

In 2022, São Tomé and Príncipe made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government continued to fund three centers run by NGOs that assist vulnerable families, orphans, and children living and working on the street. However, children in São Tomé and Príncipe are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. The Labor Code does not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are self-employed. Moreover, limited financial resources hampered law enforcement efforts, and policies addressing the worst forms of child labor do not exist.



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I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in São Tomé and Príncipe. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.



Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	14.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	92.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	23.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		84.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS6), 2019. (2)

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	Farming,† including weeding and fertilizing† (3-5)
	Fishing,† including line and hook fishing (3-6)
Industry	Carpentry and woodworking (6,7)
	Construction† (3,7)
Services	Working in shops, restaurants, and bars† (3,4,6,7)
	Street work,† including begging and street vending† (3,6,7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation (7,8)

† 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 indicate that children with a disability, especially those with mobility or hearing difficulties, may have limited access to education. (4,6)




II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

São Tomé and Príncipe has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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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 São Tomé and Príncipe's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a lack of minimum age protections for children working outside of a formal labor relationship.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Articles 268(2) and 269 of the Labor Code (9)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 273(2), 274, and 536 of the Labor Code; Article 171 of the Civil Code (9,10)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Hazardous Work List in Annex IV of the Labor Code (9)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Articles 159 and 160 of the Penal Code (11)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 160 and 181 of the Penal Code (11)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 179–182 of the Penal Code (11)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 279, 280, and 289 of the Penal Code (11)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	17	<i>Legislation title unknown</i> (12)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 1 of Decree-Law 3/83 (13)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Articles 11 and 12 of the Basic Education System Law (14)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 12 of the Basic Education System Law (14)

‡ Age calculated based on available information. (14)

The Labor Code permits children, who have completed their compulsory education, to perform light work that is not deemed harmful to their health or development; however, this framework does not establish a minimum age for light work, and legislation specifying the activities and conditions in which light work may be undertaken has yet to be adopted. (9) Minimum age protections contained in the Labor Code also do not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are self-employed. (9,15) Furthermore, laws prohibiting forced labor are not sufficient as they do not criminalize practices similar to slavery or debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor. (11)

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 Health and Social Affairs (previously the Ministry of Labor, Solidarity, Family and Professional Training)	Enforces labor laws, including child labor. (6,7,16)
Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights (MOJ)	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor. (7,16)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in São Tomé and Príncipe took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$23,000 (4)	\$86,000 (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	6 (4)	5 (6)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (16)	No (6,16)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	60 (4)	40 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (4)	0 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A	N/A
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A	N/A
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (4)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (6)

Children found working as a result of labor inspections are referred to the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights or to the Directorate of Social Protection and Solidarity within the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs for integration at one of the three support centers. (6,7,16) Although inspections are permitted in all sectors, they are seldom conducted in the informal sector, in which child labor is more prevalent. (4,6) Despite the government's substantial increase in funding for the Labor Inspectorate, most of this money was not disbursed in a timely and effective manner. Additionally, there was a 33 percent decrease in the number of overall labor inspections conducted during the reporting period as compared to 2021. (6) Reports also indicate that the allotted budget for the Labor Inspectorate was insufficient to cover operating costs, including office facilities, fuel, and transportation. Inspectors' lack of technical training also hinders their ability to perform their duties. (4,6,18)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in São Tomé and Príncipe took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the authority of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient allocation of financial resources.

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Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (4)	No (6)
Number of Investigations	0 (4)	0 (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (4)	0 (6)
Number of Convictions	0 (4)	0 (6)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (6)

During the reporting year, investigators lacked resources, including transportation, fuel, and other necessities to carry out investigations. (4,6,7)

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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Anti-Child Labor Committee	Leads efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. (5,7) Led by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. No activities were undertaken by the committee during the reporting period, due to a lack of resources. (5)

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 coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Policy and Strategy for Social Protection (2014–2023)	Establishes social protection strategies to protect Santomeans by eliminating extreme poverty over a 10-year time frame, reinforcing the rights of children, and addressing child labor. (5,19) No activities under this strategy were taken during the reporting period, due to a lack of resources. (5)

Although São Tomé and Príncipe has adopted a social protection policy which includes child labor issues, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded programs that may contribute to preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including a lack of social programs to cover all child labor issues.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Support Centers†	Three government-funded centers run by NGOs, operating in areas with high concentrations of poor families, orphans, and street children. Provide household stipends to keep children in school and teach income-generating skills. (20,21) Support centers were active during the reporting period. (5)

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 São Tomé and Príncipe.

Research found no evidence that the government has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children who are engaged in agriculture or the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.

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 São Tomé and Príncipe (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits practices similar to slavery or criminally prohibits debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor.	2021 – 2022
	Establish by law a minimum age for light work of no less than 13 years and adopt legislation defining the activities and conditions permissible for light work.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that minimum age for work laws apply to all children in formal and informal work relationships, including children who are self-employed.	2015 – 2022
Enforcement	Strengthen the Labor Inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data identifying risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents and ensure that inspections are conducted in the informal sector in which child labor is known to occur.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors are equipped with adequate resources needed to conduct inspections, including office facilities, fuel, and transportation, all disbursed in a timely and efficient manner; and ensure that they receive adequate technical training to strengthen their ability to perform their duties.	2009 – 2022
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement efforts undertaken, including data regarding imposed penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal investigators are equipped with the necessary resources, including transportation, fuel, and other necessities to carry out investigations, and ensure they receive training to better address violations of the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure that the Anti-Child Labor Committee is active and able to carry out its intended mandate.	2020 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2020 – 2022
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the National Policy and Strategy for Social Protection and that data on these activities are published.	2021 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2021 – 2022
	Increase access to education for children with disabilities, including creating programs that support children with mobility and hearing difficulties.	2021 – 2022
	Implement programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2020 – 2022
	Implement programs that specifically address child labor in agriculture.	2010 – 2022

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