

In 2019, Djibouti made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor quadrupled the size of its labor inspectorate, and Djibouti's Police Chief created a new Brigade for Minors. The government also enrolled 5,003 refugee children in education centers in Djibouti City and rural areas in collaboration with UNICEF. However, children in Djibouti engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. Minimum age provisions only apply to children with a formal employment contract, which does not comply with international standards. Law enforcement efforts are inadequate to prevent and combat child labor, in part because labor inspectors lack the authority to assess penalties. In addition, the government did not make adequate efforts to enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor due to lack of financial and human resource allocation and reporting mechanisms.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Djibouti engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1,2) Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. (1,2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Djibouti.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	12.3 (23,693)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	10.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		66.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3, 2018. (4)

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

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

Sector/ Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Caring for livestock, including goats and cattle (5)
Services	Domestic work† (2)
	Street work, such as shining shoes, washing and guarding cars, cleaning storefronts, sorting merchandise, collecting garbage, begging, and selling items (2,6,7)
	Working in restaurants, small shops, and family businesses (2)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,6-8)
	Forced domestic work and begging, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,6-8)
	Use in illicit activities, including the selling of marijuana (5)

† 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.

Reports suggest that children, including undocumented migrant girls, are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation in Djibouti City and the Ethiopia-Djibouti trucking corridor. (1,6,9,10) Djibouti is also host to the largest number of foreign military installations in the world, including thousands of military personnel and security contractors. This foreign military presence heightens the risks of commercial sexual exploitation of

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girls. (11) There are also mixed-migration flows from Ethiopia, Yemen, the East Africa region, and the Arabian Peninsula. In 2019, Djibouti hosted more than 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers, as well as more than 100,000 migrants, many of whom were transiting through the country. (12,13) Nearly half of all refugees and asylum seekers are children. (12,14) Undocumented children were allowed to attend school but could not sit for exams. Djibouti requires national birth certificates or UNHCR refugee documentation to graduate, which may serve as a disincentive for undocumented children to attend school, and, as a result, they remain vulnerable to exploitation. (2) Children in rural areas, where access to documentation is limited, also face obstacles to attaining birth certificates. Because Djibouti requires national birth certificates or UNHCR refugee documentation to graduate, undocumented children remain vulnerable to exploitation. (2) Children in rural areas, where access to documentation is limited, also face obstacles attaining birth certificates. (2)

Although primary and middle schools are tuition-free, other school-related expenses may prevent children from attending school. (15-17) Enrollment rates are lower for girls and for all children living in rural or impoverished areas, making these children more vulnerable to child labor. (17,18) Despite the Passage of a National Refugee Law in 2017 which guarantees education as a fundamental right to refugees and asylum-seekers lawfully residing in Djibouti, over 40 percent of refugees aged 6 to 16 were not enrolled in school. (12,14,19)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

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	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Djibouti's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 5 of the Labor Code (20)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 108 and 110 of the Labor Code (20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 110 of the Labor Code (20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2 and 290 of the Labor Code; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (20,21)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 1 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants; Article 23 of the Law Regarding Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes (21,22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 394, 396, and 462–463 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 8 of the Law on the Fight Against the Trafficking of Persons and the Illegal Smuggling of Migrants (22,23)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 355–356 and 461 of the Penal Code (23)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 1 of the National Army Amendment Decree (24)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 149–151 and 461 of the Penal Code (23)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 4 and 14 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (25)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 16 of the Law on the Orientation of the Education System (25)

* No conscription (26)

The Labor Code’s minimum age provision applies only to children who perform work under a formal employment agreement, which does not conform to international standards requiring the protection of all children under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (23,27,28) Djibouti’s hazardous work provision is also incomplete. Although the Labor Code prohibits the employment of children between the ages of 16 and 18 in domestic work, hotels, and bars, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not include street work, an area in which there is evidence of work in an unhealthy environment. (23,28-30) Furthermore, laws do not specifically criminalize the offering or procuring of a child for pornographic performances, or the use of a child for prostitution. (22,23)

