

In 2022, Rwanda made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government significantly increased labor inspectorate funding and conducted awareness-raising campaigns aimed at ending child labor, child abuse, and addressing human trafficking. However, children in Rwanda are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in informal mining, including carrying heavy loads. Reports indicate that children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and forced street begging have been detained by government officials in transit centers intended for individuals demonstrating so-called deviant behaviors, where they often experience physical abuse. In addition, inadequate resource allocation for the labor inspectorate, including an insufficient number of labor inspectors, may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. Finally, social programs do not address all relevant sectors in which child labor is present.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

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

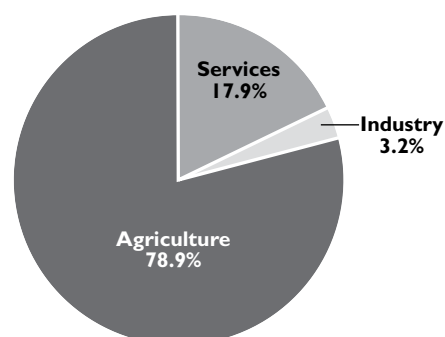
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	6 to 14	5.4 (156,522)
Attending School (%)	6 to 14	89.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.0

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 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV-5), 2016–2017. (2)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 6-14



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	Production of sugarcane, rice, bananas, beans, coffee, manioc, pineapples, and potatoes, including carrying heavy loads† and wielding machetes (3,4)
	Production of tea, including applying fertilizers,† carrying heavy loads,† planting, plucking tea leaves, and weeding (3,5,6)
	Fishing† (7)
	Herding cattle and caring for pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens (3,8)
	Forestry activities (9)
Industry	Construction,† including laying and making bricks (3,10)
	Mining† tantalum ore (coltan) and quarrying (3,11-13)
	Producing charcoal (3)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (Cont.)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work† (3,10,13)
	Repair of motorcycles and motor vehicles (12,13)
	Street work, including collecting scrap metal,† lifting and transporting heavy loads,† begging, and vending (3,10,13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (10,13,14)
	Forced labor in agricultural work, mining, domestic work, and begging (8,14)

† 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.

Rwanda is a source and transit country for child trafficking victims, primarily those from Rwanda and neighboring countries en route to exploitation in Saudi Arabia, Uganda, Kenya, and elsewhere in East Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia. (8,15-17) Within Rwanda, young girls are forced into domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation, and boys are exploited in forced labor in the agricultural and industrial sectors, including on plantations and in mines. (14,16-19) Children between ages 13 and 18 are often exploited in sex trafficking in hotels, at times with the cooperation of hotel owners. Reports indicate an increase in domestic human trafficking, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on cross-border travel. Homeless and orphaned children, children with disabilities, and girls are at particular risk of being exploited in human trafficking. (14)

The government identified street begging as a growing problem in the country, noting that some families were renting out their children to individuals who would collect earnings from the children and pay a percentage to the families. (6,8,15) The closure of schools due to the pandemic may have contributed to an increase in forced begging, and children who begged typically worked almost 11 hours per day and were at risk of not returning to school. (6,15) National data show that approximately 3.6 percent of all children in Rwanda are engaged in child labor, primarily in the agriculture and services sectors. (7,20) In a survey of working children between ages 5 and 17 from 11 districts in the country, Rwanda’s National Commission for Human Rights reported in 2020 that more than half of the respondents indicated that they performed some type of hazardous labor, including carrying heavy loads and working in construction, brick kilns, and informal mining. (6,21) Officials also indicated that children living in mining communities often drop out of school and work in abandoned artisanal mines with their parents. (6,22) Poverty was identified as the key factor contributing to child labor, which in turn led to an increased incidence of children dropping out of school. (6,21)

Although the Ministry of Education established a policy that provides free basic education for 12 years, of which the first 9 are compulsory, in practice, the costs of uniforms, school supplies, and unofficial school fees may preclude some families from sending their children to school. (20,22,23) Furthermore, children with disabilities face particular difficulties accessing education due to stigma and because schools lack the capacity to accommodate special needs. (6,15,22,23)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Rwanda 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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (Cont.)

Convention	Ratification
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Rwanda's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of free public education.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 5 of the Labor Law; Articles 2, 3, and 7–9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight Against Child Labor (24,25)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 6 of the Labor Law (24)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 6 of the Labor Law; Articles 4–6 of the Ministerial Order Determining the List of Worst Forms of Child Labor; Kigali City Guidelines 2012-02; Articles 7–9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to the Prevention and Fight against Child Labor (24-27)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 3.25 and 7 of the Labor Law; Article 178 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor (24,25,28,29)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, and 18–20 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons; Article 28 of the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence; Articles 225, 251, and 259–262 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Article 31 of the Law Relating to the Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor (25,28-32)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 3.2 and 24 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons; Articles 190, 211, and 260 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 34 and 35 of the Law Relating to the Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor (25,28,29,31,32)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 220 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor; Article 263 of the Law Determining Offenses and Penalties in General (25,28,29,33)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 5 of Presidential Order 72/01 Establishing Army General Statutes; Article 7 of Presidential Order 32/01 Establishing Rwanda Defense Forces Special Statute; Article 50 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child (28,34,35)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 5 of Presidential Order 72/01 Establishing Army General Statutes; Articles 99(8) and 100(2) of the Law Determining Offenses and Penalties in General (33,34)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 221 of the Penal Code (29)
Compulsory Education Age	No	12	Article 47 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 55–58 of the Law Determining the Organization of Education (28,36)
Free Public Education	No		Article 47 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 55–58 of the Law Determining the Organization of Education (28,36)

