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Somalia

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Somalia made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs organized awareness campaigns for the public and local authorities to raise awareness about the dangers of child labor. These campaigns focused on high-risk sectors like agriculture, fishing, and domestic work. The government also coordinated with partners to identify and remove children from armed groups and offer rehabilitation and reintegration services, including psychosocial support, family tracing, education, and vocational training. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Somalia made only minimal advancement because federal and state security forces continued to recruit and use children in armed conflict, in violation of national law. Government security forces also subjected children formerly associated with armed groups to official and unofficial detention, as well as to at least four instances in Puntland of capital punishment. In addition, Somalia lacks laws prohibiting child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the use of children in illicit activities. The government also did not collect or publish data on its labor and criminal law enforcement efforts during the reporting period.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	9.5% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	38.3%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	4.7%

Children in Somalia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in armed conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, construction, mining, and street work.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Farming, including planting, weeding, harvesting, and cleaning and packing crops; herding livestock; fishing, including cleaning fish.
Industry	Manufacturing and construction activities; crushing stones, quarrying, and excavating.
Services	Domestic work in hotels and private residences; street work, including shining shoes, washing cars, begging, conducting minibuses, vending, and selling khat; voluntarily recruited children used in hostilities by state armed forces.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Recruitment and use in armed conflict as combatants and in supporting roles (including as cooks, porters, and informants, or to operate checkpoints) by both state and non-state armed groups. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including selling of drugs. Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, breaking rocks, selling or transporting khat, begging, and construction work.

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

In 2024, members of the federal armed forces, regional forces, and clan militias continued to recruit children into their ranks, despite a government order barring the recruitment of children into state armed forces. In addition, the non-state armed group al-Shabaab continued to commit grave violations against children, forcibly recruiting children as young as age 8 into its ranks, and using children in combat, for sexual slavery, and in support roles. UN reporting for 2024 indicates that 768 children were recruited and used in armed conflict by al-Shabaab. During the reporting period, federal and regional authorities continued to detain children formerly associated with al-Shabaab, and in Puntland four former child soldiers were executed, despite the Puntland Age Verification Committee having confirmed that they were minors at the time of their arrest. When children associated with armed groups are separated from this worst form of child labor, it is incumbent on the government to protect them and provide appropriate victim services.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; and the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, and receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, both domestically and internationally.
	Criminally prohibit using, procuring, and offering a child for prostitution, pornography, and pornographic performances; ensure that penalties for the commercial sexual exploitation of children are sufficiently stringent to deter violations; and ensure that the law protects children involved in commercial sexual exploitation from criminal charges.
	Criminally prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs.
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 by non-state armed groups.
	Raise the minimum age for light work to age 13 and specify the number of hours and activities in which children are allowed to undertake light work.
	Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, after consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.
	Increase the compulsory education age from 14 to 15 years to align with the minimum age for work.
Enforcement	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has dedicated funding, increase the number of labor inspectors from 35 to 83 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of 3,318,000 people, and institutionalize training on laws related to child labor.
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted at worksites, including unannounced inspections, and in targeted sectors in which child labor most frequently occurs.
	Collect and publish data on labor law enforcement efforts related to child labor.
	Implement a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor violations.
	Establish formal complaint and referral mechanisms to identify potential child labor violations and refer victims to appropriate social services.
	Collect and publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts related to the worst forms of child labor.
	Enforce laws prohibiting the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the Somali Police Force, the National Intelligence and Security Agency, and the Somali National Army, as well as Galmudug, Jubaland, and Puntland forces and all allied militia. Investigate, prosecute, and punish, as appropriate, all commanders who recruit and use children.
	Institutionalize training for criminal law enforcement officials, including police, prosecutors, and judicial officials, on laws related to the worst forms of child labor.
Coordination	Ensure that children associated with armed groups are treated as victims—ceasing the practices of detaining them with adults; subjecting them to lengthy interrogations without legal representation, coerced confessions, and long prison terms; and imposing capital punishment—and refer them to social services providers in accordance with the handover protocol of 2014.
	Establish a robust coordinating mechanism to address all relevant worst forms of child labor in Somalia, including forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, and herding livestock.
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address child trafficking and child labor in agriculture, industry, street work, and domestic work.
Social Programs	Adopt a countrywide birth registration system to ensure accurate age verification, including for military recruitment, removal of children from armed groups, and protection of underage victims of the worst forms of child labor.
	Conduct a national child labor prevalence survey, including data on the number of children working and attending school, to inform targeted policies and programs related to elimination of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education and make education accessible and safe for all children by removing all armed groups from educational facilities, constructing schools outside Mogadishu, and ensuring that girls, internally displaced children, and nomadic and rural children have access.
	Develop programs to address all forms of child labor, including in street work and agriculture, and expand the scope of existing programs to address the use of children in armed conflict, including awareness raising on the worst forms of child labor and international standards related to the definition of a child in the context of work and participation in armed conflict.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Conflict, severe drought, and devastating floods have forced millions of people in Somalia to flee their homes in recent years, and approximately 3.3 million were still displaced at the end of 2024. Children in these communities are especially vulnerable to labor exploitation and sex trafficking due to the absence of education opportunities and basic necessities. Non-state armed groups have also been reported to recruit children from these internally displaced communities, as well as from pastoralist communities and minority clan households.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Displacement due to armed conflict and natural disasters remains a significant barrier to education. Schools are also targeted for violence by al-Shabaab and have been occupied by both state and non-state forces. In addition, there is limited availability of public schools outside the capital city of Mogadishu. Children in nomadic communities in particular are unlikely to attend school in a fixed place. Girls face additional obstacles, including lower prioritization of girls' education, an insufficient number of female teachers, and lack of sanitation facilities within schools, all of which negatively affect girls' attendance and learning.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Somalia has not ratified several key international conventions concerning child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict; the UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; or the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. In addition, Somalia's laws regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children are not sufficient because the use, procuring, and offering of a child for prostitution, pornography, and pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	15	✓	Articles 93 and 144 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 90 and 144 of the Labor Code; Article 29 of the Provisional Constitution
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✗	Articles 90 and 94 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 455 and 464 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✗	
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✗	Articles 407 and 408 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✗	
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	General Order No. 1