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 the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforces all labor laws, including child labor laws and regulations. (7) Through its General Inspectorate of Labor and Social Laws, regulates youth employment. (2,27)
Djibouti National Police, including the Brigade for Minors*	Enforce criminal laws and investigate crimes related to child labor. (7) In 2019, with the assistance of UNICEF, Djibouti’s Police Chief created a new unit called the Brigade for Minors to handle crime committed by children. (2)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes child labor cases referred by MOL. (7)
National Commission on Human Rights	Receives complaints and investigates cases of human rights violations, including child labor. (7,31) Assists victims in obtaining legal aid to prosecute violators. (31)

* Agency responsible for child labor enforcement was created during the reporting period.

In May, 21 police officers received child protection training, including 11 officers who will serve as focal points of the juvenile brigade. The training included modules on the international and national children’s rights framework, and the role of case management systems in child protection. (33)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MOL that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including human resource allocation.

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$296,380 (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	5 (7)	21 (2)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (7)	No (2,20)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (34)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown (7)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (7)	No (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	103 (2)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (7)	73 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (7)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (7)	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (7)	Yes (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (7)	No (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (7)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Unknown (7)	No (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (2)

The government made efforts to publicize its laws on child labor. To this end, the MOL published notices in local newspapers reminding businesses that child labor is strictly forbidden in Djibouti. (2) In addition to releasing data on labor inspections conducted throughout the year, the MOL quadrupled the size of its labor inspectorate and plans to further hire 20 controllers by the end of 2024. (2) Djibouti is now in compliance with the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching one inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies. (35-37) However, Djibouti does not employ inspectors or controllers dedicated exclusively to child labor law enforcement. (2) Moreover, labor inspections are not routinely scheduled. They are carried out in reaction to repeated or serious complaints, and only in the formal sector. (2) Inspectors do not target sectors or geographical areas where children are at risk of child labor, including its worst forms. (2) This inhibits the elimination of child labor in the informal sector, in which the majority of child labor occurs. The labor inspectorate is also not able to assess penalties. (2) Finally, although a mechanism for filing and responding to labor complaints exists, reports reflect a lack of efficiency and transparency. (2)

The government does not publish data on child labor violations. Funding for the General Inspectorate of Labor and Social Laws reportedly increased in 2019, but the government did not provide the budget for this report. (7,34)

Criminal Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Djibouti took actions to combat child labor.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (7)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (7)	Yes (2)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7,34)	Yes (2)

During the reporting period, the government dedicated additional resources to the protection of vulnerable populations, and the police made periodic arrests on suspicions of either sex or labor trafficking of minors. Police presence also increased along key child trafficking corridors, particularly along the Siesta beach road in Djibouti City. (32) However, due to procedural errors made in the investigation phase, a number of cases were ultimately not prosecutable. (32)

NGOs communicate trafficking indicators to the police, and the police rely upon these referrals to pass cases onto the prosecutor’s office. (5,28,32) In 2019, the NGO Caritas International entered into separate memorandums of understanding with the Ministry of Women and Family and the National Commission of Human Rights. (32) During the reporting period, the two organizations referred cases involving victims of exploitation to Caritas’ overnight shelter. The victims, who were minor girls, told center officials that they were subjects of sexual abuse in Yemen. (32) The referral mechanism exists for victims of child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, or abandonment, but not for children found in other types of child labor. (2) The government does not publicly release information on its criminal law enforcement efforts. (2)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms 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 efforts to address all forms of child labor outside the scope of human trafficking.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Anti-Trafficking Working Group	Coordinates efforts to combat human trafficking through the development of a collaboration and outreach strategy focusing on the operationalization of the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015–2022). The inter-agency working group is led by the Ministry of Justice, and includes representatives from MOL and the Ministry of the Interior. (1,38) In 2019, undertook large awareness-raising campaigns in Djibouti’s rural areas, including along major trafficking routes. (2) The Anti-Trafficking Working Group met regularly during the reporting period, leading to enhanced coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and the UN. This, in turn, occasioned an increase in investigations and prosecutions of potential human trafficking cases. (1,2)
National Council for Children	Coordinates, implements, and monitors child protection policies and programs. Guides and defines government policy on child protection, including efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (39) Led by the Prime Minister and includes eight other agencies, representatives from NGOs, the private sector, and elected officials. (40) Advocates for newborn refugees and migrants to receive birth certificates, education under governmental programs for refugees and asylum seekers, and family reunification for unaccompanied migrant minors. (5) Research was unable to determine whether the council was active in 2019. (2)
Ministry of Women and Family	Coordinates child protection efforts. (2) Through its National Policy for Children in Djibouti, focuses on the survival, development, protection, and participation of children. (2,32) In 2019, began holding monthly meetings attended by representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Police, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the National Women’s Union, the infant nursery Daryel, and the National Agency for the Disabled to coordinate efforts on at-risk children and victims of violence against children. (2)

