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2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Ethiopia

Moderate Advancement

In 2022, Ethiopia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government supported a study of child domestic servitude to learn how to better prevent this form of forced child labor. The Ministry of Justice also worked with the International Organization for Migration to launch new standard operating procedures to identify potential victims of human trafficking and refer them to services. However, children in Ethiopia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work and in commercial sexual exploitation. Children also perform dangerous tasks in traditional weaving. Ethiopian law does not include free basic education or a compulsory age for education, leaving children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Additionally, social programs to address child labor have not sufficiently targeted sectors with high incidences of child labor, including agriculture and domestic work.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Ethiopia.

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	24.3 (6,761,640)
Working children by sector	5 to 14	
Agriculture		76.3
Industry		2.1
Services		21.6
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	56.6

Children	Age	Percent
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	16.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		68.7

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from National Labour Force Survey (NLFS), 2021. (2)

These data are not comparable with data presented in last year's report due to changes in survey source, survey questionnaire, or age range surveyed.

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Planting and harvesting coffee, <i>khat</i> , and sesame (3-9)
	Herding livestock, including cattle (8,10)
	Fishing† (4)
Industry	Mining† gold and quarrying† (4,11)
	Construction, † including carrying heavy loads† and digging (3,4,6,8)
	Repairing motor vehicles and motorcycles (4)
	Producing handicrafts, including pottery and traditional handwoven textiles (4)
Services	Domestic work (4,8,12)
	Unpaid household services, including carrying heavy loadst of water and firewood (4,8,12)
	Street work, including shoe shining, weight measurement, assisting taxi drivers, vending, portering, and begging (4,8,13,14)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,15-17)
	Forced labor in domestic work, herding, street vending, construction, and traditional weaving of handwoven textiles (13,17-19)
	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (3,11,13,17)

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

† 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.

Ethiopian children voluntarily travel to Amhara to harvest sesame. This sector is allegedly linked to overland smuggling networks, with children earning enough to fund passage to Europe via North Africa. (5,7,20) Many others journey through Djibouti en route to Persian Gulf states, where they are often intercepted, repatriated, and later routed to a transition center in Addis Ababa. (7) Traffickers exploit children from rural areas surrounding Addis Ababa and other regions of the country for forced labor in the weaving industry, street vending, construction, and domestic work. (19,21,22) Moreover, children in Oromia and Amhara reportedly harvest and sell *khat*, a stimulant to which they may become addicted due to contact with the plants' excretions during harvest. (3,6,7,23,24) Children who begin as voluntary migrants may be forced into commercial sexual exploitation or become victims of forced labor. (3,16,25) Research on child trafficking survivors from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and Oromia indicates that 85 percent were removed from or escaped domestic work. (18) The children surveyed were mostly from families that continue to play a role in financing and coercing their children to go abroad or to urban areas to look for work. (16,26) A large-sample size study of female child domestic workers in Addis Ababa found the average number of hours worked per week by these girls was 55 hours, well beyond the ILO's guidelines of 14 hours per week for light work. Additionally, 52 percent of these girls were victims of human trafficking. (19) Trusted community members, known as *manamasas*, recruit and groom vulnerable youth on behalf of local and international human trafficking syndicates. (22,27)

The ongoing conflict between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) continued during the reporting period and halted November 2, 2022, when a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed between the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) and the TPLF in Pretoria, South Africa. (23,28) There were unconfirmed reports that both the TPLF and GOE-aligned forces recruited and used child soldiers during the conflict. (3,22,23,29) Some women and girls have reportedly been forced by military elements to have sex in exchange for basic commodities, though the specific military elements remain unknown. (30,31) In addition, emergency humanitarian aid distribution networks and essential services have been disrupted by conflict in the Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regions. (32,33)

Conditions in Ethiopia are also influenced by an ongoing drought, which is increasing food insecurity and internal displacement. (34) There are an estimated 2.73 million IDPs across the country due to conflict or drought. (32) Internally displaced children are acutely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including child labor. (35)

With infrastructure for remote learning non-existent, many children remained out of school for many months during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some have still not returned. (23,36) Armed conflicts and resulting

humanitarian crises have also disrupted education in Ethiopia. As a result of violence, some 2.3 million children in Tigray were unable to attend school, while estimates of all Ethiopian children out of school due to conflict or drought ranged between 3.4 and 3.6 million. (34,36,37) Children in rural areas also face additional barriers to education, including the distance they 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. (8) These factors increased children's risk of entering the workforce at a young age. (6,38,39)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Ethiopia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

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 omission of traditional weaving from the country's hazardous work list.