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	General Order No. 1
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		X	Article 29 of the Provisional Constitution
Compulsory Education Age	14‡	X	Articles 13 and 15 of the General Education Law
Free Public Education		✓	Articles 13 and 14 of the General Education Law

‡ Age calculated based on available information

Although the Labor Code establishes age 12 as the minimum age for light work and describes the conditions under which it may be undertaken, it neither determines the activities in which light work may be permitted nor prescribes the number of hours per week for light work. In addition, the gap between the end of compulsory education and the minimum age for work leaves children aged 14 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but may not legally work. Furthermore, while the Provisional Constitution states that children may not perform work that would endanger their health or development, and while the 1972 Labor Code enables the publication of a hazardous works list, the government has not determined by regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children.

The Federal Government of Somalia lacks legislation prohibiting human trafficking, including of children, or the use of children in illicit activities. Though laws prohibit procuring people for prostitution, they do not specifically increase the severity of the penalty for the procurement of children, and no laws exist prohibiting the use or offering of a child for prostitution or the use, procuring, and offering of a child for pornography or pornographic performances. Under Article 405 of the Penal Code, children involved in prostitution are not protected from criminal charges. Many fines for offenses under the Penal Code are equal to or less than one dollar, making them an ineffective deterrent against exploitation of children. Finally, although Somalia's Provisional Constitution asserts the right of children to be protected from armed conflict, there is not an explicit legal prohibition against recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies took actions to address child labor. However, a lack of resources, training, and administrative capacity hindered their enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA): Investigates and enforces laws related to child labor. Coordinates informally with other government ministries on child labor-related issues, including the Somali Police Force, the National Intelligence and Security Agency, and the Immigration and Naturalization Directorate. In 2024, MoLSA organized awareness campaigns on the dangers of child labor, focusing on high-risk sectors such as agriculture, fishing, and domestic work. However, insufficient capacity hindered inspectors' ability to carry out their mandate, including the lack of a tracking system, an inspection plan, and a formal mechanism to receive complaints of potential child labor from the public.
Somali Police Force: Investigates and enforces laws related to forced child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, and exploitation of children in other activities that would harm their health or morals. Through its Criminal Investigation Department, which includes an Organized Crime Unit, investigates cases in preparation for prosecution by the Attorney General's Office. While 15 police officers received training on victim identification and referral procedures during the reporting period, the Criminal Investigation Department lacked specialized training, funding, and personnel dedicated to trafficking investigations and often misclassified trafficking crimes as cases of smuggling, fraud, or civil violations of labor laws.