Although the government has established an Anti-Trafficking Working Group, research did not find evidence that the government coordinates efforts to address other forms of child labor.

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.

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015–2022)	Aims to strengthen the legislative framework to combat human trafficking, protect and assist human trafficking victims, and establish a national referral mechanism between law enforcement officials and social services providers. (41) The Anti-Trafficking Working Group, which coordinates the action plan's implementation, met monthly in 2019; however, the plan is not yet fully operational. (1,2)
Government of Djibouti Policies†	Includes the National Policy for Children in Djibouti (2018–2022), which set out fundamental rights for children, including access to basic social services, and mobilizes national resources toward these ends. (42) The National Strategic Action Plan for Children in Djibouti, which was renewed in 2017, provides political and strategic guidelines for implementing the country's child protection policy. (43) The National Education Plan (2017–2020) aims to expand preschool education opportunities for children in underserved regions, while reforming secondary, technical, and vocational education nationwide. The plan targets a 100 percent primary enrollment rate, with a 90 percent enrollment rate for children ages 11–14. (42,44) Under Djibouti's Education Master Plan (2010–2019), gross primary enrollment rates increased from 66 percent in 2011 to 75 percent in 2019. (42,44) The National Social Protection Strategy (2018–2022) seeks to broaden social protections for vulnerable children and youth. (42)
UNDAF (2018–2022)	Focuses primarily on programs that build capacity for victim recognition and protection, and assists the government in the development of its "Vision 2035" plan, which is aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The government has launched or expanded several new policies and programs under this framework, including a revised Social Protection Strategy. (34,42)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2019, and for the fourth consecutive year, the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons was not fully operational, although the working group has improved coordination during this reporting period. (1,2) Research was unable to determine whether the government strengthened the legislative framework.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
IOM Voluntary Return Program	Supported NGOs, including SOS Children Village and Caritas Djibouti, in hosting migrant street children in 2019. IOM funded the construction of facilities that host and provide services to vulnerable children, including victims of human trafficking referred by state and non-state services, many of whom previously slept on the street or at Siesta Beach. (32) Caritas' overnight shelter opened in June 2019, and has since hosted 137 children. (32)
Ministry of Women and the Family Programs	Includes the Social Assistance Program (2016–present), which provides children and their families in vulnerable communities with education and in-kind support. Between 2016 and 2019, 3,086 families benefited from food aid, and 500 school kits were distributed. (42) Similarly, the Support Project for Girls and Women in Precarious Situations (2017–present) is a multi-sectoral program aimed at reducing girls' economic and social vulnerability through education and training. (42) The Country Strategic Option Program (2019–2024) is a rural poverty-reduction program established under Djibouti's revised Social Protection Strategy. In 2019, the Country Strategic Option Program initiated a pilot program to establish school vegetable gardens in rural areas, reaching 50 schools in 5 regions during the reporting period. (42,45) Djibouti's Support Program for Children with Academic Difficulties, established in 2017, aims to provide academic support for children from low-income families. In 2019, nearly 300 learning-disabled students benefited from specialized tutoring. (42)
National Family Solidarity Program†	Government-funded program implemented by the State Secretariat for National Solidarity that establishes cash transfers to support Djiboutian households in extreme poverty. (46) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Family Solidarity Program during the reporting period.
UNICEF-Funded Projects	In collaboration with the Government of Djibouti through the National Office for Assistance to Refugees and Affected Populations, the Humanitarian Action for Children Project, and the UNICEF Country Program, promote access to quality education for children, especially from rural and poor urban areas; increase birth registration; and provide support for orphans and vulnerable children. (7,47,48) In 2019, UNICEF enrolled 5,003 refugee children in Read-Write-Count (<i>Lire-Ecrire-Compter</i>) and other education centers in Djibouti City and rural areas. (12) UNICEF also supported 440 migrant street children, providing them with literacy and vocational training and other social services, and funded the training of the newly created Brigade for Minors within the Police Department. (2,12)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

Program	Description
World Bank-Funded Programs	Enhancing Income Opportunities in Djibouti (2015–2019) provided 3,000 youth and women with basic life skills training, coaching in business plan development, and access to finance. The Integrated Cash Transfer and Human Capital Project (2019–2022) seeks to expand the social safety net system and provide basic services in targeted poor communities. (2,49-51) The Expanding Opportunities for Learning Project (2019–2024),* a \$28 million project, supports Djibouti's efforts to expand access to quality education for 35,000 at-risk or underserved children, including girls, refugees, and disabled students. (14,52) The World Bank is coordinating efforts to expand education opportunities with UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education, and other funding and implementing partners. (52) In October 2019, the Government of Djibouti and the International Development Association agreed to co-finance a \$22.4 million program to expand access to and improve retention in primary and lower secondary education for disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups. The project also plans to build the capacity of teachers and administrators in underserved areas. (53)
WFP-Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018–2019)	Provided social protection, human capital development, and resilience programming. (54,55) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Strategic Plan during the reporting period.

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Djibouti.

‡ The government had other programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (26,56,57)

The Government of Djibouti, in line with the 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, is working to implement its commitment to integrate child refugees into its national education system. (14,19,58,59) Nevertheless, research found no evidence of programs to assist children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation. (28) There are no official government-run shelters to assist child victims. The government has authorized NGOs to host migrant street children and orphans overnight, but it does not provide support or services to assist in these efforts. (5,8)

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 Djibouti (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that all children are afforded minimum age for work protections under the law, including children working outside formal employment relationships.	2015 – 2019
	Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of children in prostitution and the procuring/offering of a child for pornographic performances.	2012 – 2019
	Ensure that hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive.	2009 – 2019
Enforcement	Ensure that the labor inspectorate targets and conducts routine labor inspections in all relevant sectors, including informal businesses.	2017 – 2019
	Employ inspectors or controllers dedicated to child labor law enforcement, and ensure that inspectors receive training on child labor laws.	2018 – 2019
	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2019
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by allowing inspectors to assess penalties.	2015 – 2019
	Publish data related to labor law and criminal law enforcement efforts related to child labor.	2010 – 2019
	Ensure that the complaint mechanism exists, and that it is efficient and transparent.	2018 – 2019
	Provide the necessary resources, including training, for the Djibouti National Police to make viable referrals for the prosecution of child labor-related violations.	2017 – 2019
Coordination	Establish coordinating mechanisms to combat child labor, and ensure existing mechanisms are functioning as intended.	2009 – 2019
Government Policies	Implement the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons by taking concrete steps to combat child trafficking.	2017 – 2019
	Implement existing policies to address child labor, including its worst forms.	2016 – 2019

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children in rural areas, including girls, by removing school-related expenses.	2015 – 2019
	Ensure that all children, including refugees and asylum-seekers, have access to education by removing requirements for national birth certificates or UNHCR refugee documentation to attend school.	2019
	Ensure that the World Food Program Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan implementation is supported by government collaboration.	2018 – 2019
	Implement programs to specifically address children involved in domestic work, street work, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2019
	Implement the National Family Solidarity Program.	2018 – 2019
	Establish official government-run shelters to assist child victims.	2018– 2019

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