* Country has no conscription (28,34,35)

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Although Rwanda has adopted policies, separate from the 2020 Law Determining the Organization of Education, to implement fee-free 12 years of basic education and compulsory education through age 15, the national education law stipulates that primary education is free and compulsory only through the first 6 years of schooling and states that education is compulsory only up to age 12. (20,36,37) The national education law also establishes English as the primary language of instruction, which may create a barrier to education for children whose first language is not English. (36) Furthermore, the age up to which education is compulsory makes children between ages 12 and 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not legally required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work.

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.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Public Service and Labor (MIFOTRA)	Enforces labor laws, including laws on child labor, in coordination with other government entities at the national and district level. (22) In partnership with the Ministry of Education, reintegrates children withdrawn from child labor with their families and enrolls them in school. Mobilizes other ministries and agencies providing social services, including the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, the National Child Development Agency, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Local Government, to take an active role in child labor law enforcement. (6,38)
Ministry of the Interior	Oversees the Rwandan National Police, the Rwandan Investigation Bureau, and the National Public Prosecution Authority. (10) The Rwandan National Police enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor through its Child Protection Unit and Anti-Trafficking Unit. (23,38,39) The Rwandan Investigation Bureau, in turn, conducts criminal investigations, including child labor cases, and through its Directorate for Anti-Gender-Based Violence, assists victims of the worst forms of child labor through anti-gender-based violence officers at each of the country's 78 police stations. (38) Both the National Police and Investigation Bureau operate a free hotline to report these incidents. (40) Finally, the National Public Prosecution Authority is responsible for prosecuting violations of labor laws, including laws on child labor, and through its Anti-Gender-Based Violence unit dedicates 12 prosecutors to work with an additional 60 prosecutors trained in handling relevant cases at the district level. (41)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Rwanda took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Public Service and Labor (MIFOTRA) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient allocation of human resources.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$166,705 (22)	\$484,080 (10)
Number of Labor Inspectors	37 (22)	37 (10)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (24,42)	Yes (24,42)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	9,432 (22)	5,076 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	253 (43)	27 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	8 (22)	27 (10)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	8 (22)	27 (10)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (44)	Yes (44)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (22)	Yes (10)

Research indicates that Rwanda does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (10,45) Furthermore, despite MIFOTRA’s indication that the labor inspectorate was sufficiently funded, research finds that limited resources, lack of personnel, high workloads, and insufficient training may limit labor inspectors' ability to enforce child labor laws and perform onsite inspections, and that officials, at the local level, may have difficulty identifying characteristics of child labor. (8,10,14,22,41)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Rwanda took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Rwandan National Police that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including inadequate victim screening and identification.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	8 (22)	27 (10)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	8 (22)	27 (10)
Number of Convictions	0 (22)	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (22)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (22)	Yes (10)

In 2022, several human trafficking trainings were provided to Rwandan government agencies, including to the Ministry of Justice and the Rwandan National Police. (40) However, scarce resources and limited capacity of criminal law enforcement personnel inhibited efforts to investigate human trafficking cases, prosecute suspected perpetrators, and convict human traffickers. Observers also reported continued challenges in officials’ ability to distinguish human trafficking from other crimes and reported a need for Rwanda’s law enforcement agencies to conduct additional training and capacity building on recognizing and addressing internal forms of human trafficking. (14) Moreover, agencies lack a centralized database to share among law enforcement agencies, hindering coordination efforts. (17)

Recent reports indicate occasional detention of children engaged in so called "deviant behavior," such as street children, children engaged in street vending, and children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and forced begging. Sources also indicate that these children are often detained in transit centers before being transferred to rehabilitation centers partly due to inadequate screening by law enforcement officials when identifying victims of human trafficking. (10,14,46) Research indicates that children placed in the primary transit center located in Kigali, also known as Gikondo, faced overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, insufficient food or water, and physical abuse. (23,47) Rehabilitation services at the centers were limited, and children were detained for prolonged periods at transit centers before they were referred to a rehabilitation facility or released back into the street. (15,48,49)