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	No
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	No
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	N/A

In 2024, **35** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.

† Data reported are federal-level data and do not reflect state-level information.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

The Federal Government of Somalia established a mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child soldier issues. However, it does not have a mechanism to coordinate efforts to address all worst forms of child labor in the country.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
Interministerial Committee on Children and Armed Conflict: Co-chaired by the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defense and UNICEF, with representatives from the Ministry of Women, MoLSA, other relevant ministries, other Ministry of Defense officials, and UN officials. Leads interagency coordination of efforts to address child labor and related child protection concerns, playing a key role in implementing national action plans and monitoring compliance with international commitments. Implements the 2012 UN Action Plan to Eliminate Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the 2019 UN Roadmap to end and prevent grave violations against children, including by identifying and responding to the needs of victims of kidnapping and recruitment into armed conflict by al-Shabaab, helping screen the Somali National Army units for child soldiers, and engaging in awareness-raising activities.

The Federal Government of Somalia established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover child trafficking or many sectors in which child labor is prevalent, including agriculture, industry, street work, and domestic work.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
National Employment Policy: Provides a roadmap for improving labor conditions, including stipulations related to child labor. Designed with ILO support under a Joint UN Project on Youth Employment in Somalia and adopted in 2020. The plan is steered by the Somali National Tripartite Consultative Committee (SNTCC), which comprises the Federal Government, Federal Member State labor ministers, the Somali Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Federation of Somali Trade Unions and is responsible for implementing the Labor Code and relevant labor policies in Somalia. Elimination of child labor is one of the priority focus areas of SNTCC. A Decent Work Country Program for 2023–2025 is in place to support the implementation of the objectives under the National Employment Policy, including awareness-raising activities to support elimination of child labor and forced labor and data collection through integration of child labor and forced labor modules into future labor force surveys. SNTCC continued to meet during the reporting period.
UN Child Soldier Action Plans: Establish a strategy for identifying and removing children from the Somali National Army through education and monitoring of military camps. In 2012, the Federal Government of Somalia committed to two UN action plans to end grave violations against children within the military, namely the Action Plan to Eliminate Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Action Plan to End the Killing and Maiming of Children in Contravention of International Law. A 2019 UN Roadmap supports the implementation of both plans. During the reporting period, the government worked with child protection partners to screen military forces for underage recruits.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Somalia Social Protection Policy: Develops and strengthens components of a national social protection system, including safety net programs. Provisions include a guaranteed income floor for vulnerable households and families with children under age 5. The policy focuses, in part, on mitigating the vulnerability of internally displaced persons and other populations to sexual violence and human trafficking.

The Federal Government of Somalia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified, including in agriculture and street work.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Baxnaano:† MOLSA program supported by the World Bank's Shock Responsive Safety Net for Human Capital Project through 2025. Provides cash transfers to vulnerable households and builds a national shock-responsive safety net system responding to the needs of vulnerable populations affected by natural disasters and malnutrition. As of April 2024, the program was reaching over 2 million beneficiaries.

Child Soldier Reintegration Programs: Partnership between UNICEF and the Government of Somalia to address issues related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Somalia. Include programs that rehabilitate and reintegrate former combatants, emphasizing the specific needs of former child soldiers, including demobilized female combatants and their dependents. Programs in at least seven localities provide accommodations, medical care, family tracing, psychological counseling, education, and vocational training to former combatants. During the reporting period, partners provided reintegration support and care services to 3,246 children formerly associated with non-state armed groups and government armed forces.

International Organization for Migration Programs: Donor-funded programs implemented by the International Organization for Migration, in partnership with the federal, member state, and regional governments, in 74 districts across the territory. Include screening for trafficking indicators; humanitarian, livelihood, and education assistance to reduce families' vulnerabilities to labor exploitation; trafficking awareness raising among communities; training for frontline officials on regional human trafficking laws or international anti-trafficking standards; and capacity building for officials responsible for anti-trafficking policy coordination. Also active in Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation initiatives serving children formerly associated with armed groups at government-run centers in Banadir, Jubaland, and South West Somalia.

† Program is partially funded by the Federal Government of Somalia.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports