

Commodity Report: Silver (2026)

Silver is reportedly produced with forced labor (FL) and/or child labor (CL) in the following countries:¹

- Bolivia (CL)

Top ten countries that export silver worldwide:²

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. United Kingdom | 6. Switzerland |
| 2. United States | 7. Germany |
| 3. Hong Kong, China | 8. Korea |
| 4. China | 9. Poland |
| 5. Mexico | 10. Canada |

Where is silver reportedly produced with human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, silver is mined using child labor in Bolivia.³

The U.S. Department of State's 2025 *Trafficking in Persons Report*⁴ lists Bolivia as a Tier 2 Watch List country.⁵

¹ This list is based solely on findings from the [U.S. Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and the [U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor and Forced Labor](#).

NOTE: As of May 2026, this report has been only partially updated with findings from the U.S. Department of State's 2025 *Trafficking in Persons Report* and the U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor and Forced Labor*, where noted. If not specifically noted, other mentions of forced labor or child labor findings from these two government sources are from the earlier versions of those reports. Other sources beyond these government reports have not yet been updated.

² [International Trade Center. Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics). **Note:** The country list is ordered by value exported.

³ U.S. Department of Labor. [List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024](#).

⁴ U.S. Department of State. [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025](#).

⁵ [For the 2025 Trafficking in Person Report's tier ranking methodology, see "A Guide to the Tiers."](#)

What does human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor in silver production look like?

This section includes countries with publicly available research and reporting on forced labor and child labor, in addition to the countries listed in the above-mentioned government reports.

An estimated 3,800 children, some as young as six, work in mining in **Bolivia**.⁶ Children in Bolivia mine silver on sites owned by private companies and mining cooperatives.⁷ Child labor in silver production in Bolivia is specifically linked to mines in Potosí, where children toil for extremely low wages.⁸ In 2014, 387 children and juvenile workers were reported by the human rights ombudsman of Potosí Department to be working with their families in the mines of Cerro Rico.⁹ Adults and children engaged in illegal mining or mineral theft, known as “jucus,” are known to push mining carts, drill, and extract and clean ore. Workers in clandestine mines commonly lack adequate safety equipment, ventilation, or lighting for long hours. They are vulnerable to illness, lung damage from dust, repetitive motion stress injuries, and injuries from falls and carrying heavy loads.¹⁰

Although children must be 14 years old to legally work, this policy is reportedly not well enforced. In Potosí, many children join their fathers or other family members in the tunnels to earn money and help support their families. Children have been documented performing tasks including pushing carts to move rock and minerals out of the mine.¹¹ Juvenile workers often work the night shift to maintain their school schedule, working 12-hour days for between USD 2 to 3.¹² Girls in this sector are reportedly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.¹³ Many mining sites are hundreds of years old and poorly maintained,

⁶ Enzinna, Wes. [“Thousands of Children as Young as 6 Work in Bolivia's Mines.” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio. 30 Nov 2013.](#)

⁷ Mickute, Viktorija. [“Mineritos: Bolivia's Child Miners.” *Global Journalist*, 4 Sep 2014.](#)

⁸ Schipani, Andres. [“Plight of Bolivia's Child Miners.” *BBC*. June 14, 2008.](#)

⁹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015: Bolivia. 2016.](#)

¹⁰ World Vision. [Series on Child Labor and Exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean \[Bolivia\]: Children who work in tin mines. 2007.](#)

¹¹ Harper, Jake. [“PHOTOS: Dust and Danger for Adults — and Kids — in Bolivia's Mines.” *National Public Radio*. 17 Nov 2018.](#)

¹² Yu, Jiaqi. [“Understanding the Legalization of Child Labor: A Case Study of the Bolivian Child and Adolescent Code Reform.” *University of Miami, Open Access Theses*. Dec 2016.](#)

¹³ Mickute, Viktorija. [“Mineritos: Bolivia's Child Miners.” *Global Journalist*. 4 Sep 2014.](#)

so workers are also at risk of death in collapsing mine shafts.¹⁴ In 2008, at least 60 children died from a mine collapse.¹⁵

In **Peru**, children and juveniles work in silver mining, which is considered a hazardous occupation by Peruvian national law and is relevant to the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (ILO Convention 182), according to the U.S. Department of Labor.¹⁶ Peru is the world's second-largest silver producer,¹⁷ and Verité has noted a high risk of both labor and sex trafficking in and around illegal mining operations in Peru.¹⁸ Child miners in Peru are often unpaid. Instead of being paid regularly, the children work for free for a certain amount of time and are then allowed to mine for themselves as a reward.¹⁹