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 poor coordination, training, and lack of resources aimed at addressing human trafficking.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Interministerial Steering Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates government efforts related to the worst forms of child labor; reviews child labor laws, advocates for the inclusion of child labor policies in national development plans, oversees the implementation of child labor interventions, and conducts field visits to assess the prevalence of child labor and raise awareness of child labor. Led by MIFOTRA. (10) During the reporting period, convened every quarter to discuss progress made and to address any challenges encountered by the committees. (9)

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Reports indicate that poor coordination, training, and resource constraints hindered efforts to address human trafficking and that efforts were focused primarily on transnational rather than domestic human trafficking. (15,41)

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 mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant policies.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy 2019–2024	Aims to improve coordination and implementation issues in child protection, including strategies to address child labor. Focuses on key areas of identity and nationality; family and alternative care; health, survival, and standard of living; education; protection; justice; and participation. (50)
Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan	Focuses efforts on human trafficking prevention, victim protection and assistance, prosecution, and strategic partnerships with various stakeholders. (17,51)
Rwanda Urban Development Project Labor Management Procedure	Lays out specific responsibilities for the Ministry of Local Government to monitor and enforce child labor laws at the local level. Mandates that appointed local authorities conduct inspections, enforce child labor laws for rural development projects, and field child labor complaints from Grievance Redress Committees established at local worksites. (6,52)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (53,54)

The National Social Protection Policy includes measures to ensure access to education for children and assists families living in poverty; however, it does not integrate the prevention and elimination of child labor into the policy. (55) In addition, research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor in Rwanda during the reporting period.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Programs to Combat Child Labor and Raise Awareness†	Includes Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion's (MIGEPROF) campaign to teach parents and community leaders to recognize risk factors for human trafficking and to identify victims; and the Friends of the Family Program (<i>Inshuti Z'Umuryango</i>), which trains volunteers to prevent and respond to child protection issues and establishes monitoring committees at various levels to address child labor. (38) While the Friends of the Family Program remained active during the reporting period, research was unable to identify specific activities undertaken to address child labor. (10)
Victim Assistance Programs‡	Musanze Child Rehabilitation Center in Northern Province assists children separated from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (10,23) Gitagata Center provides education, vocational training, and psychosocial support, and aims to reunite former street children with their families. Isange One Stop Centers located in 44 hospitals and district capitals assist survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking. (10,14) In 2022, rehabilitation centers reported the reunification of 3,096 street children and Isange One Stop Centers conducted awareness campaigns and trained police stations, village leaders, hospitals, and health centers on how to properly identify child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse to prevent wrongful arrests. (10)
It Takes Every Rwandan to End Child Exploitation	Advocacy campaign against child labor and sexual abuse of children supported by MIGEPROF and World Vision Rwanda. (10,56) In 2022, World Vision Rwanda, in collaboration with the Rwanda Extractive Industry Workers Union, conducted a week-long awareness campaign through various districts. The campaign focused on child labor and child sex abuse violations. (57)

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 funded by the Government of Rwanda.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (58)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice conducted human trafficking awareness-raising campaigns in 111 schools, reaching over 56,000 students and teachers. Human trafficking survivors volunteered to share their stories during these campaigns. (40)

Although Rwanda has programs that target child labor, research did not identify sufficient programming to address the extent of child labor in the agriculture and mining sectors, in which child labor is prevalent. Observers indicate that despite efforts to protect and assist victims of human trafficking, the country's shelter system was focused on short-term needs, with few resources for individuals needing long-term support. (16,40) During the reporting period, there was a decrease in the scope of human trafficking trainings and awareness-raising campaigns, and service providers lacked sufficient training to properly identify victims of human trafficking. (40)

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 Rwanda (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Increase the compulsory education age from 12 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.	2020 – 2022
	Establish by law free basic public education.	2020 – 2022
Enforcement	Increase the number of inspectors from 37 to 117 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 4.7 million people.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has sufficient resources, personnel, and training to enforce child labor laws and perform onsite inspections.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement has adequate resources to investigate, prosecute, and convict child labor crimes, and has sufficient training and capacity to address the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking.	2022
	Cease the practice of detaining and physically abusing children who work on the street and ensure that any children in detention centers receive adequate screening and services and are not subjected to abuse or unhealthy detention conditions.	2018 – 2022
	Improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to share data relevant to the worst forms of child labor.	2021 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure that coordinating bodies receive adequate resources and are able to address both domestic and transnational human trafficking.	2019 – 2022
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Social Protection Strategy.	2011 – 2022
	Ensure that actions are taken to implement relevant key policies.	2019 – 2022
Social Programs	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement social programs during the reporting period and make information about implementation measures publicly available.	2020 – 2022
	Remove barriers to education, such as language barriers for non-English speakers, costs for uniforms and school supplies, and unofficial school fees, and ensure access for children with disabilities.	2010 – 2022
	Expand existing social programs to address all relevant sectors of child labor, including agriculture and informal mining.	2017 – 2022
	Expand services for human trafficking survivors, including programs for long-term care in shelters.	2019 – 2022
	Ensure that service providers are properly trained to identify victims of human trafficking.	2019 – 2022

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