, the Government of Uganda provided support to the March 23 Movement, a non-state armed group that forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, the Government of Uganda has denied supporting the March 23 Movement, and in September, arrested four members of the March 23 Movement attempting to recruit refugees from the Kyanwali refugee camp. Uganda’s laws addressing the minimum age for hazardous work also do not meet the international standard because the Employment of Children Regulations permits a commissioner to allow children ages 12 and older who are enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship program to engage in hazardous work. Moreover, compulsory education is only seven years and Ugandan law permits schools to charge fees, contrary to international standards requiring at least nine years of free and compulsory education. Lastly, the lack of a comprehensive labor inspection strategy, along with inadequate funding, training, and resources, hampered the capacity of law enforcement agencies to conduct child labor inspections and investigations.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	62.9% (7,978,224)
Boys		63.3%
Girls		62.6%
Urban		50.7%
Rural		67.3%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	6.3% (190,190)
Boys		7.0%
Girls		5.6%
Urban		8.1%
Rural		5.5%
Attending School	5 to 14	82.8%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	63.6%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14	
Sector/Industry	Percent of Population
Agriculture	80.7%
Industry	4.5%
Services	14.9%

Children in Uganda are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in gold mining.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity

Agriculture	Cultivating and harvesting coffee, rice,† sugarcane,† tea,† tobacco,† and vanilla, and acting as scarecrows in rice fields. Working with livestock, including herding cattle.† Fishing,† including catching† and selling fish, and paddling† and loading boats.† Collecting insects.
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Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity	
Industry	Construction,† including making† and laying† bricks. Quarrying stone† and sand,† mining† gold, and making charcoal. Manufacturing, including working in carpentry workshops.†
Services	Street work, including vending,† begging,† car washing,† working as porters,† scavenging,† collecting plastic bottles, and collecting and selling scrap metal. Working in hair salons, hotels,† restaurants,† bars,† and video halls.† Domestic work.†
Categorical	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging and use in illicit
Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	activities, including burglary, cattle theft, and car and house break-ins, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in agriculture, fishing, and animal herding. Forced labor in factories, mining, and quarrying. Forced labor in bars and restaurants, street vending, and domestic work.

† 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.

In May 2024, the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported that the Government of Uganda provided in-kind support, including logistical support and transportation, to the March 23 Movement, a non-state armed group that forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, in September, Ugandan police officers arrested four leaders of the Congo River Alliance, the political arm of the March 23 Movement, for attempting to recruit 32 individuals, including 4 girls, from the Kyangwali refugee camp in western Uganda.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Ensure that only minors ages 16 and older who have received adequate, specific instruction or vocational training are permitted to perform hazardous work, and that their health, safety, and morals are fully protected. Increase the compulsory education age from age 13 to age 16 to align with the minimum age for work. Ensure that basic education is free and that school officials do not levy fees.
Enforcement	Fully fund the labor inspectorate to carry out its mandated duties without relying on the financial support from civil society organizations and NGOs. Establish a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor. Ensure that labor officers receive adequate training and increase their capability to follow through on child labor cases. Put safeguards in place to ensure that the military does not support or coordinate with non-state armed groups that recruit children. Establish a mechanism to assess civil penalties. Strengthen the labor inspectorate by increasing the number of labor inspections, and integrate data on risk-prone sectors and previous incidents to inform routine and targeted inspections. Publicly release labor law enforcement data, including on the labor inspectorate budget, the number of inspectors, whether routine or unannounced inspections took place, the number of child labor violations found, whether penalties for child labor violations were imposed, and the number of penalties for child labor violations imposed that were collected. Publicly release criminal enforcement data, including the number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions during the reporting period. Ensure that the inspectorate is conducting inspections on private farms, homes, and in the informal sector, including routine and unannounced inspections. Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors from 198 to 464 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 18.6 million people.