Silver Production and Supply Chain:

Silver-predominant ore is extracted using open-pit and underground methods before the silver is separated using flotation separation.²⁰ However, most silver that is on the market does not come from silver mines; instead, it is a byproduct of industrial lead, copper, zinc, and gold mining (See the [Gold](#), [Zinc](#), and [Copper](#) Commodity Reports).²¹ In 2019, 28.7 percent of silver on the market came directly from silver mines.²²

Silver mining, like mining for other metals such as lead and zinc, can lead to significant environmental pollution affecting local populations, particularly children.²³ In 2012, the government of Peru declared a health state of emergency within 12 districts of Cerro de Pasco, a city located high in the Andes mountains near a mine, due to dangerously high levels of lead, arsenic, aluminum, and manganese

¹⁴ Forero, Juan. ["Bolivia's Silver Mountain Loses its Lustre as Report Warns of Risk of Collapse." *The Guardian*, Oct 2012.](#)

¹⁵ Enzinna, Wes. ["Thousands of Children as Young as 6 Work in Bolivia's Mines." *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio. 30 Nov 2013.](#)

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Labor. [2020 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Peru. 2020.](#)

¹⁷ International Labour Organization: Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. [Promoting Decent Work in Global Supply Chains in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2016.](#)

¹⁸ Verité. [Risk Analysis of Indicators of Forced labor and Human Trafficking in Illegal Gold Mining in Peru. 2013.](#)

¹⁹ Hastings, Deborah. ["Held as Slaves, Children in Peru Forced to Work in Mines that Produce Much of World's Gold." *NY Daily News*. 11 February 2014.](#)

²⁰ Hoffman, James. ["Silver processing." *Encyclopedia Britannica*.](#)

²¹ Hoffman, James. ["Silver processing." *Encyclopedia Britannica*.](#)

²² The Silver Institute. ["World Silver Survey 2020." 2020.](#)

²³ Reuters staff. ["Chained to health ministry, Peruvians protest mining pollution." *Reuters*. 23 June 2017.](#)

found in the local water. According to media reports at the time, twenty percent of residents examined had unsafe levels of lead in their blood – though any amount can be considered unsafe – including over 40 children with serious illnesses.²⁴ While the government of Peru has not confirmed what they believe to be the source of the metals in the environment, NASA research shows how Cerro de Pasco’s long history of mining silver has led to widespread heavy metal contamination of water and sediment that appears in soil, streams, animal tissue, and residents’ blood.²⁵

How consumers are linked to human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor in silver production:

Top ten countries that import silver:²⁶

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. United Kingdom | 6. Switzerland |
| 2. India | 7. Canada |
| 3. United States of America | 8. Thailand |
| 4. Hong Kong, China | 9. Turkey |
| 5. Germany | 10. Japan |

Silver has a wide variety of applications including jewelry, ornaments, silverware, coins, electronics (batteries, solar panels), mirror coatings, and musical instruments. Due to its anti-bacterial properties, silver can also be used to treat wounds or prevent bacterial growth in plastics and textiles.²⁷

²⁴ Livingstone, Grace. [“Peru’s Children Hit by Metal Poisoning.” BBC News. 5 Sept 2018.](#)

²⁵ Voiland, Adam. [“Mining Peru’s Cerro de Pasco.” NASA Earth Observatory. 8 Oct 2017.](#)

²⁶ [International Trade Center. Trade Map.](#) (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics). **Note:** The country list is ordered by value imported.

²⁷ Australian Government Geoscience Australia. [Zinc, Lead, Silver. 7 June 2023.](#)

Examples of what governments, corporations, and others are doing:

The Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) is a multi-stakeholder initiative that has established standards for socially and environmentally ethical mining operations, including silver. In June of 2018, IRMA launched the Standard for Responsible Mining, a global certification program.²⁸ IRMA offers mine-site certifications for specific mining sites.²⁹

How can I learn more?

- [See this photo essay about children working in mines at Potosí, Bolivia.](#)
- [Watch this video of the Potosí silver mines.](#)
- [Watch this video of Cerro Rico and Potosí.](#)

²⁸ [Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance. "New Standard for Responsible Mining Released." 28 June 2018.](#)

²⁹ [Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance. "Assessment."](#)