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Articles 4.1, 89.1, 89.2, and 185 of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019 (40)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	15	Article 36.1(d) of the Constitution; Article 89 of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019 (40,41)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 89.3, 89.4, and 186.1 of the Labor Proclamation 1156/2019; Directive on the Restating of Activities Prohibited for Young Workers (40,42)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 18.3 of the Constitution; Articles 596, 597, and 637 of the Criminal Code; Articles 2–4 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020 (41,43,44)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 18.2 of the Constitution; Articles 597 and 635–637 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020 (41,43-45)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 634–636 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020 (43,44)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 525 of the Criminal Code; Articles 3.1–3.5 and 4.1 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons Proclamation No. 1178-2020 (43,44)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Recruitment	Yes	18‡	Article 270 of the Criminal Code (43)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		

Standard	Meets		Age	Legislation
	International Standards			
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		No		Articles 3.1, 3.2, and 4.1–4.3 of the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (44)
Compulsory Education Age		No		
Free Education	Public	No		

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

* Country has no conscription (43)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (13)

In 2022, Ethiopia published Directive No. 813/2021 on the Restating of Activities Prohibited for Young Workers, which had been signed and entered into force on August 24, 2021, replacing an earlier directive. (23,42) In addition to listing the prohibited categories of work, it provides weight limits for loads carried or transported by young workers and specifies employer responsibilities to verify worker age and ensure workplace awareness of the protections for young workers. (42) However, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover traditional weaving, an area of work in which there is evidence that children use dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools. (40,42,46,47) Moreover, Article 89.5 of the Labor Proclamation allows children ages 15 to 16 to engage in certain forms of hazardous work during a government-approved and inspected vocational training course. (23,40) This contradicts ILO Convention 138, which prohibits hazardous work for all children under the age of 16. (46,48) The GOE notes that, in practice, children begin apprenticeships after the completion of 10th grade, typically at age 16 or 17. (49) Lastly, while Ethiopia has a policy encouraging public funding of primary education, its laws do not provide for free public education or a compulsory age for education. (13,44,50)

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 operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Organization/Agency Role & Activities

Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS)	Conducts labor inspections of formal worksites through its regional Bureaus of Labor and Skills.
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Organization/Agency		Role & Activities
Ethiopian Police Commission	Federal	(8) Through its National Referral Mechanism (NRM), coordinates referrals of survivors to social services providers. (26,51)
		Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (8)
		Addresses child trafficking and assists vulnerable children through its Special Child Protection Units in Addis Ababa and other major cities. (8,22,52)
Ministry of Justice		Refers cases to the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MOWSA), which develops and implements programs to protect vulnerable children, maintains rehabilitation centers, and coordinates foster families for children rescued from the worst forms of child labor. (8,23)
		Prosecutes criminal violations of child labor laws, including through its Special Investigative Unit for Women and Children. (8)

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Ethiopia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Skills (MOLS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial and human resource allocation.

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,524,544 (3)	Unknown (8)
Number of Labor Inspectors	537 (3)	Unknown (8)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (3,40)	Yes (8,40)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	40,639 (3)	24,989 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (3)	Unknown (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (3)	Unknown (8)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (3)	Unknown (8)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (8)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (40)	Yes (8,40)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (8)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

The government did not provide information concerning labor inspectorate funding in 2022. Data on child labor violations are not aggregated at the national level, and the government did not publish the number of child labor violations identified as a result of its labor inspections. (8) Labor inspectors refer child labor violations to judicial authorities, who are able to assess penalties. (8,40) While the official number of labor inspectors was unreported, local NGOs and civil society organizations estimate there to be between 550 and 700 inspectors. (8,23) This suggests that Ethiopia does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (8,53,54) MOLs and other stakeholders report that a lack of resources and poor coordination among agencies hampered their ability to enforce child labor laws. (3,8)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Ethiopia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of published information about penalties for child labor violations.

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (3)	Yes (8)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (3)	11 (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (3)	9 (8)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (3)	Unknown (8)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (3)	Unknown (55)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (8)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

The government provided some criminal law enforcement data for inclusion in this report that had not been reported in recent years. In the

11 cases of suspected child labor crimes reported to have been investigated, the government identified 13 alleged violations of child labor laws and initiated 9 prosecutions. (8) However, the number of convictions achieved, and penalties imposed, remains unknown. (8) The government continued to disproportionately focus on transnational trafficking crimes and did not take adequate action to address internal trafficking crimes, including child domestic servitude and child sex trafficking, despite the scale of the problem. (22,23)

Ethiopian immigration and border patrol authorities refer human trafficking survivors to NGO-run shelters, where they are given first aid and assistance to return home. NGOs reported that many of those receiving services were younger than age 18. (21,26) In 2022, the Ministry of Justice worked with the IOM to improve mechanisms for referring victims to services. (8) In November 2022, the government updated its Standard Operating Procedures for victim identification and validated and launched its new National Referral Mechanism, which includes a directory of service providers. (23,51)

IV. Coordination of Government Efforts on Child Labor

The government has established a key mechanism 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 overlapping mandates, limited budgets, and ineffective coordination among key agencies.

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Steering Committees	The National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor coordinates activities on the worst forms of child labor. Members include MOLS, MOWSA, and the Ministry of Education. (3,8,16,56) The National Steering Committee Against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children develops action plans and coordinates activities to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (16) Research was unable to determine whether coordination activities were undertaken during the reporting period. (8)

Table 8. Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Limited committee budgets, overlapping mandates, and poor coordination between the committees and relevant agencies hindered coordination efforts to address child labor at the national and regional levels. (3,8)

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 implementation of policies to address child labor.

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2021–2025)	Includes guidelines on child labor identification, withdrawal, reintegration, and education. Overseen by the National Steering Committee on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (56) The National Action Plan (NAP) was created in 2021 with input from government ministries, ILO, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU), the Confederation of Ethiopian Employers Federation, and other NGOs. (3) In 2022, although there was no update on the status of the NAP, MOLs and CARE Ethiopia prepared a joint action plan dedicated to the prevention and reduction of child labor that was funded by the USDOL's She Thrives project. (8,57) In addition, with assistance from ILO, CETU launched guidance on reducing child labor, human trafficking, and forced labor. (8,55)
Five-Year Strategic Plan for Migration Management (2021–2025)	Aims to prevent and suppress trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; supports safe, humane, and orderly migration; and supports efforts to reduce child labor as it occurs in the context of human trafficking and migration. (8,55) The government implemented several activities under the plan during the reporting period, including working group meetings, awareness raising, law enforcement efforts, victim identification and referral to services, and validating the NRM. (21,23)
National Education and Children's Policies	Promote children's rights and aim to improve access to education. The National Children's Policy facilitates access to quality primary and secondary education for out-of-school youth, including in rural areas, and provides measures against exploitation and human trafficking. (58) The Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030) aims to make education free and compulsory, while the Education and Training Policy prioritizes government support for education through grade 10. (39,50) The Pastoralist Area Education Strategy provides for alternative education in pastoralist communities, while the National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy aims to improve access to vocational education for girls and out-of-school children. (59,60) The government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the Education Sector Development Roadmap, the National Technical & Vocational

Policy	Description & Activities
	Education & Training Strategy, or the National Youth Policy. (59-61) The Ethiopian government did not provide an update on progress of these policies. (8)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (61,62)

VI. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Program	Description & Activities
The Freedom Fund	Works to reduce prevalence of child domestic servitude with support from the Government of Ethiopia and the USDOS Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. (8,19) The Freedom Fund conducted a study of child domestic workers in Addis Ababa published in October 2022 that concluded that over half of the girls studied are victims of human trafficking. (19)
World Vision Programs	Included Effective Approaches to Ending the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2019–2022), an international program designed to test and measure innovative approaches to reduce the worst forms of child labor, and which targeted approximately 500,000 at-risk youth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, and Ethiopia, including victims of child commercial sexual exploitation and child soldiering, and children engaged in hazardous work. The program's efforts were coordinated by World Vision, with funding by a consortium of NGOs and multilaterals, including UN Global Compact, the Global Compact UK, War Child UK, Thompson Reuters, and the private sector. (7,63,64) This program supported children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in Dera, Libo Kemekem, and Gondar Zuria districts of Amhara. (3) World Vision has remained active during the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, addressing food insecurity and gender-based violence. (65)
Multilateral Projectst	The Ethiopia General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity (GEQIP-E) (2017–2025)† is a \$583 million World Bank-funded program implemented by the Ministry of Education and development partners to improve education quality and access. Originally slated to end in 2022, GEQIP-E has been extended to 2025 to better address

Program	Description & Activities
	issues compounded by the pandemic and recent conflict. (66,67) Despite challenges due to the conflict, the project reported achieving results in several project indicators, including the improvement of girls-to-boys ratio in grade 8 in marginalized regions such as Afar, Somali, and Benishangul-Gumuz, from 63 percent in 2016 to 71.2 percent in 2022, and increased grades 1 and 2 enrollment rates from 76 percent in 2016 to 88.6 percent in 2022. (23,68) UNICEF-funded programs include Child-to-Child and Accelerated School Readiness programs, which extend educational opportunities to internally displaced children, and the Integrated Safety Nets Program (2017–2023). (6) UNICEF, the Swedish International Development Agency, and MOLS also jointly fund the Urban Productive Safety Net Program, which aims to build upon efforts to address nutritional and educational outcomes in Amhara and Addis Ababa through cash transfers and linking participants to basic social services. (6,69) During the reporting period, UNICEF reached over 295,000 children through formal or non-formal education across drought- and conflict-afflicted regions. (70)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is co-funded by the Government of Ethiopia. (11)

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (3,71,72)

Although the government participates in and implements several programs to address child labor, programs do not sufficiently target sectors with high incidences of child labor, such as agriculture and domestic work. (56) There is also a lack throughout the country of rehabilitation and reintegration centers for victims of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. (15,16)

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).

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age at which children may perform dangerous tasks during vocational training from age 15 to age 16, in line with ILO Convention 138.	2009 – 2022

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
Enforcement	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, including hazardous tasks in traditional weaving.	2016 2022	–
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2020 2022	–
	Establish by law free basic education.	2012 2022	–
	Establish by law a compulsory education age that extends to the minimum age for employment of 15 years.	2012 2022	–
	Gather and publish information related to labor inspectorate funding, number of labor inspectors, child labor violations found, and penalties imposed.	2022	
	Employ at least 964 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 38.6 million people.	2015 2022	–
	Ensure that labor inspectors have sufficient resources to conduct inspections in all sectors and are able to coordinate adequately with other agencies.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that both domestic and transnational child trafficking cases are investigated and punished.	2013 2022	–
	Gather, disaggregate, and publish information on penalties applied and collected, trainings conducted, and convictions obtained related to child labor violations.	2009 2022	–
	Prosecute perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment of children into armed conflict, according to the law.	2021 2022	–
Coordination	Clarify individual mandates for coordinating mechanisms charged with addressing child labor, and enhance inter-committee communication, coordination, and collaboration.	2015 2022	–
	Provide adequate funding to coordinating bodies so that they may effectively coordinate activities related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020 2022	–

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Development Program, the National Technical & Vocational Education & Training Strategy, and the National Youth Policy.	2013 2022	–
	Publish activities undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor to address child labor on an annual basis.	2018 2022	–
Social Programs	Increase access to education for all children by decreasing the distance to schools in rural areas, hiring additional teachers, constructing sanitation facilities, and eliminating school-related costs.	2010 2022	–
	Develop or expand social protection programs to address child labor, including in agriculture and domestic work.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that social services necessary to prevent child labor, such as rehabilitation and reintegration centers, are available throughout the country.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure student safety while at school, including by ensuring environments free from sexual harassment and preventing schools from being attacked by armed actors.	2021 2022	–

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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