Area	Suggested Action
	<p>Increase funding and technical capacity to strengthen coordination between national- and district-level child labor enforcement bodies to ensure that relevant data are shared and that child labor inspections are prioritized across the country.</p> <p>Ensure that child labor cases reach the Industrial Court and that penalties are assessed by addressing monitoring issues and improving the court's reach outside urban centers.</p> <p>Continue to increase efforts to hold accountable public officials who facilitate or participate in human trafficking or the worst forms of child labor, including those with ties to labor recruitment companies.</p> <p>Strengthen mechanisms to properly refer child labor claims, including those concerning children in domestic work, to criminal and civil law enforcement authorities, and ensure that minors found to be subjected to sexual exploitation are not detained and abused by police.</p> <p>Increase the capacity of criminal law enforcement agencies to respond to the worst forms of child labor by dedicating more personnel to worst forms of child labor cases and improving training for criminal law enforcement staff.</p>
Government Policies	Ensure that district labor action plans reflect national policies implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development.
Social Programs	<p>Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by defraying informal costs, including for supplies, uniforms, and materials; addressing physical and sexual violence; and ensuring sufficient teachers, infrastructure, and transportation in rural areas. Moreover, ensure that children have access to school regardless of sexual orientation.</p> <p>Enhance efforts to ensure that refugee children have access to educational opportunities by accommodating their language needs, correcting their classification status as refugees, and addressing issues related to delays and costs in processing their equivalency examinations. Additionally, ensure that refugee children are not deterred from attending school by addressing issues of violence and exploitation, harassment, and discrimination, and by locating well-equipped schools accessible to refugee settlements.</p> <p>Enhance the availability of shelters for victims of child labor, including child trafficking victims.</p> <p>Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, particularly in mining and commercial sexual exploitation, in all areas of the country.</p>

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children in Uganda, especially from impoverished rural areas, are vulnerable to human trafficking and forced into begging, street vending, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation. Children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation continued to be abused and assaulted by law enforcement officers in 2024. NGOs and media reports have indicated that children from the Karamoja region are sold in open-air markets or through intermediaries and forced into cattle herding. Cattle rustlers in the Karamoja region recruit children, especially boys, for violent cattle raids. An unspecified number of these children have been killed during military operations against the cattle rustlers, and cattle raids also increase children's vulnerability to human trafficking. Moreover, reports indicate that refugee children throughout the country were at an increased risk of engaging in child labor or being subjected to the worst forms of child labor.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

While Ugandan law provides for free primary education, parents must pay official and unofficial expenses, such as school supplies, meals, and other materials, thus hindering some children from attending school. Fees are paid directly to the schools, and if students are not able to pay the amount in full, they might be prevented from attending or completing their term. The Ministry of Education implemented a new curriculum for lower secondary schools; however, the government did not provide the necessary supplies, putting the onus of procurement on parents and teachers. Other barriers to education include a shortage of trained teachers, poor school infrastructure, and a lack of transportation, particularly in remote rural areas where children may have to walk very long distances to the nearest school. In addition, although free primary education laws apply equally to refugee children, reports indicate

that some are wrongfully classified as “international students,” resulting in a significant increase of their education fees. Girls, especially those in refugee camps, are less likely to attend school and thus are vulnerable to exploitation due to violence against girls, harassment, and the pressure to undertake domestic duties. Additionally, for a number of refugee settlements, such as Nakivale, schools are often located far from where refugees live and are inadequately equipped to meet the needs of the large student population. As a result of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, some children were expelled or suspended from school based on their sexual orientation, hampering their access to education.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Uganda has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor, having acceded to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons in March 2024. However, Uganda’s laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for hazardous work because children ages 12 and older enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship programs are legally eligible to engage in hazardous work provided they obtain permission from a commissioner.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	16	✓	Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✗	Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Section 32 of the Employment Act; Regulations 5 and 8 of the Employment (Employment of Children) Regulations
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Regulation 6 and the First Schedule of the Employment (Employment of Children) Regulations; Section 7 of the Children (Amendment) Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Sections 2 and 5 of the Employment Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Section 8 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Section 8 of the Children (Amendment) Act; Sections 2–6 of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Section 131 of the Penal Code; Section 14 of the Anti-Pornography Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Article 5(d) of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act; Article 88 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 52(2)(c) of the Defense Forces Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		N/A	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Section 5(b) of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act
Compulsory Education Age	13‡	✗	Sections 2 and 10(3)(a) of the Education Act
Free Public Education		✗	Sections 2, 4, 9, 10(3)(a), and 57(g) of the Education Act

‡ Age calculated based on available information

While Uganda has a list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children under the age of 18, Section 8 of the Employment of Children Regulations permits a commissioner to allow children ages 12 and older enrolled in an educational training or apprenticeship program to engage in hazardous work in violation of international standards. In addition, children in Uganda are required to attend school only up to age 13, making children ages 13 to 16 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to

attend school while also not being legally permitted to work. Finally, although Uganda has adopted policies to extend universal education through the secondary level, by law schools are permitted to charge fees and school is only compulsory for seven years.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Uganda took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of a budget for the labor inspectorate to conduct labor inspections and the inability to assess penalties hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD): Formulates, implements, and enforces labor inspection policies and laws related to working conditions through its Department of Labor, Industrial Relations and Productivity. Includes the Industrial Court, which judges labor dispute cases that are referred by labor officers. Operates the Uganda Child Helpline known as Sauti.

Ministry of Internal Affairs: Responsible for the enforcement of criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor. The Uganda Police Force's Child and Family Protection Unit investigates forced labor cases, the Special Investigations Division and the Anti-Human Trafficking Desk investigate cases related to human trafficking and the use of children in illicit activities, and the Sexual Offenses Desk investigates cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The police also work with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to investigate and prosecute cases related to child labor, including its worst forms.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

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

In 2024, **198** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, or whether child labor violations were found. An **unknown** number of investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted. The number of prosecutions initiated and perpetrators convicted is also **unknown**.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Uganda established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

National Steering Committee on the Elimination of Child Labor: Coordinates child labor issues and implements the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor, including by setting policy priorities, securing resources for child labor programs, and coordinating with key stakeholders. Led by MGLSD, includes members from several ministries, including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Local Government, and members of the Uganda Police Force. During the reporting period, the committee participated in quarterly consultative meetings with members of law enforcement and civil society to develop labor inspection checklists and to review and revise the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor. Meetings also focused on providing input on newly drafted policies such as the "Child-Friendly Justice System," reviewing training requirements for frontline service providers and case workloads, and discussing policy and enforcement gaps.

Uganda established policies related to child labor. However, the implementation of national policies was not consistent throughout all of the country's districts.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor (2020/2021–2024/2025): Aims to focus government efforts on the prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and reduction of the risk of child labor, with the goal of eliminating all forms of child labor by 2025. The Coordinating Office for Preventing Trafficking in Persons initiated the development of a new 5-year National Action Plan. In 2024, the Steering Committee, including stakeholders from government, law enforcement, and civil society, met quarterly to discuss the evolving draft of the new action plan.

National Child Policy: Focuses on four basic children's rights: survival, development, protection, and participation. Prioritizes the elimination of child labor, launched with an implementation strategy through 2025, and outlines the responsibilities of all stakeholders in implementing child-related policies. In 2024, outreach and sensitization campaigns for educators, local leaders, businesses, health workers, and protection staff on the child policy were conducted throughout the year by staff of MGLSD and NGOs with support from international donors and partners.

National Action Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons in Uganda (2019–2024): Focused on developing sustainable systems and structures to prevent human trafficking; improving capacity for the identification, protection of and support for victims; improving investigations and prosecutions; and establishing cooperative relationships with international stakeholders. Included the National Referral Guidelines for Management of Victims of Trafficking, which sought to improve coordination among stakeholders responsible for providing services to victims and those responsible for prosecuting criminals. In 2024, sensitization campaigns targeting educational institutions, as well as at-risk populations, regarding trafficking were carried out through the Coordinating Office for Preventing Trafficking in Persons.

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

Uganda funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified, including in mining and commercial sexual exploitation.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labor in Supply Chains: Implemented by ILO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in Uganda, in partnership with the Government of Uganda and the Federation of Ugandan Employers. Uganda's participation in the \$29 million multi-country project targeted child labor in the coffee and tea supply chains in the Mbale, Kabarole, Buikwe, Hoima, and Bushenyi districts. During the reporting period, conducted a 3-day monitoring and evaluation training, which was fundamental to the implementation of the project's second phase. The training focused on strengthening the capacities of national stakeholders through the implementation of the "Results Framework and Indicator Measurement Guidelines."

Uganda Child Helpline: Funded primarily by UNICEF with in-kind contributions from the government, comprises District Action Centers and a physical call center located in Wakiso that screens all calls for reported cases of child abuse. Caseworkers at District Action Centers follow up directly on cases of child abuse, including child labor and exploitation, assigned to them by the National Call Center and liaise with local authorities to address reported incidents. In 2024, the Uganda Child Helpline was active.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Uganda.

† 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